Portrait of Hawai'i's Families

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HAWAI'I FAMILY TOUCHSTONES

The Center on the Family developed Hawai'i Family Touchstones to monitor the well-being of families in our state. Relevant and measurable indicators are tracked over time to provide an overview of Hawai'i's families at a given point and in relation to the past.

The data for Family Touchstones are gathered from a variety of public and private sources. In addition, the Center on the Family conducts periodic surveys on a representative sample of Hawai'i's families to collect data unavailable from other sources. In 2002, the sample consisted of 1,051 families. These data often focus on the quality of family interactions and relationships.

The inaugural Hawai'i Family Touchstones report, published in 1999, presented baseline indicator data. These data are regularly updated and reported on the Center on the Family's Web-based Data Center on Children and Families (www.uhfamily.hawaii.edu), which the reader is encouraged to visit for a presentation of all project indicators and trend data.

The American family has changed significantly in the past 30 years. Three decades ago, people were married when slightly younger and divorced less, more children grew up with two married parents in the home, families were somewhat larger, and at least one parent had more time to devote to the children. Changes in social norms and values, in workforce composition, in economic cycles, and in social policies and laws, and advances in medical technologies, have all influenced marriage, divorce, fertility, and mortality trends. These, in turn, have affected family formation and composition. For example, during the latter part of the twentieth century:

- Premarital cohabitation and births became more socially acceptable
- Birth control methods and options increased
- Social values related to sexual activity became more liberal
- Educational, employment, and earning opportunities improved for women
- Our nation experienced an economic recession, a boom, and growing disparities between the "haves" and the "have nots"
- Public assistance policies were reformed to include training and work requirements and lifetime limits
- Medical advances improved the quality of life for an aging population.

While this is not, by any means, an exhaustive list of the social changes that characterized the last several decades, it does provide examples of factors that influenced family formation and composition (the postponement of marriage, increases in single parenthood and divorce, multi-generational households that include aging relatives) and the challenges that families
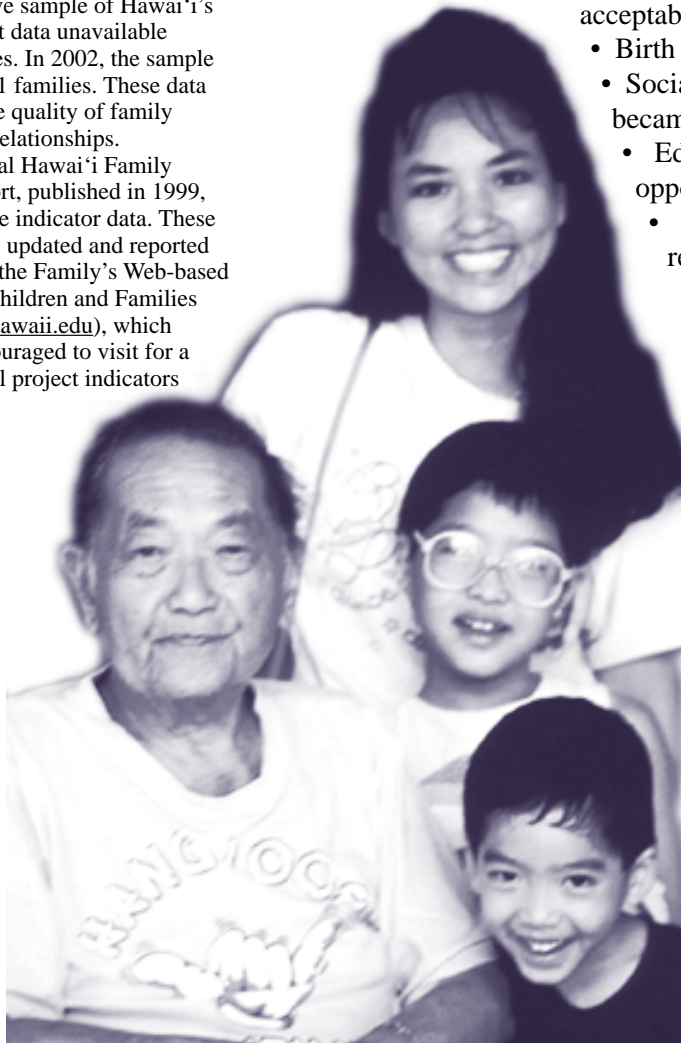
Photo by Dave Au

face (poverty, parents spending increased hours at work and less time with children).

As with the rest of the nation, the social forces operating in society have also affected Hawai'i's families. This paper presents a portrait of Hawai'i's families that is drawn by quantifiable indicator data regularly tracked by Hawai'i Family Touchstones, a project of the Center on the Family at the University of Hawai'i. These indicators are grouped into three categories: (1) family formation, (2) family and household composition, and (3) family challenges and goals. Data for each indicator are presented for the counties of Honolulu, Hawai'i, Kaua'i, and Maui. In addition, the indicator and related issues are discussed to provide context and a better understanding of the picture that emerges.

