

An International Report from



WORLD  
FAMILY  
MAP *2013*

MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE AND  
CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

ESSAY

TWO, ONE, OR NO PARENTS?

*Children's Living  
Arrangements and  
Educational Outcomes  
Around the World*

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# WORLD FAMILY MAP *2013*

## MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE AND CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

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# Executive Summary

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*Laura H. Lippman & W. Bradford Wilcox*

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The family is a core social institution that occupies a central place in the lives of men, women, and children around the world: It is

- a source of support, and sometimes an obstacle, to individual and collective achievements;
- a unit of economic production and consumption;
- an emotional haven that can sometimes be a source of emotional strain; and
- a vehicle for extending caregiving and culture across the generations, for better and for worse.

Traditionally, the family has been defined as a group of people linked through blood, marriage, or adoption, typically centered on a married couple and their dependents and relatives. However, nontraditional families made up of people linked neither by blood nor by marriage have often existed, and are now found in growing numbers in many regions around the world.

Given the centrality of the family to child and adult well-being and the changing dynamics and structure of families today, an urgent need exists to map trends in family life across the globe, with a special focus on the consequences of these trends for children. Enter The World Family Map Project, a new, nonpartisan, nonsectarian initiative from Child Trends, acting in partnership with a number of foundations, nongovernmental organizations, and universities, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Focus Global, and the Social Trends Institute.

The World Family Map Project seeks both to monitor the health of family life around the globe and to learn more about how family trends affect the well-being of children. This effort is particularly timely because of dramatic demographic, cultural, and economic changes affecting family life. Fertility and marriage rates are falling in much of the world, especially in higher income regions. The percentage of children living in two-parent families is also falling, particularly in Europe, the Americas, and Oceania. Likewise, individualism is on the ascendancy, as is equality between the sexes, while family-centered values and adherence to traditional gender roles are losing ground in many regions. The global economic slowdown is also putting major pressures on family life, yet it is precisely in these times that strong families are needed to support optimal child and youth development. The World Family Map Project aims to broaden understanding about how these developments among families affect children and youth in different regions of the world.

In pursuit of this mission, the project will issue an annual report, *The World Family Map*, designed to paint a holistic portrait of global family life by mapping trends in family structure, family socioeconomics, family processes, and family culture in every region of the world. The report will be the first to provide internationally comparative data for low-, middle-, and high-income countries on key characteristics of families across the selected domains. The report will also feature an essay on a topic of major international import to the family, usually related to child well-being.

For its inaugural 2013 edition, *The World Family Map* covers family trends in 45 countries. Taken together, these countries represent every region of the world, as well as a majority of the world's population. This inaugural edition also features an essay, *Two, One or No Parents? Children's Living Arrangements and Educational Outcomes Around the World*, which explores the links between one indicator of family structure (i.e., the number of parents in the household) and children's educational outcomes in low-, medium-, and high-income countries.

The indicators section of *The World Family Map* shows that family trends and strengths vary markedly by region. Here are some highlights:

## Family Structure

- Although two-parent families are becoming less common, they still constitute a majority of families around the globe. Children are most likely to live in two-parent families in Asia and the Middle East, and somewhat less likely to live in two-parent families in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Extended families appear to be common in Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

## Family Socioeconomics

- The proportion of absolute poverty in the countries studied in the report ranges from zero percent in several countries to 64 percent in Nigeria. The proportion of relative poverty for children ranges from six percent (Netherlands) to 33 percent (Peru), with the lowest rates found in Asia, Europe, and Oceania, and the highest rates found in South America.
- The lowest levels of parental educational attainment are found in Africa, followed by Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America. The highest levels are found in North America and Western Europe.

## Family Processes

- Between six percent (South Korea) and 39 percent (Argentina) of 15-year-olds discuss political or social issues with their parents several times a week.
- The percentage of 15-year-olds who eat meals with their families regularly varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 62 percent in Israel to 94 percent in Italy.

## Family Culture

- In the majority of countries, most adults believe that working mothers can establish just as good relationships with their children as stay-at-home mothers can.
- In the majority of countries, most adults believe that children need a home with both a mother and a father to grow up happily.

These family trends are related to distinct patterns of economic wealth, family solidarity, education, religiosity, and urbanization, factors that often cut in different directions, depending on the trend. *The World Family Map* also shows that no one country or region excels in all of the domains mapped out by the report.

Finally, the report's main essay—*Two, One or No Parents? Children's Living Arrangements and Educational Outcomes Around the World*—presents strong evidence that children living in two-parent families in middle- and high-income countries are more likely to stay on track in school and demonstrate higher reading literacy than are children living with one or no parents. In these high- and middle-income countries, the additional financial, social, and cultural capital that two parents can provide to their children appears to give them an educational advantage over their peers from single-parent homes and those who do not live with either of their parents.

However, this family structure advantage is not found in many low-income countries (mostly in the southern hemisphere). In these countries, children in one-parent households often do about as well as or sometimes even better than children in two-parent households on indicators such as secondary school enrollment and being the right age for their grade. There are several reasons why children in single-parent households in poorer countries may be performing well academically. The family may receive social and financial support from extended kin or the resident parent may draw on the financial resources of the nonresident parent who is working as a migrant worker away from home. It is also possible that children may benefit from living with single mothers if these mothers invest in their children's education more heavily than do fathers and if single mothers have more control over the resources and decision-making that support children's education.

In many low-income countries, family structure simply may not matter as much for children's education, given the many obstacles to good educational outcomes that affect children in all types of families. Parents may not be able to afford schooling for their children; schools and teachers may be inadequate; parents and their children may suffer from poor health and nutrition; seasonal labor demands may take priority; and attitudes toward school may militate against achievement.

The inaugural *World Family Map* essay concludes by noting the anomaly of the increasing fragility of two-parent families in most middle- and high-income countries even as the evidence shows that such households give children a hand up in excelling educationally. Ironically, perhaps, low-income countries may provide insight about how to strengthen families in a climate of instability, both socially and economically, insofar as those countries rely on extended kin to buffer children from the effects of single parenthood or orphanhood.

Overall, this report demonstrates the importance of monitoring the strength of the family globally, and the benefit of understanding the variety of ways in which families contribute to the well-being of children and youth.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3

### WORLD FAMILY INDICATORS

- FAMILY STRUCTURE ..... 10
- FAMILY SOCIOECONOMICS ..... 20
- FAMILY PROCESS ..... 34
- FAMILY CULTURE ..... 42

ESSAY ..... 48

*TWO, ONE, OR NO PARENTS? CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS  
AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AROUND THE WORLD*

CONCLUSION ..... 67

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... BACK COVER

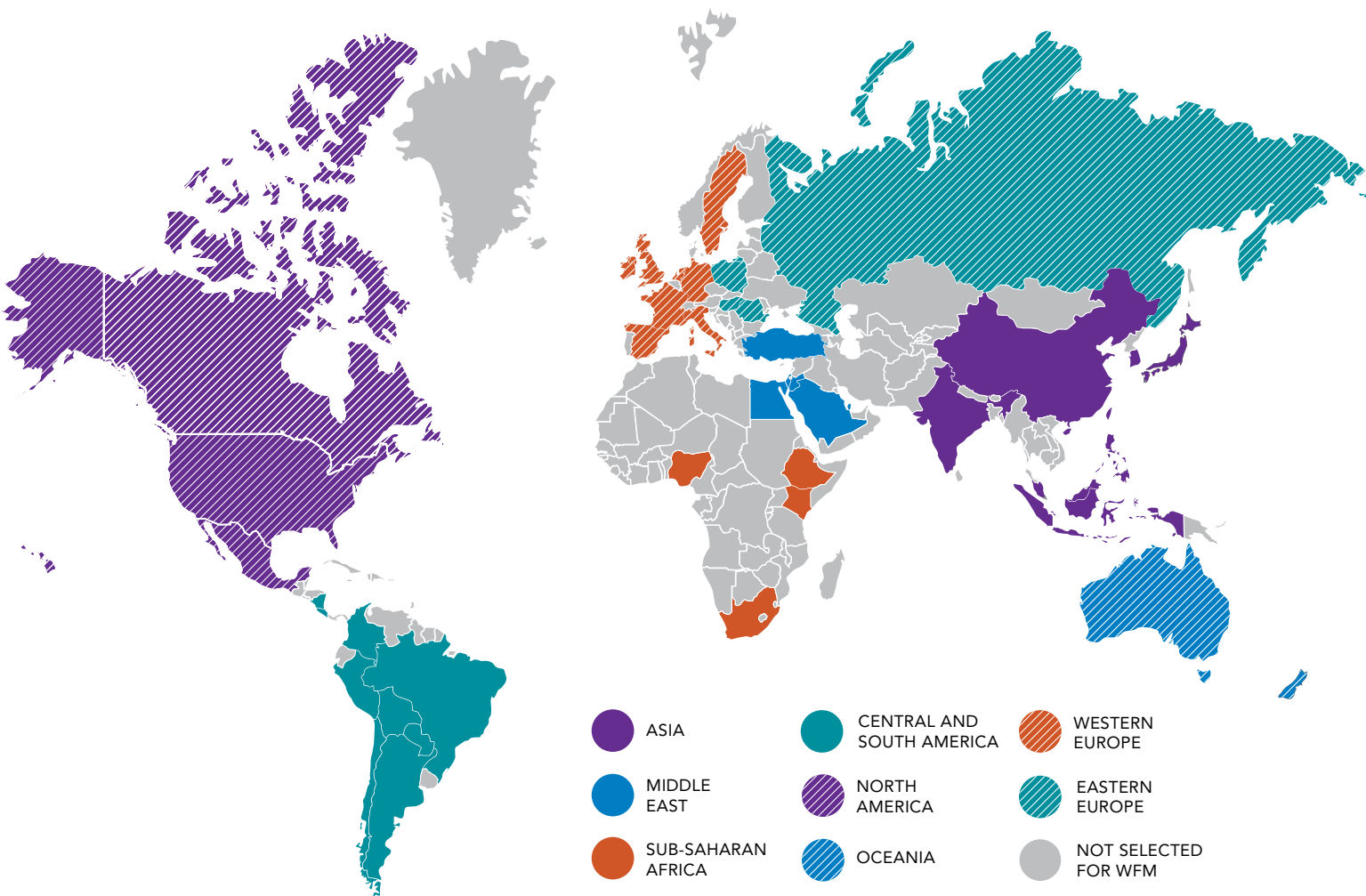


**WORLD  
FAMILY  
INDICATORS**

*Laura H. Lippman,  
W. Bradford Wilcox, and  
Renee Ryberg*

# General Methods

**Figure 1** COUNTRIES IN THE 2013 WORLD FAMILY MAP



China  
India  
Indonesia  
Japan  
Malaysia  
Philippines  
Singapore  
South Korea  
Taiwan

**ASIA**

Egypt  
Israel  
Jordan  
Qatar  
Saudi Arabia  
Turkey

**MIDDLE EAST**

Ethiopia  
Kenya  
Nigeria  
South Africa

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Argentina  
Bolivia  
Brazil  
Chile  
Colombia  
Costa Rica  
Nicaragua  
Paraguay  
Peru

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Canada  
Mexico  
United States

**NORTH AMERICA**

Australia  
New Zealand

**OCEANIA**

France  
Germany  
Ireland  
Italy  
Netherlands  
Spain  
Sweden  
United Kingdom

**WESTERN EUROPE**

Hungary  
Poland  
Romania  
Russian Federation

**EASTERN EUROPE**



**Selecting indicators:** Indicators were selected by the study team along with advisors representing every region of the world using a research-based conceptual framework of family strengths. Four groups of indicators were generated in the following domains: family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture. Indicators were chosen for each domain based upon their importance to family and child well-being, data availability, and regional representation, and in order to achieve balance in the number of indicators across domains.

**Selecting countries:** When designing this report, it was necessary to select a set of countries that could provide data across the selected indicators as well as in the essay on living arrangements of children and their education outcomes. While it was not possible to include all of the approximately 200 countries in the world, countries were selected to ensure regional representation of high-, middle-, and low-income countries, and data availability for the desired time period was considered as well, resulting in 45 countries that account for a majority of the world's population. **See Figure 1.** As data availability on key indicators of family well-being increases, *The World Family Map* will be able to include more countries.

**Data sources:** There are numerous data sources available on indicators of family well-being. The sources presented here (see Data Sources below) were selected for their quality and coverage of countries as well as indicators. These sources have a strong reputation of rigorous data collection methodologies across countries, or if data are collected from individual country sources, such as censuses, they were harmonized post data collection to ensure comparability across countries. In addition, data sources were chosen in which multiple countries were represented; however, data from the same source may not be available for all countries or for the same year across countries, so caution is needed in making comparisons. For each indicator a primary data source was chosen. When data for a particular country were not available from that source, other sources were used to supplement. In some cases, it was necessary to sacrifice recency to ensure consistency and comparability in measurement across countries.

## Data Sources

**Country-level Sources** When data were not available from an international source, country-level data sources were sought. Examples include data from national statistic bureaus and country-level surveys.

**Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS)** DHS is a survey of over 90 low-income nations, focusing on population and health information. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 2001 to 2011.

**Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** As part of the United Nations, FAO compiles statistics on food- and agriculture-related indicators, including undernourishment. The most recent data are from 2010-12 and are published in their report *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*.

**Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-International (IPUMS)** IPUMS is a compilation of harmonized censuses from countries throughout the world. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 1990 to 2010.

**International Social Survey Program (ISSP)** ISSP is a collaboration between annual national surveys to ensure data comparability on social science questions. This report uses their 2002 collection on family and changing gender roles. Unfortunately, data are only available for a handful of countries that are not representative of regions. ISSP is conducting a similar set of items in 2012; the data will be released in 2013.

**LIS (formerly known as the Luxembourg Income Study)** LIS is a collection of harmonized data on the income and wealth of individuals in middle- and high-income countries. Data from LIS used in this report range from 2000 to 2010.

**Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)** OECD's Family Database provides cross-national statistics on the well-being of families and children throughout OECD's member and partner countries. A 2011 OECD report, *Doing Better for Families*, was also used as a source. OECD data used in this report are generally from 2007.

**Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)** PISA is an international tri-annual assessment of literacy in reading, mathematics, and science. PISA is administered in all OECD member countries as well as additional self-selected countries. The indicator section of this report uses data from the contextual part of the 2000 survey. Unfortunately, the items of interest were asked in a small group of countries in the 2009 survey. To ensure comparability, this report uses 2000 data.

**UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre** A 2012 UNICEF report, *Measuring Child Poverty: New League Tables of Child Poverty in the World's Rich Countries*, was used for up-to-date relative poverty rates.

**World Values Survey (WVS)** WVS is a survey of political and sociocultural values in over 50 countries. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, from the fourth and fifth survey waves, ranging from 1999 to 2008. The next wave is currently being conducted.

For more information on specific sources, see appendix at [worldfamilymap.org/e-appendix](http://worldfamilymap.org/e-appendix).

# Family Structure

## Key Findings

Children's lives are influenced by the number of parents and siblings that they live with, as well as by whether their parents are married. *The World Family Map* reports these key indicators of family structure in this section.

- Although two-parent families are becoming less common in many parts of the world, they still constitute a majority of families around the globe. Children under age 18 are more likely to live in two-parent families than in other family forms in Asia and the Middle East, compared with other regions of the world. Children are more likely to live with one or no parent in the Americas, Europe, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions.
- Extended families (which include parent(s) and kin from outside the nuclear family) also appear to be common in Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa, but not in other regions of the world.
- Marriage rates are declining in many regions. Adults are most likely to be married in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and are least likely to be married in South America, with Europe, North America, and Oceania falling in between. Cohabitation (living together without marriage) is more common among couples in Europe, North America, Oceania, and—especially—in South America.
- Childbearing rates are declining worldwide. The highest fertility rates are in Sub-Saharan Africa. A woman gives birth to an average of 5.5 children in Nigeria—down from close to seven in the 1980s, but still high by world standards. Moderate rates of fertility (2.3-3.1) are found in the Middle East, and levels of fertility that are sufficient to replace a country's population in the next generation (about 2.1) are found in the Americas and Oceania. Below replacement-level fertility is found in East Asia and Europe.
- Given the decline in marriage rates, childbearing outside of marriage—or nonmarital childbearing—is increasing in many regions. The highest rates of nonmarital childbearing are found in South America and Europe, paralleling increases in cohabitation, with moderate rates found in North America and Oceania, varied rates found in Sub-Saharan Africa, and the lowest rates found in Asia and the Middle East.

## Living Arrangements

Family living arrangements—how many parents are in the household and whether the household includes extended family members—shape the character and contexts of children’s lives, as well as the human resources available for children. As evidenced in **Figures 2 and 3**, which are derived from IPUMS, DHS, and national censuses, the living arrangements that children experience vary substantially around the globe.

Kinship ties are particularly powerful in much of Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the majority of the countries in these regions, more than 40 percent of children lived in households with other adults besides their parents. **See Figure 2.** In many cases, these adults were extended family members. Indeed, at least half of children lived with adults besides their parents in parts of Africa (Kenya [52 percent], Nigeria [59 percent], and South Africa [70 percent]); Asia (India [50 percent]); and South America (Nicaragua [55 percent], Peru [51 percent], and Colombia [61 percent]). In these regions, then, children were especially likely to be affected by their relationships with other adults in the household, including grandparents, uncles, and cousins, compared with children living in regions where extended household members played smaller roles in children’s day-to-day lives.

Whether in nuclear or extended family households, children were especially likely to live with two parents (who could be biological parents or step parents) in Asia and the Middle East. **See Figure 3.** On the basis of the data available for the specific countries examined in these regions, more than 80 percent of children in these three regions lived with two parents (ranging from 84 percent in Israel/Turkey to 92 percent in Jordan). About 80 to 90 percent of children in European countries lived in two-parent households (ranging from 76 percent in the United Kingdom to 89 percent in Italy/Poland). In the Americas, about one-half to three-quarters of children lived in two-parent households, from 53 percent in Colombia to 78 percent in Canada. The two-parent pattern was more mixed in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from 36 percent (South Africa) to 69 percent (Nigeria). Some of these children living in two-parent households were also living with extended families, as noted above.

By contrast, in much of South America and Sub-Saharan Africa, from 16 percent (Bolivia) to 43 percent (South Africa) of children lived in single-parent families and from four percent (Argentina) to 20 percent (South Africa) of children lived in homes without either of their parents. Among the South American countries in this study, for instance, Colombia had the highest percentage of children living without either of their parents: 12 percent. The high percentage of South African children living with one parent or without either parent—43 percent and 20 percent, respectively reflects the high incidence of AIDS orphans,<sup>1</sup> as well as adult mortality from other causes and labor migration.

Finally, although a small percentage of children in North America, Oceania, and Europe lived in households without at least one of their parents, a large minority—about one-fifth—lived in single-parent households. Rates were slightly lower in Europe. In these regions, the United States (27 percent), the United Kingdom (24 percent), and New Zealand (24 percent) had particularly high levels of single parenthood. Many European countries have projected the proportion of children living with single parents to grow through 2030.<sup>2</sup>

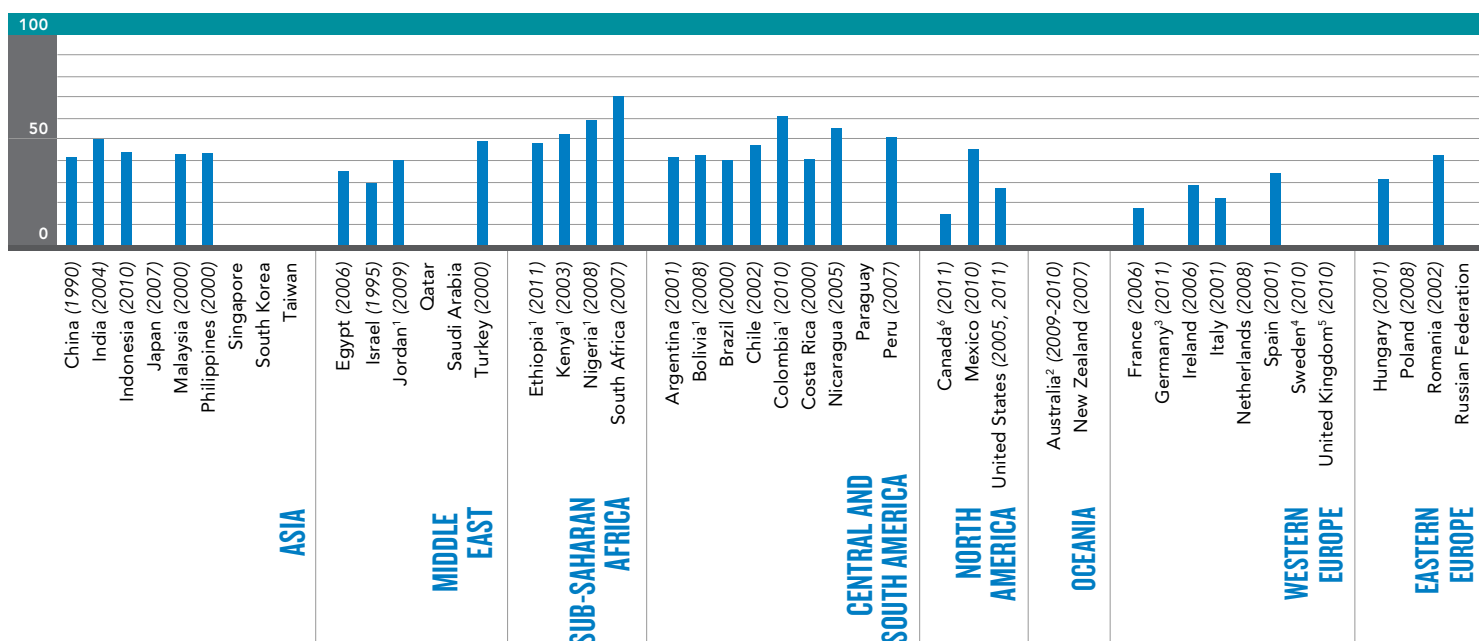
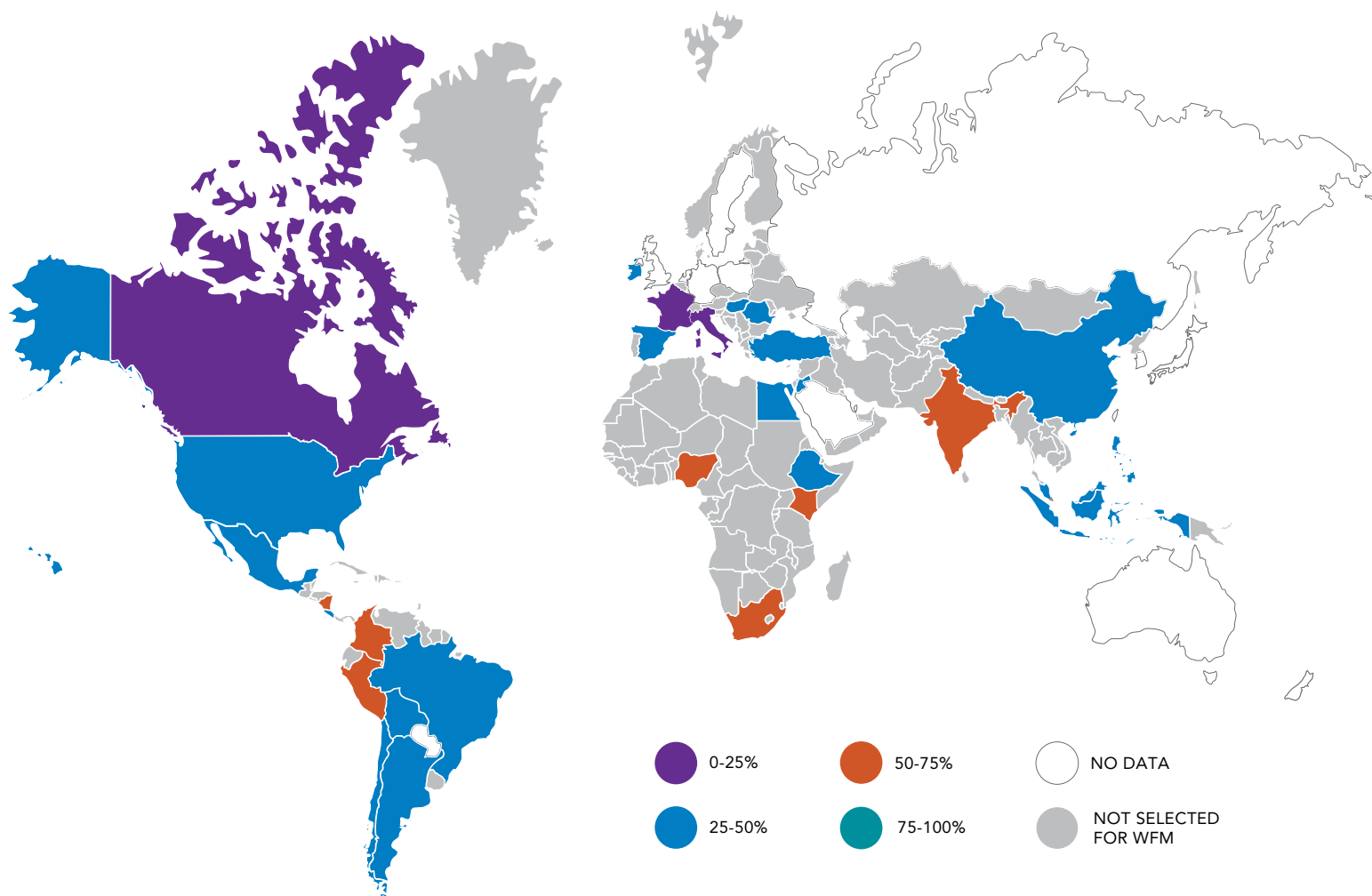
In sum, the regional patterns identified in this section of *The World Family Map* suggest that children are especially likely to live with two parents in Asia and the Middle East. Elsewhere large minorities of children live with either one parent

<sup>1</sup> Neddy Rita Matshalaga and Greg Powell, "Mass Orphanhood in the Era of HIV/AIDS," *British Medical Journal* 324 (2002), Anthony J. McMichael et al., "Mortality Trends and Setbacks: Global Convergence or Divergence," *Lancet* 363 (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Doing Better for Families," (OECD, 2011).

