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TIME

Detroit's Uphill Battle

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Woe Is One

Two parents are better, it seems

As the divorce rate rose in the '70s, so did the comforting theory that most children do not really need both parents at home to grow up straight. Children are amazingly resilient, said the theory, and besides, one parent can do the job because quality of emotional care is more important than mere quantity. According to a new study of children who get in trouble at school, however, that is apparently not the case. The study, conducted by the Kettering Foundation and the National Association of Elementary School Principals, surveyed 8,556 students at 15 elementary and high schools around the country last year. The one-parent children showed substantially more absenteeism, truancy, discipline problems, suspensions, expulsions and dropouts.

One conclusion of the study: schools must pay more attention to the problems of one-parent children. According to the Census Bureau, 48% of children born this year will spend a considerable amount of time in a one-parent family by age 18.

Another study among six- to eleven-year-olds suggests that the performance of one-parent children may be improved if the divorced father retains custody of a son and the mother raises a daughter. However logical such an arrangement may seem, it flies in the face of the traditional legal presumption that women are, by nature, better equipped than men to nurture children of either sex.

Dallas Psychologists Richard Warshak and John Santrock, both associated with the University of Texas, made a close clinical study of relations between children and divorced parents in 60 families. Their conclusion, reported in an article in the *Journal of Social Issues*, was that children reared by same-sex parents exhibit greater maturity and independence. There is also less child-parent friction and a closer interrelationship. Mothers, after all, are less likely to teach boys to fish or hit a ball, and fathers are less experienced at dressing dolls or little girls. But try to tell that to the judge. ■