Family Formation

Mean age at first marriage

Today when they marry, Americans are slightly older than they were 30 years ago – in their mid-twenties rather than early twenties.[1] The pursuit of higher education and career development may be a possible explanation for the delay in marriage, especially for women.[2] A greater acceptance of premarital cohabitation, as evidenced by a significant increase in unmarried-couple households in the latter part of the century,[3] may also have contributed to the increase in age at first marriage. By waiting until greater maturity and educational achievements before marriage and the formation of family,

Mean Age at Marriage in Hawai'i
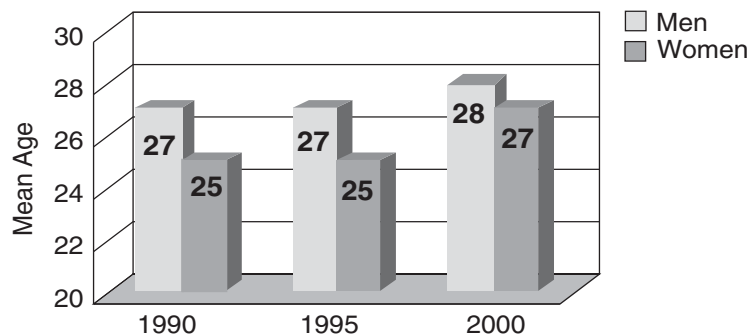
Mean Age at Marriage – County Data

County	1990		1995		2000	
	M	W	M	W	M	W
C&C of Honolulu	26	25	27	25	28	26
Hawai'i	28	25	29	26	30	27
Kaua'i	27	24	28	25	30	27
Maui	28	25	29	26	30	27

Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring, Vital Statistics
*Note: M = mean age at first marriage for men; W = mean age at first marriage for women.

Americans have increased their chances for economic security and a healthy, successful family life.[4]

The average age at which Hawaiʻi residents first marry has remained relatively stable since the early 1990s, mirroring the national trend.[5] The mean age at marriage is slightly higher on the neighbor islands for men, with neighbor island men marrying at the average age of 30, two years older than the State average.

Interethnic marriages

The family portrait in Hawaiʻi is unique because of its high rate of interethnic marriages. A majority of residents are immigrants or descendants of immigrants who were part of the labor migration in the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. Throughout the generations, many individuals from these various racial and ethnic groups, as well as from the Native Hawaiian community, have come together to form families that represent a rich blend of mixtures, as evident in the 21.4% of Hawaiʻi residents who identify themselves as multiracial, compared with only 2.4% of the people nationwide.[6] Cultural traditions and values are important to Hawaiʻi's people. Individuals from different heritages who marry often face different marital adjustments than those with more homogeneous backgrounds.[7] The differences can lead either to a blend of cultural beliefs that support healthy marriages and families or to conflicting values and marital problems.

Percentage of Interethnic Marriages in Hawaiʻi
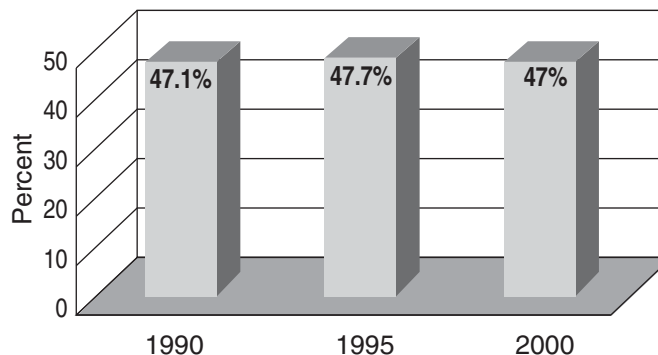
Percentage of Interethnic Marriages – County Data

County	1990	1995	2000
C&C Honolulu	47.0	47.1	47.0
Hawaiʻi	50.3	53.7	48.0
Kauaʻi	49.3	55.8	49.0
Maui	43.5	42.3	41.0

Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring, Vital Statistics
*Note: Data based on bride's resident status, where ethnicity category is known and categories are different.

The percent of interethnic marriages in Hawaiʻi remained stable during the last decade. County trends varied somewhat, with an increase in the mid-nineties, then a drop back to rates similar to 1990 rates for the counties of Hawaiʻi and Kauaʻi. National data on interethnic marriages are not available. However, Census data indicate that Hawaiʻi leads the nation in the percent of households, married or living together, with partners of different races. Nearly 35% of married-couple households in Hawaiʻi include partners of different races, compared with 6% nationally, while over one-half (56%) of opposite sex unmarried-couple households have partners of different races, compared with 12% nationally.[8]
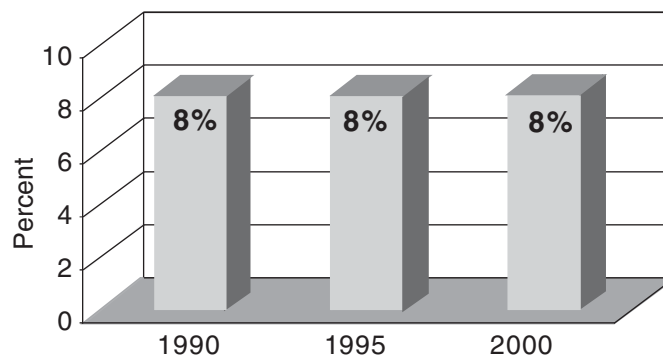
New families at risk