**Figure 2** LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, 1990-2011

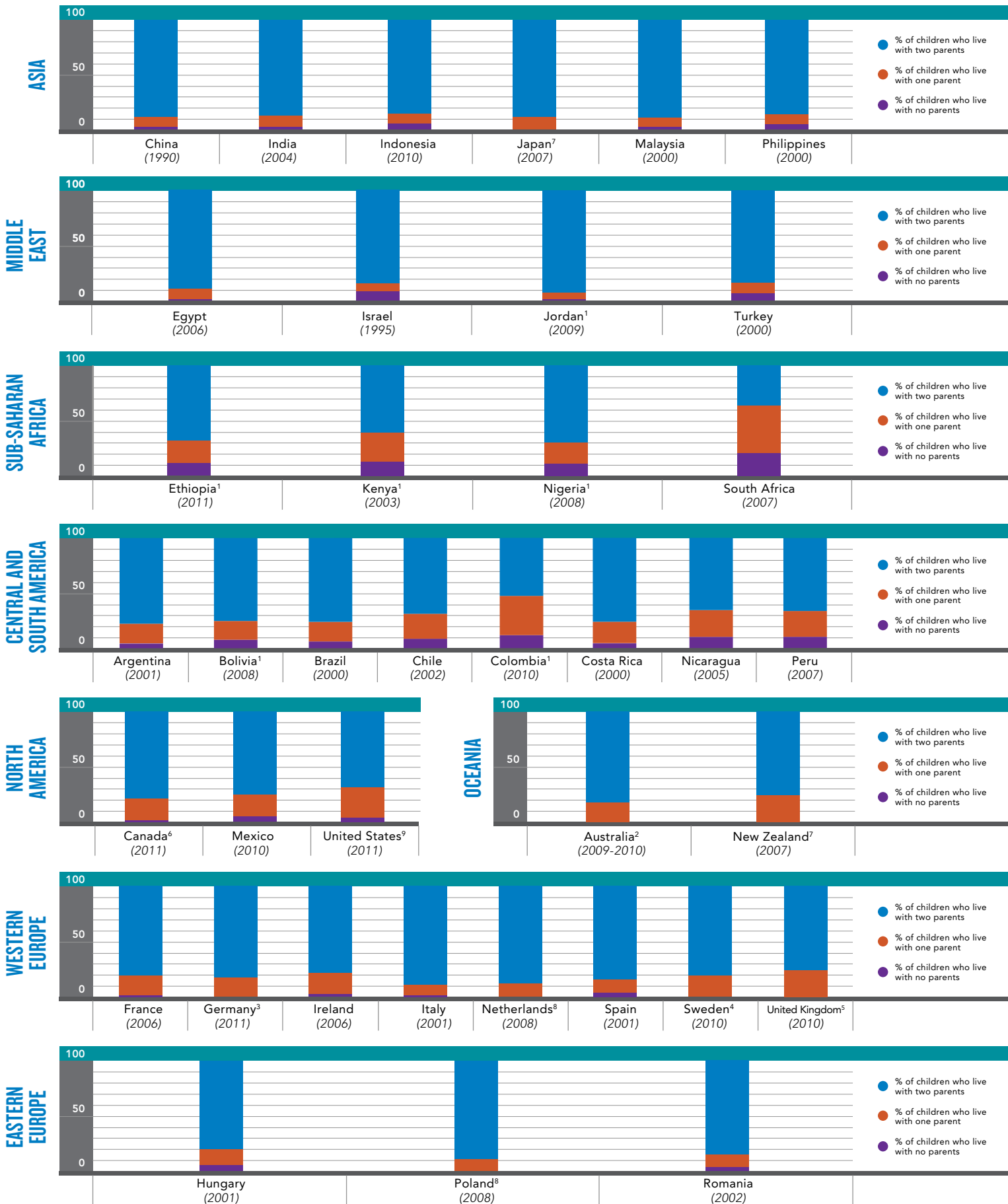
PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING WITH PROBABLE EXTENDED FAMILY (ADULTS IN ADDITION TO PARENTS)



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure2](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure2)

**Figure 3** LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, 1990-2011

Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure3](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure3)



(Europe, North America, Oceania, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa) or neither parent (South America and Sub-Saharan Africa). Extended families are common in Asia, the Middle East, South America, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In general, then, extended kinship ties to children appear to be stronger in low-income regions of the world, and children are more likely to live in two-parent families in regions where higher incomes or marriages (see below) are more prevalent.

## Marriage and Cohabitation

The nature, function, and firsthand experience of marriage varies around the world. Marriage looks and feels different in Sweden, compared with the experience in Saudi Arabia; in China, compared with the experience in Canada; and in Argentina, compared with the experience in Australia. Nevertheless, across time and space, in most societies and cultures, marriage has been an important institution for structuring adult intimate relationships and connecting parents to one another and to any children that they have together.<sup>3</sup> In particular, in many countries, marriage has played an important role in providing a stable context for bearing and rearing children, and for integrating fathers into the lives of their children.<sup>4</sup>

However, today the hold of marriage as an institution over the adult life course and the connection between marriage and parenthood vary around much of the globe. Dramatic increases in cohabitation, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania over the last four decades suggest that the institution of marriage is much less relevant in these parts of the world.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the meaning of marriage appears to be shifting in much of the world. Marriage is becoming more of an option for adults, rather than a necessity for the survival of adults and children. Cohabitation has emerged an important precursor or alternative to marriage in many countries for any number of reasons. Adults may look for more flexibility or freedom in their relationships, or they may feel that they do not have sufficient financial or emotional resources to marry, or they may perceive marriage as a risky undertaking.<sup>6</sup>

Given the changing patterns and perceptions about marriage and cohabitation in many contemporary societies, this section of *The World Family Map* measures how prevalent marriage and cohabitation are among adults in their prime childbearing and childrearing years (18-49) around the globe.

**Figure 4** provides information compiled from censuses and surveys conducted in 41 countries around the world, primarily in the early- and mid-2000s. These data indicate that adults aged 18-49 were most likely to be married in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and were least likely to be married in South America. Marriage levels fell in the moderate range (about half) in most of Europe, Oceania, and North America. Moreover, the data show that a larger percentage of adults were cohabiting in Europe, the Americas, and Oceania than in other regions.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, B. Chapais, *Primeval Kinship: How Pair Bonding Gave Birth to Human Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), K. Davis, *Contemporary Marriage: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Institution* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1985), W. J. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (New York: Free Press, 1963).

<sup>4</sup> Chapais, *Primeval Kinship: How Pair Bonding Gave Birth to Human Society*, P. Heuveline, J. Timberlake, M., and F. F. Furstenberg, "Shifting Childrearing to Single Mothers: Results from 17 Western Countries," *Population and Development Review* 29 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> R. Lesthaeghe, "A Century of Demographic and Cultural Change in Western Europe: An Exploration of Underlying Dimensions," *Population and Development Review* 9 (1983), P. McDonald, *Families in Australia: A Socio-Demographic Perspective* (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1995), D. Popenoe, "Cohabitation, Marriage, and Child Well-Being: A Cross-National Perspective," (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> A. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Knopf, 2009), S. Coontz, *Marriage: A History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2005), W. J. Goode, *World Change in Divorce Patterns* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), Heuveline, Timberlake, and Furstenberg, "Shifting Childrearing to Single Mothers: Results from 17 Western Countries."

**Figure 4** MARRIAGE AND COHABITATION, 1990-2011

Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure4](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure4)



As **Figure 4** also shows, between 47 (Singapore) and 77 percent (India) of the young adult population in the Asian countries included in this report were married, and marriage was even more common in the Middle East, where a clear majority of adults (between 61 [Turkey] and 80 [Egypt] percent) were married.

By contrast, marriage patterns fell in the mid-range, or were less consistent, in the Americas, Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa. In North America and Oceania, about half of adults aged 18-49 were married, ranging from 43 (Canada) to 58 percent (Mexico). In the Sub-Saharan African countries studied, marriage patterns showed a great deal of variation, with between 30 (South Africa) and 67 percent (Nigeria) of adults aged 18-49 married. Indeed, South Africa had one of the lowest marriage levels of any country included in this study. Likewise, among the European countries, between 37 (Sweden) and 60 percent (Romania) of adults aged 18-49 were married, with marriage clearly being more common in Eastern Europe. By contrast, in South America, generally, less than 40 percent of adults were married; in Colombia, the proportion of married adults in that age group was a low 19 percent.

**Figure 4** indicates that cohabitation was rare in Asia and the Middle East, two regions where relatively traditional mores still dominate family life. Moderate to high levels of cohabitation were found in North America and Oceania, where between eight (Mexico/United States) and 19 percent (Canada) of adults aged 18-49 were in cohabiting relationships. Levels of cohabitation in Sub-Saharan Africa varied considerably, with comparatively high levels of cohabitation in South Africa (13 percent) and low levels in Ethiopia (4 percent), Nigeria (2 percent), and Kenya (4 percent).

The data also show high levels of cohabitation in much of Europe. For example about one-quarter of Swedish and French adults aged 18-49 were living in a cohabiting relationship. Cohabitation is most common among South Americans, where consensual unions have played a longstanding role in South American society.<sup>7</sup> Between 12 (Chile) and 39 percent (Colombia) of adults aged 18-49 lived in cohabiting unions in South America, with Colombia registering the highest level of cohabitation of any country in our global study.

In general, marriage seems to be more common in Asia and the Middle East, whereas alternatives to marriage—including cohabitation—were more common in Europe and South America. North America, Oceania, and Sub-Saharan Africa fell in between. Both cultural and economic forces may help to account for these regional differences.

It remains to be seen, however, how the varied place of marriage in society—and the increasing popularity of cohabitation in many regions of the world—affect the well-being of children in countries around the globe.

## Childbearing

Family size also affects the well-being of children, in part because children in large families tend to receive fewer financial and practical investments than do children in small families.<sup>8</sup> Alternatively, some research suggests that children who grow up without siblings lose out on important social experiences.<sup>9</sup> How, then, is region linked to family size around the globe?

**Table 1** presents the total fertility rate (the average number of children born to each woman of childbearing age) as a proxy for family size. These data indicate that large families were most common in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the total

<sup>7</sup> T. Castro Martin, "Consensual Unions in Latin America: Persistence of a Dual Nuptiality System," *Journal of Comparative Family Systems* 33 (2002).

<sup>8</sup> D. Downey, "When Bigger Is Not Better: Family Size, Parental Resources, and Children's Educational Performance," *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 5 (1995).

<sup>9</sup> D. Downey and D. Condrón, "Playing Well with Others in Kindergarten: The Benefit of Siblings at Home," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 66, no. 2 (2004).



NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO WOULD BE BORN PER WOMAN GIVEN AGE-SPECIFIC FERTILITY RATES

**ASIA**

China <sup>15</sup>	1.2
India	2.6
Indonesia	2.1
Japan	1.4
Malaysia	2.6
Philippines	3.1
Singapore	1.3
South Korea	1.3
Taiwan <sup>13</sup>	1.1

**MIDDLE EAST**

Egypt	2.7
Israel	2.9
Jordan	3.1
Qatar	2.3
Saudi Arabia	2.8
Turkey	2.4

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Ethiopia	4.2
Kenya	4.7
Nigeria	5.5
South Africa	2.5

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina	2.2
Bolivia	3.3
Brazil	1.8
Chile	1.9
Colombia	2.4
Costa Rica	1.8
Nicaragua	2.6
Paraguay	3.0
Peru	2.5

**NORTH AMERICA**

Canada	1.7
Mexico	2.3
United States <sup>14</sup>	1.9

**OCEANIA**

Australia	1.9
New Zealand	2.2

**WESTERN EUROPE**

France	2.0
Germany	1.4
Ireland	2.1
Italy	1.4
Netherlands	1.8
Spain	1.5
Sweden	1.9
United Kingdom	1.9

**EASTERN EUROPE**

Hungary	1.4
Poland	1.4
Romania	1.4
Russian Federation	1.5

fertility rate (TFR) ranged from 2.5 children per woman in South Africa to 5.5 per woman in Nigeria. Fertility was also high in the Middle East, ranging from a TFR of 2.4 in Turkey to a TFR of 3.1 in Jordan.

In the Americas and Oceania, fertility rates are now close to the replacement level of 2.1. This means that women in most countries in these regions were having enough children for the population to replace itself from one generation to the next or levels that were just slightly below replacement levels. For instance, the TFR was 1.9 in Australia, 1.9 in Chile, 2.3 in Mexico, and 1.9 in the United States. It is worth noting that fertility has fallen markedly in South America in the last four decades, which is one reason that fertility rates in South America (which range from a TFR of 1.8 in Brazil and Costa Rica to 3.3 in Bolivia) now come close to paralleling those in North America and Oceania.<sup>10</sup>

Fertility rates in Europe had increased since their lows in the early 2000s, but generally remained below the replacement level.<sup>11</sup> Ireland had a replacement level TFR of 2.1, but the TFRs for all other countries in this region fell below this level, ranging from 1.4 to 2.0.

Finally, fertility rates in Asia, especially East Asia, have fallen dramatically in recent years and vary substantially, to the point where the TFR ranged from 3.1 (Philippines) to 1.1 (Taiwan).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, no country in East Asia had a fertility rate higher than 1.4. The long-term consequences of such low fertility—both for the children themselves and for the societies they live in—remain to be seen.

<sup>10</sup> A. Adsera and A. Menendez, "Fertility Changes in Latin America in Periods of Economic Uncertainty," *Population Studies* 65, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>11</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Doing Better for Families."

<sup>12</sup> Social Trends Institute, "The Sustainable Demographic Dividend" (Barcelona: Social Trends Institute, 2011).

## Nonmarital childbearing

Tracking nonmarital childbearing is important because in many societies, children born outside of marriage are less likely to enjoy a stable family life than are children born to married parents. Children whose parents are not married also are less likely to have positive outcomes in many areas of life, from social behavior to academic performance.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 5** indicates that rates of nonmarital childbearing were especially high in South America, followed by those in much of Northern and Western Europe. In South America, well over half of children were born to unmarried mothers, with Colombia registering the highest levels (85 percent). In much of Europe, between a third and a half of children were born outside of marriage, whereas in France and Sweden, more than 50 percent of children were born outside of marriage. In many European countries, the average age of first childbirth is now younger than the average age of first marriage.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Colombia marriage rates are even lower among those under 30 than for the entire reproductive-aged population.

Nonmarital childbearing was also common in Oceania and North America. In these regions, about four in 10 children were born outside of marriage, ranging from 27 (Canada) to 55 percent (Mexico), with the U.S. at 41 percent. By contrast, trends in nonmarital childbearing were quite varied in Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging from a low of 6 percent in Nigeria to a high of 62 percent in South Africa. Finally, nonmarital childbearing is comparatively rare throughout much of Asia and the Middle East. With the exception of the Philippines (where 37 percent of children were born to unmarried parents), nonmarital childbearing was in the single digits in these two regions. Not surprisingly, these patterns track closely with the marriage and cohabitation trends identified above in **Figure 3**; that is, where marriage was prevalent, the proportion of children born outside of marriage was smaller, and in countries with high levels of cohabitation, births outside of marriage were more common.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Brown, "Marriage and Child Well-Being: Research and Policy Perspectives," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72 (2010), Martin, "Consensual Unions in Latin America: Persistence of a Dual Nuptiality System.", W. Bradford Wilcox, "Why Marriage Matters: 30 Conclusions from the Social Sciences," (New York: Institute for American Values/National Marriage Project, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Doing Better for Families."

**Figure 5** NONMARITAL CHILDBEARING, 1990-2011

Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure5](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure5)



# Family Socioeconomics

## Key Findings

Socioeconomic indicators measure the material, human, and government resources that support family and child well-being. The socioeconomic indicators highlighted in this report include poverty; undernourishment (as a marker of material deprivation); parental education and employment; and public family benefits.

- In this study, poverty is calculated as *absolute poverty* (the percentage of the population living below \$1.25 a day) or as *relative child poverty* (the percentage of children living in households earning less than half the median household income in a country). The proportion of absolute poverty in the countries in our study ranges from zero in several countries to 64 percent in Nigeria. The proportion of relative poverty for children ranges from six to 33 percent, with the lowest rates found in Asia, Europe, and Oceania, and the highest rates found in South America.
- In the Middle East, North America, Oceania, and Europe, less than five percent of the population is undernourished. In contrast, the highest levels of undernourishment are found in Africa, Asia, and South America.
- Levels of parental education as shown by completion of secondary education ranges widely around the world. The lowest levels are found in Africa, followed by Asia, the Middle East, and Central and South America. The highest levels are found in North America and Western Europe.
- Between 45 and 97 percent of parents are employed worldwide, with the highest parental employment rates found in Asia; consistently high rates are found in the Middle East; medium-to-high rates are found in the Americas and Europe.
- Public family benefits across countries represented in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) range from 0.7 to 3.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). The highest benefits are offered in Europe and Oceania, followed by Israel, North America, Asia, and then Chile.

## Poverty

Poverty is a well-documented risk factor for many negative outcomes in childhood. Children growing up in poverty have more social, emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems than do children who do not grow up in poverty.<sup>15</sup> Children who are

<sup>15</sup> D. Lempers, D. Clark-Lempers, and R. Simons, "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence," *Child Development* 60, no. 1 (1989), D. Seith and E. Isakson, "Who Are America's Poor Children? Examining Health Disparities among Children in the United States," (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2011).

poor also score lower on cognitive tests and are less likely to be ready to enter school than are their more affluent peers.<sup>16</sup>

Poverty affects children differently depending on the age at which it is experienced. Developmental differences between children who are poor and those who are not can be detected by a child's second birthday.<sup>17</sup> In adolescence, poverty can lead parents to provide less nurture and more inconsistent discipline for their children, leading to young people's subsequent feelings of loneliness and depression.<sup>18</sup>

Prolonged poverty is especially detrimental to healthy child development. Experiencing poverty for at least half of childhood is linked with an increased risk for teenage pregnancy, school failure, and inconsistent employment in adulthood in the United States.<sup>19</sup>

In the United States and elsewhere, poverty is often related to family structure as well. Children living in single-parent households, especially those headed by a woman, are more likely to grow up in poverty.<sup>20</sup> This report considers two measures of poverty as indicators of family socioeconomics: absolute poverty and relative poverty.

### **Absolute Poverty**

The absolute poverty indicator captures the living conditions in one country, compared with others, by using an international poverty line and determining the percentage of the population living below that line. The international poverty line that we used in this report is set by the World Bank at 1.25 U.S. dollars a day. One of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals is to cut the proportion of people who live on less than one U.S. dollar a day in half.<sup>21</sup>

Data for this indicator come from The World Bank, which has compiled information from individual countries' government statistical agencies based on household surveys and LIS. Because individuals and countries themselves provide the information on poverty levels, instead of a more objective source, it is possible that these rates underrepresent the true level of absolute poverty. Another limitation is that data are not available for this indicator for the most economically prosperous countries, including the United States and countries in Western Europe.

Absolute poverty rates varied widely in Asia, ranging from zero percent in Malaysia to 42 percent in India. The remaining Asian countries had absolute poverty rates between 16 and 23 percent, as shown in [Figure 6](#). The selected Middle Eastern countries had relatively low levels of absolute poverty. Three percent of people or fewer lived on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day in these countries.

The highest rates of absolute poverty were found in Africa. In the Sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 17 and 64 percent of the population lived in poverty. Nigeria had the highest poverty rate: 64 percent of the

<sup>16</sup> T. Halle et al., "Background for Community-Level Work on School Readiness: A Review of Definitions, Assessments, and Investment Strategies. Part II: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors to School Readiness. Paper Prepared for the John S. And James L. Knight Foundation," (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2000), Moore, K. A., Z. Redd, M. Burkhauser, K. Mbwana, and A. Collins. "Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options." In *Child Trends Research Brief*. Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009, Duncan, Greg J., and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, eds. *Consequences of Growing Up Poor*. New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

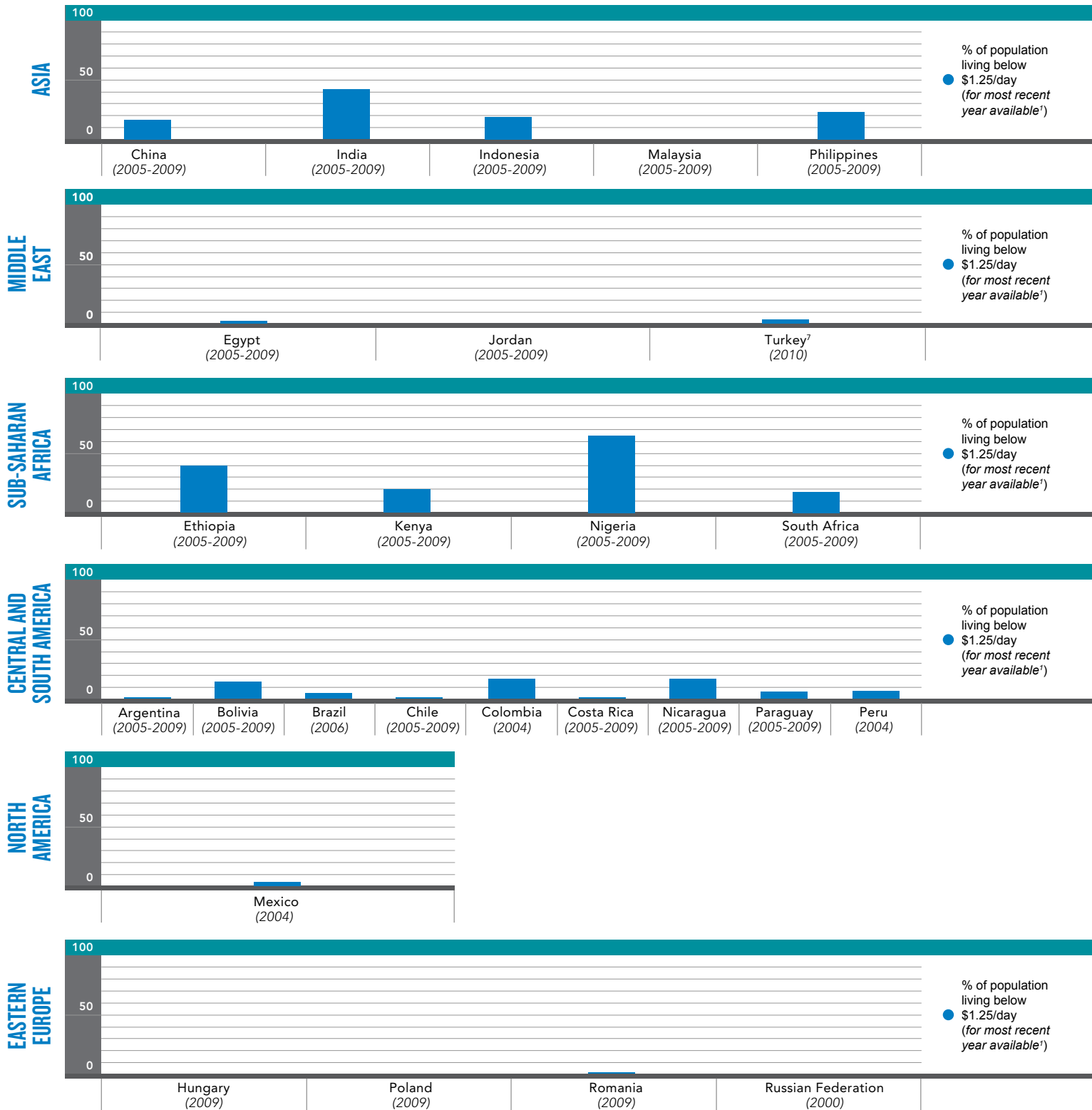
<sup>18</sup> Lempers, Clark-Lempers, and Simons, "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence."

<sup>19</sup> Caroline E. Ratcliffe and Signe-Mary McKernan, "Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences," (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2010).

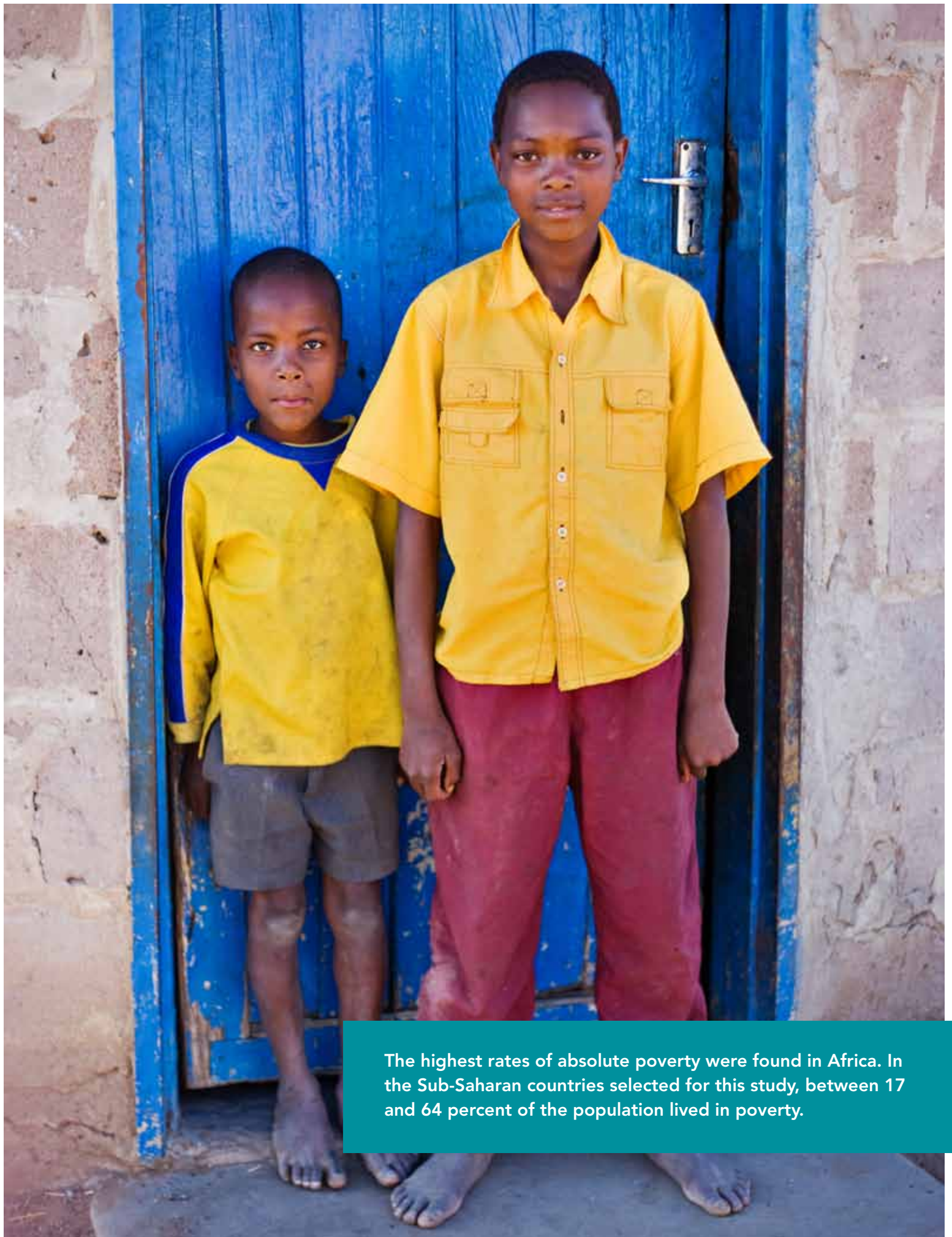
<sup>20</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, "America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012," (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> United Nations. "The Millennium Development Goals Report." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010.

**Figure 6** ABSOLUTE POVERTY



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure6](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure6)



The highest rates of absolute poverty were found in Africa. In the Sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 17 and 64 percent of the population lived in poverty.

population lived below the international poverty line. Kenya and South Africa had poverty rates that were high at 20 and 17 percent, respectively, when compared with those outside the African continent, but these rates were still much lower than those of Nigeria and Ethiopia, at 64 and 39 percent, respectively.

