

CHANGING HOUSEHOLD-FAMILY TYPOLOGY, CHICAGO METRO AREA, 1990-2000: A NEIGHBORHOOD PERSPECTIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A neighborhood's character or personality is determined to a substantial degree by the mixture of *household types* that it contains. This paper undertakes to describe the great diversity in household typology of Metropolitan Chicago's neighborhoods, what factors underlie this diversity, how neighborhoods changed in family type between 1990 and 2000, and the future direction to which they appear to be heading. There are four large categories of households:

- Married couples with dependent children (under 18 years of age)
- Married couples with no dependent children
- Female family heads, with no husband
- Persons living alone

In addition, there are two small categories of households

- Male family heads, with no wife
- Cohabiting pairs

Each of the major race-ethnic groups has a distinctive mix of household types. Black families tend to have a female head. Hispanic households tend to have children. White households tend either to be married couples whose one child has left home or widows living alone. Race-ethnic groups also differ from each other in the number of persons per household and the number of special members (grandchildren, parents, brothers-sisters, other relatives, and non-relatives) they contain.

The household typology of Chicago metro area is nearly identical to the U.S. During the 1990-2000 decade, the household typology of metropolitan Chicago changed only little. There was a small decline in the proportion of married couple households and a compensating increase in the number of persons living alone.

Household typology composition is determined jointly by more than twenty highly diverse demographic economic and social forces. These are listed and their current trend described. In general, conditions between 1990 and 2000 were favorable or neutral toward the preservation of the more conventional types of households and families, and increasingly unfavorable toward the expansion of one-spouse (broken family) households. Increased living alone is primarily a result of marriage postponement by the young, population aging, and improved economic and health security of the elderly.

Cohabitation (two unmarried persons of opposite or same sex living together) increased slightly from 4.6 to 5.3 percent of all households between 1990 and 2000. These are overwhelmingly persons of

opposite sex and young age (under 65). Same-sex cohabiting partners (both men and women) comprise less than 1 percent of households.

Neighborhoods vary widely in the mixture of household types. Each of the major household types predominates in some neighborhoods. Every neighborhood (census tract) in Metro Chicago was categorized by its *predominant household type*, that is, the type of household that outnumbers every other type in that particular tract. Maps demonstrate that there is much clustering of tracts with similar types.

Although categorizing whole neighborhoods by their predominant traits is useful for showing spatial patterning, this is not precise enough for a refined study of the causal factors that underlie the typology. For a more precise analysis of the factors that influence neighborhood household type, the statistical procedure of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is here employed. The tract-to-tract variation in mixture of household types is not explained completely by race-ethnic composition. Within each race-ethnic neighborhood, there is considerable variation due to variations in income, education, and age of householder, independently of race-ethnicity..

A very high proportion (50-80%) of tract-to-tract variation in household type composition is accounted for jointly by the four variables of race-ethnicity, educational attainment, income, and age. Although there may be additional factors, these are all clearly powerful. These appear to be the core causes of neighborhood variation in household type. Each household type is caused by a different combination of these four explanatory variables

Neighborhoods with middle-class level of income or greater tend to be married couple neighborhoods, while those with low levels of education and income tend to be families headed by women. Neighborhoods where there are concentrations of elderly households tend to be occupied by married couples with no children and widowed persons living alone.

Cohabitation tends to be most prevalent in neighborhoods where the level of college or graduate education is unusually high and/or the level of income is low. It also is high where there are high proportions of young single people. Hence, youth who are learned but financially deprived tend to cohabit; those who are both well educated and affluent tend to marry.

This analysis permits some prediction of future trends in type-of-household composition. The mild pressure toward living in non-family households (living alone or cohabiting) seems likely to continue as marriage continues to be delayed and as the general levels of education and income tend to rise. The trend toward female-headed families with children appears to have peaked and may be expected to decline as rising education and rising income levels push black populations in the direction of more conventional family living. The little-understood small but ubiquitous rise in male family heads (no wife) may plateau or increase modestly. *The predominant form, the married couple, will continue to be the preferred and principal family type for mature adults.* Marriage still appears to represent the life cycle ideal for the typical successful citizen — college graduate with affluent income. An accelerated decline (for all race-ethnic groups) in the prevalence of families headed by a mother but no father is a plausible development for the not too distant future.