A growing trend toward single parenthood is changing the portrait of the American family. The delay in marriage among women pursuing higher education, training, and career development, as well as the increasing number of cohabiting relationships, have also increased the likelihood of nonmarital births. This trend is apparent in the large proportion of births to unmarried women in the nineties compared with 30 years ago.[9] In 2000, a third of all births were to unmarried women, compared with 28% in 1990.[10]

Despite the advances made by women in the workforce, single-parent households (the majority of which are headed by women) typically have limited financial resources. Over a third of female-

headed families with children live below the federal poverty level, compared with 13% of all families with children.[11] When parenthood occurs before high school graduation, the young parent is less likely to finish school, limiting job prospects and the ability to adequately support a family.[12] Families that are formed by first births to single parents, to young mothers, or to mothers with limited education are therefore at risk of facing long-term difficulties, with the risk for poor outcomes increasing when families are formed under all three circumstances. Children in these families tend to grow up in poverty, have below average academic achievement, have lower college aspirations, engage in early sexual activity, and, as adults, have greater risk for divorce.[13]

Statewide, the percent of first births affected by all three risk factors—first births to unmarried parents, to women under 20 years of age, and to women without a high school diploma—remained steady at 8% during the three time intervals examined, though there was a slight increase in 1998 to 10%.[14] While the County of Hawai'i showed the greatest increase between 1990 and 1995, the percentage decreased in the five years that followed. In 2000, Hawai'i and Kaua'i counties had the highest percentage of new families at risk, with 12% of first births in both counties affected by all three risk factors. Nationally, 11.4% of first births in 2000 were affected by all three risk factors, down from 1995 when 12.5% of new families were created under these circumstances.[15]

Percentage of New Families at Risk in Hawai'i

Percentage of New Families At Risk – County Data

County	1990	1995	2000
C&C Honolulu	8	7	7
Hawai'i	10	17	12
Kaua'i	9	10	12
Maui	10	8	9

Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring, Vital Statistics
*Note: Data represent the number of live first births with all three risk factors divided by the number of live first births.

Family and Household Composition

Divorce and annulment rate

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the number of female-headed families increased by nearly 27%, from 6 million in 1990 to 7.6 million in 2000.[16] The shift from two-parent to one-parent families seen in the last 30 years has been driven by several demographic trends, including the number of births to unmarried parents, as discussed above, as well as the increase in divorce among couples with children (although much of the growth in divorce was during the 1970s and 1980s, with rates steady throughout

the 1990s).[17] Marital disruption can take an emotional toll on family members, especially on children. Research suggests that most children of divorced parents adjust and do well in the long run.[18] However, evidence also suggests that children from divorced families are somewhat more likely to use alcohol and drugs, achieve less academically, and experience marital disruption themselves, especially if in fragile marriages.[19]

Family resources are strongly influenced by the number of parents in the home.[20] Women (who are often the custodial parent) typically earn less than men, and only a little over one-third of child support orders are fulfilled.[21] It is not uncommon for women and children to experience a decline in financial well-being following marital

disruption. Divorce *can* reflect healthy life choices, especially in situations where there is emotional and/or physical abuse. Children growing up in intact but high-conflict families tend to have poor emotional well-being and are at great risk if they grow up with domestic violence.[22]

The divorce rate in Hawai'i remained relatively the same during the three periods examined, although in 1996 and 1997 the state experienced a drop in the divorce rate to 3.6 per 1,000 residents.[23] Maui County showed a slight increase between 1990 and 2000. All other counties showed a slight decrease or little change in the divorce rate. At the national level, the divorce rate was 4.1 per 1,000 persons in 2000 and 4.0 in 2001.[24]

Average household size

Delays in marriage, increasing single-parenthood, and divorce have affected household and family composition. It is not surprising then that the average household size has decreased over the past 30 years.[25] Household size has also been affected by other trends, such as the decline in the proportion of households with children and with large numbers of children, as well as the increase in the proportion of women remaining childless during this period.[26]

The average household size remained relatively unchanged at the state and county levels between 1990 and 2000. The average household size was only slightly higher than the rest of the nation, perhaps due to the high incidence of multigenerational households in Hawai'i, as discussed below. Nationally,