In Central and South America, three countries (Bolivia, Colombia, and Nicaragua) had poverty rates that at approximately 15 percent were much higher than those in the remaining selected countries. Brazil, Paraguay, and Peru had poverty rates around five percent, while in the remaining Central and South American countries, one percent of their citizens were living in poverty.

Of the countries for which data were available, those in Eastern Europe had the lowest rates of absolute poverty. According to the international definition, zero or one percent of people in these countries were poor.

## Relative Child Poverty

*The World Family Map* also presents rates of relative poverty as an indicator of well-being of children in middle- and high-income countries. These rates speak to the poverty experienced by children living in families relative to that of other families *within* each country. Thus, the relative poverty indicator describes the share of children who live in households with household incomes that are less than half of the national median income for each country.<sup>22</sup> The higher the relative poverty rate, the more children are living in poverty in comparison with the average income of all households with children within that country. This indicator also speaks to the income distribution within a country.

Data for this indicator come from household surveys, as reported by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Center's *Measuring Child Poverty* report card.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the countries for which relative child poverty was measured, between six and 33 percent of children lived in households with incomes that were below half of the national median income. There was wide regional variation on this indicator, as seen in [Figure 7](#).

The selected Asian countries had comparatively low rates of relative child poverty. In Taiwan, eight percent of children lived in households with incomes that were below half of the population's median income. The rates were slightly higher for South Korea and Japan, at 10 and 15 percent, respectively.

Israel, the sole representative of the Middle East due to data limitations, had a relative child poverty rate of 25 percent. The three countries included in the study from South America had higher relative poverty rates for children, ranging from 27 to 33 percent. Peru had the highest rate of all South American countries included in the study, with 33 percent of children living in households earning less than half of the median income.

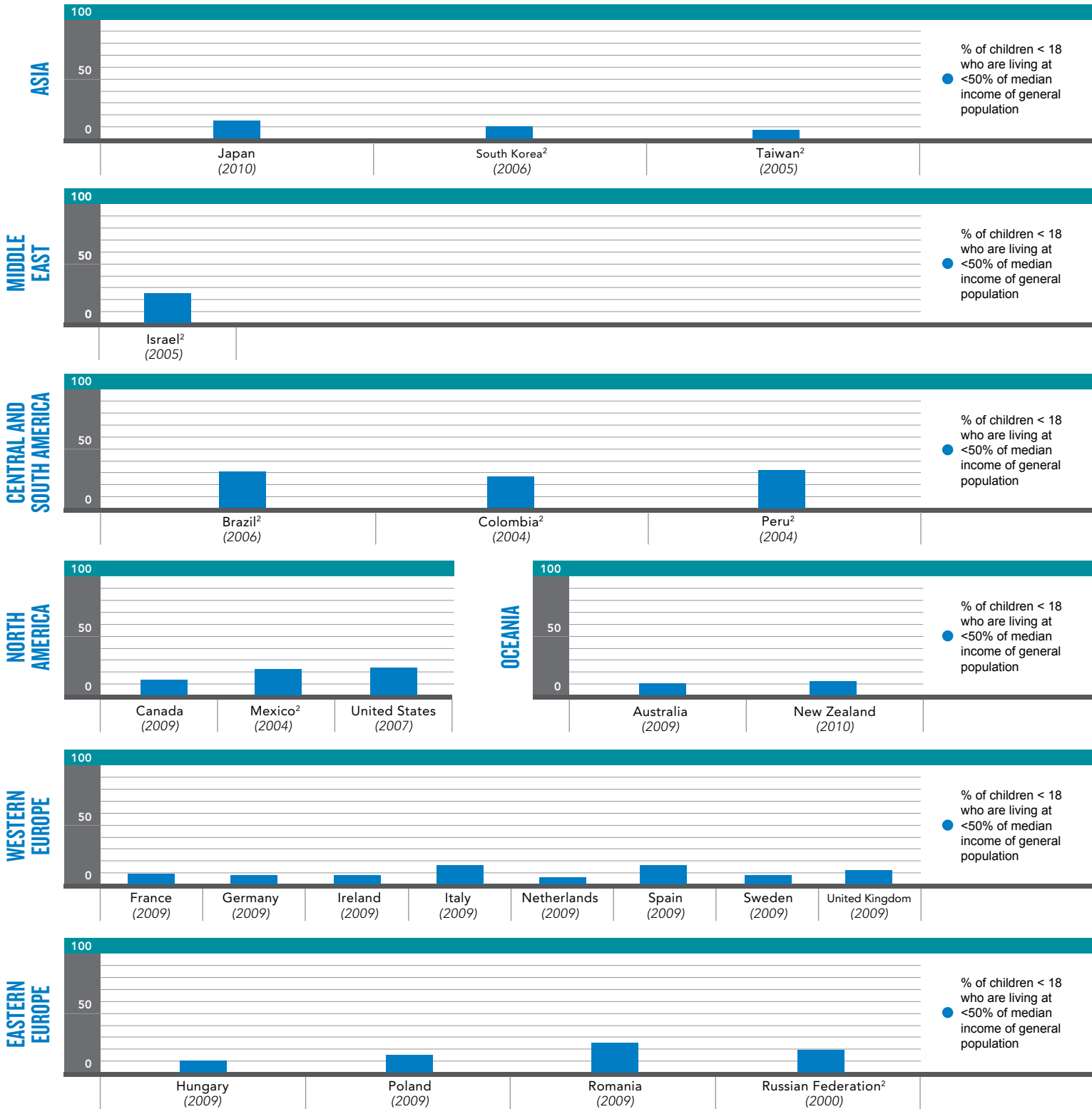
The North American countries' relative child poverty rates ranged from 13 to 23 percent. Canada had the lowest levels of relative child poverty, with 13 percent of children living in households with incomes below half of the country's median income. The United States and Mexico, in contrast, had higher levels of relative child poverty, at 23 and 22 percent, respectively. In fact, the United States has the highest relative child poverty rates of the selected high-income nations.

<sup>22</sup> Income is adjusted according to household size and composition.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, "Measuring Child Poverty: New League Tables of Child Poverty in the World's Rich Countries," in *Innocenti Report Card 10* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Center, 2012). Data come from EU-SILC 2009, HILDA 2009, PSID 2007, the Japanese Cabinet Office, Gender Equality Bureau (2011), and B. Perry, "Household Incomes in New Zealand: Trends in Indicators of Inequality and Hardship 1982 to 2010," (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Social Development, 2011).



**Figure 7** RELATIVE CHILD POVERTY, LATEST AVAILABLE YEAR



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure7](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure7)

In Oceania, Australia had a relative child poverty rate of 11 percent, and New Zealand's was 12 percent.

Western Europe had the lowest rates of relative child poverty of the regions, led by the Netherlands at six percent. Sweden, Ireland, Germany, and France all had rates that were below 10 percent. The United Kingdom, Italy, and Spain had higher rates, ranging from 12 to 17 percent.

In Eastern Europe, between 10 and 26 percent of children lived in households with incomes below half of the country's median income. Hungary had the lowest relative poverty rate, at 10 percent, whereas Romania had the highest, at 26 percent.

## Undernourishment

One of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals is to cut the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in half between 1990 and 2015.<sup>24</sup> The percentage of the entire population of each country that is undernourished is an indicator of material deprivation, disproportionately affecting families with children. In an effort to protect their children, mothers tend to go hungry before their children in some cultures.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, this tendency means that undernourishment is passed from generation to generation, because pregnant women and their babies are especially vulnerable to the effects of hunger. For example, undernourished mothers are more likely to give birth to undernourished babies.<sup>27</sup>

Not having enough to eat and being poor are related in a cyclical fashion. Children growing up in families that lack the means to provide adequate and nutritious food are more likely to have physical ailments, such as blindness, stunted growth, iron deficiencies, and overall poor health. Children who are undernourished are also more likely to have delays in mental development, to show symptoms of depression, and to have behavior problems. Academically, undernourished youth have lower achievement and lower IQs. Undernourishment is a factor in one in three deaths of children under five throughout the world.<sup>28</sup> The loss of productivity associated with undernourishment among children can cost a country up to three percent of its GDP.<sup>29</sup>

*The World Family Map* presents information on undernourishment for the entire population rather than for families with children specifically because the available data are limited. As it is, the data on undernourishment come from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Bank.<sup>30,31</sup> The FAO defines undernourishment as "an extreme form of food insecurity, arising when food energy availability is inadequate to cover even minimum needs for a sedentary lifestyle."<sup>32</sup>

In the majority of countries throughout the world with data, less than five percent of the population was undernourished. All countries in Europe, the Middle East, North America, and Oceania had undernourishment rates under five percent. Countries with higher levels of undernourishment were concentrated in Africa, Asia, and South America, as seen in [Figure 8](#).

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Millennium Development Goals."

<sup>26</sup> United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, "The Impact of High Food Prices on Maternal and Child Nutrition," in *SCN Side Event at the 34th Session of the Committee on World Food Security* (Rome: United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, 2008).

<sup>27</sup> E. Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children," in *Briefing paper* (Washington: Bread for the World Institution, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> M. Nord, "Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics," in *Economic Information Bulletin* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2009), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "The State of the World's Children 2012," (New York, NY: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children."

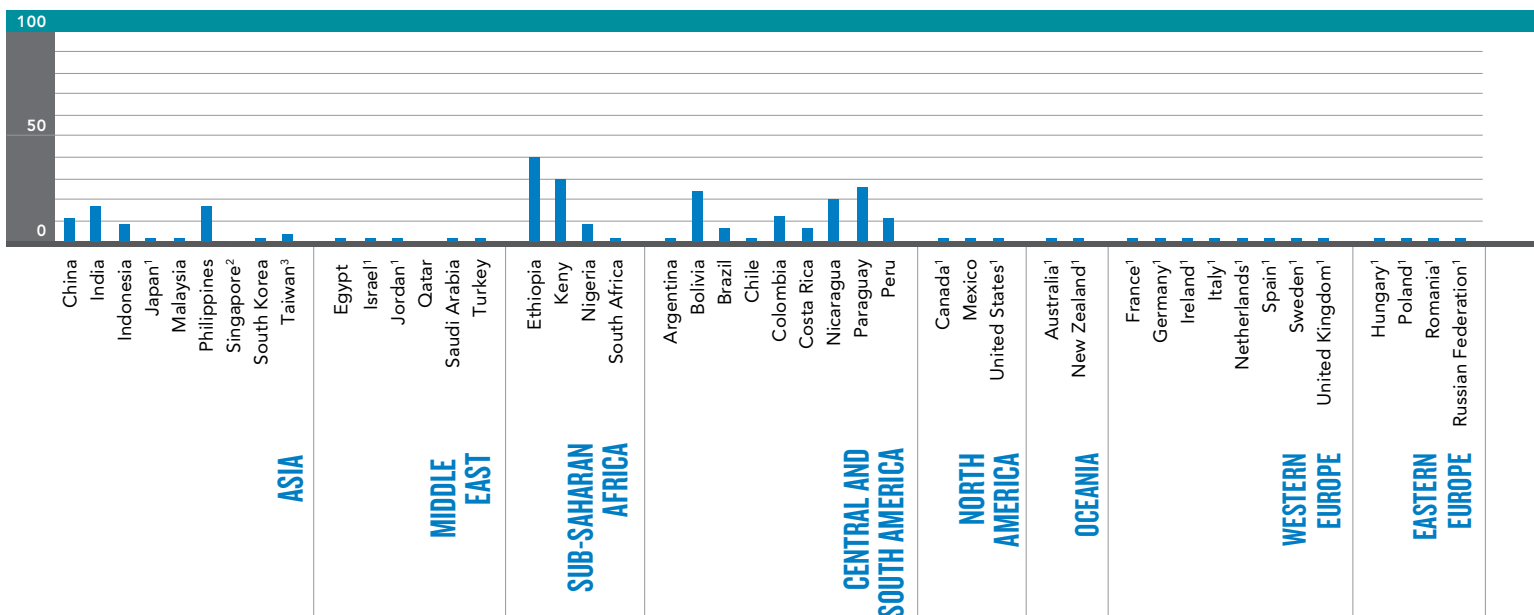
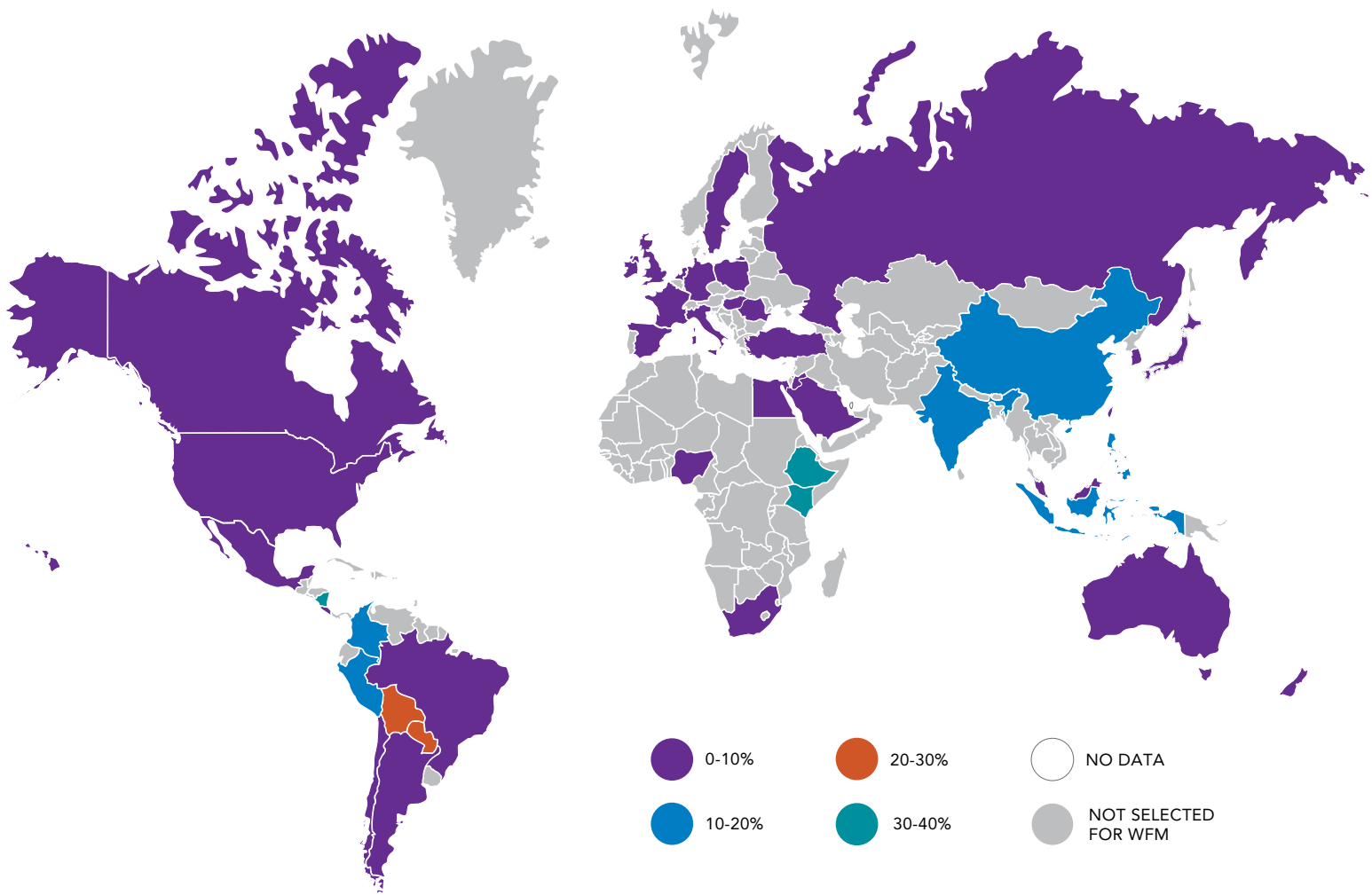
<sup>30</sup> Data for Taiwan come from C. Y. Yeh et al., "An Empirical Study of Taiwan's Food Security Index," *Public Health Nutrition* 13, no. 7 (2010).

<sup>31</sup> Note that dates are not comparable. See Figure 8 for detail.

<sup>32</sup> FAO, WFP, and IFAD. "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012. Economic Growth Is Necessary but Not Sufficient to Accelerate Reduction of Hunger and Malnutrition." Rome: FAO, 2012.

**Figure 8** UNDERNOURISHMENT, CIRCA 2010

PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION THAT IS UNDERNOURISHED



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure8](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure8)

Undernourishment rates varied widely in Asia, from under five percent (Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and Japan) to 18 percent (India). Following India, the countries with the highest levels of undernourishment were the Philippines and China, at 17 and 12 percent, respectively.

The countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available had higher levels of undernourishment than countries in other regions. In Ethiopia, two out of five people were undernourished; in Kenya, one out of three. Rates were much lower in Nigeria and South Africa, where approximately less than one out of 10 people were undernourished.

In Central and South America, undernourishment also varied widely. The highest rate of undernourishment was found in Paraguay, where 26 percent of the population was undernourished. Bolivia and Nicaragua also had higher undernourishment rates, at 24 percent and 20 percent of the population, respectively. Brazil and Costa Rica had lower rates, at seven percent each.

The percentage of the population that suffers from undernourishment varies widely throughout the world, and does not always follow the level of absolute poverty in a given country. Despite having higher poverty levels, some countries were able to protect their populations from undernourishment. While the year of data are not the same across indicators, the percentage of the population living in absolute poverty (on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day) was greater than the percentage of the population that was undernourished in China, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, South Africa, and Colombia. For example, in Nigeria 64 percent of the population lived on less than \$1.25 a day and nine percent were undernourished. Some countries are able to make combating hunger a high priority among expenditures; in addition, private sector programs as well as international food aid, food pricing differences, land ownership patterns, and a country's food distribution infrastructure may help explain these differences.<sup>33</sup>

## Parental Education

Parental education influences parenting behaviors and child well-being. Well-educated parents are more likely to read to their children and provide their children with extracurricular activities, books, cognitive stimulation, and high educational expectations. Such parents are more likely to be active in their children's schools and are less likely to use negative discipline techniques.<sup>34</sup> Internationally, children of well-educated parents have higher academic achievement and literacy.<sup>35,36</sup> Parents transmit their education, knowledge, skills, and other aspects of human capital to their children, and parents' levels of education directly influence their access to social networks and well-paying jobs with benefits. These advantages are, in turn, conferred upon their children.

Due to data limitations, this report used a proxy measure for the parental education indicator: the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head had completed secondary education, as shown in **Figure 9**. In the United States, completing secondary education equates to earning a high school diploma or GED. Data for this indicator came from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series–International (IPUMS) and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> FAO, WFP, and IFAD. "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012. Economic Growth Is Necessary but Not Sufficient to Accelerate Reduction of Hunger and Malnutrition." Rome: FAO, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> P. Davis-Kean, "The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment," *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005), E. Hair et al., "Parents Matter: Parental Education, Parenting and Child Well-Being" (paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, 2007), S. Hofferth and F.J. Sandberg, "How American Children Spend Their Time," *Journal of Marriage & the Family* 63, no. May (2001), K. R. Phillips, "Parent Work and Child Well-Being in Low-Income Families," (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2002).

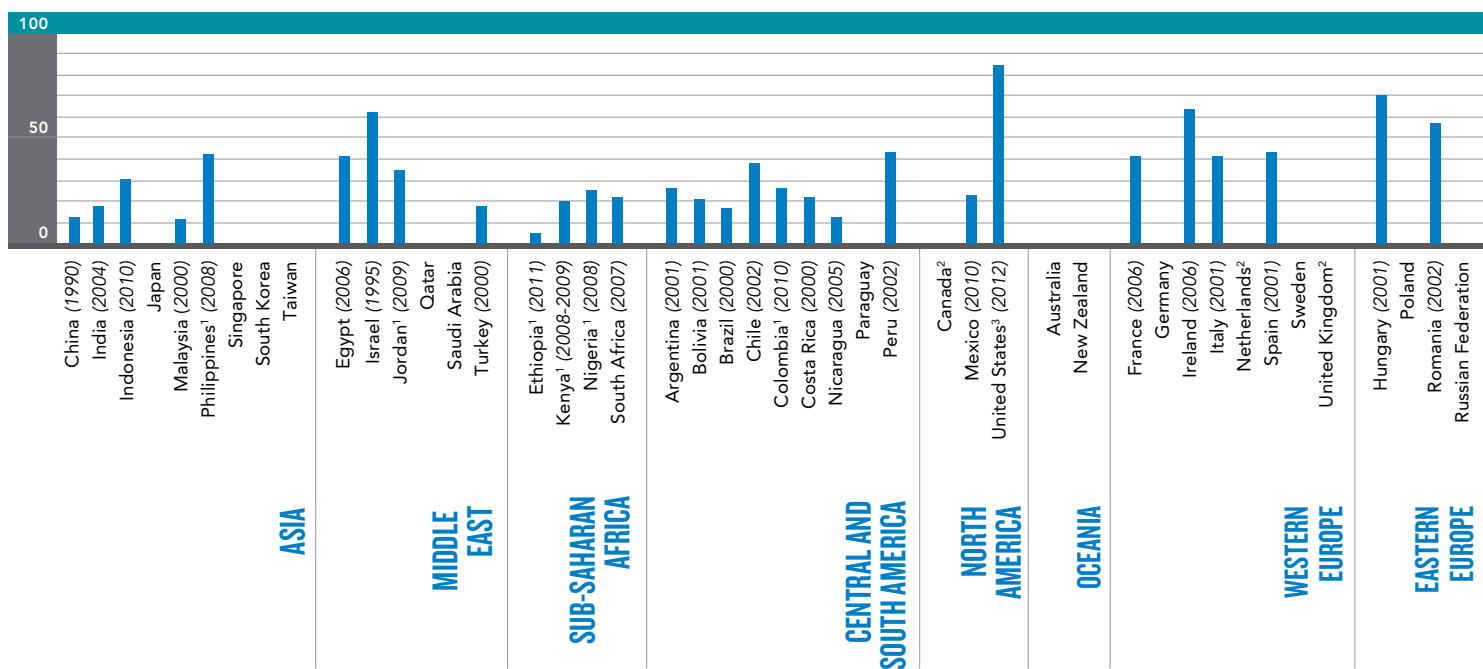
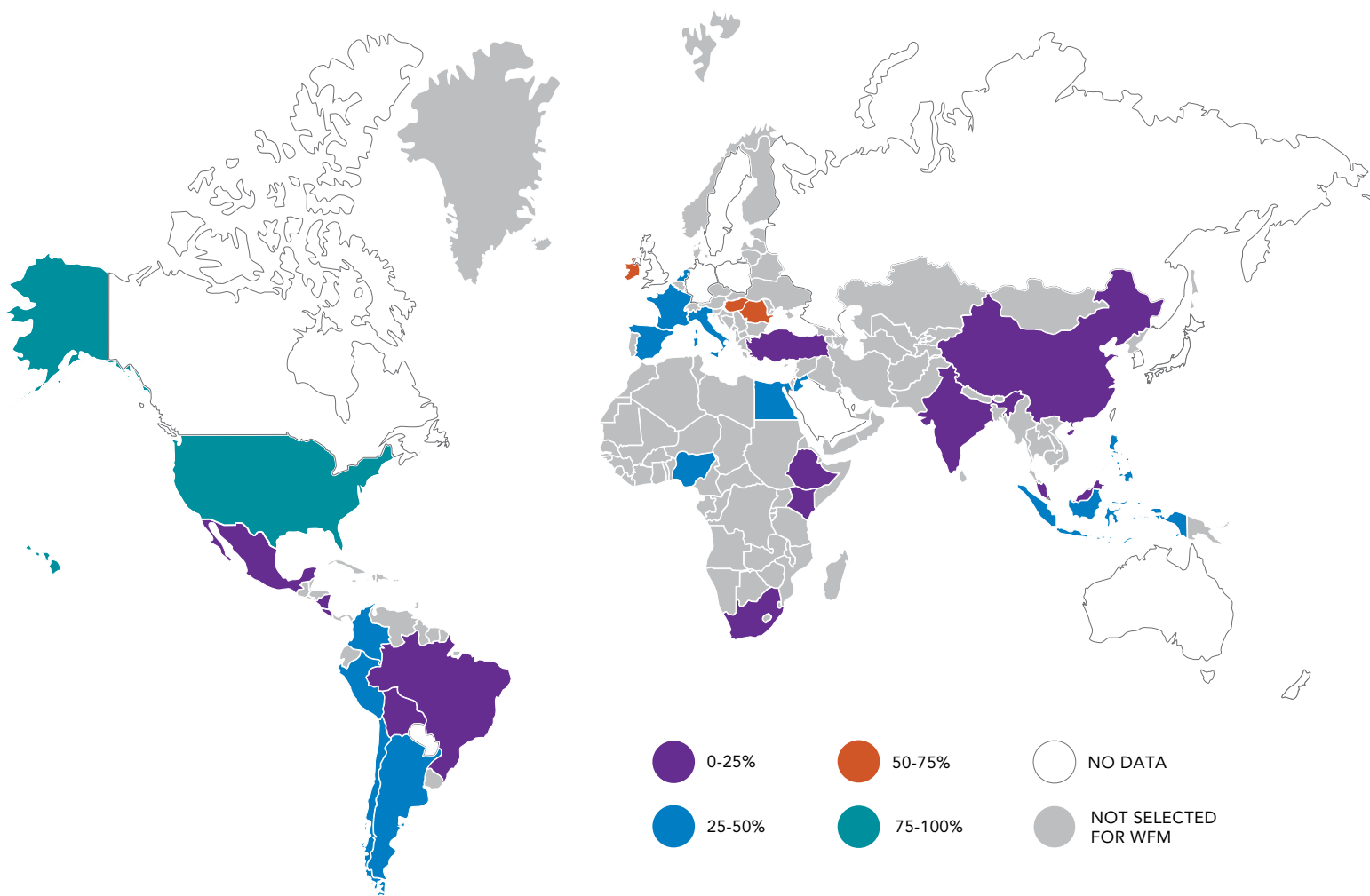
<sup>35</sup> M. Lemke et al., "Outcomes of Learning: Results from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-Year-Olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy," (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> I. V. S. Mullis et al., "Tims 1999 International Mathematics Report: Findings from IEA's Repeat of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study at the Eighth Grade," (Boston: International Study Center, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, 2000).

<sup>37</sup> In this report, we present data for the most recent year available, which differs across countries. As with other indicators, we caution readers to refrain from making direct comparisons between countries that have data from different years.

**Figure 9** PARENTAL EDUCATION, 1990-2011

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS IN WHICH HOUSEHOLD HEAD HAS A SECONDARY EDUCATION



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure9](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure9)

Levels of parental education varied widely across Asian countries. In 2000, 12 percent of Malaysian children lived with a household head who had completed secondary education. Eighteen percent of children did so in India in 2004. In 2010, 31 percent of Indonesian children lived with a household head who had completed secondary education. Filipino children were the most likely to live with an educated household head: 42 percent did so in 2008.

