

U.S. no longer dominated by 'typical' families

By Brigid Schulte, Washinton Post

The iconic 1950s family of the breadwinner father going off to work and caregiving mother taking care of the homefront, has been described by economists as the most efficient family structure. Everyone has a distinct job to do in their "separate spheres" of public and private life. And in the 1950s, the majority of children were being raised in such "typical" families.

We all know that's not true anymore. But perhaps what we haven't fully understood yet is that today, there is no one "typical" family. The breadwinner-homemaker family, the norm since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, is being replaced by a new norm of diversity.

"There hasn't been the collapse of one dominant family structure and the rise of another. It's really a fanning out into all kinds of family structures," said Philip Cohen, a sociologist at the University of Maryland. "Different is the new normal."

In a report for the Council on Contemporary Families being released this week, Cohen notes that in the 1950s, 65 percent of all children under 15 were being raised in traditional breadwinner-homemaker families. Today, only 22 percent are.

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