### Rate of Divorce and Annulment per 1,000 Residents in Hawai'i
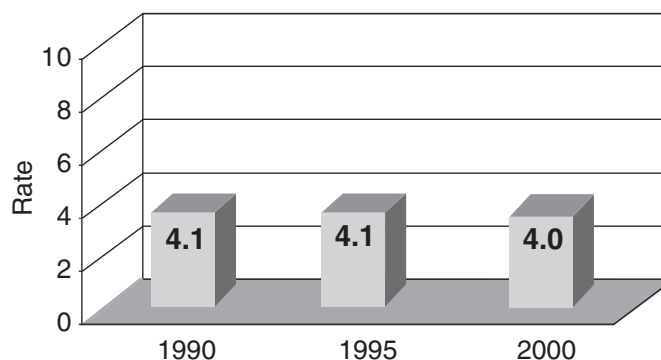
Rate of Divorce and Annulment per 1,000 Residents – County Data

County	1990	1995	2000
C&C Honolulu	4.1	4.2	4.0
Hawai'i	3.8	3.5	3.6
Kaua'i	4.0	3.9	3.4
Maui	3.9	4.4	4.2

Department of Health, Office of Health Status Monitoring, Vital Statistics
*Note: Rate of divorce and annulment represents the number of divorces and annulments of Hawai'i resident wives per 1,000 resident population.

Average Household Size in Hawai'i
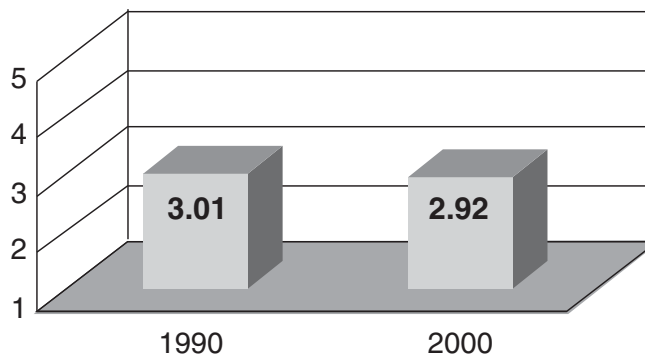
Average Household Size – County Data

County	1990	2000
C&C Honolulu	3.02	2.95
Hawai'i	2.86	2.75
Kaua'i	3.10	2.87
Maui	2.99	2.91

U.S. Census Bureau. Table DP-1 Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000 & 1990.

the average household size also remained relatively unchanged between census years, with 2.59 persons per household in 2000 compared with 2.63 in 1990.[27]

Multigenerational households

As the life expectancy of Americans increases, social and economic factors and personal and cultural values help shape the multigenerational household (a household with more than two generations). Multigenerational households are more likely to exist where there are many immigrants living with relatives, where there are housing shortages, where the high cost of living causes families to double up, or where high rates of unmarried young parents live with their parents for support.[28] In a growing U.S. trend, larger percentages of grandparents are now responsible, to varying degrees, for the care of their grandchildren and assume, for example, financial responsibility for food, shelter, clothing, and day care.[29] Nationally, 42% of grandparents living with their grandchildren are responsible for their care. In Hawai'i that percentage is smaller, with 28.5% of grandparents living with their grandchildren assuming responsibility for their care.[30]

In Hawaii, the concept of *'ohana*, or family, often includes extended family and non-related people. Living in a multi-generational household may encourage shared responsibilities and provide enriching opportunities for children to interact with grandparents and other extended family members. Hawai'i Family Touchstones survey data indicate that 80% of
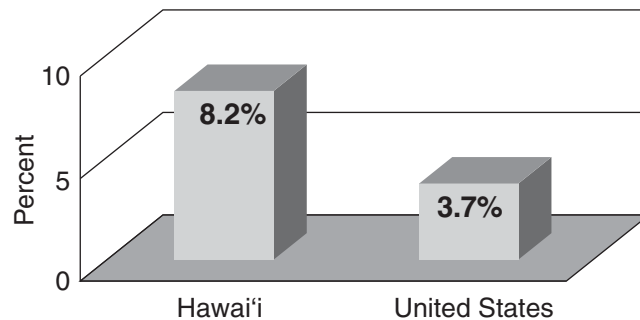
U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 1.

children are in regular weekly contact with grandparents.[31] National survey data suggest that 44% of grandparents see their grandchildren at least weekly.[32] However, living in a multigenerational household may also increase tensions and decrease levels of privacy. Those in the middle, or the "sandwich generation", may be particularly stressed, especially when resources are limited and when both the young and the elderly need care.

Given the high cost of living in Hawai'i, the large immigrant population, and the strong cultural values that place an emphasis on supporting the *'ohana*, it is not surprising that Hawai'i leads the nation with the highest percentage of multigenerational households.[33] Multigenerational households account for 8.2% of all households in our state, compared with 3.7% nationwide. Annual data previously collected by the State of Hawai'i Department of Health reveal a growing trend in multi-generational households throughout the nineties: in 1990, 5.5% of households surveyed included the presence of more than two generations in the home; by 1997, that number had increased to 7.3%,

with the highest percentage of multigenerational households present on O'ahu.[34]