Among the Middle Eastern countries studied, Turkey had the lowest percentage of children living in a household with a household head who had completed secondary education, at 18 percent in 2000. In the remaining surveyed Middle Eastern countries, between 35 percent (Jordan in 2009) and 62 percent (Israel in 1995) of children lived with a household head who had completed secondary education.

Parental education was lower in Sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions. Among the Sub-Saharan African countries studied, between five and 25 percent of children lived in households in which the heads of these households had completed secondary education. For example, in Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria, at least 20 percent of children lived in such households, in 2007-09. In contrast, in Ethiopia, five percent of children lived in such households in 2011.

In Central and South America, between 12 and 44 percent of children lived in a household in which the household head had completed secondary education. For example, 17 percent of Brazilian children lived in a household in which the head of that household had completed secondary education in 2000; and that year, 22 percent of children in Costa Rica did so. Twenty-six percent of children lived in a household in which the household head had completed secondary education in Argentina and Colombia, in 2001 and 2010, respectively. In Peru, 44 percent of children lived in such circumstances in 2007.

For North American children, levels of parental education also varied widely. Twenty-three percent of Mexican children lived in a household in which the head of the household had completed secondary education in 2010. Eighty-five percent of American children lived in such households in 2012.

In Western Europe, 42 percent of children in Italy and 44 percent of children in Spain lived in a household in which the head of the household had completed secondary education in 2001. In 2006, 41 percent of French children and 63 percent of Irish children lived in such households.

Eastern Europe had some of the highest rates of parental education. Fifty-seven percent of children in Romania in 2002 and 70 percent of children in Hungary in 2001 lived in a household in which the head of the household had completed secondary education.

## Parental Employment

Researchers agree that poverty has detrimental effects on child and adolescent outcomes. Employed parents are more likely to be able to provide for their children, as well as to connect their families to important social networks and to serve as important role models for productive engagement. Having an employed parent creates an opportunity for the consumption of goods and services that are especially valuable during childhood, such as health care. In fact, adolescents of unemployed parents report lower levels of health.<sup>38</sup>

Parental unemployment can create stress in a family. The financial and emotional strain associated with unemployment can lead to depression and lower levels of satisfaction with a spouse or partner.<sup>39</sup> Family conflict created from this strain,

<sup>38</sup> Maria Sleskova et al., "Does Parental Unemployment Affect Adolescents' Health?" *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, no. 5 (2006).

<sup>39</sup> A. D. Vinokur, R. H. Price, and R. D. Caplan, "Hard Times and Hurtful Partners: How Financial Strain Affects Depression and Relationship Satisfaction of Unemployed Persons and Their Spouses," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 1 (1996).

whether in the setting of an intact family or one separated by divorce, is detrimental to child well-being.<sup>40</sup>

Parental employment is also related to the number of parents present in a household. Children living with two parents are less likely to live in a jobless household than children living with one parent.<sup>41</sup>

Data limitations restricted the measurement of parental employment to the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head has a job. This measure is limited for a number of reasons. It does not provide information on whether the employment is full-time or full-year, or on how many hours a day the provider is working. In addition, the measure does not shed light on what the parent's work means in the context of the child's life. For example, the data about parental employment do not reveal whether one or multiple adults in the household are working, where and with whom the child spends time while the parent is working, how old the child is while the parent is working, or what hours of the day the parent is working, all of which can have an impact on child well-being outcomes.

The data used to calculate parental employment were drawn primarily from LIS and Integrated Public Use Microdata Series–International (IPUMS). Data for most countries are from 2000 to 2010. This indicator is very sensitive to country economic conditions and general economic climate, so we do not recommend that readers use these data to make comparisons across countries for different years.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the world, between 45 and 97 percent of children under the age 18 lived in households in which the head of the household was employed. See [Table 2](#) for more details.

As a region, Asia had the highest percentage of children living in households with an employed household head, ranging from 88 percent in Malaysia in 2000 to 97 percent in Taiwan in 2005.

Parental employment levels were slightly lower in the selected Middle Eastern countries. Jordan, Israel, and Turkey had parental employment rates of less than 80 percent. In Egypt, 88 percent of children lived in a household with an employed head of household.

The selected Sub-Saharan African countries had the largest range of parental employment in a region. Forty-five percent of children lived in a household with an employed household head in South Africa, whereas 88 percent did so in Kenya.

Central and South America's parental employment rates also had a large span, from 68 percent in Chile and Argentina to 90 percent in Peru. In North America, parental employment rates ranged from 71 percent in the United States to 88 percent in Mexico and 90 percent in Canada. In Australia, the sole country for which we have data in Oceania, the parental employment rate was 81 percent.

<sup>40</sup> G.D. Sandefur and A. Meier, "The Family Environment: Structure, Material Resources and Child Care," in *Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being: Completing the Picture*, ed. B.V. Brown (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Doing Better for Families."

<sup>42</sup> See Table 2 for detail

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 IN HOUSEHOLDS IN WHICH THE HOUSEHOLD HEAD IS EMPLOYED

**ASIA**

China <sup>1</sup> (1990)	94
India (2004)	89
Indonesia <sup>1</sup> (2010)	93
Japan	–
Malaysia <sup>1</sup> (2000)	88
Philippines	–
Singapore	–
South Korea (2006)	93
Taiwan (2005)	97

**MIDDLE EAST**

Egypt <sup>1</sup> (2006)	88
Israel (2007)	72
Jordan <sup>1</sup> (2004)	72
Qatar	–
Saudi Arabia	–
Turkey <sup>1</sup> (2000)	77

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Ethiopia	–
Kenya <sup>1</sup> (1999)	88
Nigeria	–
South Africa (2008)	45

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina <sup>1</sup> (2001)	68
Bolivia <sup>1</sup> (2001)	71
Brazil (2006)	83
Chile <sup>1</sup> (2002)	68
Colombia (2004)	82
Costa Rica <sup>1</sup> (2000)	80
Nicaragua <sup>1</sup> (2005)	76
Paraguay	–
Peru (2004)	90

**NORTH AMERICA**

Canada (2007)	90
Mexico (2004)	88
United States (2010)	71

**OCEANIA**

Australia (2003)	81
New Zealand	–

**WESTERN EUROPE**

France (2005)	88
Germany (2007)	80
Ireland (2004)	60
Italy (2004)	81
Netherlands (2004)	81
Spain (2004)	82
Sweden (2005)	90
United Kingdom (2004)	79

**EASTERN EUROPE**

Hungary (2005)	88
Poland (2004)	85
Romania <sup>1</sup> (2002)	63
Russian Federation (2000)	84

In Western Europe, parental employment rates ranged from 60 percent in Ireland to 90 percent in Sweden.<sup>46</sup> In the majority of selected countries in this region, approximately 80 percent of children lived in a household in which the head of household was employed.

Rates were similar in Eastern Europe, where they ranged from 84 to 88 percent. Romania was an exception to these relatively high rates: 63 percent of children in the country lived in a household in which the head of the household was employed.

**Public Spending on Family Benefits**

Government spending on benefits for families provides support when parents need time off work to take care of a newborn, and to replace lost income during this time, as well as to support parental employment through early care and education.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports public spending on family benefits, including child care supports, parental leave benefits, child allowances, and family tax breaks. Unfortunately, these data are only available for members of the OECD, which are middle and high income nations. These data are also limited because funding plans differ between countries and local expenditures may not be depicted for all nations.<sup>47</sup>

Public spending on family benefits may be viewed as one potential measure of governmental spending priorities. Here, we focus on the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that a country allocates to family benefits. As presented in **Table 3**, governments spent between 0.7 and 3.7 percent of their GDP on benefits exclusively for families in 2007.

<sup>46</sup> Interpret Sweden's rate with caution. More than 15 percent of data is missing.

<sup>47</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Public Spending on Family Benefits," <http://www.oecd.org/els/familiesandchildren/37864391.pdf>.



In Asia, Japan spent 1.3 percent of its GDP on family benefits and South Korea spent 0.7 percent. Israel, the only represented country in the Middle East, spent two percent of its GDP on family benefits, despite a hefty military budget.

In North America, spending on family benefits hovered around one percent, ranging from 1.0 percent in Mexico to 1.4 percent in Canada. South American countries, as represented by Chile, had lower levels of spending on families, at 0.8 percent.

Oceanic countries placed more monetary emphasis on family benefits. New Zealand spent 3.1 percent of its GDP in this area and Australia spent 2.8.

Western European countries had the highest levels of government spending on family benefits. France led the selected countries by spending 3.7 percent of its GDP on family benefits. The United Kingdom and Sweden also spent more than 3 percent of their GDP on family benefits.

In Eastern Europe, Hungary spent more than three percent of its GDP on family benefits, whereas Poland and Romania spent 1.6 and 1.7 percent, respectively.

**Table 3** PUBLIC SPENDING ON FAMILY BENEFITS, CIRCA 2007

PUBLIC SPENDING ON FAMILY BENEFITS IN CASH, SERVICES AND TAX MEASURES, IN PERCENT OF GDP

**ASIA**

China	–
India	–
Indonesia	–
Japan	1.3
Malaysia	–
Philippines	–
Singapore	–
South Korea	0.7
Taiwan	–

**MIDDLE EAST**

Egypt	–
Israel <sup>1</sup>	2.0
Jordan	–
Qatar	–
Saudi Arabia	–
Turkey	–

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Ethiopia	–
Kenya	–
Nigeria	–
South Africa	–

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina	–
Bolivia	–
Brazil	–
Chile	0.8
Colombia	–
Costa Rica	–
Nicaragua	–
Paraguay	–
Peru	–

**NORTH AMERICA**

Canada	1.4
Mexico	1.0
United States	1.2

**OCEANIA**

Australia	2.8
New Zealand	3.1

**WESTERN EUROPE**

France	3.7
Germany	2.7
Ireland	2.7
Italy	1.4
Netherlands	2.8
Spain	1.5
Sweden	3.4
United Kingdom	3.6

**EASTERN EUROPE**

Hungary	3.3
Poland	1.6
Romania	1.7
Russian Federation	–

Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/table3](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/table3)

# Family Processes

## Key Findings

Family process indicators describe the interactions between members of a family, including their relationships, communication patterns, time spent together, and satisfaction with family life. Data on family processes are challenging to obtain in a way that allows for international comparisons, but this situation is likely to improve in the next few years as new data are released. Here are some examples of indicators of family processes that can influence child and family well-being: family satisfaction; agreement or disagreement over household work; social and political discussions; and family meals together. While few countries had data on these measures, there was wide variation across the countries that did have data available.

- Between 31 percent (Russia) and 74 percent (Chile) of adults around the world are completely or very satisfied with their family life (8 countries with information)
- Between 55 percent (Russia) and 88 percent (Philippines) of couples report low levels of disagreement around household work (8 countries)
- Between six percent (South Korea) and 39 percent (Argentina) of 15-year-olds discuss political or social issues with their parents several times a week (25 countries)
- The percentage of 15-year-olds who eat meals with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 62 percent in Israel to 94 percent in Italy (25 countries)

## Family Satisfaction

Family satisfaction both influences and is influenced by family structure, economics, and culture. The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) from 2002 provides data on this indicator for only a handful of countries. So, unfortunately, information in this area is quite limited.

The data that are available show that satisfaction with family life varied widely throughout the world. In the eight surveyed countries, between 31 and 74 percent of respondents reported being completely or very satisfied with their family life, as seen in [Figure 10](#).

The highest levels of family satisfaction were found in South America, where 74 percent of Chileans reported being satisfied with their family life. The lowest levels of family satisfaction were found in Eastern Europe, with only 31 percent of Russian adults being satisfied with their family life. The surveyed countries in Western Europe and Asia fell in the middle, with satisfaction rates between 45 and 66 percent.

## Disagreement Over Household Work

Research in the United States has demonstrated that children tend to have better outcomes when they are living with both parents and when their parents have a low-conflict marriage.<sup>48</sup> Research on relationship quality also points to the importance of low levels of conflict in maintaining healthy relationships.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, maintaining a marriage or partnership that is not plagued by conflict has implications for each member of the entire family. Because responsibility for household work represents one area of potential disagreement that is shared by just about all couples who live together, the extent to which couples disagree about sharing household work can be seen as an indicator of family processes that couples throughout the world have in common.

The extent to which couples share household work is affected by norms in each country, and values related to gender equity, as well as the extent to which each spouse or partner in the relationship is working, or is at home caring for children and the household.

Data on this indicator are only available for a handful of countries from the 2002 International Social Survey Program (ISSP). Even though the information on sharing household work is limited, what little data that exist are suggestive of regional differences.

For the eight countries with information available, the lowest levels of conflict reported were in the Philippines, where 88 percent of adults who were living with a spouse or a partner reported a very low incidence of disagreement around housework, and in Chile, where 80 percent did so, as shown in [Figure 10](#).

In the Western European countries represented, low levels of disagreement also were reported, with 71 to 75 percent of coupled adults in all three countries (France, Great Britain and Ireland) reporting low levels of conflict around housework. These countries are characterized by women's high levels of participation in the labor force and by family policies—such as the provision of child allowances—that are supportive of mothers who stay home with their children in the early years.<sup>50</sup>

Relative to the other regions for which data are available, married or partnered adults in Eastern Europe were less likely to agree over housework. In the Eastern European countries represented, 55 percent of adults who were married or living with a partner in Russia, 57 percent in Poland, and 69 percent in Hungary reported low levels of conflict.

## Social and Political Discussions With Parents

Research has found that students who discuss social and political issues with their parents score higher in reading, math, and science literacy across the globe.<sup>51</sup> Such specific and topical discussions also are more highly and consistently related to literacy

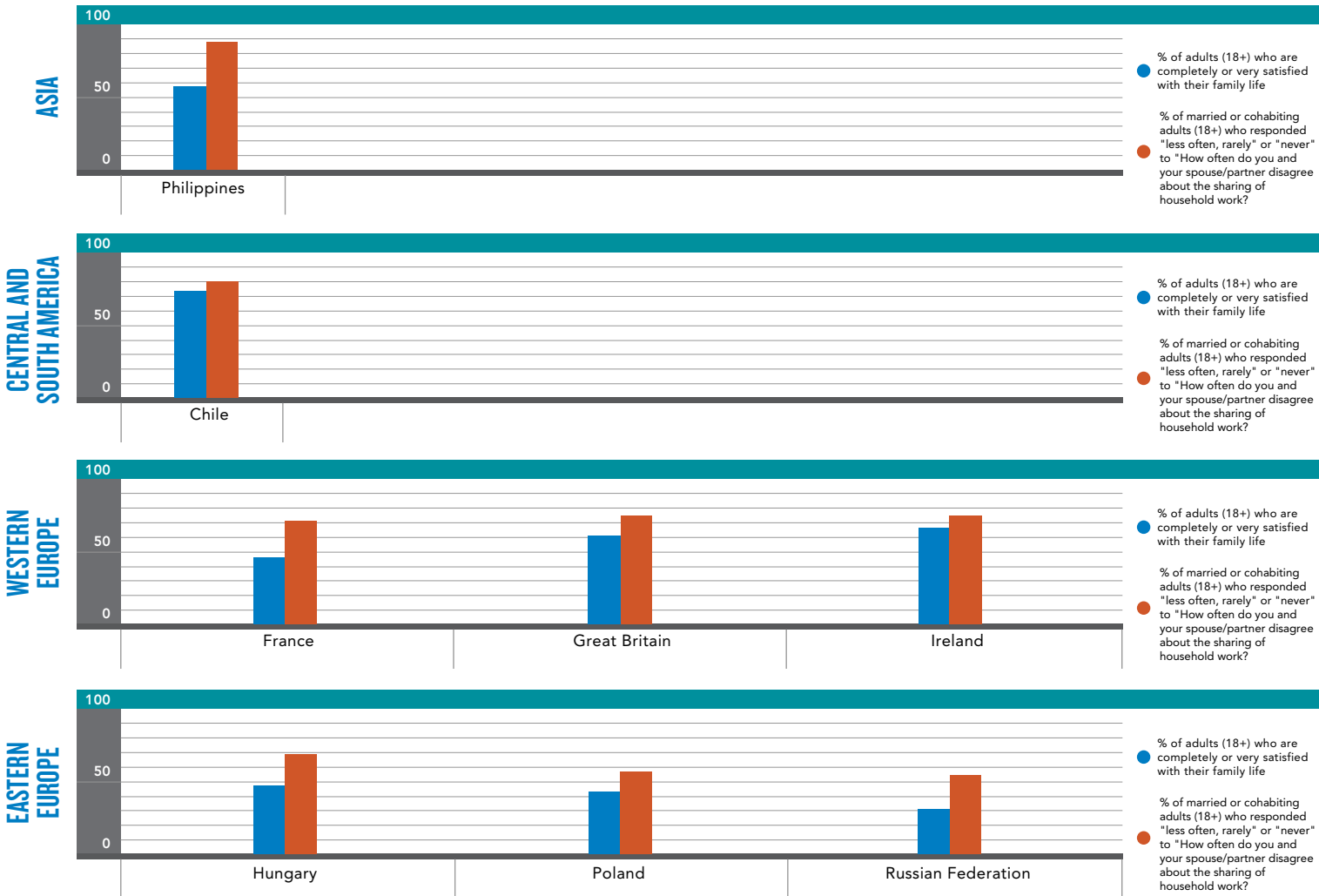
<sup>48</sup> G. Brody, I. Arias, and R. Finchman, "Linking Marital and Child Attributions to Family Process and Parent-Child Relationships," *Journal of Family Psychology* 10, no. 4 (1996), S.L. Brown, "Family Structure and Child Well-Being: The Significance of Parental Cohabitation," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004), C. Buehler and J. Gerard, "Marital Conflict, Ineffective Parenting, and Children's and Adolescents' Maladjustment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (2002), J. M. Gerard, A. Krishnakumar, and C. Buehler, "Marital Conflict, Parent-Child Relations, and Youth Maladjustment: A Longitudinal Investigation of Spillover Effects," *Journal of Family Issues* 27, no. 7 (2006), G. T. Harold, J. J. Aitken, and K. H. Shelton, "Inter-Parental Conflict and Children's Academic Attainment: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 48, no. 12 (2007), Sandra L. Hoffert, "Residential Father Family Type and Child Well-Being: Investment Versus Selection," *Demography* 43, no. 1 (2006), K. Kitzman, "Effects of Marital Conflict on Subsequent Triadic Family Interactions and Parenting," *Developmental Psychology* 36, no. 1 (2000), S. McLanahan and G.D. Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), K. A. Moore, A. Kinghorn, and T. Bandy, "Parental Relationship Quality and Child Outcomes across Subgroups," (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2011), D. K. Orthner et al., "Marital and Parental Relationship Quality and Educational Outcomes for Youth," *Marriage and Family Review* 45, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>49</sup> K.A. Moore et al., "What Is a 'Healthy Marriage'? Defining the Concept," (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Doing Better for Families."

<sup>51</sup> L. Guzman, G. Hampden-Thompson, and L. Lippman, "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy" (paper presented at the International Society for Child Indicators, June 28 2007), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from the Oecd Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) 2000," (Paris: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2001).

**Figure 10** FAMILY SATISFACTION AND HOUSEHOLD WORK DISAGREEMENT, 2002



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure10](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure10)

across countries than is general social communication, such as talking about daily activities.<sup>52</sup> Spending time talking about social and political issues is a way for parents to transmit information and values to their children.<sup>53</sup>

The measure that we used for this indicator was the percentage of 15-year-old students who discuss social and political issues with their parents several times a week. This measure has the potential to vary according to the current social and political situation in each country. We took the data for this indicator from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. The PISA sample contains primarily middle- and high-income countries.

How often families discuss social and political issues ranged widely throughout the world, and within regions. Across surveyed countries, between six and 39 percent of 15-year-olds discussed political or social issues with their parents several times a week, as seen in [Figure 11](#).

Teens from Asian countries reported lower levels of social and political discussions with their parents than did teens in other regions, ranging from 13 percent in Japan to six percent in South Korea.

Israeli adolescents, in contrast, reported relatively higher levels of social-political family discussions, at 29 percent.<sup>54</sup> Israel was in an election year and dealing with the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict. Unfortunately, it is the only Middle Eastern country for which we have data.

Argentina boasted the highest rate of social-political family discussions among all selected countries, with 39 percent of 15-year-olds in the 2000 PISA survey reporting that they discussed social and political issues with their parents several times a week. Argentina was suffering from major economic woes during this time period, which no doubt contributed to this frequency.<sup>55</sup> However, Brazil, Chile, and Peru were not far behind, with rates on this measure of 28, 26, and 25 percent, respectively, indicating that such discussions are common in Latin America.

The United States had the highest percentage of teens within North America who reported having such discussions, at 22 percent, compared with seven percent in Mexico. In both countries in Oceania (Australia and New Zealand) about 12 percent of teens reported such discussions.

Among European countries, Italy, which was leading up to an election that year, had the highest levels of family social and political discussions, at 28 percent. In France, 19 percent of 15-year-olds reported frequent social or political discussions with their parents, while in Russia, 16 percent did so. In other European countries, between 12 (Hungary) and eight percent (Sweden and Germany) of 15-year-olds reported having such discussions.

## Family Meals

Eating meals together can be a regular time for children to talk with their parents and share what is going on in their lives.<sup>56</sup> It is a direct measure of a positive family process.

<sup>52</sup> Guzman, Hampden-Thompson, and Lippman, "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy", Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from the OECD Program for International Student Assessment (Pisa) 2000."

<sup>53</sup> P. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1985).

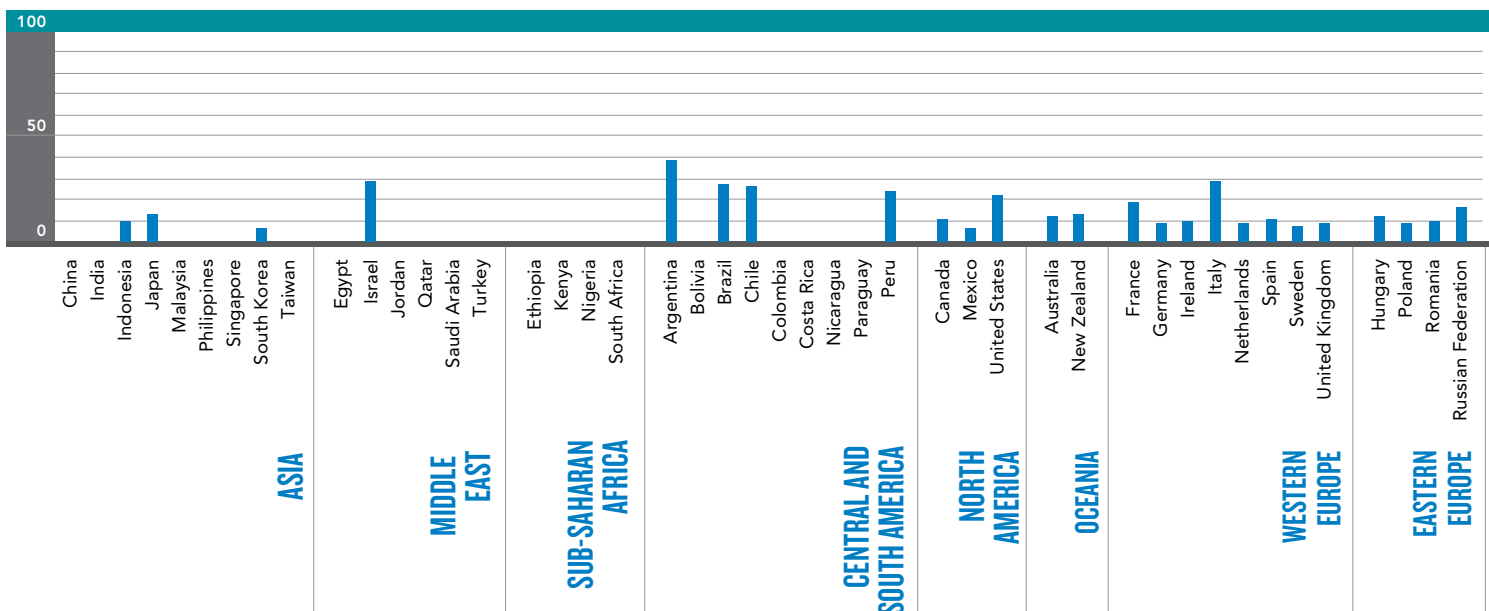
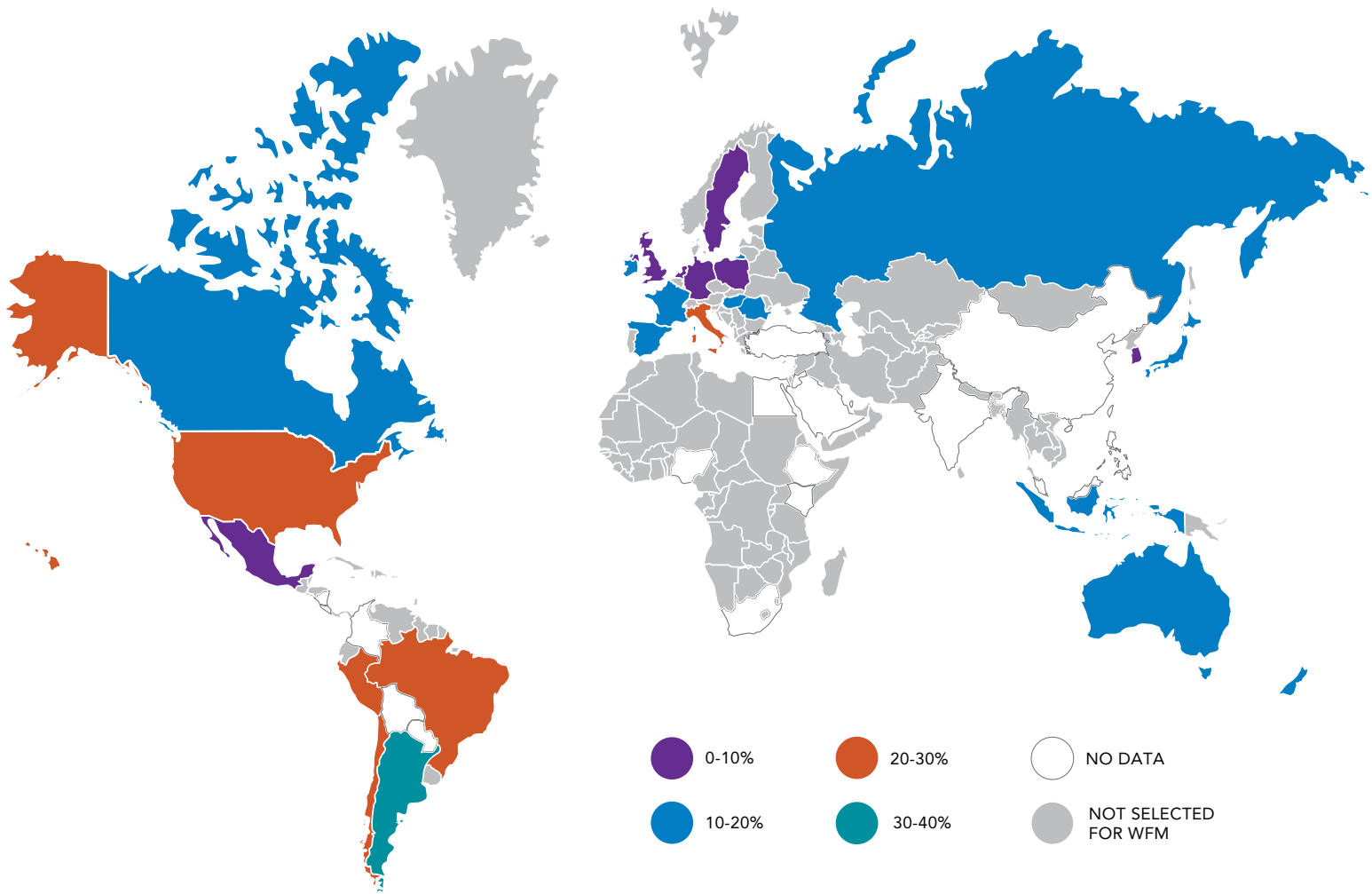
<sup>54</sup> Data for Israel should be interpreted with caution due to high levels of missing values.

