

# Parenting in America <sup>[1]</sup>

Outlook, worries, aspirations are strongly linked to financial situation

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## AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

## Overview

Contemporary debates about parenthood often focus on parenting philosophies: Are kids better off with helicopter parents or a free-range approach? What's more beneficial in the long run, the high expectations of a tiger mom or the nurturing environment where every child is a winner? Is overscheduling going to damage a child or help the child get into a good college? While these debates may resonate with some parents, they often overlook the more basic, fundamental challenges many parents face – particularly those with lower incomes. A broad, demographically based look at the landscape of American families reveals stark parenting divides linked less to philosophies or values and more to economic circumstances and changing family structure.

A new Pew Research Center survey conducted Sept. 15- Oct. 13, 2015, among 1,807 U.S. parents with children younger than 18 finds that for lower-income parents, financial instability can limit their children's access to a safe environment and to the kinds of enrichment activities that affluent parents take for granted. For example, higher-income parents are nearly twice as likely as lower-income parents to rate their neighborhood as an "excellent" or "very good" place to raise kids (78% vs. 42%). On the flip side, a third of parents with annual family incomes less than \$30,000 say that their neighborhood is only a "fair" or "poor" place to raise kids; just 7% of parents with incomes in excess of \$75,000 give their neighborhood similarly low ratings.

Along with more negative ratings of their neighborhoods, lower-income parents are more likely than those with higher incomes to express concerns about their children being victims of violence. At least half of parents with family incomes less than \$30,000 say they worry that their child or children might be kidnapped (59%) or get beat up or attacked (55%), shares that are at least 15 percentage points higher than among parents with incomes above \$75,000. And about half (47%) of these lower-income parents worry that their children might be shot at some point, more than double the share among higher-income parents.

Concerns about teenage pregnancy and legal trouble are also more prevalent among lower-income parents. Half of lower-income parents worry that their child or one of their children will get pregnant or get a girl pregnant as a teenager, compared with 43% of higher-income parents. And, by a margin of 2-to-1, more lower-income than higher-income parents (40% vs. 21%) say they worry that their children will get in trouble with the law at some point.

There are some worries, though, that are shared across income groups. At least half of all parents, regardless of income, worry that their children might be bullied or struggle with anxiety or depression at some point. For parents with annual family incomes of \$75,000 or higher, these concerns trump all others tested in the survey.

The survey also finds that lower-income parents with school-age children face more challenges than those with higher incomes when it comes to finding affordable, high-quality after-school activities and programs. About half (52%) of those with annual family incomes less than \$30,000 say these programs are hard to find in their community, compared with 29% of those with incomes of \$75,000 or higher. And when it comes to the extracurricular activities in which their children participate after school or on weekends, far more higher-income parents than lower-income parents say their children are engaged in sports or organizations such as the scouts or take lessons in music, dance or art. For example, among high-income parents, 84% say their children have participated in sports in the 12 months prior to the survey; this compares with 59% among lower-income parents.

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** quality <sup>[4]</sup>

availability <sup>[5]</sup>

parenting <sup>[6]</sup>

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