Family Challenges and Goals

Percentage of people and families living below the federal poverty level

A disproportionate segment of the poor in this country continue to be children. Although children made up 25.6% of the population in 2001, they comprised 35.7% of the poor.[35] That same year, the poverty rate for families increased to 9.2% from the lowest it had been in a quarter century, 8.7% in 2000.[36] The most recent rate nevertheless represents a decrease in the percentage of families in poverty since the early nineties (10.7% of families lived in poverty in 1990, 11.6% in 1994), and is comparable to the family poverty rate in the mid-seventies.[37]

Living in poverty can have long-lasting, negative conse-quences for children and families. Children raised in families at or near the poverty level are more likely to do poorly in school, to earn less, and to experience

greater unemployment as adults.[38] Early sexual activity and teen pregnancy are more common in impoverished teens.[39] Families are also at greater risk for poor physical and mental health because of factors associated with poverty, factors such as lack of adequate nutrition, exposure to environmental toxins (lead), limited access to preventive and quality health care, and stress.[40]

The federal poverty level estimates the pre-tax income that is needed for households of various sizes to meet basic living expenses, such as food, clothing, housing, and utilities. In 2001, the federal poverty level for a family of four was $17,960.[41] Between decennial censuses, the poverty rate in Hawai'i increased from 8.3% in 1989 to 10.7% in 1999.[42] Turning to more current data from the U.S. Census Current Population Surveys, in 2001, 11.4% of Hawai'i's residents were living below the federal poverty level, compared with 11.7% nationwide.[43]

To improve the statistical reliability of these poverty estimates, it is more useful to examine the three-year state averages because poverty rates at the state level are based on small samples of the population. These three-year averages indicate that the percentage of Hawai'i residents in poverty has increased since the mid-nineties, from a 9% three-year average in 1993 – 1995, to a 10.4% three-year average in 1999 - 2001. By comparison, the most recent three-year average at the national level indicates that 11.6% of people in the country live below the federal poverty level.[44] A three-year average of the percentage of families in poverty suggests

Percentage of People in Poverty in Hawai'i: 3-Year
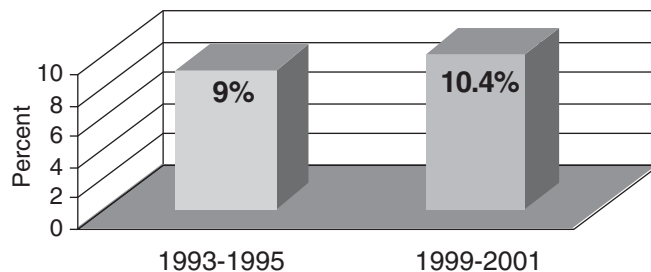
Percentage of Families in Poverty, 3-Year Average: 1999, 2000, 2001
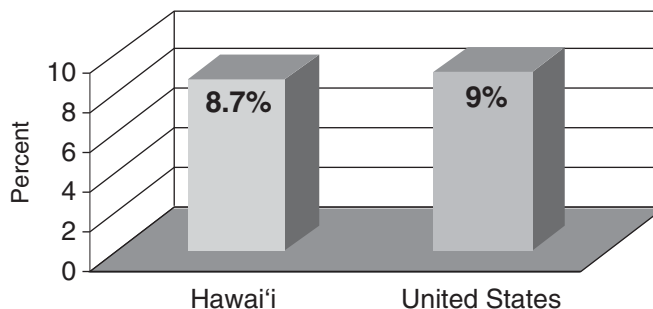
U.S. Census Bureau (various Census tables) and Current Population Surveys[45]

that Hawai'i is fairly comparable to the rest of the nation on this measure. But it is critical to remember that Hawai'i's cost of living is quite high, and federal thresholds therefore underestimate the true extent of poverty in our state.

Greatest challenges facing families in Hawai'i

As with families throughout the nation, Hawai'i's families face a variety of challenges on a daily basis. Many of the challenges common to families can provide opportunities for members to work together through hardship, thereby growing stronger. But some challenges can impede family well-being if families are not well supported or equipped to overcome adversity.

Understanding the greatest challenges that Hawai'i's families

face provides opportunities to better support families and promote their well-being. Without healthy, strong families to perpetuate our traditions and values, Hawai'i will increasingly experience social ills that diminish the vitality of our communities.

Issues related to the quality of family life, such as not having enough time with the family, keeping the family together, and family communication were identified as the greatest challenges facing families today by 28% of those surveyed statewide. Given the state's struggling economy, it is not surprising that economic issues, such as family finances, the high cost of living, and making ends meet, were a close second on the list of issues identified by 27% of respondents as the greatest challenge facing families.

Together, these issues speak to the challenges experienced by many working parents in Hawai'i, such as balancing work to make ends meet (in a state where the cost of living is high) with a healthy family life. In Hawai'i, well over two-thirds of children under the age of 17 have "all parents" (the single parents or both parents in two-parent households) in the workforce, slightly higher than the national average.[46] It is no surprise then that these issues are at the forefront of many parents' minds. County results were somewhat similar, with a higher percentage of Maui residents reporting financial strain as their greatest challenge.