<sup>55</sup> Horwood, C. "Lessons Learnt from Argentina's Financial Crisis." Euromoney 2006.

<sup>56</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners Vi," (New York, NY: Columbia University, 2010).

**Figure 11** SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS, 2000

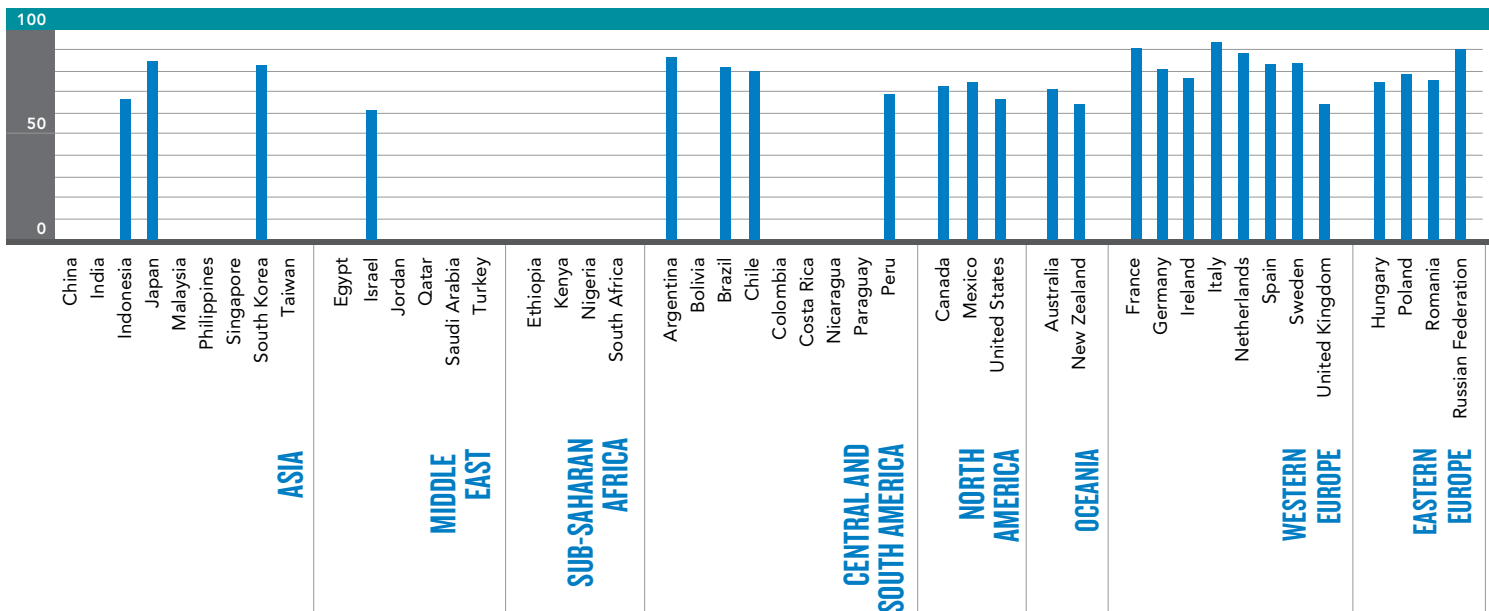
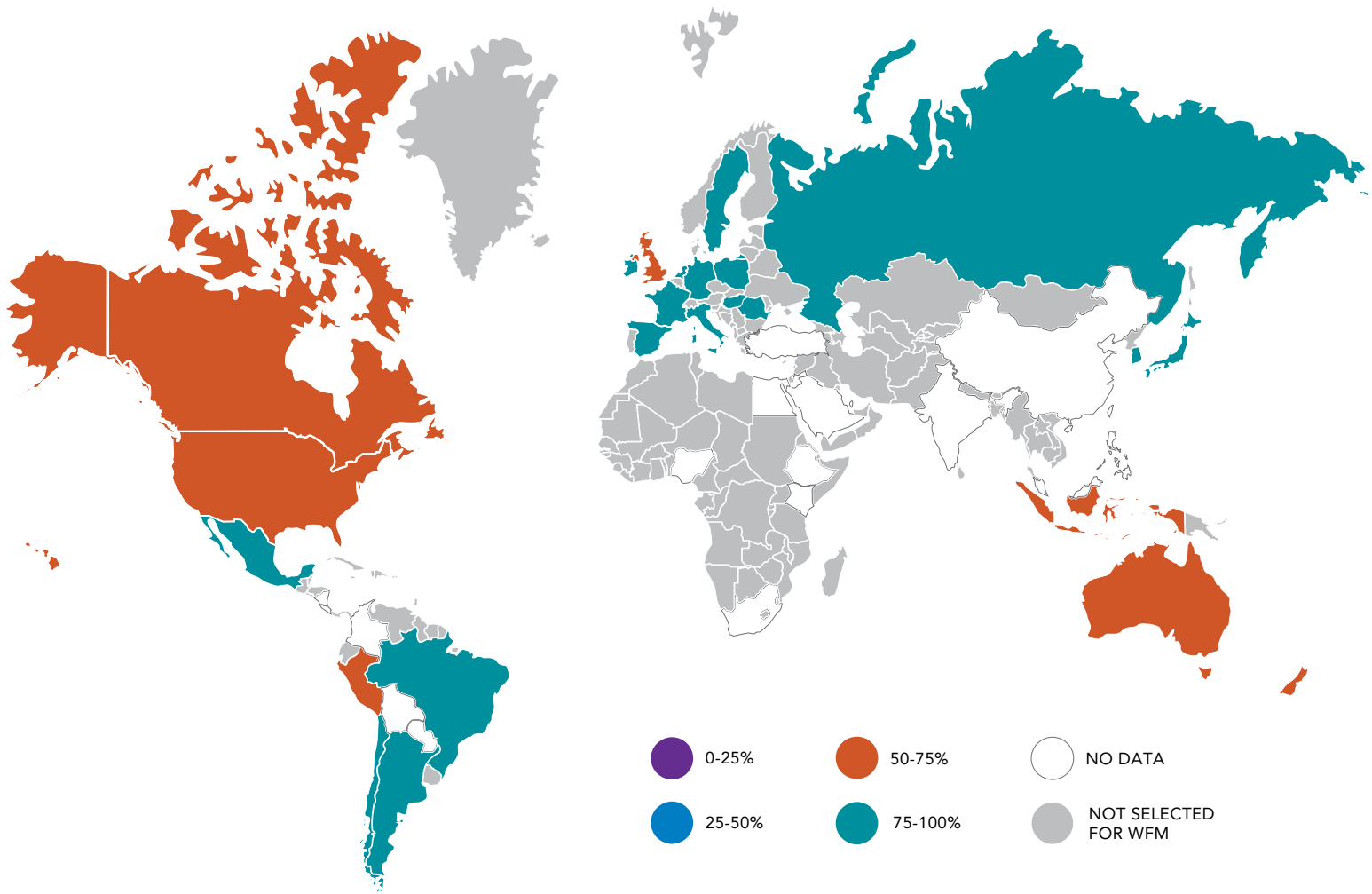
PERCENTAGE OF 15-YEAR-OLDS WHO DISCUSS POLITICAL OR SOCIAL ISSUES WITH THEIR PARENTS SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure11](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure11)

**Figure 12** FAMILY MEALS, 2000

PERCENTAGE OF 15-YEAR-OLDS WHO EAT THE MAIN MEAL WITH THEIR PARENTS SEVERAL TIMES PER WEEK



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure12](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure12)

In the United States, eating together as a family has been associated with myriad positive outcomes, ranging from reduced levels of substance and alcohol use to lower levels of depression, even after accounting for other family factors. Eating meals together is also associated with favorable educational outcomes, such as showing a commitment to learning, seeking and earning higher grades, spending more time on homework, and reading for pleasure.<sup>57</sup> After including controls for background characteristics, one study found that eating meals as a family was the most important predictor of adolescent flourishing.<sup>58</sup> Recent longitudinal research has found that the value of eating meals together as a family may dissipate as adolescents enter young adulthood, leaving only indirect effects on well-being.<sup>59</sup> The influence of sharing meals on positive outcomes also depends on the quality of family relationships. While sharing meals in families with stronger relationships has been found to have positive associations with child well-being, sharing meals in families that are marked by poorer or conflict-filled relationships has been shown to have a lesser influence on how well children develop.<sup>60</sup>

Evidence suggests that both adolescents and their parents agree that eating together is important, although parents place more value on mealtime.<sup>61</sup>

Internationally, research has demonstrated that students who eat meals with their families more frequently are more likely to score higher in reading literacy in 16 out of 21 countries. This relationship is more consistent than that between discussing general topics with parents and reading literacy.<sup>62</sup>

Families all around the world eat meals together, though the particular meal of importance may vary from country to country. *The World Family Map* presents the proportion of children who eat the main meal of the day with their families several times a week as an indicator of family processes. The information for this indicator was drawn from the direct answers given by 15-year-olds from a variety of countries participating in the 2000 PISA survey.

These data indicate that the percentage of 15-year-olds who frequently eat meals with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 62 percent in Israel to 94 percent in Italy,<sup>63</sup> as seen in **Figure 12**.

There was also a wide difference in the proportion of families frequently eating meals together within Asia, ranging from 67 percent in Indonesia to 85 percent in Japan, and in South America, ranging from 69 percent in Peru to 86 percent in Argentina. In the North American countries in this study, frequent family meal-sharing rates hovered more consistently around 70 percent.

<sup>57</sup> M. Eisenberg et al., "Correlations between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being among Adolescents," *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 158 (2004), Jayne A. Fulkerson et al., "Family Dinner Meal Frequency and Adolescent Development: Relationships with Developmental Assets and High-Risk Behaviors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 39, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>58</sup> N. Zarrett and R. Lerner, "Ways to Promote the Positive Development of Children and Youth," in *Research-to-Results Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2008).

<sup>59</sup> Kelly Musick and A. Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being," *Journal of Marriage & Family* 74, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Jayne A. Fulkerson, Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, and Mary Story, "Adolescent and Parent Views of Family Meals," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106 (2006).

<sup>62</sup> L. Guzman, G. Hampden-Thompson, and L. Lippman, "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy," Under Review (2012).

<sup>63</sup> This data should be interpreted with caution. Fifteen percent or more cases are missing.



The highest rates of sharing meals were found in Europe. In particular, in France and Italy in Western Europe and Russia in Eastern Europe, at least 90 percent of 15-year-olds ate with their families several times a week. In contrast, just 65 percent of 15-year-olds in the United Kingdom frequently shared meals with their families.

The differences in the frequency of families eating meals together may reflect differences in family structure, time use, proximity of work and school to home, rates of female labor-force participation, and cultural patterns. For example, in the United States, higher income families with two parents and a stay-at-home mother are more likely to eat meals together.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Musick and Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being."

# Family Culture

## Key Findings

Family culture refers to the family-related attitudes and norms that are expressed by a country's citizens. Data suggest that adults take a range of progressive and conservative positions on family issues.

- Acceptance of voluntary single motherhood varies by region, with adults in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania leaning more towards acceptance (with a high acceptance rate of 80 percent in Spain), and countries in Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa leaning more towards rejection (as evidenced by an acceptance rate of only two percent in Egypt and Jordan).
- In the majority of countries featured in this study, most adults believe that working mothers can establish just as good relationships with their children as stay-at-home mothers, with those holding this view ranging from 47 percent in Jordan to 84 percent in Sweden.
- In the majority of countries, as well, most adults believe that children are more likely to flourish in a home with both a mother and a father, with those sharing this belief ranging from 47 percent of adults in Sweden to 99 percent of adults in Egypt.
- Most adults worldwide report that they completely trust their families; however, attitudes on this issue vary by region and country, with 63 percent of adults reporting they completely trust their families in the Netherlands, and 97 percent reporting this to be the case in Jordan. It should be noted that the willingness of adults to affirm the term "completely" varies across countries.

To shed light on adults' attitudes toward family life around the world, we relied on data from the World Values Survey (WVS), collected between 1999 and 2008, on four cultural indicators in 24 countries: 1) approval of single motherhood, 2) agreement that a child needs a home with a mother and father to grow up happily, 3) approval of working mothers, and 4) presence of family trust.<sup>65</sup> Given that respondents in different countries may interpret the questions and response categories somewhat differently, and that population representation of the survey varies from country to country, the WVS does not allow us to draw a perfect comparison between countries. Nevertheless, the survey remains the best source of data for international comparisons of adult attitudes towards family-related matters.

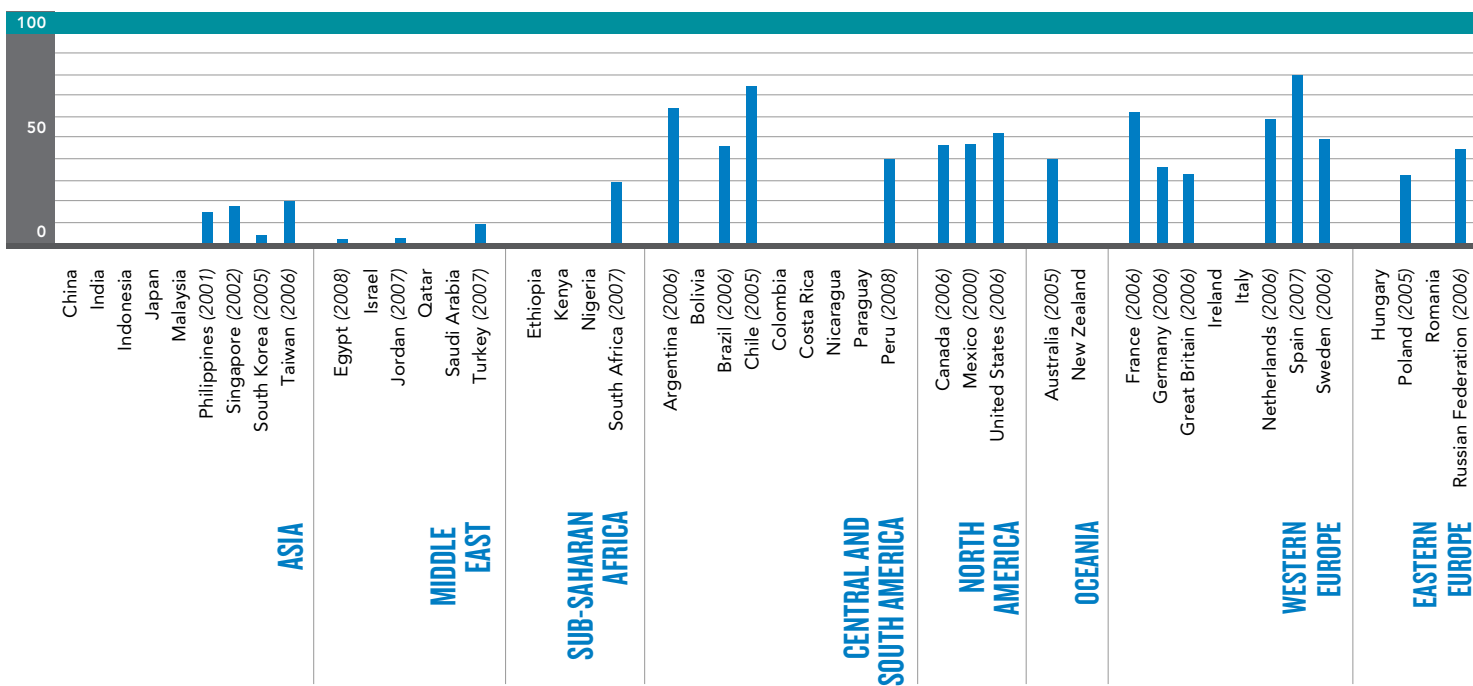
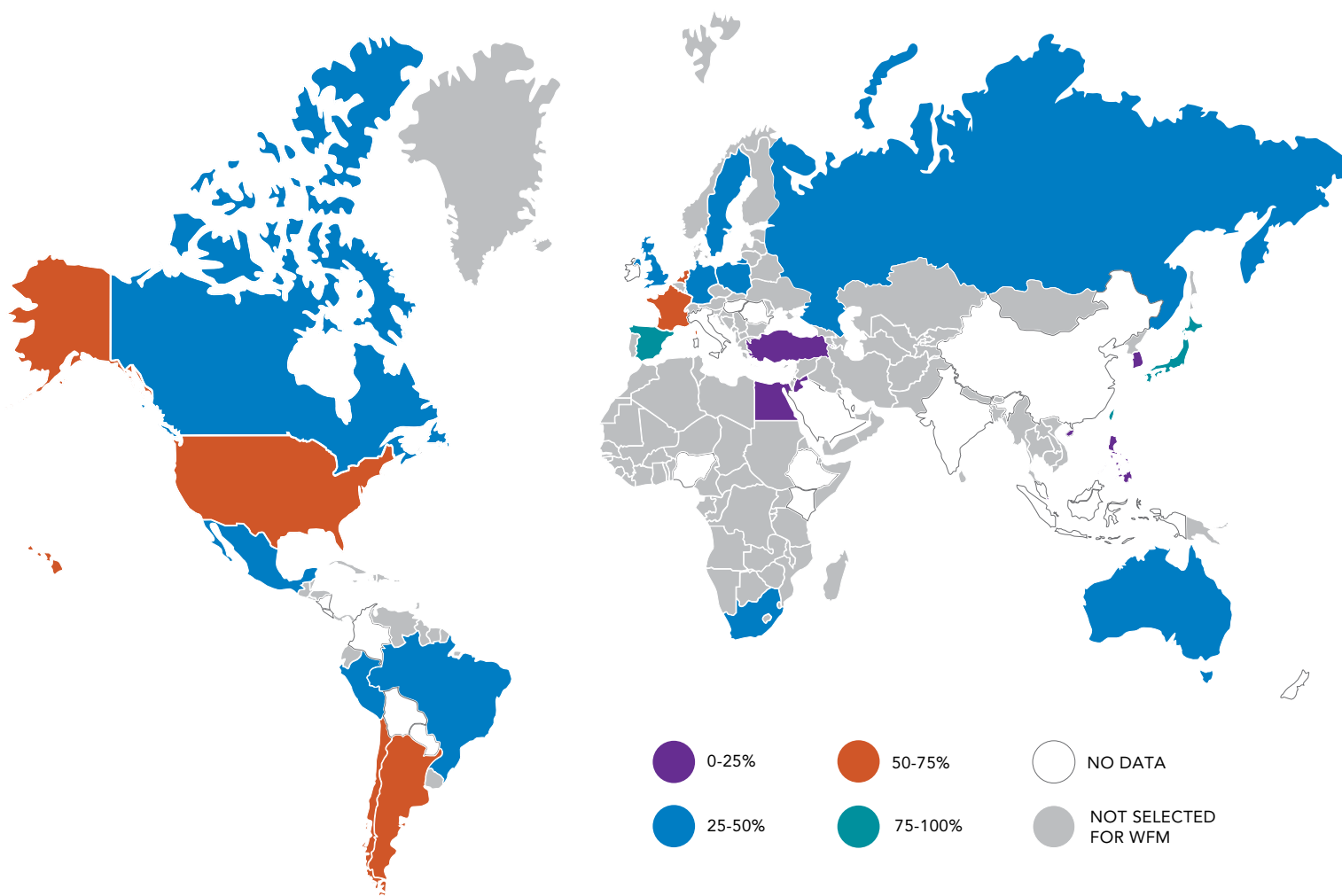
## Attitudes Toward Voluntary Single Motherhood

Adult attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood vary greatly by region, as seen in [Figure 13](#). The WVS asked adults if they approved of a woman seeking to "have a child as a single parent" without a "stable relationship with a man." In Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa, little public support exists for this type of single motherhood. Specifically, in Asia and the

<sup>65</sup> World Values Survey Association, "World Values Survey 1981-2008 Official Aggregate V.20090901," (World Values Survey Association ([www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org)). Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid, 2009).

**Figure 13** ATTITUDES TOWARD VOLUNTARY SINGLE MOTHERHOOD, 1998-2008

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS (18+) WHO APPROVE OF A WOMAN WHO WANTS TO HAVE A CHILD AS A SINGLE PARENT BUT DOESN'T WANT TO HAVE A STABLE RELATIONSHIP WITH A MAN



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure13](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure13)

Middle East, support for this view ranged from a high of 20 percent (Taiwan) to a low of two percent (Egypt and Jordan). Support was also comparatively low in South Africa, where only 29 percent of adults expressed approval of voluntary single motherhood, despite far less than half of children actually living with two parents.

Support for voluntary single motherhood is markedly higher in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. Forty or more percent of adults living in Oceanic or American countries surveyed in the WVS expressed approval of single motherhood. For example, 52 percent of adults in the United States, 46 percent in Canada, 40 percent in Australia, and 74 percent in Chile indicated that they approved of unmarried women having children on their own. Views were more heterogeneous in Europe. Just 32 percent of adults in Poland expressed support for voluntary single motherhood, compared with 80 percent of adults in Spain. Overall, slightly less than half of the adults in most other European countries registered their approval of voluntary single motherhood. In general, adults in countries with more affluence, lower levels of religiosity, or high levels of single parenthood proved to be more supportive of women having children without a husband or male partner. By contrast, countries with strong religious or collectivist orientations were less supportive of women who chose to be single mothers.<sup>66</sup>

## Attitudes About Whether Children Need Both a Mother and Father

Despite the fact that there are considerable regional variations in public attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood, much less variation exists in public attitudes toward the value of a home with a mother and a father. In most of the world, the majority of adults appear to believe that a child “needs a home with both a mother and a father to grow up happily,” as seen in [Figure 14](#).

This sentiment was especially strong in Asia, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa, where between 87 percent (Taiwan) and 99 percent (Egypt) of adults expressed the belief that children are likely to be happier in homes with a mother and father. Indeed, more than 90 percent of adults in Egypt (99 percent), the Philippines (97 percent), Jordan (96 percent), Turkey (96 percent), Singapore (94 percent), South Korea (92 percent), and South Africa (91 percent) held this view.

In addition, support for this belief was high among respondents in South America, where large majorities agreed that children were more likely to flourish in mother-father homes, including 88 percent of adults in Argentina, 82 percent in Brazil, 76 percent in Chile, and 93 percent in Peru. North Americans were less likely to agree with this idea, but still 63 percent of U.S. adults, 87 percent of Mexican adults, and 65 percent of Canadian adults expressed the belief that the mother-father household is optimal for raising happy children. Australian adults (70 percent) held similar attitudes on this issue.

