

FAMILY STRUCTURE AND ITS

RELATIONSHIP TO TRAVEL

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This paper examines the relationship between family structure and travel to further understand what differences exist between family groups. Results indicate that the absence of a husband delays travel for single mothers and that they are not as well-off as their married counterparts. We examine other travel and leisure studies to make comparisons with these data, begin to construct a picture of parents who travel and comment on the analysis of family leisure.^{1, 2}

Introduction

Kaplan (1974) suggested that leisure, individuals, and family units cannot be understood separately and that a person's leisure is inextricably affected by the family. However, families are changing. In 1970, 40% of America's households were made up of married couples with one or more children under age 18. In 1980, the proportion dropped to 31%. The 1990 census indicates that today only 26 % (or one in four) of American households are traditional nuclear families (New York Times 1991). Some view the female headed household and the rising divorce rate as an indication of the demise of the family. The more accepted view of marriage and family scholars is that this new family form is consistent with changing demographics and emerging economic independence of women (McLanahan and Booth 1989). Currently 14% of all family households are headed by single mothers (United States Bureau of Census 1988). The number of families headed by women without a husband is expected to be 12.9 million by the year 2001 (American Demographics 1987). In a study by Norton and Glick (1986), 88% of single parent families were mother-child families. Bumpass (1984) predicts that if present trends continue nearly half of all children born since 1975 will live in

a female headed household during a portion of their youth before they reach age 18. In 1984, 66% of women who had sole custody of their children under 18 years of age were members of the labor force. Approximately one of two single mothers is living below the poverty line, as compared with one in ten married couples with children. (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). Economically these families are increasingly holding a disadvantageous position relative to other family groups.

For those involved in planning and providing travel experiences these demographic changes suggest that women who head single parent households and their families may possibly have different travel styles than individuals and families of households where both parents are present. To assume that single parents travel as frequently and in the same manner that parents from husband-wife families do is to assume that the roles, role expectations and everyday demands on members of these families are the same. This mistake could lead to misconceptions about family life, confound the study of family travel and encourage inappropriate management of family or independent travel experiences. Providing professionals with travel data based on the typical notion of the nuclear family encourages the management of family travel counter to demographic trends. In this study we hope to: 1) describe the differences between those parents who travel and belong to husband-wife families and single female headed families; 2) demonstrate the relationship between family structure (single female headed families v.s. husband-wife families) and travel frequency; 3) compare our data to previous studies of family structure and travel; and 4) make recommendations to managers and researchers based on this exploratory study.

Literature Review

Family roles tend to influence leisure decisions through the life course and across social contexts, even when no other family member is present. Shifts in social roles (such as a divorce) and developmental tasks (such as learning to manipulate a ball) could result in a change of leisure motivations and satisfactions (Osgood and Howe 1984). Cornell (1989)³ suggested that family composition (e.g. children present, number of adults and senior citizens within the family group) may provide different opportunities for leisure participation. Most notably, Kelly (1974, 1978 and 1980) has demonstrated the usefulness of using the family life cycle to describe the leisure participation of individuals and families. Others (Bollman, Moxley and Elliot 1975; Buchanan, Christensen and Burdge 1981; Burch 1964; Burch and Wegner 1967) have demonstrated how leisure experiences are effected by the family life cycle and the presence or absence of children. The majority of these studies however have focused primarily on the traditional two parent family. This study seeks to further understand single parent families and leisure.

An additional purpose of this paper is to compare our data with that of other family travel research. While the work that covers this topic is limited, two studies are of interest. What we know about family structure and travel comes largely from Better Homes and Garden (BHG) study conducted by the U.S. Travel Data Center (Mason 1990). The study divided the summer of 1989 travel market into families that consist of married couples with children, married adults 18-44, married adults 45 and up,

¹The data utilized in this paper were made available by the Indiana Division of Tourism and Film Development. The data were originally collected by National Family Opinion, Inc. Neither the collector of the original data nor the Indiana Division of Tourism bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretations presented here.