Greatest concerns for children

Healthy families raise healthy, responsible children capable of facing tomorrow's challenges. Given the high cost of living in our state, increases in poverty rates, a strained educational system, and increases in the number of single-parent households, it is important to place as a priority the well-being of our children as a critical investment in our future. Besides understanding the challenges Hawai'i's families face, it is also important to learn their concerns for their children so that we may better support families and develop Hawai'i's future.

Education, by far, leads all other concerns listed by parents. One-third of parents surveyed indicated that their greatest concern for their children pertains to education, such as the quality of the public school system and other related issues. Twelve percent (12%) of parents indicated they are concerned that their children develop a good

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### Greatest Challenges Facing Families in Hawai'i
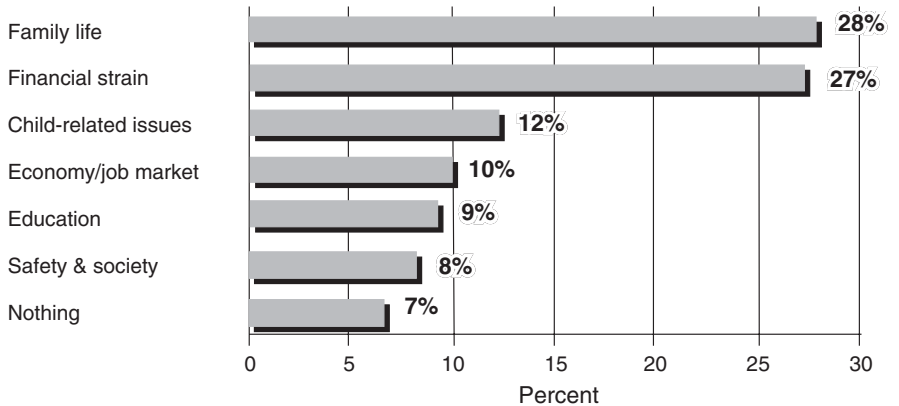
Greatest Challenges-County Data
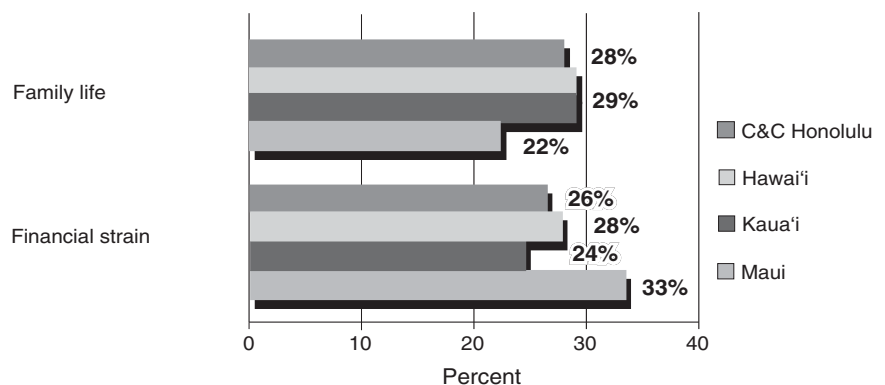
Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
Data represent the percentage of respondents who mentioned the respective response categories when asked: *There are many problems facing families today. In your opinion, what is the greatest challenge facing your family today?* Data based on reduced sample size (n=851).

Greatest Concerns for Children-State Data
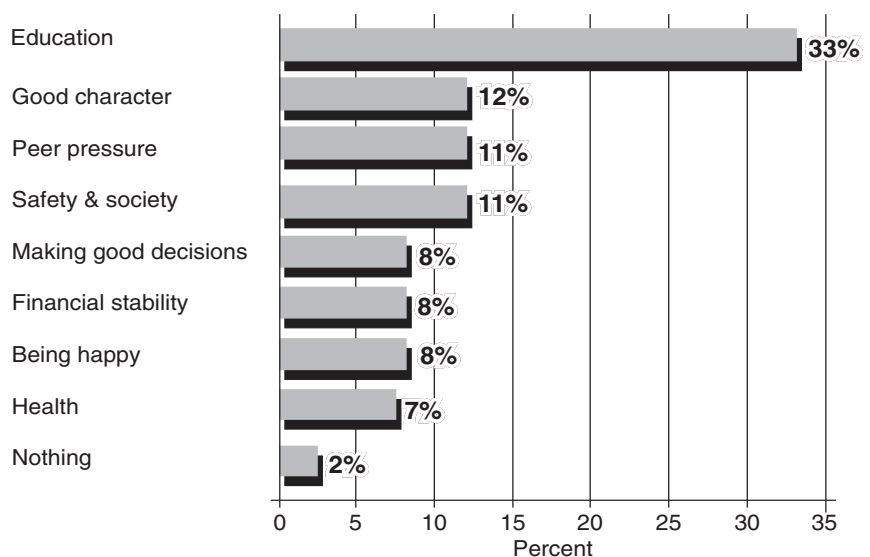
character and grow up to be decent human beings. An equal number of parents, 11%, were concerned about the negative consequences of peer pressure, the safety and security of their communities, and/or the effect of the environment on their children. County results were quite similar, though a smaller percentage of Hawai'i County parents were concerned about educational and safety issues, a larger percentage of O'ahu residents listed safety issues, and a larger percentage of Kaua'i residents listed concerns related to character development.