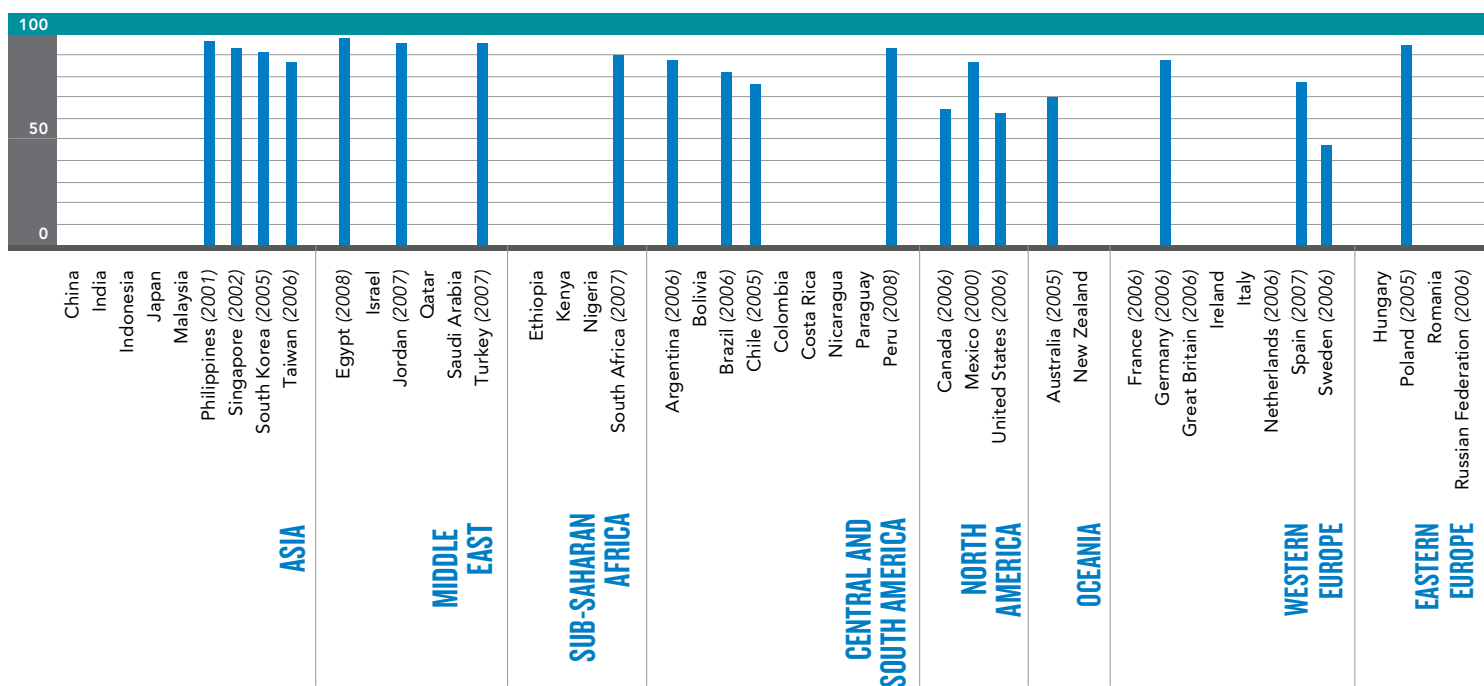
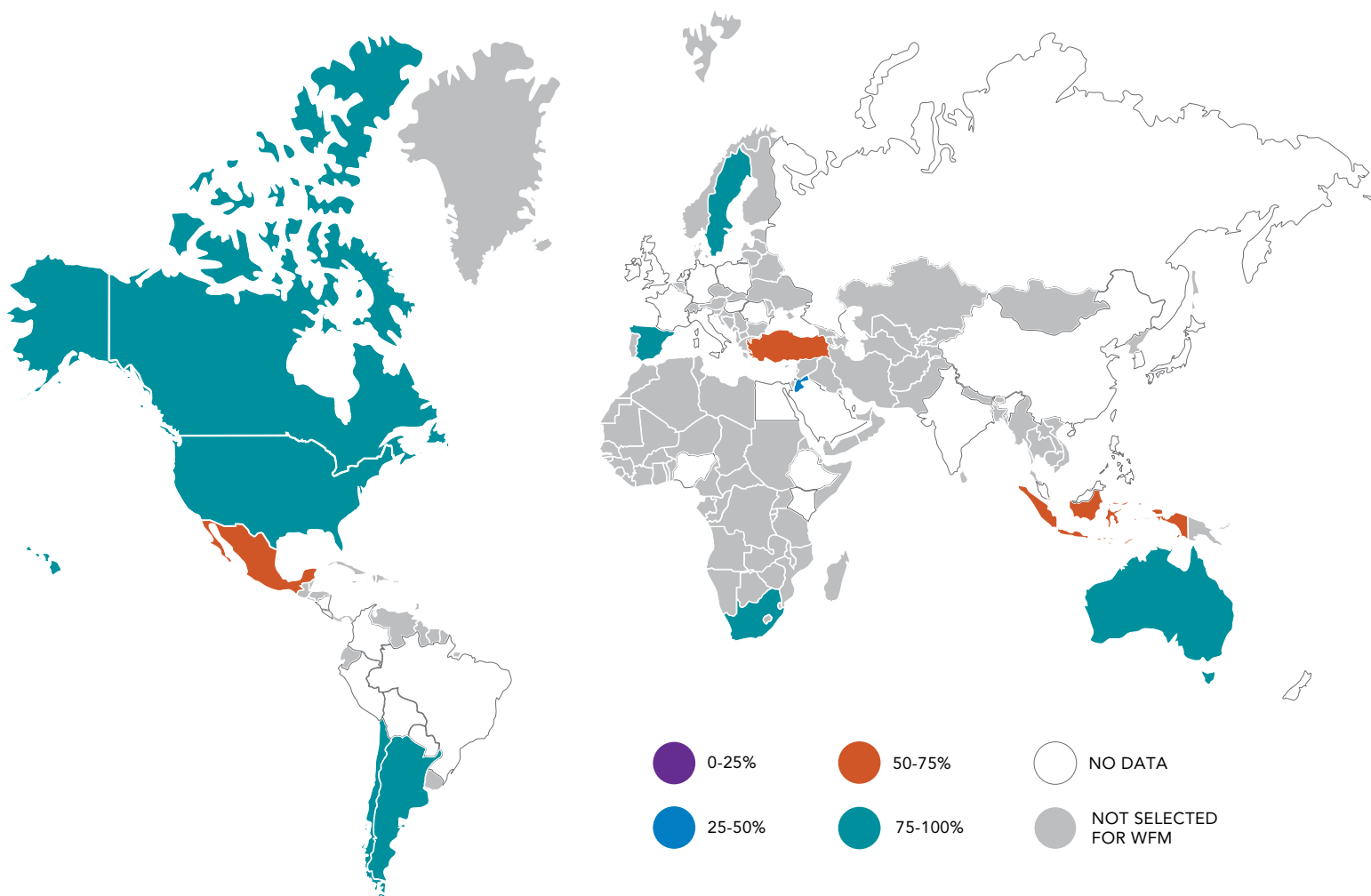
Agreement with the mother-father family ideal was higher among European adults than among adults in the Americas and Oceania, with the sole exception of survey respondents in Sweden. There, only 47 percent of adults agreed that a child needs to be raised by a mother and father to be happy, standing in sharp contrast to the majority of opinions on this issue expressed in the WVS. Agreement with a mother-father ideal exceeded 80 percent among adults in Poland (95 percent) and Germany (88 percent). More than three-quarters (78 percent) of adults in Spain also viewed this family arrangement as best for children.

Thus, even though many adults in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania approve of voluntary single motherhood, most adults in these regions believe the ideal is for a child to have a mother and a father in the home. And the survey revealed that throughout the rest of the globe more than 80 percent of adults took the view that children need a home with both their mother and their father to grow up happily.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *The Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World* (New York: Cambridge, 2003).

**Figure 14** ATTITUDES TOWARD THE NEED FOR BOTH PARENTS, 1999-2008

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS (18+) WHO TEND TO AGREE THAT A CHILD NEEDS A HOME WITH BOTH A FATHER AND A MOTHER TO GROW UP HAPPILY



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure14](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure14)

## Support for Working Mothers

In a majority of the world's countries, more than 50 percent of women aged 15 and older are participants in the paid labor force.<sup>67</sup> In line with this trend, as **Table 4** indicates, a clear majority of adults in countries around the globe believe that a “working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.”

This view seems to be particularly common in the Americas and Europe, where more than 75 percent of adults in the survey of countries generally agreed that working mothers perform just as well as mothers who do not work outside the home. For instance, 78 percent of adults in Canada, 78 percent of adults in Chile, and 81 percent of adults in Spain expressed the belief that working mothers can establish just as good a relationship with their children as can stay-at-home mothers. Likewise, in South Africa, 80 percent of adults in the survey agreed that working mothers do as well as mothers who do not work outside the home.

Judging by trends in the Philippines and Singapore, where about three-quarters of adults approved of working mothers, public attitudes in Asia also seem to be supportive. By contrast, support for working mothers seems lower in the Middle East, where 47 percent of adults in Jordan and 70 percent of adults in Turkey reported that they approved of working mothers.

In general, then, this somewhat limited global survey of public attitudes towards working mothers suggests that public support for working mothers is high. The one exception to this trend appears to be in the Middle East, where women's labor force participation is comparatively low and where traditional social mores are strongly held.<sup>68</sup>

**Table 4** SUPPORT FOR WORKING MOTHERS, 1999-2008

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS (18+) WHO AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE THAT A WORKING MOTHER CAN ESTABLISH JUST AS WARM AND SECURE A RELATIONSHIP WITH HER CHILDREN AS A MOTHER WHO DOES NOT WORK

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China –	Egypt –	Ethiopia –	Argentina (1999) 76
India –	Israel –	Kenya –	Bolivia –
Indonesia –	Jordan (2001) 47	Nigeria –	Brazil –
Japan –	Qatar –	South Africa (2001) 80	Chile (2000) 78
Malaysia –	Saudi Arabia –		Colombia –
Philippines (2001) 73	Turkey (2001) 70		Costa Rica –
Singapore (2002) 74			Nicaragua –
South Korea –			Paraguay –
Taiwan –			Peru –
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada (2000) 78	Australia –	France –	Hungary –
Mexico (2000) 69	New Zealand –	Germany –	Poland –
United States (1999) 79		Great Britain –	Romania –
		Ireland –	Russian Federation –
		Italy –	
		Netherlands –	
		Spain (2000) 81	
		Sweden (1999) 84	

Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/table4](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/table4)

<sup>67</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "The World's Women 2010," (New York: United Nations, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Inglehart and Norris, *The Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*.

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS (18+) WHO COMPLETELY TRUST THEIR FAMILIES

**ASIA**

China	-
India	-
Indonesia	-
Japan	-
Malaysia	-
Philippines	-
Singapore	-
South Korea (2005)	87
Taiwan (2006)	87

**MIDDLE EAST**

Egypt (2008)	96
Israel	-
Jordan (2007)	97
Qatar	-
Saudi Arabia	-
Turkey (2007)	96

**SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Ethiopia	-
Kenya	-
Nigeria	-
South Africa (2007)	85

**CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**

Argentina (2006)	91
Bolivia	-
Brazil (2006)	67
Chile (2005)	83
Colombia	-
Costa Rica	-
Nicaragua	-
Paraguay	-
Peru (2008)	76

**NORTH AMERICA**

Canada (2006)	83
Mexico	-
United States (2006)	72

**OCEANIA**

Australia (2005)	83
New Zealand	-

**WESTERN EUROPE**

France (2006)	80
Germany (2006)	82
Great Britain (2006)	86
Ireland	-
Italy	-
Netherlands (2006)	63
Spain (2007)	92
Sweden (2006)	94

**EASTERN EUROPE**

Hungary	-
Poland (2005)	72
Romania	-
Russian Federation (2006)	92

**Family Trust**

In most societies, the family is seen as a fundamental source of social solidarity, the place where some of humankind’s deepest needs for belonging are met, as well as the wellspring of the emotional and social support needed to thrive and survive in society. What, then, does the global public believe about the presence of trust in their own families? The World Values Survey asked its respondents if they trust their families, and the results suggest that trust remains high in most families around the world (see Table 5). Here *The World Family Map* provides information on the percentage of respondents reporting that they “completely” trust their families.<sup>69</sup> However, differences across cultures exist in the degree to which survey respondents will affirm the highest category given ordered options. Evidence suggests that in the Netherlands and in Latin America, specifically, and perhaps in other countries, respondents often avoid choosing the highest categories on survey questions because these response options are not culturally acceptable.<sup>70</sup>

With these caveats, we find that family trust is especially high among adults in the African, Asian, Oceanic, and especially Middle Eastern countries studied. In the Middle East, 96 percent of Egyptian and Turkish adults indicated that they completely trust their families, as did 97 percent of adults in Jordan. Likewise, 83 percent of adults in Australia, 85 percent of those in South Africa, and 87 percent of those in South Korea and Taiwan expressed complete trust in their families.

Trends in family trust were more mixed in Europe and the Americas. In Europe, the proportion of adults who reported completely trusting their families ranged from 63 percent in the Netherlands to 94 percent in Sweden, with most countries in the region falling close to 80 percent. In the Americas, the proportion of adults who reported completely trusting their families ranged from 67 percent in Brazil to 83 percent in Canada and Chile, with the percentage in other countries in the region falling in between.

Given the heterogeneous character of countries where high levels of family trust are registered—such as Egypt, Jordan, Spain, and Sweden—it remains to be seen how factors like affluence, public policy, religion, and familism (the elevation of the family over individual issues) play a role in fostering high levels of family solidarity in countries around the globe. Nevertheless, the varied character of nations that register high on the attitudinal measure of family trust suggests that different factors in different regional contexts foster high levels of family solidarity.

<sup>69</sup> Respondents could indicate that they trust their family “completely,” “somewhat,” “do not trust very much,” or “do not trust at all.”

<sup>70</sup> *The World Family Map* partner research institutions in the Netherlands and South America, email message to authors, October 2012.

**TWO, ONE,  
OR NO  
PARENTS?**

**CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND  
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES AROUND THE WORLD**





# Overview

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by Mindy E. Scott, Laurie F. DeRose, Laura H. Lippman, and Elizabeth Cook

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This section of the report examines the role of one important aspect of family structure, children's living arrangements, for their educational achievement and attainment in countries across the world. Prior research—mostly on the US and Europe—suggests that children who grow up without one or both parents in the household are at risk for a host of negative educational outcomes.<sup>1</sup> This essay builds on this research to explore whether this finding holds true in all regions of the world by asking the following questions:

- How does living with one parent or neither parent compare with living with two parents on a range of educational outcomes in both lower income countries (mostly in the southern hemisphere) and middle- and high-income countries (mostly in the northern hemisphere)?
- Do individual and family background differences, and children's attitudes about school and relationships with teachers, help to explain why children who do not live with two parents experience worse educational outcomes than those who do?
- Are there important differences in the relationship between living arrangements and children's education between major world regions?

Based on analyses presented here, the answers to these questions tend to reflect different and diverse patterns, often based upon the level of income in the countries. For example, children living with two parents tend to experience better educational outcomes compared with those living with one or no parents in high- and middle-income countries, although there are a number of exceptions to this finding. The experiences of children in low-income countries appear to be much more diverse. In particular, in these countries, living with one parent isn't necessarily a negative experience, and appears to be associated with benefits for some children when it comes to education. However, children who don't live with either parent tend to have the worst educational outcomes (based on the measures examined here) in all regions of the world. The results presented in this essay provide a more comprehensive and global look at the link between family structure and children's education than has been done in the past, although additional work is needed to continue to understand how and why families matter for children's education and other aspects of child well-being.

<sup>1</sup> K. Magnuson and L. M. Berger, "Family Structure States and Transitions: Associations with Child Well-Being During Middle Childhood," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 575-591 (2009), S. McLanahan and G.D. Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), Kathryn. S. Schiller, Vladimir T. Khmelkov, and Xiao-Qing Wang, "Economic Development and the Effects of Family Characteristics on Mathematics Achievement," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (2002).

## Background

Educational outcomes are key indicators of children's well-being and their prospects for future success. Enrollment and level of achievement in school influence how children are doing at the present time, including their cognitive, psychological, and social development. Children's cognitive abilities and academic achievement also set the stage for children's future successes, such as their employment and earnings opportunities, and achievement in school can also affect children's health outcomes.<sup>2</sup> These varied outcomes are important not only for an individual's well-being, but also for the productivity and well-being of families, communities, and nations. One of the eight Millennium Development Goals for 2015 is to ensure that children everywhere—boys and girls alike—will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.<sup>3</sup> Most countries have succeeded in increasing overall enrollment in school at the primary level, although there remain challenges to providing secondary education opportunities for all children, especially in low-income countries where access to education and educational resources are more limited.

In these low-income countries, access to education is determined by many of the same factors as in middle- and high-income countries, but there are additional issues that greatly affect both children's enrollment and children's successful progression through school. One of these issues is that although the quality of available schooling matters everywhere, differences in quality seem to be much greater in low-income countries.<sup>4</sup> For example, something as basic as whether a teacher comes to class regularly was found to be an important factor in children's achievement in rural India.<sup>5</sup> This kind of problem does not often enter into the discussion of school quality in high-income countries. Children's work status is also a factor in low-income countries, where families rely on children's labor and earnings. For example, children who have to work are more likely to repeat a grade.<sup>6</sup> Caregiving by children is another reality in low-income countries, and includes children taking care of younger siblings so mothers can work, but also children caring for sick parents or relatives. This occurs in many countries heavily afflicted by HIV/AIDS. Parents' health status also affects children's schooling by limiting the amount of money available for school.<sup>7</sup>

There are a number of important theoretical perspectives that may help to explain why children's living arrangements (or family structure) may or may not be linked to educational outcomes. From an evolutionary perspective, biological parents are more likely to invest more in their children's education than are other adults who are not biologically related to the child or children.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to two biological parents who invest in their relationship with each other by investing in their children, single parents may have to choose between investing in new relationships and in their children.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, investment in children may not be as strong in stepfamilies, compared with two biological-parent families, even though it appears that children living with two partnered adults should have educational advantages over children living with single parents, with these advantages going beyond the additional time and resources that two parents bring to households.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Kerckhoff, S. W. Raudenbush, and E. Glennie, "Education, Cognitive Skill, and Labor Force Outcomes," *Sociology of Education* 74, no. 1 (2001), R. B. McNeal, "Extracurricular Activities and High School Dropouts," *Sociology of Education* 68, no. 1 (1995), J. Mirowsky and C. E. Ross, "Education, Cumulative Advantage, and Health," *Ageing International* 30, no. 1 (2005), Esping-Andersen, Gosta. "A Child-Centred Social Investment Strategy." In *Why We Need a New Welfare State*, edited by Gosta Esping-Andersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> "The Millennium Development Goals Report," (New York: United Nations, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Tim B. Heaton, Yaw Acheampong Amoateng, and Mikaela Dufur, "Race Differences in Educational Attainment in Post-Apartheid South Africa" (paper presented at the Population Association of America Annual Meeting, San Francisco, 2012), P. Jensen and H. S. Nielsen, "Child Labour or School Attendance? Evidence from Zambia," *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 4 (1997).

<sup>5</sup> E. Duflo, R. Hanna, and S. P. Ryan, "Incentives Work: Getting Teachers to Come to School," *American Economic Review* 102, no. 4 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> G. Psacharopoulos, "Child Labor Versus Educational Attainment: Some Evidence from Latin America," *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 4 (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Burke and Kathleen Beegle, "Why Children Aren't Attending School: The Case of Northwestern Tanzania," *Journal of African Economies* 13, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> W. D. Hamilton, "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behaviour I and II," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7, no. 1 (1964).

<sup>9</sup> Kermyn G. Anderson, "Family Structure, Schooling Outcomes, and Investment in Education in South Africa," in PSC Research Report (Population Studies Center at the Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 2003).

From a resource perspective, parents provide their children valuable social and financial capital, and these types of resources tend to be more limited in families with one parent and even more so in families with no parents. Social capital refers to social benefits that are gained through networks of relationships that facilitate interaction among individuals within these networks and the exchange of knowledge, support, and other valuable resources.<sup>10</sup> Within the context of the family, social capital is typically measured by the strength of ties between family members. Following this framework, then, parental absence may reduce family social capital by weakening relationships between children and nonresident parents, typically fathers, and sometimes even between the remaining resident parent and his or her children. For example, single mothers are often less able to provide emotional support and monitor their children effectively if they are overburdened by financial and emotional strains or are less able to balance work and family responsibilities successfully.<sup>11</sup>

Although these perspectives emphasize the benefits provided by two parents, there are also reasons to expect that children living with just one parent, and mothers in particular, may sometimes have an advantage over children living with two parents, resulting in better outcomes for children in single-parent families. Prior research suggests that female-headed households, and households where mothers have more decision making power, tend to make decisions in favor of child schooling in some regions of the world.<sup>12</sup> In other words, when mothers have more decision-making power, which is likely when they are single mothers, children may be more likely to be enrolled in school, particularly if mothers place a higher value on their children's schooling than fathers. Since the majority of single-parent families are single-mother families, this may reflect the experiences of many children living with one parent in low-income countries. For instance, a number of studies in Sub-Saharan Africa have found that children are more likely to succeed in the educational arena if they are raised in female-headed households, compared with children raised in homes with their two biological parents<sup>13</sup>; which is partly explained by the tendency for mothers to invest greater resources, including time, money, and emotional support to facilitate the education of their children than fathers.<sup>14</sup>

Another possibility is that family structure does not matter for children's educational attainment and achievement, so that children living with one or neither parent do just as well as those living with two parents. This may occur in countries where children's educational opportunities are influenced by a number of other factors beyond the family, including the type of school (public or private)<sup>15</sup>, school quality, the cost of schooling, gender norms, parental health, or child nutrition.<sup>16</sup> Further, there may be fewer differences based on family structure for certain educational outcomes like school enrollment, especially in countries where access to schooling is fairly universal, although the quality of the schools that children attend may still differ depending on family structure and the available resources in a family.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital." James S. Coleman, "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital," *American Journal of Sociology* 96 (1988).

<sup>11</sup> McLanahan and Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*.

<sup>12</sup> Woldehanna, Tassew, Nicola Jones, and Bekele Tefera. "Children's Educational Completion Rates and Achievement: Implications for Ethiopia's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006-10)." *Working Paper*. London: Young Lives, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Fuller, Bruce, and Xiaoyan Liang. 1999. Which girls stay in school? The influence of family economy, social demands, and ethnicity in South Africa, in C.H. Bledsoe, J.B. Casterline, J.A. Johnson-Kuhn and J.G. Haaga (eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Schooling and Fertility in the Developing World*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, pp. 181-215.

<sup>14</sup> Lloyd, Cynthia B. and Ann K. Blanc. 1996. "Children's Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Fathers, Mothers, and Others." *Population and Development Review* 22(2): 265-298.

<sup>15</sup> Gamboa, L.F. & Waltenberg, F.D. (2012). Inequality of opportunity for educational achievement in Latin America: Evidence from PISA 2006-2009. *Economics of Education Review*, 31, 694-708.

<sup>16</sup> Heneman, Stephen P., and William A. Loxley. "The Effect of Primary-School Quality on Academic Achievement across Twenty-Nine High- and Low-Income Countries." *American Journal of Sociology* 88 (1983): 162-1194, Woldehanna, Tassew, Nicola Jones, and Bekele Tefera. "Children's Educational Completion Rates and Achievement: Implications for Ethiopia's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006-10)." *Working Paper*. London: Young Lives, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Buchmann, C., and E. Hannum. "Education and Stratification in Developing Countries: A Review of Theories and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 77-102.

This essay focuses specifically on the link between family structure (indicated by the number of parents children live with) and children's educational outcomes. In looking at the evidence, it is important to recognize that families can influence children's well-being in diverse ways, and that other family-level factors beyond family structure may matter for child well-being. Among these factors is the quality of family relationships. For example, some prior research indicates that children who live in households with married parents who fight a lot may be less happy and have more difficulties in life when they are older than do children whose parents experienced conflict in their marriage, but subsequently divorced.<sup>18</sup> Other research indicates that children who live with their fathers, but are not close to them, experience lower self-esteem, more delinquency, and more depressive symptoms than do children who do not live with their fathers, but maintain a close relationship with them. Thus, it is possible that children living with two parents may not always do better than those living with one or no parents, depending on the quality of the relationships, and other factors within the family.<sup>19</sup>

Previous research tends to find different effects of family structure on children's educational outcomes in high- versus low-income countries. In high-income countries, children in single-parent and no-parent homes often fare worse educationally than do children who live with both parents.<sup>20</sup> These differences in educational outcomes by family structure have been found across a variety of measures, including attainment of a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED), college attendance, performance on standardized achievement tests, and grade point average. Family structure has also been linked to students' engagement in school (including their feelings of attachment to the school, relationships with teachers, and the value they place on receiving an education), which has further implications for their educational attainment.<sup>21</sup> Thus, school connectedness and perceived school relevance are two important aspects of school engagement that may be linked to other educational outcomes, and may explain some of the link between family structure and educational attainment.

Research in low-income countries has also explored the link between children's living arrangements and children's educational attainment. For example, studies show that children in Northern Province, South Africa, had lower standardized test scores if they were living in a household without a father,<sup>22</sup> and in northeastern Brazil, preschool children living in fatherless

<sup>18</sup> Paul Amato, Laura Spencer Loomis, and Alan Booth, "Parental Divorce, Marital Conflict, and Offspring Well-Being During Early Adulthood," *Social Forces* 73 (1995).

<sup>19</sup> A. Booth, M.E. Scott, and V. King, "Father Residence and Adolescent Problem Behavior: Are Youth Always Better Off in Two Parent Families?," *Journal of Family Issues* 31 (2010).

<sup>20</sup> McLanahan, S. "Family Structure and the Reproduction of Poverty." *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 4 (1985): 873-901, Amato, P.R., and B. Keith. "Parental Divorce and Adult Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1991): 43-58, Amato, P.R., and B. Keith. "Consequences of Parental Divorce for Children's Well-Being: A Meta-Analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 110 (1991): 26-46, Zimiles, H., and V.E. V.E. Lee. "Adolescent Family Structure and Educational Progress." *Developmental Psychology* 27 (1991): 314-20, Beller, A., and S. S. Chung. "Family Structure and Educational Attainment of Children: Effects of Remarriage." *Journal of Population Economics* 5 (1992): 309-20, Sandefur, G.D., S. McLanahan, and R. A. Wojtkiewicz. "The Effects of Parental Marital Status During Adolescence on High School Graduation." *Social Forces* 71 (1992): 103-21, Zill, N., D.R. Morrison, and M.J. Coiro. "Long-Term Effects of Parental Divorce on Parent-Child Relationships, Adjustment, and Achievement in Young Adulthood." *Journal of Family Psychology* 7 (1993): 91-13, Downey, Douglas B. "The School Performance of Children from Single-Mother and Single-Father Families: Economic or Interpersonal Deprivation." *Journal of Family Issues* 15, no. 1 (1994): 129-47, Furstenberg, Jr., F.F., and J. O. Teitler. "Reconsidering the Effects of Marital Disruption: What Happens to Children of Divorce in Early Adulthood?" *Journal of Family Issues* 15 (1994): 173-90, McLanahan, S., and G.D. Sandefur. *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994, Biblarz, Timothy, and Greg Gottainer. "Family Structure and Children's Success: A Comparison of Widowed and Divorced Single-Mother Families." *Journal of Marriage & Family* 62 (2000): 533-48, Pong, S. L., and D. B. Ju. "The Effects of Change in Family Structure and Income on Dropping out of Middle and High School." *Journal of Family Issues* 21 (2000): 147-69, Hofferth, Sandra L. "Residential Father Family Type and Child Well-Being: Investment Versus Selection." *Demography* 43, no. 1 (2006): 53-77, Schiller, Kathryn. S., Vladimir T. Khmelkov, and Xiao-Qing Wang. "Economic Development and the Effects of Family Characteristics on Mathematics Achievement." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64 (2002): 730-42, Hampden-Thompson, Gillian. "Are Two Better Than One? A Comparative Study of Achievement Gaps and Family Structure." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 39, no. 4 (2009): 513-29, Magnuson, K., and L. M. Berger. "Family Structure States and Transitions: Associations with Child Well-Being During Middle Childhood." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 575-591 (2009).

<sup>21</sup> J. D. Willms, "Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation: Results from PISA 2000," (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003). M. M. Chiu and Z. Xihua, "Family and Motivation Effects on Mathematics Achievement: Analyses of Students in 41 Countries," *Learning and Instruction* 18 (2008).

<sup>22</sup> M. M. Mboya and R. I. Nesengani, "Migrant Labor in South Africa: A Comparative Analysis of the Academic Achievement of Father-Present and Father-Absent Adolescents," *Adolescence* 136 (1999).

households had significantly lower cognitive performance.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in urban Peru, children living with both parents had better grades in school than did children in all other family formations.<sup>24</sup>

Other studies of South Africa indicate that children living with two biological parents were more likely to progress through school than were children with all other parental configurations (mother and stepfather, single mother, father and stepmother, single father, no parents).<sup>25</sup> More recent research on South Africa confirmed a disadvantage for children living with a single father or neither parent, but found that children living with a single mother progress through school at the same pace as those with two parents.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the link between children's living arrangements and educational outcomes appears to be less clear and consistent in low-income countries. Some studies have found that not living in a household with a father increases the probability of children working, but the effects on schooling may not always be negative, and vary by child gender and age.<sup>27</sup> Some previous research suggests that adaptation to apartheid-era family separation may explain why children from single-mother households may not be at a disadvantage. Another possible explanation for the finding is methodological, i.e., combining stepparents with biological parents in the same comparison group may obscure differences between children living with two biological parents and those living with single mothers.

Some research that has explored these issues across a number of low-income countries found that the absence of either a mother or a father independently and negatively affected enrollment in a pooled sample of 30 lower income countries,<sup>28</sup> and living with neither parent seemed to have an almost consistently negative effect on schooling across a number of regions of the world.<sup>29</sup> However, relatively few studies have consistently examined the link between family structure and educational outcomes in low-income countries. This essay aims to fill this gap by taking a more comprehensive look at this topic across a broad range of countries.

## Goals of the Current Study

Given recognition of the importance of educational achievement and attainment for young people's development and well-being, and the evidence suggesting that family structure can play a critical role in shaping children's educational access and opportunities, this essay focuses on differences in educational outcomes by family structure across all regions of the world. It is possible that the influence of family structure may vary according to the type of educational outcomes examined. This essay focuses on three critical areas of

<sup>23</sup> D. Santos et al., "Determinants of Cognitive Function in Childhood: A Cohort Study in a Middle Income Context," *BMS Public Health* 8, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Soto, "Education Achievements in Urban Schools in Peru" (Universidad de Piura, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> Kermyt G. Anderson, Anne Case, and David Lam, "Causes and Consequences of Schooling Outcomes in South Africa: Evidence from Survey Data," *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001).

