

IOWA IN THE '90s

Families used to be defined by Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, Ward and June Cleaver. Then someone pressed the fast-forward button and families got scrambled. Now, the definition of a family is changing, but there are some encouraging new signs for Iowa family life.

The changing American family

By MELINDA VOSS,

Register Staff Writer

For years, Mary L. Anderson of Waterloo, a single mother of six children, promised herself a "free-at-last" party when her youngest child turned 18.

Instead, that was the day she took temporary custody of three young granddaughters.

Now, Anderson, 49, attends PTA meetings, shuttles the children to dance lessons and tucks them in each night.

What happened to Anderson tells much about the tumultuous state of the family in the 1980s — a decade when society's main building block was wracked by divorce and drugs, stretched thin by demands on two employed parents and strained by the rising costs of education and child care.

Rediscovery

Out of this turmoil, however, many families are growing stronger and closer, experts say. "I think the next decade will bring a rediscovery of family," said Joanne Lane, chairwoman of the Iowa Commission on Children, Youth and Families.

The usual definition of a family will be stretched in the next decade. The traditional nuclear fami-

More on '90s living: Today's Life/Style

✓ Houses built during the next decade could be smarter than their occupants.

✓ For many Iowans, homes and lots will be smaller, but prices will be anything but.

✓ Entertainment will continue moving into the home, and children will face even more organized activities.

✓ Reusable products will begin to replace throwaways as emphasis on a clean environment gets stronger.

✓ Cellular telephones will change the way Iowans do business and run their home lives.

These articles and more are in today's Life/Style section.

One in a series

ly — with mom as homemaker and dad as breadwinner — will be one of many kinds of families, experts say. By the mid-'90s, 75 percent of all families will have two wage-earners, said David Snyder of Bethesda, Md., who studies trends.

Some will be "skip-generation" families such as Anderson's, although more may be like the West

Des Moines couple of Diane and David Lawnsdail.

By the end of the 1990s, when they near retirement, the Lawnsdails may be a "two-generation geriatric" family. The Lawnsdails, who are in their late 40s, and Diane's mother, Larita Robinson, 70, live in a specially designed home. Robinson has a separate apartment. They share expenses and chores, but lead independent lives.

Homosexual "Family"

Others may be like Jerold Crawford and Jeff McMullen, two homosexuals from Des Moines who have lived together for 12 years. Although they call themselves a family, they feel frustrated that society does not recognize them as such. A family membership at a health club, for example, is not available to them.

Yet, whatever form the family takes, the pace of family life, which seemed stuck on fast-forward in the '80s, is not likely to change.

The American dinner hour died in the juggle of soccer practices and teen work schedules with aero-

FAMILIES

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Americans poised to rediscover the family in 1990s

FAMILIES

Continued from Page One

nics classes and parents' jobs. At the same time, high-tech gadgets — answering machines, home computers and videocassette recorders — eased chores, created new ways to educate and entertain, and encouraged families to "cocoon."

So, why, despite all these intrusions, will commitment to family grow?

Need to Connect

Timothy H. Brubaker, director of the Family and Child Study Center at Miami University in Ohio, said an underlying reason was an emotional need for connections.

"We're just starting to notice that we need more than buying a four-bedroom house and a BMW," he said. "In the '90s, I see the upwardly mobile groups viewing intimate family relationships as more positive."

Demographics also help to explain the swing to family values. There will be fewer children, making them more precious. The mass of aging baby-boomers and increased longevity will create more four- and five-generation families and more opportunities for families to discover their heritage.

But Lane also worries that families will be on two economic tracks. Trends suggest that dual-income families will prosper and offer their children a multitude of enriching opportunities, while single-parent households, frequently headed by poor women, will increasingly struggle to furnish necessities, she said.

David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute for American Values, a New York organization that studies families, has predicted the eruption of a social crisis if nothing changes the divisive economy.

The fact that 23 percent of U.S. children are born into poverty is nothing short of tragic, he said.