Goals, wishes, and dreams for children

Few things are more important to parents than the goals and dreams they hold for their children. By communicating these goals, parents set expectations and influence their children's personal values, life choices, and development. The support of others outside the family is invaluable in helping parents ensure their children's success and well-being.

Hawai'i's parents remain hopeful for the future of their children. Among parents surveyed, the greatest number, 86%, indicated that a good marriage and family life for their children is extremely important to them. Sixty-two percent (62%) rated their children's future success at work as extremely important, while a little more than half responded that it is important their children contribute to society. County results were somewhat similar to each other and to state results. Results of the 1999 Hawai'i Family Touchstones survey were quite similar, with 88% of parents favoring a good marriage and

Greatest Concerns for Children - County Data
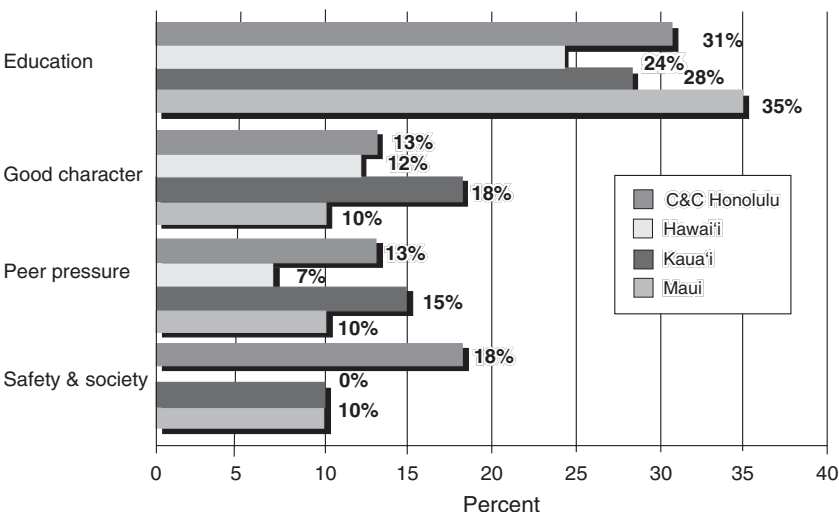
Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
Data represent the percentage of parents who mentioned the respective response categories when asked the question: *In raising your kids, what are your greatest concerns for your children?* Data based on reduced sample size (N=851).

Goals, Wishes, and Dreams for Children – State Data
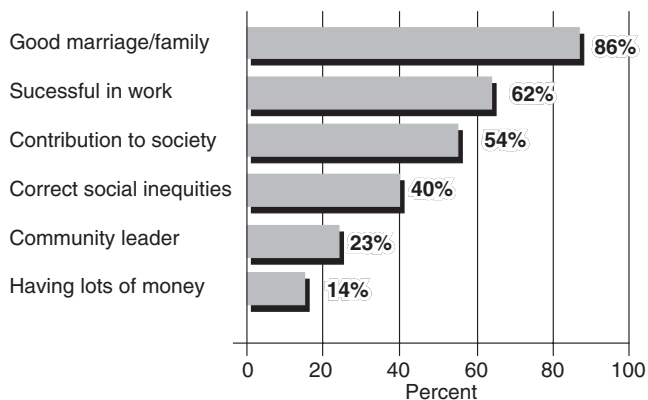
Goals, Wishes, and Dreams for Children – County Data

	C&C Honolulu	Hawai'i	Kaua'i	Maui
Good marriage/family	87	81	88	86
Successful in work	63	67	65	61
Contribution to society	54	40	58	54
Correct social inequities	42	37	35	41
Community leader	22	15	24	23
Having lots of money	10	8	13	16

Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
Data represent the percentage of parents who responded "extremely important" to the question: *How important is that your children have [response category] as a life goal?*

family life as important, 68% rating success at work, and 48% rating contributions to society as important.[47]

Self-ratings by Families

Self-assessment is often useful to see how far we have come and to help us set goals for the future. Where do families see themselves on the "ladder of life" where 10, the top rung, indicates the best possible life and one, the lowest, indicates the worst possible life? We include this indicator for discussion because it addresses a family's morale, the state of its spirit, and its satisfaction and confidence. These data come from a direct question to families about self-assessment.

A large portion of Hawai'i's families place themselves on the top half of the ladder of life, 86% on rungs 6 – 10, and only 15% on the bottom rungs, 1 – 5. Fourteen percent (14%) rated themselves as having the best possible life (rung 10), while only 1% indicated they were experiencing the worst possible life (rung 1). Respondents had an optimistic view of the future for their families. Mean scores at the county level were quite similar to each other. Families see themselves as climbing the ladder of life, rating themselves as doing better today than they did five years ago, and projecting they will do even better in the future.