<sup>26</sup> Heaton, Amoateng, and Dufur, "Race Differences in Educational Attainment in Post-Apartheid South Africa", Townsend, N., S. Madhavan, S. Tollman, M. Garene, and K. Kahn. "Children's Residence Patterns and Educational Attainment in Rural South Africa, 1997." *Population Studies* 56, no. 2 (2002): 215-25.

<sup>27</sup> Bock, John. 2002. "Evolutionary demography and intrahousehold time allocation: School attendance and child labor among the Okavango delta peoples of Botswana." *Am J Hum Biol* 14, no. 2 (2002): 206-21; Psacharopoulos, G. 1997. Child labor versus educational attainment: Some evidence from Latin America. *J Popul Econ* 10 (4): 377-86; J. Smits, "Family Background and Context Effects on Educational Participation in Five Arab Countries," (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: Nijmegen Center for Economics, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> J. Huisman and J. Smits, "Keeping Children in School: Household and District-Level Determinants of School Dropout in 363 Districts of 30 Developing Countries," (Nijmegen, The Netherlands: Nijmegen Center for Economics, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Jensen, P., and H.S. Nielsen. "Child Labour or School Attendance? Evidence from Zambia." *Journal of Population Economics* 10, no. 4 (1997): 407-24, Anderson, Kermyt G., Anne Case, and David Lam, "Causes and Consequences of Schooling Outcomes in South Africa: Evidence from Survey Data." *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 27, no. 1 (2001): 37-59, Case, Anne, Christina H. Paxson, and Joseph Ableidinger. "Orphans in Africa: Parental Death, Poverty, and School Enrollment." *Demography* 41, no. 3 (2004): 483-508, Monasch, Roeland and J. Ties Boerma, "Orphanhood and Childcare Patterns in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Analysis of National Surveys from 40 Countries," *AIDS* 18, no. Supplement 2 (2004): S55-65, Wilcox, W. Bradford, Laura Lippman, and Camille Whitney, "World Family Map Project Prototype Report," Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009.

educational achievement and attainment. These areas are 1) reading literacy; 2) normal progression through school (as measured by repeating a grade or being behind in school based on age); and 3) enrollment in school. The study on which this essay is based sought to answer three key questions:

**Question 1: Is family structure associated with children's educational outcomes, even when other possible factors explaining differences are taken into account (for example, parental education, family wealth, and parental employment)?**

**Question 2: Is family structure associated with children's feelings of being connected to their school and their perceptions of how relevant school is for them?**

**Question 3: Are there important differences in the association between family structure and children's education between major world regions?**

## Data Sources

This essay draws on original analyses of two international datasets to answer these questions. The first was the 2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which was used to examine the effect of family structure on educational outcomes among 15-year-olds in countries that are mostly considered middle- or high-income countries, though some countries in PISA may be considered low-income.<sup>30</sup> The 2000 PISA data were also used to supplement these analyses.<sup>31</sup> The second was from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which was used to examine the effect of family structure on educational outcomes among similar youth in low-income countries.<sup>32</sup>

Specifically, using PISA data, the analyses examined students' reading literacy and whether or not students ever repeated a grade.<sup>33</sup> This analysis took into account the sex of the student, parental education, parental employment, family wealth, and the primary language spoken at home (language of target country versus a different language). These factors have been linked to school achievement, and are likely to differ across family types, which may help to explain family structure differences in educational attainment or achievement. For example, based on a resource perspective, two parents may have greater economic resources to contribute to the household, so that living with two parents leads to greater family wealth than living with one or neither parent, which in turn influences children's educational attainment or achievement.<sup>34</sup> Thus, family wealth may be a stronger predictor of children's educational outcomes than family structure. Family wealth is analyzed separately from the other background factors to determine how much family wealth may explain the link between family structure and each outcome, after accounting for all other background factors.

The analysis also examined students' connection to their school (school connectedness) and their perceptions of how relevant school is for their future (school relevance), as potential school-related factors that may help to explain why students in

<sup>30</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)." OECD, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)." OECD, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Demographic and Health Surveys. ICF International. Calverton, MD. [www.measuredhs.com](http://www.measuredhs.com)

<sup>33</sup> The extent to which grade repetition is supported in schools varies by country and may depend on cultural and social norms. Grade repetition may also be rare in some countries, so that the number of students who repeat a grade may be small across all family types.

<sup>34</sup> Gillian Hampden-Thompson, "Are Two Better Than One? A Comparative Study of Achievement Gaps and Family Structure," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 39, no. 4 (2009). Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). "PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background-Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes." Volume II. OECD, 2010.

different family structures perform differently at school. Family structure is a measure of children's living arrangements, indicated by an estimate of the number of parents in the household (two versus one versus no parents).<sup>35</sup>

Using DHS data, the study examined whether young people between the ages of 11 and 14 in low-income countries were currently enrolled in school and whether they were progressing on time through school. While grade repetition is a reason that a child might be behind grade for age, this measure is not completely comparable to the PISA measure of repeat grade, because being behind could also be caused by either beginning school at an older age (late enrollment)<sup>36</sup> or having dropped out of school. These additional possible explanations are important to consider because late enrollment is much more common in low-income countries than it is in high-income countries. The analyses using the DHS accounted for factors that might explain the differences by family structure, namely parental education, child sex, region of country, and household wealth.

The results described below are based on analyses that account for all background factors, including wealth, although the way in which the results change before and after accounting for wealth are also noted in a few instances to demonstrate the unique effect wealth had on explaining family structure consequences. All figures are based on analyses that include all background factors, including wealth. Findings from separate analyses that added the measures of school connectedness and perceived school relevance are also discussed.

## Results

### Reading Literacy

Children in two-parent families have higher scores on tests of reading literacy than do children in one-parent families or in families with no parents in the household in most middle- and high-income countries.<sup>37</sup> Many of these differences persist after taking into account all background characteristics. Compared with students in two-parent families, those living with one parent had lower literacy scores in all but nine countries (out of 37 total) after factoring in all controls except family wealth. Once wealth was taken into account, we found fewer statistically significant differences, but the analyses indicate that children were still at a disadvantage when living in a single-parent family than when living in a two-parent family in 24 out of the 37 countries examined. The results from these models are presented in [Figure 15](#).

Children who weren't living with any parent had lower literacy scores than did those living with two parents in almost every country (35 of 37), after including all background characteristics, including wealth, in the analyses. Children living with no parents were also more disadvantaged than were those living with one parent, although these results were less consistent and the differences in outcomes between these two groups were smaller.

The analyses provided limited evidence that school connectedness and school relevance explain why children with different living arrangements experience better or worse educational achievement. For many countries, students had similar levels of school connectedness and perceptions of school relevance across all family structure types. This is important in that it suggests that student motivation for academic achievement does not vary much by family structure, even if access to schooling and the quality of schools does differ. Also, accounting for school connectedness and school relevance did not change the association

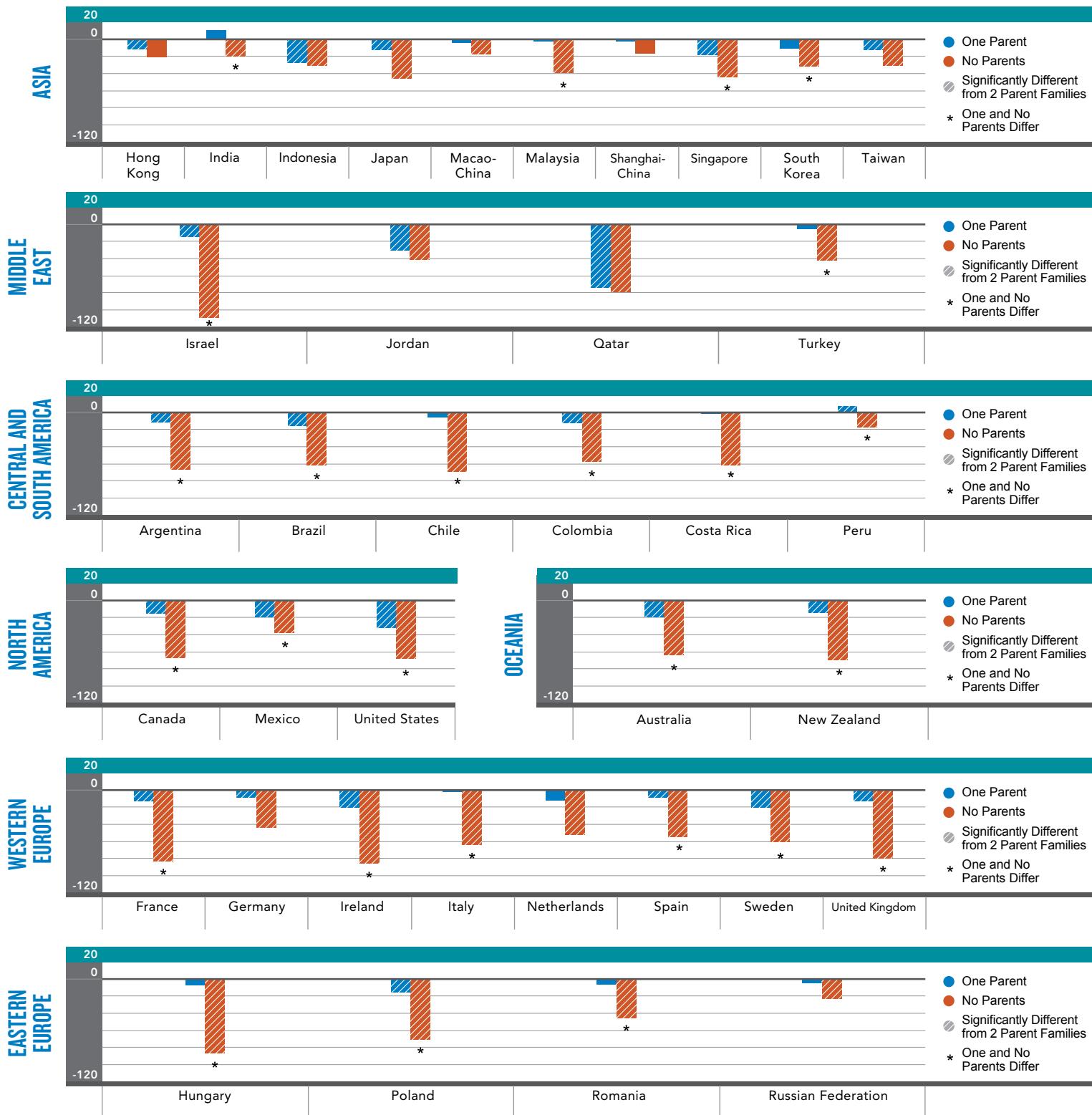
<sup>35</sup> Two-parent families consist of families with two biological parents as well as families with one biological parent and one stepparent. The proportion of children not living with either parent was small (less than 2%) in many countries in this dataset, and the results from analyses of no parent families in these countries should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>36</sup> We use country-specific school start ages which range from 5 to 7 when calculating whether a child of a given age and completed years of schooling is behind.

<sup>37</sup> Although some countries in PISA are considered lower income, the majority of countries in this data set are middle- and high-income. Thus this essay distinguishes between middle- and high-income countries in PISA and low-income countries in DHS.

**Figure 15** DIFFERENCES IN READING LITERACY BY NUMBER OF PARENTS, PISA 2009

DIFFERENCES IN READING LITERACY OF STUDENTS, ACCOUNTING FOR BACKGROUND FACTORS: ONE AND NO PARENTS COMPARED TO TWO



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure15](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure15)



Children living with two parents had higher reading literacy than those in one-parent families in almost 2/3 of the countries examined.



between family structure and reading literacy for children in most countries. Israel and France were the only two countries in which family structure differences in school connectedness appeared to contribute to the explanation of why students living in single-parent families had lower reading literacy scores, on average. In these two countries, children living in single-parent families experienced lower school connectedness than did those living with two parents, which in turn was associated with lower reading literacy. Once school connectedness was included in the analyses, there were no longer any differences in reading literacy between children living with two parents and those living with a single parent.

### *Noteworthy Region-Specific Findings for Reading Literacy*

As stated above, the differences in reading literacy were in the expected direction, with children living with two parents performing at a higher level than those living with one or no parents. However, there were several exceptions to these findings. Children living with one parent did not differ from those living with two parents in terms of reading literacy in five out of the ten Asian countries examined (Shanghai, India, South Korea, Macao, and Malaysia), after accounting for all individual and family background characteristics, including family wealth. Other studies have found that a large number of single mothers in Malaysia are widows, who are likely to be more supported by extended family members than are divorced single mothers.<sup>38</sup> Thus, children living with widowed mothers may not experience the same negative consequences of living in a single-parent family as those living with divorced or never married mothers in countries like Malaysia. After accounting for all family and individual background factors, children living with no parents were no longer different from those living with two parents in Shanghai and Hong Kong.

In Europe, the performance of children living with one parent was similar to those living with two parents on tests of reading literacy in Romania, Russia, and Hungary, after accounting for all background characteristics. This same pattern was found in Italy and the Netherlands.<sup>39</sup> Related research on families in Italy and other Southern European countries reinforces these results and suggests that the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and strong family ties can compensate for the lack or loss of one parent.<sup>40</sup> Children living with two parents performed better than those with one or neither parent in seven out of the twelve European countries examined (in both Western and Eastern Europe).

In Turkey, no statistically significant difference was found in the reading literacy scores between children living with one parent and those living with two parents, after taking family background characteristics into account. Similarly, in Central and South America, no significant difference was found in reading literacy scores between children living with one parent and those living with two parents in Chile and Costa Rica, but in Peru, children living with one parent were found to have higher reading literacy scores than did those living with two parents. This finding for Peru was unexpected, however, and suggests the need for further exploration.<sup>41</sup> The observed advantage of single-mother families in Peru may be explained by other family-, economic-, or school-level factors that were not the focus of this study, but that could be explained through future work.

<sup>38</sup> Pong, Suet-ling. "School Participation of Children from Single-mother Families in Malaysia." *Comparative Education Review* 40, no. 3 (1996): 231-49.

<sup>39</sup> The results for Italy and the Netherlands were different when we examined earlier PISA data from 2000. See the text box on "Exploring Differences within Two-Parent Families" for more information. Using earlier data, we found that children in these two countries who were living with one parent had lower reading literacy scores compared to children living with two parents.

<sup>40</sup> Hampden-Thompson, G., and S. Pong (2005). "Does Family Policy Environment Moderate the Effect of Single-Parenthood on Children's Academic Achievement? A Study of 14 European Countries." *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 36, no. 2 (2005): 227-248.

<sup>41</sup> The results found here are consistent with other analyses conducted using PISA 2009 data. See OECD. "PISA 2009 Results: Overcoming Social Background-Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes." Volume II. This report presents similar analyses comparing reading performance among students from single-parent families and those from other types of families before and after accounting for socioeconomic background.

## Exploring Differences Within Two-Parent Families

One limitation of the PISA 2009 dataset is that it does not make it possible for researchers and others to compare two-parent families consisting of two biological parents and two-parent families consisting of one biological parent and one stepparent. However, this comparison was possible using PISA 2000 data. Analyses of the 2000 data suggest that meaningful differences exist between these two types of two-parent families. Grouping these families into one category, as was done in the PISA 2009 dataset, may provide weaker results than when other family types are compared to families with two biological parents.

When the two different types of two-parent families (those headed by two biological parents versus those headed by one biological and one stepparent) were compared, the analyses showed that, on average, children in stepfamilies had lower reading literacy scores than did children living with two biological parents (in 10 out of 22 countries) or there were no differences between these two family types.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in many countries, children living with one or no parents were more similar, in terms of their reading abilities, to children living with two biological parents. Thus, removing stepfamilies from the two-parent family category changed the comparison between two-parent and one-parent families in many countries. Prior research supports these findings, and indicates that the absence of either biological parent can have negative effects on children's well-being, and that children in stepfamilies often do not have better educational outcomes than those in single-parent families, despite the presence of two parents in the household.

When examining a measure of family structure that was similar to the measure available in the 2009 data, there were fewer differences in reading literacy scores for students in two- versus one- versus no-parent families in high- and middle-income countries in 2000, compared with 2009.<sup>2</sup> This finding may be due to increasing inequalities between two-parent families and families where one or both parents were absent, so that there were greater disadvantages to living without both parents in 2009. The finding may also be due to changes over time in the similarities and differences between stepfamilies and families with two biological parents. These changes may have influenced how students in two-parent families compare with those in other families when stepparents and biological parents are combined into the same category.

After accounting for all background characteristics, only seven out of 22 countries, mostly in Europe, showed significant disadvantages in reading literacy associated with living in a one-parent family (France, Italy, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States).<sup>3</sup> Students living with no parents had lower reading literacy scores compared with students living with two parents in five countries (Australia, New Zealand, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

See [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/two-parentfamilies](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/two-parentfamilies)

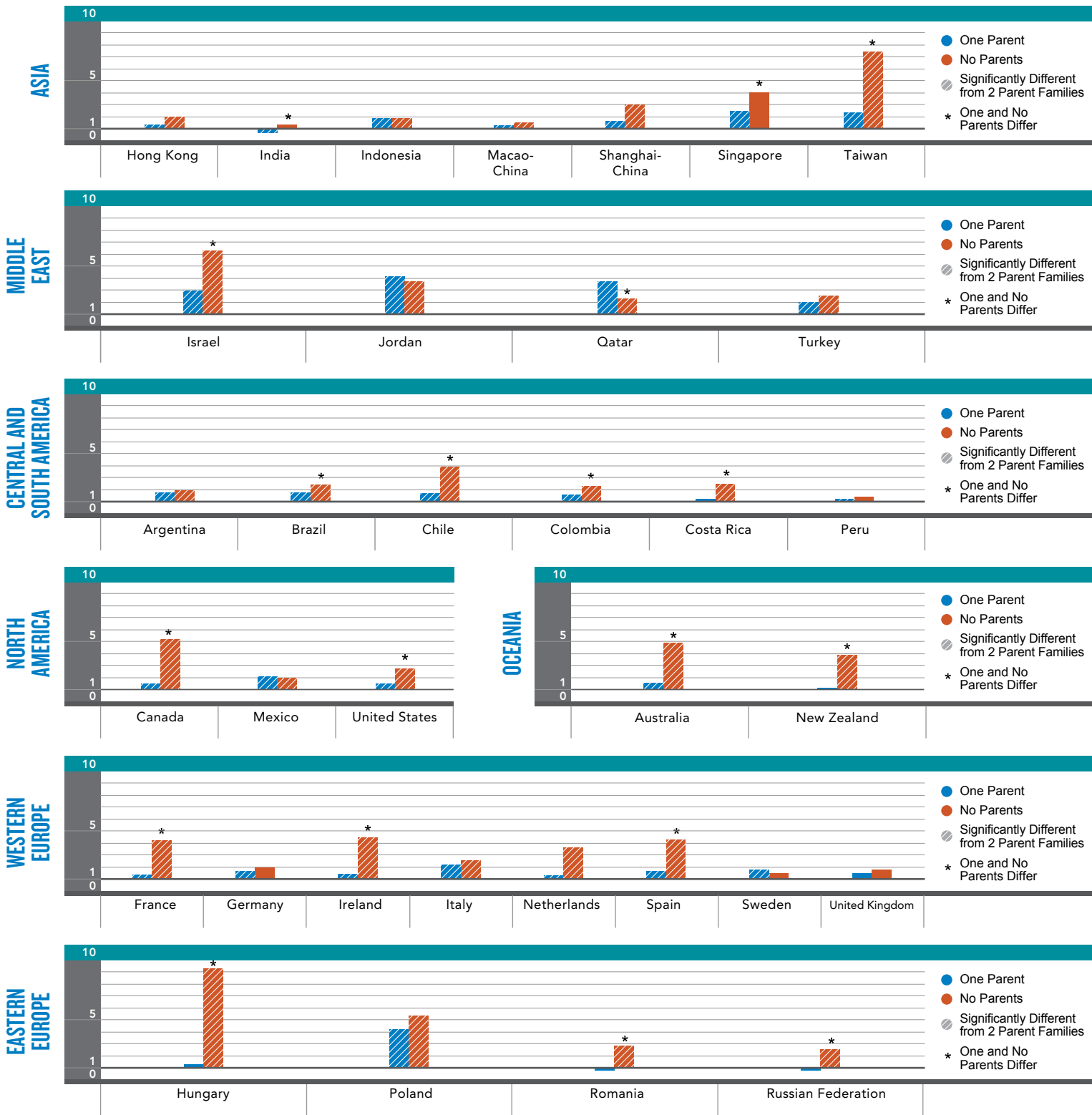
<sup>1</sup> These analyses were based upon a subset of 26 countries that were available in both the 2000 and 2009 survey rounds, and comparable measures were used in both sets of analyses. We first examined a measure of family structure similar to that used in the analyses of the 2009 PISA data. We then created a four-category measure of family structure, with separate categories for two biological-parent families and step families (plus categories for one-parent and no-parent families). Next, a measure of family structure similar to that used in the analyses of the 2009 PISA data was examined.

<sup>2</sup> Artis, J.E. "Maternal Cohabitation and Child Well-Being among Kindergarten Children." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69 (2007): 222-36.  
Coleman, M., L. Ganong, and M. Fine. "Reinvestigating Remarriage: Another Decade of Progress." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 62, no. 4 (2000): 1288-307.  
Manning, W.D., and K.A. Lamb. "Adolescent Well-Being in Cohabiting, Married, and Single-Parent Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 65 (2003): 876-93.

<sup>3</sup> Model 2 could not be estimated for four countries due to missing data on the control variables.

**Figure 16** LIKELIHOOD OF GRADE REPETITION, BY NUMBER OF PARENTS PRESENT, PISA 2009

ODDS RATIOS FOR GRADE REPETITION, ACCOUNTING FOR BACKGROUND FACTORS:  
ONE AND NO PARENTS COMPARED TO TWO



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure16](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure16)

## Grade Repetition

Family structure was also linked to grade repetition (whether or not a student had ever repeated a grade), as seen in [Figure 16](#). Children in two-parent families were significantly less likely to have repeated a grade than were children with one or no parents. Children living with one parent were at a disadvantage on this measure in 28 out of 34 countries, and children living with no parents were at a disadvantage in 29 out of 34 countries, after accounting for all background factors, including wealth. Children living with no parents were also more likely to repeat a grade than were those living with one parent in about half of the countries examined.

School relevance and students' connections to school played only a limited role in helping to explain family structure differences in grade repetition. Perceptions of school relevance were significantly lower among children living with one parent (compared with living with two parents) in Ireland, which helped to explain why children living in a single-parent family in this country were more likely to repeat a grade. However, the association between family structure and grade repetition was not explained by school connectedness and school relevance in any other countries.

### *Noteworthy Region-Specific Findings for Grade Repetition*

After accounting for all relevant background characteristics, children in one-parent families were found to be no more likely to repeat a grade than were those in two-parent families in New Zealand, Costa Rica, and in four of the 12 European countries, mostly in Eastern Europe: Russia, Romania, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. No differences were found in the likelihood of repeating a grade for children in no-parent versus two-parent families in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The same pattern was found in results for no-parent and two-parent families in Peru and India. However, students living with a single parent in India actually had lower odds of repeating a grade than did students living with two parents.<sup>42</sup>

## Expected Grade for Age

The measure of the expected grade for a child's age (reflecting on-time progression through school) that was explored among low-income countries is similar to the grade repetition outcome in that it examines standard or expected educational progress. Among the 15 low-income countries examined, living with neither parent was almost always linked to increased chances that a child would be behind the expected grade for age. However, the results for children living with one parent were both less consistent and unexpected. That is, after accounting for all background factors, including wealth, children living with one parent were significantly *less* likely to be behind the expected grade for their age compared to children living with two parents in six of the 15 countries. This suggests an advantage for children living with one parent in these countries. Moreover, there were no differences in on-time progression for children living with one versus two parents in any other countries examined. [Figure 17](#) presents a summary of these results, after accounting for all relevant background factors, including wealth.

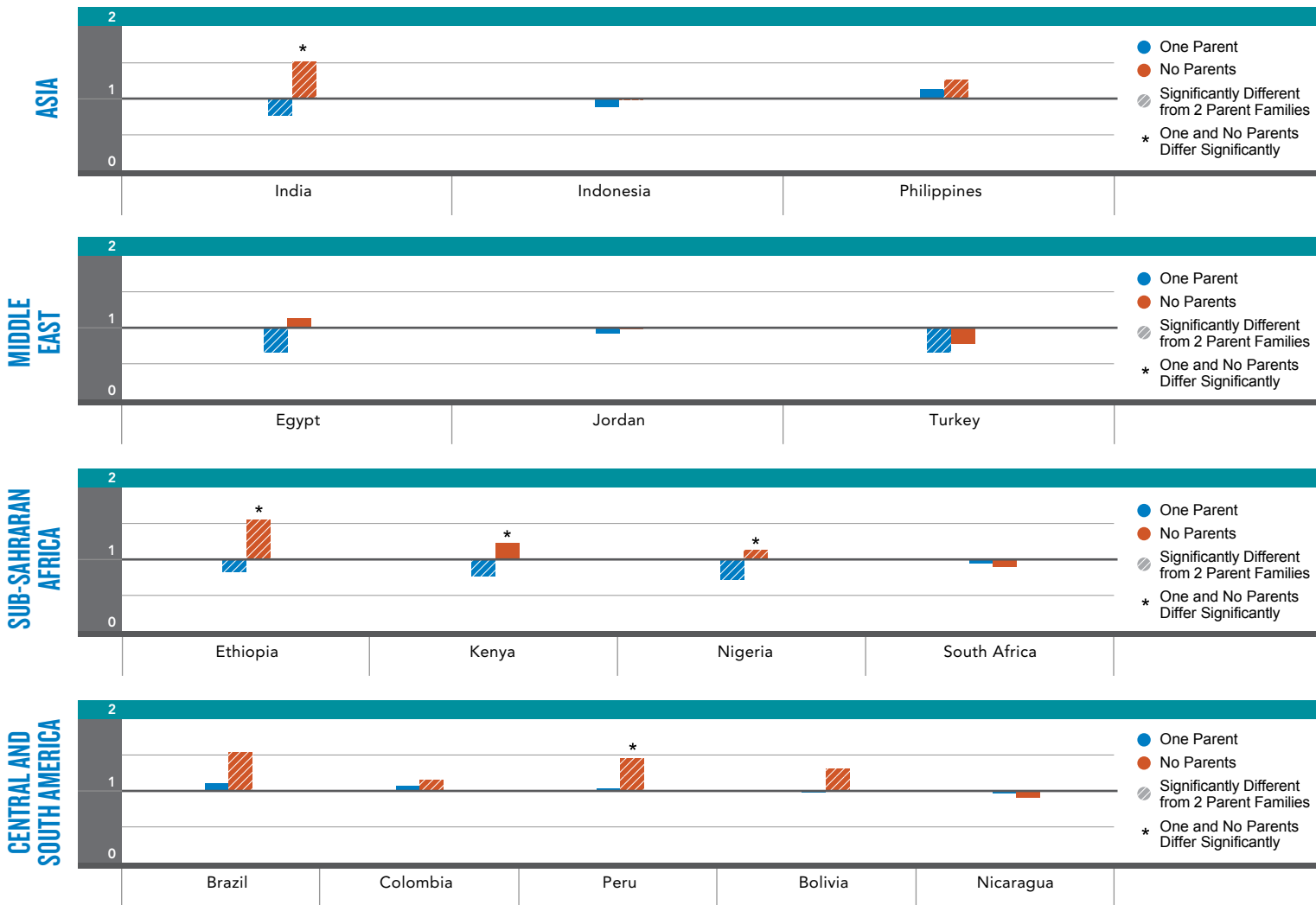
### *Noteworthy Region-Specific Findings for Expected Grade for Age*

Children living with single parents were less likely than children with two parents were to be behind the grade they were expected to be in given their age in most of Africa, in India, and in the Middle East (although not in Jordan).