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³Cornell, C. 1989. Family Composition and activities auxiliary to developed camping. Unpublished Masters Thesis, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

married couples with children and not married, with and without children. It is those who are not married with and without children that may be the most insightful into how family structure influences travel. Of this group 48% of the households included children. The segment had the highest rate of plane travel, rental car usage, travel agent consultations, weekend trips during summer and fall, and travel for outdoor recreation. When we compare them to the married couples with children in the same data set, it is important to note that married couples with children use hotels/motels at a lower rate than singles and had a high usage of camper/RV's/trailers and tents for lodging. Married couples with children were the most affluent group and highest educated. On the other hand not married with and without children were the least affluent, 18-26 % of the segment were divorced or separated, and they were the least educated.

The second study with comparable data is a study of resort motivations for different family life cycle stages by Hill, McDonald and Uysal (1990). Although the study concerns resort motivations and not travel frequency or the propensity to travel, the research does include single parents. However they were not able to place any real emphasis on single parents due to the small sample size. In this work, single individuals with children felt that health and social motivations were important when choosing a resort vacation.

We do not know if the marital status of parents inhibits or encourages leisure. With respect to travel, frequency, style, purpose of travel and/or travel destination may be effected by child care issues, income, custody arrangements and/or other factors which occur due to family structure. Questions remain as to whether or not the structure of the family creates the same leisure opportunities for members of different family types.

Methods

To initiate this investigation, secondary data were obtained from the The National Family Organization (NFO). Each quarter of the year NFO sends questionnaires to a panel of over 30,000 households. The data is household based and details the respondents age, ages of other household members, household income, education level of both male and female adults, family living situation, a number of other demographic items and states visited. A second file details four pleasure trips of one hundred miles or more round trip where the respondent stayed at least one night away from home.

Data for this study are from the summer of 1988 (July, August and September). For comparison purposes distributions of both travelers and non-travelers are presented. Households were divided into family structure categories based on the respondents marital status and the presence of children in the home. This study compares households which consist of two parents and households which consist of single females with children. Households that consist of single males with children are excluded from this study because only about two percent of all single parent households are headed by single fathers. Women who had children and were never married, widowed, divorced or were separated were considered single. Life cycle stages were predefined in the data set. They are: 1) 'young parents'-parents under 45 with children under 6; 2) 'middle parents'-parents under 45 with children 6 and over; and 3) 'older parents'-parents 45 and over with children of any age living in the household. The number of married respondents included 5,362 households and the number of single respondents included 905 households. For respondents who did not travel, married respondents represented 5,734 households and single respondents represented 1,730 households.

Chi-square test and were used to identify unique demographic characteristics of travelers. A multiple analysis of variance (SAS 1985) determined if number of trips were significantly different between the two groups. Demographic variables (identified by Chi-square tests) and marital status were used as independent variables in the model.

Results

Results of the the demographic and economic profile of married parents and single female parents are shown in Table 1 and Table 2. Due to the large number of cases in this sample each of the Chi-square test were significant at the 0.001 level. One of the original goals of this study was to determine if family structure along with other variables would have an effect on travel frequency. After multiple analysis of variance was computed using life cycle, education and income separately with marital status as an independent variable, there were no mean differences in the number of trips taken for either married or single parents. These results were surprising and will be discussed later. Highlighted here are some of the more notable results of the cross-tabulations.

Single women with children who travel, are more often in the middle parental stage, having the youngest child at home between six and twelve years old. Married women with children travel during the early and older parental stages. For married women travel decreases during the middle parent years. These percentages are somewhat similar to non-travelers. However, our population of interest, single parents who travel, show somewhat of a higher incidence during middle parent years and a lower percentage during the early parent years than non-travelers. Being a single parent with preschool children does appear to constrain travel. These single women who had children at home were also slightly older than married women with children. However, this may be due to the life cycle stage during which these women travel.

