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HOME SCHOOLING

Home educating children has become increasingly popular in the United States. The home schooling movement originated in the 1960s within the countercultural or libertarian political left. By the mid-1980s, however, the religious right was leading the movement. Throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century, the number of home schooled children in the United States grew tremendously. The movement has come to be considered mainstream as home schooling is advocated for a variety of reasons and has become much more publicly acceptable. This topic is important to life course scholars given that education is a major social institution that transmits societal norms, values, and a knowledge base. As an alternative to public and private schools, home education provides children with a different socialization experience. This specific educational alternative should be examined for its impact on society.

STUDYING HOME SCHOOLERS

The social scientific study of home schooling in the United States began to take off in the late 1980s as at least 250,000 children were being educated at home. Over the next 20 years numerous studies of this population were published. Nonetheless, although the quantity of evidence is notable, the quality of the scholarship is less than ideal. As many scholars have noted, home schoolers are a difficult population to study. They are geographically dispersed, and there are no reliable lists from which a representative, random sample can be drawn. Some states do not require home schooling

Lesson Plan. Alison Pittman, right, and her daughter, Adrienne, 10, work on reading skills while Daniel Pittman, 15, left, gets ready to get to work on his English lesson at the Pittman's home in Petal, MS. AP IMAGES.

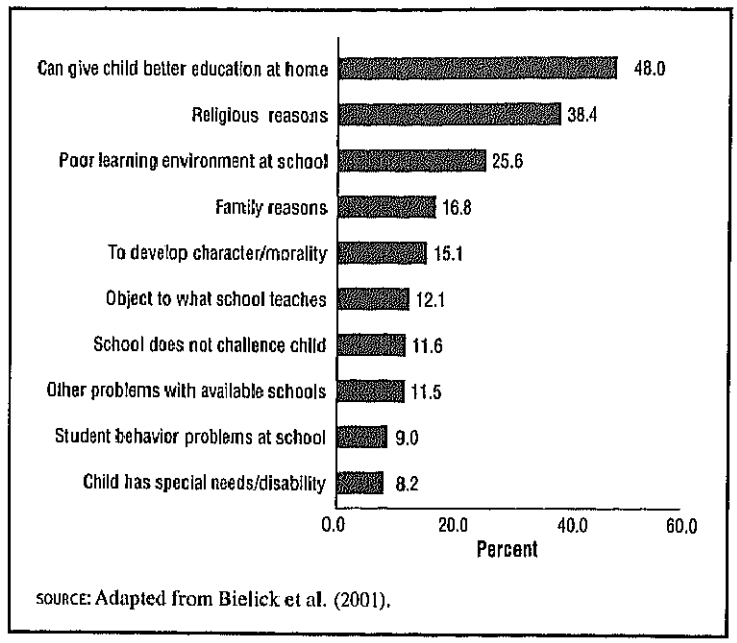
families to register, and some parents refuse to either way. Moreover, many home schoolers hold alternative worldviews and are unwilling to participate in studies by unknown researchers.

Estimating the number of home schooled children in the United States is politically contentious. Critics have interests in portraying the movement as marginal, whereas advocates seek to stress its prevalence. Thus, government estimates are considerably lower than those given by advocacy groups. Data from the 2003 National Household Education Survey (NHES) indicates that an estimated 1.1 million children were home educated that year (up from an estimated 850,000 in 1999). Given a similar rate of growth, the estimate for 2007 can be increased to 1.4 million. By 2007 some advocacy groups were estimating that the number had reached more than 2 million.

The majority of research studies on home schoolers is qualitative in nature, based on interviewing and/or observing relatively small numbers of parents and their children. These studies tend to find participants through local networks and associations and then ask them for referrals to other local home schooling parents. Several studies are quantitative and employ sophisticated statistical analyses. These are often based on surveys of members of home schooling organizations. Response rates in these types of surveys tend to be problematically low. Other quantitative studies (such as the NHES) are based on telephone surveys of large-scale, random samples of American adults with school-age children. Home-educating parents are part of this population, but it is difficult to assess whether they differ from parents of publicly and privately schooled children in regard to having a landline telephone, answering it, and actually participating in the survey.

MAJOR FINDINGS ABOUT HOME SCHOOLING

There are only a few major areas of inquiry in the home schooling scholarship. Most important, scholars (as well



SOURCE: Adapted from Bielick et al. (2001).

Figure 1. Ten reasons for home schooling and the percentage of home schooled students whose parents gave each reason, 1999. CENGAGE LEARNING, GALE.

as policymakers and the public) want to know the reasons why parents choose to home school their children (the inputs), who it is that does it (the demographics), and what is accomplished in doing so (the outputs). The literature indicates that the motivations for home schooling as well as the demographics of who home schools have changed across time. Regarding outputs, the focus has been on three primary topics: the socialization and academic performance of home schooled children as well as the long-term effects into adulthood.