<sup>42</sup> Also unexpected was the finding that children that do not live with either parent were significantly less likely to repeat a grade than children living with a single parent in Qatar. However, the proportion of children living without any parents in Qatar and other countries was small, and these results should be interpreted with some caution.

**Figure 17** LIKELIHOOD OF BEING BEHIND EXPECTED GRADE FOR AGE, BY NUMBER OF PARENTS PRESENT, DHS

ODDS RATIOS FOR BEING BEHIND EXPECTED GRADE FOR AGE, ACCOUNTING FOR BACKGROUND FACTORS: ONE AND NO PARENTS COMPARED TO TWO



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure17](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure17)

### School Enrollment

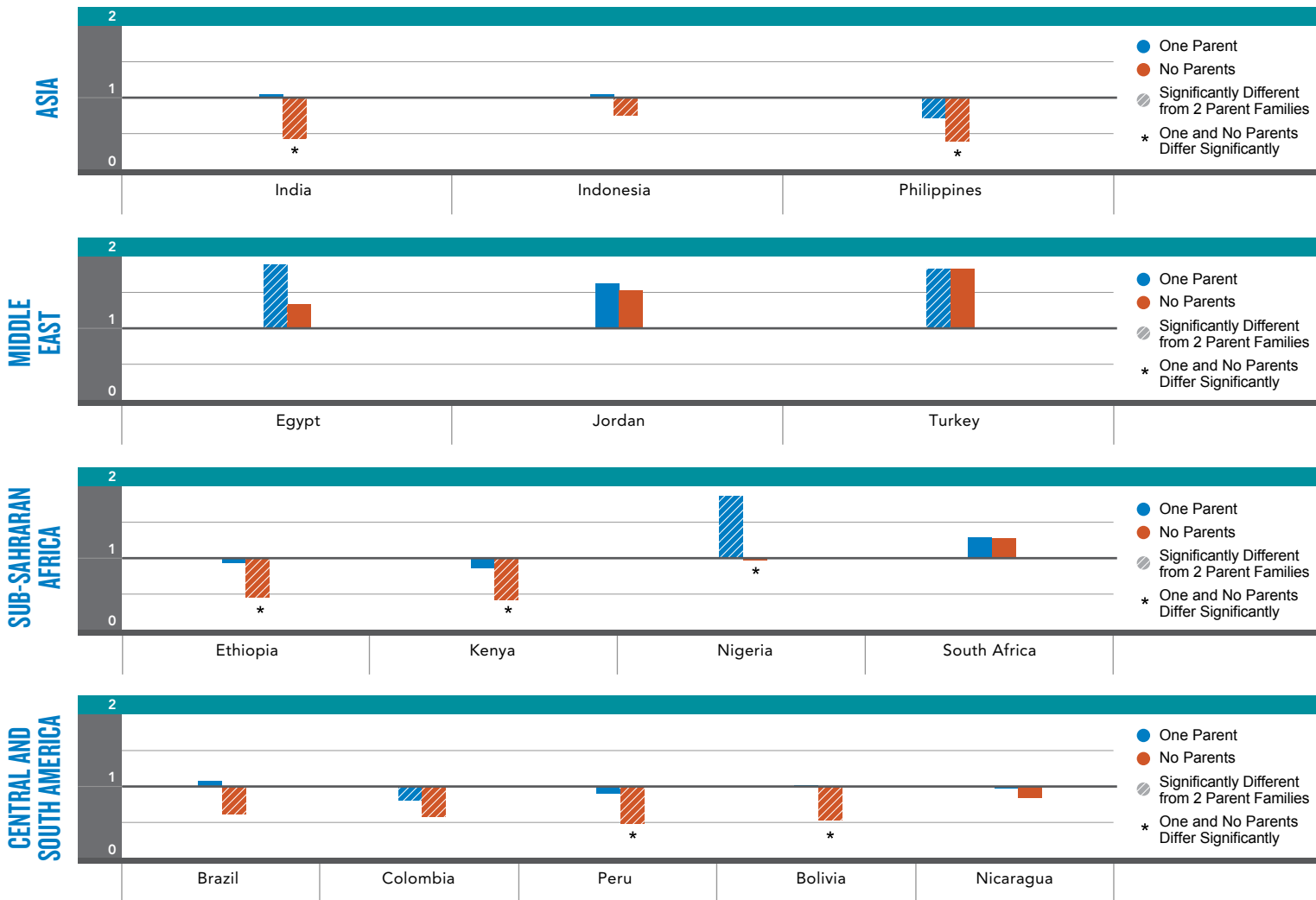
The study looked at one additional measure of educational attainment, school enrollment, in low-income countries. This is a measure of whether students aged 11 to 14 attended school during the current school year.<sup>43</sup> Figure 18 summarizes the results of these analyses. The results indicate that, after taking all background characteristics, including wealth, into account, children living with neither parent were significantly less likely to be enrolled in school than were those living with two parents in 10 of the 15 countries of focus with data available. There were no countries where living apart from both parents was a significant advantage.

The effects of living with a single parent (in comparison with living with two) were both smaller and more variable than for living with neither parent. After accounting for all background factors, living with one parent was associated with a significantly lower chance of being in school in two countries (the Philippines and Colombia). However, the difference between children in one- versus two-parent families was not as large as the difference for children living with neither parent (compared to two

<sup>43</sup> In Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, and South Africa the measure was whether the child was currently in school.

# Figure 18 LIKELIHOOD OF SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, BY NUMBER OF PARENTS PRESENT, DHS

ODDS RATIOS FOR SCHOOL ENROLLMENT, ACCOUNTING FOR BACKGROUND FACTORS:  
ONE AND NO PARENTS COMPARED TO TWO



Sources: [www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure18](http://www.worldfamilymap.org/2013/e-ppendix/figure18)

parents). Also, there were three countries (Nigeria, Egypt, and Turkey) where children living with single parents had higher rates of enrollment in school than did those living with two parents, but in the majority of countries, enrollment rates did not differ between children with one versus two parents, both before and after accounting for family background factors.

### Noteworthy Region-Specific Findings for School Enrollment

Living with neither parent was not significantly associated with a lower rate of school enrollment in any of the three Middle Eastern countries studied (Jordan, Turkey, and Egypt). Children in no-parent families were also not found to be at a disadvantage in Nigeria, where children sometimes live apart from their parents specifically for the purpose of attending school, and in South Africa, where almost 97 percent of children between the ages of 11 and 14 were enrolled in school regardless of whom they lived with. There was also no significant difference in enrollment between children living with two parents and no parents in Nicaragua.

Two of the four countries where children living with one parent had an enrollment advantage compared to children in two-parent families were in the Middle East (Egypt and Turkey); the advantage did not pertain to Jordan, where enrollments were uniformly high. Higher enrollment among children in single-parent families was also significant in India (only before accounting for differences in wealth), and in Nigeria.

## Essay Summary and Discussion

This section of *The World Family Map* report highlights the important role that families play in young people's educational achievement and attainment, although the essay has examined only one of many important dimensions of families in this essay: the number of parents in the household. Although we do not have information about the quality of relationships within these families, looking at the number of parents in a family is a strong starting point for better understanding the important contributions that families make to child development and well-being.

Throughout the world, children who don't live with either parent often exhibit the worst educational outcomes: they are particularly disadvantaged in terms of educational enrollment and performance relative to children in two-parent families, and also experience a disadvantage when compared with children in single-parent families. Further, this essay presents fairly consistent evidence that living with two parents rather than one is associated with children's educational achievement and attainment in high- and middle-income countries. These results suggest that there are important differences in terms of the social, emotional, and financial resources necessary for academic achievement that are available to children based on the number of parents in the household, even when biological and stepparents are combined.

As expected, among high- and middle-income countries, children living with two parents are more likely than are those living with one or no parents to follow a normal progression through school, and to experience higher levels of reading literacy. These results suggest that in many countries, parents serve as an important source of support and resources that can benefit their children's education, with greater resources coming from two parents. In many European countries, parents' skills and resources have a strong association with children's cognitive abilities, and family conditions during childhood (including the number of parents children live with) play a key role in children's long-term life chances.<sup>44</sup>

However, the results of this study also indicate that the positive effects of living with two parents were much less consistent in low-income countries. There were few differences between children living with one versus two parents in many low-income countries once all family and individual background factors were considered, and there was even an advantage to living with a single parent for some educational outcomes in some countries.

There are several potential non-competing explanations for why family structure seems to matter less in low-income countries. It is possible that family structure simply does not matter as much for children's education in low-income countries where many obstacles to good educational outcomes remain. These obstacles are likely to affect children in all types of families, and include the availability and cost of schools, teacher quality, parental health, children's health and nutrition, seasonal labor demands, and attitudes toward work and school. Thus, rates of school enrollment and children's normal progression through school in low-income countries may be much more sensitive to these types of factors than to the number of parents in the household.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Esping-Andersen, Gosta. "A Child-Centred Social Investment Strategy." In *Why We Need a New Welfare State*, edited by Gosta Esping-Andersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Buchmann, C., and E. Hannum. "Education and Stratification in Developing Countries: A Review of Theories and Research." *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 77-102.



In contrast, high- and middle-income countries have the resources to make high quality secondary education available to all, and in the context of greater equality, children's success appears to be more sensitive to the home environment. In other words, there may actually be few differences between children according to whether or not their education is supported at home in low-income countries until larger obstacles to school success that affect entire communities are removed. In countries where education is universal, those in two-parent families may be best able to take advantage of its benefits. Such a pattern has been identified within developed countries where as school quality becomes more uniform, family-level factors differentiate students more.<sup>46</sup> Additional research on the availability of secondary education for students in low-income countries suggests that family background may not matter as much in determining access to and enrollment in secondary education as it becomes more universal and countries implement policies to make access to education more equal across all families, although the quality of schools that children attend is likely to vary by a family's social status and economic resources.<sup>47</sup>

The finding of an advantage of living with one parent in several of the low-income countries studied is supported by research in Asia, where children's reading performance was found to be higher among children in single-parent families than in two-parent families in Indonesia and Thailand, but not in the three wealthier countries/regions that were also examined (Hong Kong, Japan, and South Korea).<sup>48</sup> Higher rates of extended families in these areas supporting single parents no doubt contribute to the success of children in these family types. However, research that explores the supportive role that extended families may play is not well developed, and the available information on this topic is inconsistent across countries.<sup>49</sup> In addition to kin support, children may also benefit from living with a single mother given that mothers who have more decision-making power are likely to have more control over resources in the family and more freedom to invest in their children's educational outcomes. This situation is especially likely in many low-income countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where previous research suggests that mothers invest more resources in their children's education than fathers do.<sup>50</sup>

Labor migration may also play a role in the relationship between family structure and educational outcomes in low-income countries. When a parent is absent from the household because he or she is sending money home while working in a more economically-advanced area, children may experience less disadvantage from a parent's absence than may children whose parent was never part of the household or whose parents divorced. Additional income may even place such households at an advantage. For example, in South Africa, households receiving remittances were found to be 50 percent more likely to keep children in school.<sup>51</sup> Thus, in low-income countries, incentives for separating the family in order to support it are greater than in high- and middle-income countries. Further exploration of the reasons that children may be living with only one or no parents, and more detail on who is in these households (many children that are not living with their parents may be living with grandparents, for example) will help us understand the processes occurring within these families that may benefit or harm children's educational attainment and achievement.

<sup>46</sup> Baker, D. *The Schooled Society: The Educational Transformation of Postindustrial Society*. (manuscript under review).

<sup>47</sup> Holsinger, Donald B., and Richard N. Cowell. "Positioning Secondary School Education in Developing Countries." In *Policies and strategies for secondary education*. Paris: UNESCO, 2000.

<sup>48</sup> H. Park, "Single Parenthood and Children's Reading Performance in Asia," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>49</sup> Laurie F. DeRose et al., "Parental Marital Status and Children's Education in DHS Countries" (paper presented at the Population Association of America Annual Meeting San Francisco, May 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Lloyd, Cynthia B., and Ann K. Blanc. "Children's Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Role of Fathers, Mothers, and Others." *Population and Development Review* 22, no. 2 (1996): 265-98.

<sup>51</sup> A. Sibanda, "Who Drops out of School in South Africa? The Influence of Individual and Household Characteristics," *African Population Studies* 19, no. 1 (2004).

Finally, the data from the low-income countries only allow for measuring educational progress in a very rough fashion (enrollment and on-time progression). If more sensitive measures of educational success such as literacy were available for the low-income countries, the contrast we observe in the importance of family structure might or might not remain. For example, in a study of children's primary school educational completion and achievement in Ethiopia, researchers examined the relative influence of child, household/family, school, policy, community and nutritional factors on children's completion of primary school as well as their achievement in school, and found that there are a number of important factors that influence children's schooling in Ethiopia beyond family influences, and these factors differ based on the type of educational outcome examined (school completion versus achievement).<sup>52</sup>

As part of this discussion, the essay has touched on a number of possible reasons that children in one- or no-parent families may or may not be disadvantaged when it comes to their educational outcomes, although the specific context of each country and the diverse circumstances and motivations of parents and families make this story more complex. For example, the influence that children's living arrangements have on their educational success may also be due to factors such as the role of extended family members, parent involvement, mother-father relationship quality, and other family-related factors that could not be examined here due to data limitations. It is important to consider how these factors differ for families in low- versus high-income countries, how they differ depending on children's living arrangements, and how they work together to shape children's educational attainment and achievement, as well as other indicators of well-being. A greater focus on these types of family processes may help to better explain why children's living arrangements matter (or do not matter). A consideration of how factors at the school-, community-, region-, or country-level influence children's academic opportunities, whether and how these factors interact with the family, and how the role of these various factors changes with greater economic development would also be valuable.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Woldehanna, Tassew, Nicola Jones, and Bekele Tefera. "Children's Educational Completion Rates and Achievement: Implications for Ethiopia's Second Poverty Reduction Strategy (2006-10)." *Working Paper*. London: Young Lives, 2005.

<sup>53</sup> See Buchmann, C. and E. Hannum. "Education and Stratification in Developing Countries: A Review of Theories and Research," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 77-102 for a review of the multiple levels that contribute to education inequality in low-income countries.

## Conclusion

This first edition of *The World Family Map* has reviewed indicators of family well-being in four areas: family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture, as well as the relationship of one indicator of family structure—children’s living arrangements—to education outcomes for countries representing all regions of the world. The report specifically explores the links between family structure and children’s reading literacy, grade repetition, school enrollment, and expected grade for age, even when other possible socioeconomic factors that often explain differences are taken into account (for example, parental education, family wealth, and parental employment).

The rationale for choosing each indicator of family well-being was based upon evidence of its relationship to child well-being outcomes in prior (mostly Western) research. A key task of families is to raise children, and this report highlights strengths as well as weaknesses in family patterns across the globe, based upon what is known from the research literature on what promotes and protects healthy child and adolescent development. Regional patterns in the family indicators are striking, but there is also tremendous variation within regions. And family wealth, along with other indicators of family socioeconomics, appears to be a critical characteristic in determining whether and how family structure relates to education outcomes.

### Asia

This report included nine countries in Asia (see [Figure 1 for a list of countries in each region](#)). Among the Asian countries included, at least 80 percent of children are raised by two-parent families, and at least 40 percent are also living with extended family members. About half to three-quarters of adults in Asia are married, depending on the country. Cohabitation is rare, as is non-marital childbearing, and fertility is falling across the region, hitting below replacement levels in East Asia. There is a wide range in the socioeconomic indicators, where, for example, absolute poverty ranges from zero percent in Malaysia to 42 percent in India, and parental secondary education attainment ranges from 12 percent in Malaysia and China to 42 percent in the Philippines. Despite this variation, parental employment levels in Asia are consistently the highest in the world.

In the area of family processes, Asian family members express modest levels of family satisfaction, low levels of disagreement about household tasks, a high incidence of regularly eating meals together, but low levels of political and social discussions. Aligned with their actual behaviors, Asian adults voice low levels of support for voluntary single motherhood and believe that children are happiest when raised by both a mother and father, but the majority of adults do support working mothers.

Perhaps because single parenthood is relatively rare and extended families are relatively common in Asia, 15-year-olds from single-parent families performed as well as those from two-parent families on tests of everyday reading literacy in about half of the Asian countries studied after accounting for socioeconomic differences between the two groups. Similarly, among lower-income Asian countries, children with one or no parents were not consistently disadvantaged compared with those from two-parent families in enrolling in school or being behind in grade for their age, although children living with neither parent were more often (but not always) at a disadvantage compared to those living with two or one parents, not only in Asia, but in all other regions.

## ***Middle East***

Four countries in the Middle East are included in this report. Two parent and extended families are also highly prevalent in these Middle Eastern countries, and marriage is even more prevalent than in Asia. Fertility is comparatively high in this region, and childbearing outside of marriage is rare. On socioeconomic indicators, Middle Eastern families do well. Absolute poverty and undernourishment are low (less than 4 percent and 5 percent respectively), and parental employment is relatively high (from about 75 to 88 percent). Data on family process are limited to Israel, where there are relatively high levels of family discussions on social and political issues, and relatively low levels of eating meals together regularly. Family culture data are limited to two or three countries, where adults report the highest levels of trust in their families, and the lowest levels of support for working mothers, in the world. Here, the prevalence of traditional families and strong socioeconomic indicators in this region may help to account for significantly lower levels of literacy and greater frequency of grade repetition of children raised by one or no parents compared with those raised by two, even after accounting for differences in socioeconomic background. However, with the exception of Jordan, children in two-parent families were less likely to be enrolled in school and more likely to be behind grade for age than those in one-parent families. This reversal of the expected pattern for these two educational outcomes in this region requires further exploration, and may be related to the role of extended families in this region.

## ***Africa***

Among the four Sub-Saharan African countries included in the report there is a wide range of living arrangements for children. Between 40 and 70 percent of children live with two parents, and the highest rates in the world of extended families and children being reared apart from parents are found in Africa. The percentages of children living in single-parent families are among the highest in the world. The majority of adults are married, but at least a small proportion is cohabiting in every country, especially in South Africa where only 30 percent of adults are married. African countries have the highest fertility rates in the world, with non-marital fertility ranging from six to 62 percent of births. They also have the highest rates of poverty and undernourishment, and the lowest levels of parental education in the world. Levels of parental employment range widely from 45 to 88 percent. While there are no data on family process for African countries, South Africa's indicators of family culture show that family trust and approval of working mothers is high.

The relationship between children's living arrangements and their education outcomes is mixed in Africa. Children living with two parents are no more likely to be enrolled in school than those with a single parent in three out of the four African countries that were studied, and they are more likely to be enrolled in school than children without any parents in just two countries. There were also mixed patterns in normal progression through school, in that children with single parents were sometimes at an advantage, and children without any parents were sometimes at a disadvantage, but sometimes not. Clearly, the high prevalence of extended families, as well as other factors besides living arrangements suggested in the essay discussion above, plays a role in education outcomes. It is unclear whether and how other challenging family socioeconomic factors relate to education outcomes, since not all were accounted for in the analysis.

## ***Central and South America***

Nine countries in Central or South America were included in this report. While two-parent families are still the most common family type in these Central and South American countries, there are substantial proportions of children being raised by single parents, more so than in any other region, but with only moderate levels of extended families. The region has the lowest marriage and highest cohabitation rates, as well as the highest levels of non-marital childbearing in the

world. Absolute poverty ranges from one to 16 percent of the population, whereas one-fourth to one-third of the families live in relative poverty (in the three countries in the region with data). Undernourishment rates in the region are second only to Africa, while parental education is at moderate levels and parental employment levels varied widely. Despite these challenges, adults in this region report that family satisfaction and trust are high, and that there are rare disagreements over housework. Students report the highest levels of communication on political and social issues in the world, and that their families are regularly eating meals together. A high percentage of adults in this region believe that children are happier when they grow up with both a father and a mother, even though many children in Central and South America are raised outside of a two-parent home. Support for working mothers and voluntary single parenthood is also high.

This mixed picture on the family indicators for this region is replicated in the education outcomes analyzed. In half of the six countries for which there are data on reading literacy, youth with two parents outperform those with one parent, while outperforming those with no parents in all countries studied. These youth are less likely than youth with one or no parents to repeat a grade in five out of six countries. However, children with two parents look similar to those with one parent on rates of school enrollment and being on grade for age in most countries, although they differ on these outcomes from children without any parents. The Central and South American region presents a striking example of how literacy and grade repetition may be more sensitive to family structure, while enrollment and progression through school are less so.

## **North America**

In this report, three countries in North America were included. These countries have relatively high proportions of children living in single-parent families—about one in five—and moderate levels of extended families, with Mexico having the highest level in the region at over 40 percent of children living in an extended family. About half of adults in each country are married, and there are moderately high levels of cohabitation. While this region has replacement level fertility, a relatively high proportion of births are to unmarried women. Relative poverty is among the highest among countries for which such data exist (the U.S. and Mexico). However, undernourishment is less than five percent in all countries in the region. Parental education varies widely across the countries, and parental employment is relatively high. Adults report moderately high levels of trust of their families, and students report moderately high levels of discussions and regular meals with their families. While high proportions of adults approve of voluntary single motherhood and working mothers, they are less likely to agree that both a father and mother are necessary to raise a child.

Only two education outcomes were examined for this region and the remaining regions of the world – reading literacy and grade repetition. Children living with two parents had higher reading literacy scores and were less likely to repeat a grade compared to those living with either one parent or neither parent in all three North American countries included in the report: Canada, Mexico, and the United States. This pattern is found even after accounting for the higher levels of poverty and lower levels of parental education among single-parent families.

## **Oceania**

This report included two countries in Oceania: Australia and New Zealand. Oceania's family structure indicators closely track those of North America, with one in five children living in single-parent families, about half of adults married, and moderate levels of cohabitation. Both regions have replacement level fertility, and four in 10 births are to unmarried mothers. Family socioeconomic indicators are similar as well, but with the important exception that levels of relative poverty—at 11 to 12 percent—are much lower than in North America. One explanation can be found in the higher

levels of public benefits to families in Oceania, where from 2.8 to 3.1 percent of GDP is spent on these benefits, compared with 1.0 to 1.4 percent in North American countries. Malnutrition is low, at less than five percent of the population, and parental employment rates are high.

Oceania resembles its Asian neighbors, however, in the low levels of social and political discussions reported by teens, and moderate levels of eating regularly with parents. There is moderate support for voluntary single motherhood, and moderately high proportions endorsing the idea that fathers and mothers are necessary for optimal child well-being. Levels of family trust are high.

The analysis of education outcomes by the number of parents found that children living with two parents had higher reading literacy scores than those with one or without any parents in both Australia and New Zealand, and the gaps between the groups were quite large between children with two parents and those without any parent. The results for grade repetition were mixed across the two countries; with children of single parents being at a relative disadvantage in Australia, but not in New Zealand.

## ***Western Europe***

Eight Western European countries were included in the report. Living arrangements of children in Europe are similar to those in North America and Oceania, in that about four out of five children live with two parents while one out of five children live with a single parent. Small percentages of children live with extended family, except in Spain. About half of adults are married, and cohabitation is common. However, Western Europe has below replacement level fertility and between one-third and one-half of births are to unmarried mothers. Western European families had the lowest rates of relative poverty of any region, and not coincidentally, the highest levels of government spending on family benefits. About 80 percent, on average, of parents were employed. Western Europeans had moderate levels of family satisfaction, rare disagreement over housework, and low levels of family discussions about political or social issues (except in Italy), yet high levels of eating meals together. Views on voluntary single motherhood varied greatly across this region, as did the proportion of adults who completely trusted their families. But there was strong support for working mothers, and higher support for two-parent families than in the Americas or Oceania.

Once all background factors were accounted for, children living with two parents scored higher on reading literacy than those with one parent in six out of eight countries in Western Europe, and they scored higher than those living without any parents in all eight countries. Children living in two-parent families were less likely to repeat a grade than those in one-parent families in all Western European countries except the United Kingdom, and were less likely to repeat than those without any parents in five countries.

## ***Eastern Europe***

While data for Eastern Europe were sparse, among the four countries included, children were less likely to live in single-parent families and more likely to live in extended families than children in most Western European countries. About one-half to 60 percent of adults were married, and cohabitation was less prevalent than in Western Europe. Fertility rates in Eastern Europe were the lowest in the world, and nonmarital childbearing was comparatively moderate. Relative poverty among families was moderately high compared to other regions, but there were low levels of undernourishment. Eastern Europe had the highest rates of parental education among the regions, and moderate to high levels of parental

employment. Adults were more likely to be dissatisfied with family life and couples were more likely to disagree over housework in this region than in any other, suggesting high levels of stress. Students reported low levels of discussion of political and social issues, but moderately high levels of eating meals regularly with their parents.

Children living with two parents and those living with one parent had similar educational outcomes in Eastern Europe. Only in Poland did children in two-parent families have higher reading literacy scores and lower chances of repeating a grade than those in single-parent families. However, children in two-parent families did perform better than those without any parents on both educational outcomes in all four Eastern European countries studied.

Each region, then, has a unique profile when it comes to *The World Family Map's* indicators of family well-being: family structure, socioeconomics, process, and culture. No region is without its strengths or its deficits. There are clear patterns in the relationship of children's living arrangements to the education outcomes in each region: on average, family structure appears to be more clearly linked to children's educational outcomes in high- and middle-income countries than in low-income countries, such that children in two-parent families tend to do best in high- and middle-income countries, but living in a two-parent family does not provide children with a consistent advantage in low-income countries. Strategies that are employed to mediate challenges for children who are not being raised in optimal conditions in various regions of the world include reliance upon extended family support, government supports for families, and allocation of resources within individual families to benefit children.

While the regional portraits created by the data in this report corroborate prior regional or country-specific research on demographic, economic, and education trends, this report synthesizes this information for all regions of the world, and rounds out that picture with the additional exploration of patterns of family processes and family culture. These portraits are incomplete, however, and the data gaps that can be seen in each table and figure in this first edition of *The World Family Map* need to be filled. Future internationally comparable and periodic data collections that can be included in future editions of this report are needed. The centrality and importance of the family in fostering healthy child and youth development, and the rapid changes to the family occurring around the globe, demand no less.

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