Table 1. Parental Stage of Travelers and Non-travelers, Summer 1988.

Parental Stage	Travelers		Non-travelers	
	MP ^a	SP	MP	SP
	(%)		(%)	
Early Parent	37.1	15.6	37.5	19.7
Middle Parent	27.7	44.8	28.0	38.9
Older Parent	35.2	39.7	34.6	41.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^a/ MP = married parent. SP = single parent.

Household income for single women with children who travel is far less than that of married couples. For married couples with children the percent of families in each increasing income category rises. For single women with children the percentage of families in each increasing income category decreases. For summer 1988 non-travelers however, the percentage of female headed households making \$15K or less is 52.5%, while among summer 1988 travelers incomes of female headed household making \$15K or less is 32%.

Educational attainment for married women with children is higher than single women with children. Slightly more married women with children received college and post-graduate degrees. A majority of single women with children have high school education.

Table 2. Sociodemographics of Travelers and Non-travelers, Summer 1988

	Travelers		Non-travelers	
	MP ^a	SP	MP	SP
	(%)		(%)	
Female Age				
under 30	15.8	11.7	21.1	15.2
30-39	39.8	32.9	38.6	29.7
40-49	27.8	25.8	23.5	22.1
50-59	12.4	13.7	11.5	15.4
60+	4.2	16.6	5.4	17.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Household Income (Income in dollars)				
Under \$15K	4.5	31.9	12.5	52.5
\$15-19,999	7.3	22.2	13.0	18.6
\$20K-29,999	16.0	21.0	20.9	14.3
\$30K-39,999	21.0	11.3	19.1	7.2
\$40K-49,999	30.9	8.8	22.8	4.9
\$50K-84,999	13.6	3.4	10.6	2.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Female Education (Years)				
8 years or less	0.8	1.1	2.3	4.7
1-3 years H.S.	2.6	5.5	6.6	12.9
High school	33.6	35.0	45.6	41.3
College 1-3 years	33.5	37.5	27.8	29.7
4yr. College	17.3	11.2	10.5	5.9
Post-Grad	14.1	9.6	7.0	5.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Race				
White	97.0	90.3	95.3	84.9
Black	1.4	7.9	2.4	11.9
Asian/Pacific	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
Other	0.7	0.8	0.9	2.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Market Size (Population of Residence)				
Under 50,000	26.0	23.5	34.4	29.4
50,000-499,999	21.0	22.1	19.6	21.5
500,000-1,999,999	18.7	18.1	16.6	19.4
2,000,000 or more	34.5	36.2	29.4	29.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

^a/ MP = married parent. SP = single parent.

The majority of the NFO sample is white. Of non-travelers two percent of married parents are black and 12 % of single parents are black. Of travelers only around one and a half percent of the

married parents are black and about eight percent are single. Around eight percent of single women with children who travel are black as compared to two percent of married women with children who travel. Hispanic populations were too small in the sample to be measured.

Discussion

Although these data are cross-sectional and the percentages of persons traveling at different life cycle stages may be a function of the number of respondents in each life cycle stage, these data are consistent with today's life cycle trends. Divorce is the primary cause of a white household being headed by a single female. It is important for leisure and travel planners to note that women often become single parents due to divorce soon after their children enter grade school (approximately during the 7th year of marriage). These women will often remarry after 6 years of heading their household alone (Levitan, Richard and Gallo 1988) and become involved in a two parent family again. If travel opportunity providers encounter single parents the largest majority of them will be in their middle parent years.