"What we're doing is spending less and less of our time and money promoting a good environment for children," he said. "They have fewer parents. Their parents spend less time with them. And a barrage of influences — media, drugs, peers — affect them. It's not a good time to be a child."

In Iowa, the problem is reflected in the state's growing number of foster children, said Anne Thompson, director of the Coalition for Family and Child Services. In 1989, the state averaged 3,000 children a month in foster care. Now, it is close to 4,000, despite a smaller pool of children in the state.

Not Whole Story

Economics do not tell the whole story, however. Men who abandon their families also contribute to family problems, Blankenhorn said. Fa-

thers who neglect to pay child support and those who are emotionally distant from their children frequently fail to provide the necessary role model for well-adjusted children to develop, he said.

Women, too, need to pay more attention to purposes larger than self, he said. "From offices in Washington, D.C., to homes in Iowa, there needs to be a value shift at the most profound level that creates a cultural ethos in favor of strong families," he said.

While Lane sees the same problems in Iowa, she also sees signs of change. In the early '80s, many people put career ahead of family, even if it meant moving thousands of miles away, she said. Now, she sees more people skipping promotions for the sake of family.

As for poor families, she said, "we're finally waking up and saying we need to provide support so low-income families can provide a healthy environment for their children."

To that end, Iowa has about two dozen programs to strengthen families and prevent out-of-home placements, said Kristine Nelson, director of research at the University of Iowa's National Resource Center on Family-Based Services.

These programs typically provide family counseling or direct help for extended family members, neighbors or government agencies working to keep the family together.

Families as Whole

"It's the first time in the history of social services that there's serious attention to looking at the needs of families as a whole," Nelson said. "What we've learned is you just can't wait until families fail. It's much more cost-effective and human to offer help to families facing predictable problems, like no child care or management of a difficult adolescent."

No one helps Mary Anderson to raise her three grandchildren in Waterloo, but she does not complain about her situation. The girl's mother, Anderson's daughter, was an alcoholic who died in 1987, shortly before Anderson took permanent custody. "I would not have had any sense if I had not taken them," she said.

Anderson who has a 23-year-old son who exemplifies the "baby boomer-ang" generation. Boomerangers — adult children who do not leave or keep returning home — also are creatures of the '80s.

Currently, the average age at which adult children leave home is 26, said David Snyder, the Maryland future expert. They are staying home longer mostly for economic reasons. If they want to give up cars and live in less-than-high-quality surroundings they could be on their own. But they've grown up with fairly middle-class standards. Until they can afford those standards, they aren't



Mary Anderson of Waterloo has dinner with her three grandchildren, whom she is raising. They are Deora (at left), 9, Anka, 10, and Mary, 6. The family is at Little John's Burgers, a fast-food restaurant near their home.

leaving."

At the same time, single-parent households, most often older divorced or widowed women, also will grow in number because of the aging population, Snyder said.

Larkia Robinson is one of those. Until last year, Robinson lived five houses from the home her only child, Diane Lawnsdall, shared with a husband and two college-age sons. About a year ago, they all moved into a specially designed home.

Robinson paid for her 1,100-square-foot apartment in the basement of the Lawnsdalls' home. She also contributes to each month's utility bills. The apartment includes a large kitchen, a three-season porch, a dumbwaiter to the garage and two large walk-in closets.

The arrangement works beautifully, Robinson said. "I probably don't see them as often now as I used to. My daughter and son-in-law come down every Friday evening to visit with me."

For the Lawnsdalls, the benefits include a ready supply of Robinson's fried chicken, pies and other culinary delights and the comfort of knowing that Grandma, a diabetic, is a few steps away if she needs help.

The close ties of grandparents to families will become even stronger in the '90s, Snyder said. The traditional role they have played for centuries should see a renewal in the coming decade, he said.

In the next decade, rising health costs will force more families to take in aging relatives, Snyder said. Even now, a third of the nation's middle-class elderly are reduced to poverty before they die because of expensive institutional care, he said.