Early studies of motivations to home school identified two major groups: *pedagogues* and *ideologues*. The pedagogues tended to be leftists on the political spectrum and stood against the bureaucratization and professionalization of public schools. These do-it-yourselfers sought personalization and decentralization under family control. The ideologues came largely from the political right, crusading against the secular forces of modern society, and seeking to impart religious values to their children. Although many commentators and much of the public continue to associate home schooling with the religious right, this segment of home schoolers has been declining. The majority of home schooling parents are not motivated by religious reasons.

As the movement grew in the 1990s and early 21st century, it became much more diverse. Home schooling is now advocated for a variety of reasons from average, mainstream Americans. Overall, there is a general consensus among researchers that there are four broad categories of motivation (and considerable overlap). Academic/pedagogical concerns and religious values certainly continue to be prevalent. In regard to the former, 48.9% of the home schooling parents who responded to the 1999 NHES survey indicated that they were motivated by the ability to give their child a better education. This type of response reflects the fact that, for many parents, home schooling is a positive choice rather than just a reaction against public schools. Also, according to the 1999 NHES, only 38.4% of respondents reported that they were motivated by religious reasons. In the 2003 NHES, 29.8% of respondents chose "to provide religious or moral instruction" as their most important reason for home schooling.

In addition to pedagogical and ideological reasons, home schooling parents also cite their general dissatisfaction with the public schools and family lifestyle reasons. The public school criticism usually takes two forms. First, there are environmental concerns such as safety issues and the potential for negative peer influences. Second, there are curricular concerns surrounding standards-based education and high-stakes testing resulting from state and national government initiatives (such as California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999 and the national No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). Finally, although they are the least common of the four, family lifestyle reasons are very important for some parents who decide to home school. This diverse set of motivations includes the inflexibility of the public school schedule, having children with special learning needs, and having children with unique abilities.

As the home schooling movement has grown, the demographic profile of its participants has changed. The pedagogues of the 1960s and 1970s and the ideologues of the 1980s were fairly homogeneous groups. Research from the mid-1990s through the middle of the first decade of the 21st century is quite consistent in regard to the demographics of who home schools. These families differ from the average American family in that they are more likely to be White, to be headed by a married couple, to have greater numbers of children, to be headed by college-educated parents, to have larger annual incomes, and to be state-certified to teach. Mothers usually provide about 90% of the home instruction, and most are not in the paid labor force. The fathers are more likely to work in professional/technical occupations or be self-employed. The importance of religion for some home schoolers also makes this population more likely to be socially and politically conservative and have stronger religious values than average Americans.

Even though home schooling has become less polarizing as an issue, research concerning its effects is still likely to be of the greatest interest. Many studies have documented that home schooled children do not suffer in terms of self-esteem or self-concept (an indicator of positive socialization). A few studies provide evidence that these children are better socialized than their public school counterparts. Indeed, some argue that it is in formal education settings that students experience negative socialization and peer pressure. Much of the research in this area highlights the fact that home educators do not usually act in isolation. They work together through networks and organizations. By sharing teaching materials and ideas, taking their children on group field trips, and engaging in other social activities, home schooling parents and their children build a community. Some note that the children also benefit from the age diversity of their social contacts—they are not segregated in age-based classrooms.

A multitude of studies concerning the student achievement of home-educated children have been conducted. More than 25 different studies indicate that these students score above national averages. Only two studies have demonstrated otherwise. Although home schooled students consistently score higher on various student achievement measures, the specific determinants of their achievement are less well known. Parental demographic factors have had inconsistent effects across these studies. Of all the areas of research, the long-term effects are the least studied. The available evidence does indicate that home-educated children have high college completion rates and go on to lead successful careers and lives.

The social scientific study of this growing movement is certain to continue. The existing literature illustrates that the least is known about the long-term effects, so this area should be a priority for researchers. Although home schooling has been a very polarizing issue, this is changing as it continues to become more popular and more publicly acceptable. The methodological problems of identifying and studying this population are likely to diminish in the future, providing the grounds for additional rigorous analysis. As a whole, the existing research indicates that those who are home schooled match or exceed their public school counterparts in terms of socialization, academic performance, and success in later life. Despite its many critics, there is no consistent or major evidence in the social scientific literature suggesting that home schooling is in any way detrimental to those involved or to society as a whole.

SEE ALSO Volume 1: *Parental Involvement in Education; Religion and Spirituality, Childhood and Adolescence.*

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HOMELESS, YOUTH AND ADOLESCENTS

Estimating the number of runaway and homeless youths in the United States is challenging because homelessness is not a steady state, particularly for adolescents. Even if returning home is not an alternative, minors have the options of temporary shelters, foster care, group homes,