Self-rating by Families - State Data
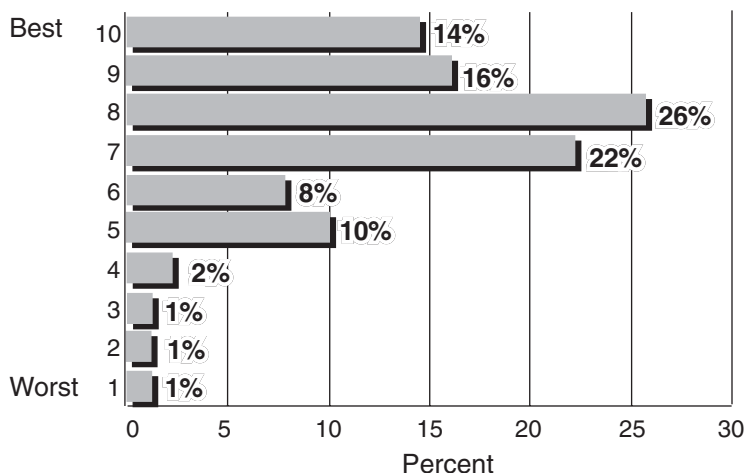
Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
Data represent the percentage of respondents who rated their family on the respective rungs when asked: *On which rung of the ladder is your family today?* (Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding)

Self-rating by Families - County Data
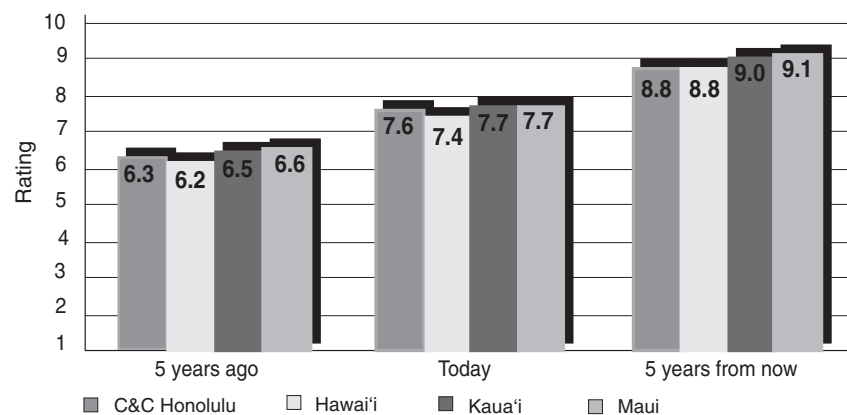
Hawai'i Family Touchstones Survey, Market Trends Pacific, Inc.
Data represent mean response (rung) to the question: *On which rung of the ladder do you think your family was…is…will be?*

Summary

The portrait of Hawai'i's families is somewhat different from the portrait of families in the larger United States. Our households are slightly larger, we have a greater percentage of multi-generational households, and we have a high proportion of interethnic marriages and, therefore, a larger percentage of families with multiethnic and multiracial members.

Hawai'i's families place great value on their *'ohana* and community. Many consider having a strong and happy family life and giving to the community to be important goals for their children and values that should be perpetuated. But many families are challenged as they try to balance family life and time together with job demands and meeting financial obligations. It is not surprising, then, that many families support policies

that would increase public funds related to these areas. When asked about their funding priorities, 75% of our survey respondents indicated they favor increased public funds that would support the well-being of children, youth, elders, and families, and 70% indicated support for increased spending that would develop and improve the local economy.[48] Among our families with children, education is the issue of greatest concern. Of those surveyed, 85% reported that they would like to see the state increase spending on education.[49] Despite the challenges and concerns, Hawai'i's families remain hopeful about their future, with many believing the quality of their lives will continue to improve as time goes on.

We hope this portrait of Hawai'i's families enriched your understanding of the challenges, concerns, and goals of this foundational unit of our society. We also hope the information will inform the work and advocacy that is undertaken to improve the conditions for the families in our state.

Endnotes

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3. U.S. Census Bureau, *How Does POSSLQ Measure Up? National Estimates of Cohabitation*, May 2000, and *How Does POSSLQ Measure Up? Historical Estimates of Cohabitation*, May 1999.

4. White, L. & Rogers, S.J. (2000), *Economic Circumstances and Family Outcomes: A Review of the 1990s*, Journal of Marriage and the Family 62, pp. 1035 - 1051.

5. U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P20-537, *America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000,* Table MS-3: *Estimated Median Age at First Marriage, by Sex: 1890 to Present*.

6. U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP-1, *Profile of General Demographic Characteristics: 2000.*

7. Henderson, D.A. (2000), *Racial/ Ethnic Intermarried Couples and Marital Interaction: Marital Issues and Problem Solving, Sociological Focus* 33 (4), pp. 421 – 438.

8. U.S. Census Bureau, *Married-Couple and Unmarried-Partner Households: 2000*, February 2003.

9. U.S. Census Bureau, *America's Families and Living Arrangements*, June 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, *Trends in Premarital Childbearing*, October 1999.

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