Leisure style and frequency have both consistently been shown to be impacted by the development of the family. Classic family life cycle stages are driven by the presence and/or absence of children and spouses. Variables which are based on the age of the oldest child (Bollman et al. 1975; Burr, Nye and Reiss 1979) stages based on the age of the youngest child (Witt and Goodale 1981), stages based on the number of years married (Orthner 1975) and simple pre-parental, parental and post parental stages (Kelly 1974) have all been used to characterize the development of the family in leisure research. Family scholars however have begun to criticize the traditional family life cycle concept for excluding couples who never have children and one parent families (Nock 1979; Murphy and Staples 1975). We have expanded on the work of leisure scholars (Bollman et al. 1975; Kelly 1974, 1978, 1980; Witt and Goodale 1981) by including marital status which allows for the inclusion of single parents.

The suggestion that travel waxes and wanes according to family structure and family life cycle stage is particularly interesting because of the similarity to Burch and Wenger's (1967) work on three styles of family camping. Burch and Wenger found that the age of children had a significant effect on the camping style in which individuals participated. These data suggest that the age of family members (family stage) and the marital status of parents may influence when travel opportunities will be available to parents.

This research suggests parental travel is either constrained or encouraged by family roles and responsibilities. What is yet to be investigated is how these roles and responsibilities effect the style of travel. For example, the difference in income between single parents and married parents probably influences accommodation choice and activities. A preliminary analysis of the same data indicates that single parents more often will visit family and friends during pleasure trips. With 10.2 million single mothers in the U.S. today (American Demographics 1987) it is crucial that leisure and travel professionals begin to investigate the needs and wants of this market. Currently available data on parental/family travel is limited to an application of the family life cycle to a tourist setting (Kerstetter and Gitelson 1989), family decision making (Jenkins 1980; Nichols and Snepenger 1988), research which includes single parents with single adults (Mason 1990) and work dealing with motivations (Hill et al. 1990). This study has provided a base for comparison of socioeconomic characteristics of single and married parents to future studies.

Now travel research on the family needs to move on and investigate destination and accommodation choice, preferred activities, purpose of trip, booking activities, etc.

When comparing our data to others, results from this study are similar to the BHG study with respect to the economic condition of singles parents. In addition education levels of single and married parents in this study were similar to others. However our preliminary analysis of the purpose of trip for married and single parents showed that single parents more often visit family and friends than travel for outdoor recreation. The differences may obviously be due to the construction of family categories in each data set. The BHG study should be viewed with extreme caution. The category not married with and without children is not mutually exclusive. It is possible that not married individuals without children could skew results, creating an inaccurate travel profile of those who do have children.

Travel data collection needs to be expanded to include single parents and to refine family stages. In particular leisure scholars have been in the habit of using the term 'empty nest'. We are far behind the family scholars who have recognized the stage in a married couples life without their children as not empty but full of life and activity. Retired or older couple might be a more appropriate designation. Not only should travel researchers begin to include the single parent in their analysis of the family but all leisure research needs to consider this family form separate from married parents.

Our analysis found no differences between married and single parents with respect to the number of times traveled during the summer of 1988. This is puzzling, because of what we know about the correlation between income and the propensity to travel. However our analysis is limited to three month periods. We have no way of determining if differences exist between the two groups for an entire year. Our future analysis might further explore the possibility that pleasure travel is different for these populations by examining the number of nights away from home a trip included.

Although this study and the others mentioned are each incomplete and in no way complementary we can begin to sketch a picture of how family structure influences travel. From our analysis it appears as if six stages of family travel exist. These stages of travel will wax and wane along with the family life cycle depending on an individuals marital status. Single women with children over six will be the travel providers main concern. Travel providers will need to be aware that pricing is very important to these women, because of significantly reduced income compared to married couples with children. Singles travelers with and without children are weekend travelers during the summer and fall, they make arrangements through travel consultants and single parents may most often be concerned about health and social motivation when choosing a vacation. These characteristics will have a number of implications for planning activities for family vacationers and for attracting this particular market. Mothers traveling with their grade school children may desire separate programs for children or they may wish travel agents to plan their trips due to time constraints. Single mothers may even perceive different vacation travel as unattainable due to cost or the type of trip available. Further research directed at the motives, perceptions and travel styles of parents will increase our understanding of this new and growing market.

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