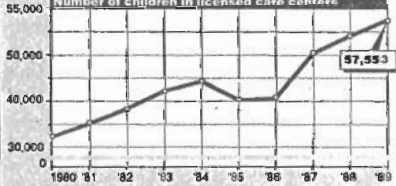
The problem with multi-generational households, however, is a loss of independence and privacy — two ideals Iowa studies show are important to the older generation.

Definition Changing
Although Snyder still sees the family as the "perfect social institution," he also said its definition was changing.

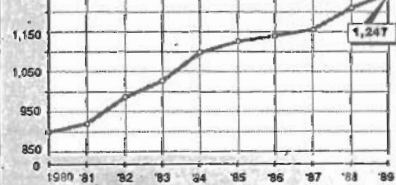
Like homosexuals elsewhere, some homosexual couples in Iowa want to be recognized as families, said Michael Current, co-chairman of the Iowa Lesbian and Gay Political Caucus.

Child care in Iowa

Number of children in licensed care centers

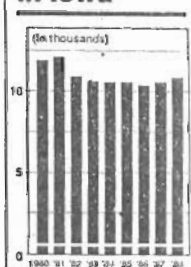


Number of licensed child care centers



SOURCE: Iowa Department of Human Services

Divorces in Iowa



SOURCE: Iowa Department of Human Services

are here.

Although birth rates for the techniques still are relatively low, Dr. Craig Syrop, head of the University of Iowa's in-vitro fertilization program, said the odds would improve in the next decade. The newest possibility on the horizon at the U of I is "gamete micro-manipulation," which a hole is opened in the outer cover of the egg, increasing its chance for a sperm to fertilize it, he said.

And while Syrop does not want to be "made to order" babies — with sex, hair color, eye color and other qualities able to be selected — in the immediate horizon, the Doran Clinic for Women in Ames is offering sex selection for \$300 per amniocentesis.

How families have been is not necessarily how they will be in the '90s. Although experts predict the statistics experienced by many families in the '80s have set the stage for a period of stability — a time to catch one's breath, so to speak.

Just do not expect too much of weather. Chances are your kid's soccer game starts in 25 minutes.

NEXT SUNDAY: During the 1990s Iowa schools and colleges will plan into a more competitive decade than ever before as they scramble for the students and to keep up with fast-paced technology.

Jerold Crawford, 36, and Jeff McMillan, 32, a homosexual couple, said their relationship deserved legal recognition. "I get angry sometimes with the fact that if you don't have a piece of paper then you don't count," Crawford said.

Homosexual couples have discovered they cannot share health-care benefits, bereavement leave or other benefits. Some insurance companies also decline to sell a total renter's insurance policy to a homosexual couple, he said.

At the same time, society scorns homosexuals for what is perceived as promiscuous behavior, Current said. "If society were really concerned, especially with the spread of AIDS, one of the first things it would do as a society would be to give these relationships some legal authority and make it easier for them to exist."

New York took such a step last July

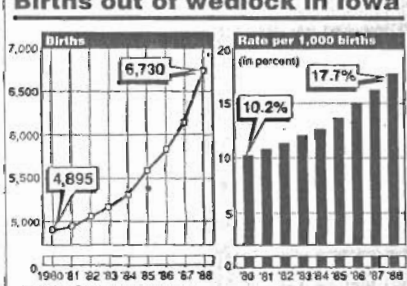
when the state Supreme Court ruled that a homosexual couple could be defined as a family under New York's rent control laws.

Medical Technologies

Besides controversy surrounding the legal rights of homosexual families, debates also swirl around the rapidly advancing medical technology for creating babies. These methods raise a host of perplexing questions that will affect families in the '90s.

Does a child have a right to know he was conceived in a petri dish? Should frozen embryos be viewed as property to be awarded in a divorce? Should donors be guaranteed anonymity? Perhaps more important, however, is who will answer these questions: lawmakers, the courts, churches or individuals? The answers may not come easily, but the questions will not go away. The techniques

Births out of wedlock in Iowa



SOURCE: Iowa Department of Public Health

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More spy satellites eyed to monitor peace steps

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EPA to restrict use of controversial fungicides

In spite of the sharp reduction in summary exposure was not drastically lowered by the voluntary action.