

NATIONAL CENTER ON CHILDREN IN POVERTY - A RAPIDLY CHANGING PORTRAIT OF FATHERHOOD IN AMERICA AND HOW THE STATES ARE RESPONDING TO IT

A new report by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University shows a rapidly changing demographic portrait of American fathers and a surprising level of activity in the states to promote agendas for responsible fatherhood. Much of the new activity reported in *Map and Track: State Initiatives to Encourage Responsible Fatherhood*, is in response to welfare reform and the new demographic realities facing today's fathers and families. Yet there are many issues--such as the rapid increase in the number of single-parent families headed by fathers--which have not yet been adequately understood by the public or addressed by state policymakers.

The report includes national demographic data for the last two decades as well as detailed demographic and program and policy information on all 50 states drawn from surveys conducted by NCCP and the Council of Governors' Policy Advisors (CGPA). NCCP produced the report in collaboration with the CGPA and the National Center on Fathers and Families at the University of Pennsylvania. The report was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

There are two compelling reasons for states to focus on fatherhood issues. The first is that children who are regularly and positively connected to their fathers tend to do better in school, avoid involvement with the juvenile justice system, and have more positive relationships with their peers. The second reason is that it is in the states' fiscal interest. Children whose fathers do not contribute to their economic security burden the states and other taxpayers. Therefore, it is in the states' interest to ensure that fathers who can pay do, and that other fathers have the economic supports to be able to contribute to the well-being of their children. To that end, this report focuses on identifying and profiling state strategies to encourage fathers to be responsible.

FINDINGS

- **Explosive Growth for Single-Father Families and a Decline in the Number of Married-Couple Families**
Over two-thirds of U.S. children are growing up in households with their fathers but the composition of the American family is rapidly changing. There has been

substantial growth in the number of families headed by single-mothers but families headed by single-fathers are growing at a much faster rate. One in seven single-parent families is now headed by a father.

- Since 1976, the number of children in:
 - _ Father-only families is up by 220 percent from 863,000 to 2.8 million
 - _ Mother-only families is up by 56 percent from 10.9 to 17 million
 - _ Married-couple families is down by 9 percent from 52.9 to 48.2 million
- Increased Father Absence
The number of children affected by father-absence increased by 56 percent from 10.9 million to 17.0 million between 1976 and 1996. (This number of children refers specifically to those in mother-only families. An additional 3.1 million children live in families in which neither parent is present. Each year one million babies are born out-of-wedlock and another million are newly affected by divorce.

Fathers as Economic Providers: Education Matters

Only about half of all children--48 percent--had fathers with formal education beyond high school. Fifteen percent of children had fathers who did not complete high school and another 33 percent had fathers who completed only high school. This has important implications for fathers' future potential as economic providers. According to a 1994 report by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the average college graduate will earn more than twice as much over a lifetime (\$1,420,850 million) as the average person who did not complete high school (\$608,8100).

Fathers and Child Support

Almost half of all children with absent parents lack child support orders. That means fathers are not required to pay child support for them. Even if there are orders, it does not ensure support. Close to 40 percent of custodial mothers and one-quarter of custodial fathers did not receive support even if they were awarded it. Many nonresident fathers have difficulty supporting their children because they are in poverty--15 percent of nonresident fathers had incomes below the poverty line. Low-income, nonresident fathers pay disproportionately more of their income to child support than high-income fathers, sometimes up to two and one-half times as much.

Positively Involved Fathers Benefit Children, Families, and Taxpayers

When nonresident fathers are positively involved in their children's upbringing it benefits children, families, and taxpayers. Children whose fathers do not contribute to their economic security burden the states and taxpayers. Fathers with joint custody and/or visitation rights pay their child support at a significantly higher rate. Among fathers

whose children were awarded child support, 85 percent of fathers with joint custody and 79 percent of fathers with visitation rights paid some or all of the money owed their children. Only 56 percent of other fathers made some or all of their payments. These payment rates are almost 50 percent higher than those for fathers without joint custody and/or visitation rights.

Fathers and Poverty

Children are much more likely to be poor when their father is absent. The poverty rate for children in single-mother families (48 percent) was more than twice as great as the poverty rate for children in single-father families (22 percent) and over four times as high as the rate for two-parent families (10 percent).

On the other hand, the poverty rate for children in traditional "Ozzie & Harriet" families with a full-time working father and a mother who is not in the labor market has increased by 136 percent between 1975 and 1995--from 5.6 percent to 13.2 percent. In 1995 there were 1.4 million children in poverty who lived in such families.

Fatherhood and Welfare Reform

Welfare-linked changes, particularly those related to improving child support enforcement and reaching out to noncustodial fathers are playing a central role as states shape a fatherhood agenda. The following box highlights some of the changes related to fatherhood in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act.

Opportunities and Risks for Fathers in the 1996 Federal Welfare Law In August of 1996, Congress enacted major legislation replacing the Aid To Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program with a new Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant to the states, and strengthened child support provisions. Below is a brief synopsis of how the legislation, known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) is likely to affect fathers.

- _ Permits states to offer benefits to all poor two-parent families and, depending on how the state defines families, to also provide services to the nonresidential parent.
- _ Permits the state to offer work opportunities to the noncustodial father.
- _ Requires all states to allow fathers to initiate paternity actions.
- _ Makes optional and solely at the state's expense, any direct child support payments to the families (previous law required a \$50 pass through to families, with the cost shared by federal and state governments).
- _ Requires states to create a state case registry that contains basic information about all child support awards and other information on families receiving public assistance or

child support services.

_ Allows states to revoke the driver and professional licenses of nonresident parents not paying child support.

_ Eliminates Food Stamp eligibility for fathers behind in child support payments. State Demographic Variation

There is considerable state-by-state variation in the demographics of fatherhood. For the years 1991-1995, the average percentage of two-parent families ranged from a low of 61 percent in Mississippi to a high of 81 percent in Nebraska. Mother-only families ranged from a high of 36 percent in Mississippi to a low of 13 percent in Utah. The percentage of unmarried teen mothers ranged from almost 4 percent in Mississippi to less than 1 percent in Vermont. Father-only families as a percentage of all single-parent families also varied, from 8.6 percent in Georgia to 24.6 percent in Vermont.

HOW ARE STATES RESPONDING TO THE CHANGING FACE OF FATHERHOOD

State Strategies to Promote Responsible Fatherhood

NCCP surveyed every state as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The survey found that state activities to promote responsible fatherhood were clustered in five areas: (1) increasing public awareness about responsible fatherhood; (2) preventing unwanted or too-early fatherhood; (3) promoting fathers' ability to contribute to their children's economic security; (4) encouraging fathers to be caregivers and nurturers; and (5) building community and state leadership capacity around a fatherhood agenda.

There is now widespread recognition among the states of the importance of a fatherhood agenda. 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico all report one or more activities to promote responsible fatherhood. Seven states (Arizona, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and New Mexico) report activities that cluster in each of the five areas highlighted in the report. Eleven states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico report only one or two activities. The remaining states report activities in three or four areas.

Enhancing Fathers as Economic Providers * Forty-six states report strategies to strengthen fathers' roles as economic providers. Most of the efforts reported link a fatherhood agenda with a welfare reform agenda. Strategies include: license revocation to force noncustodial parents to pay child support; job-linked services for noncustodial fathers, including those defined as able-bodied Food Stamp recipients; supporting two-parent families by extending benefits to them; enhancing existing paternity establishment procedures; outreach to mothers through Head Start and health clinics to enhance child

support collection; increasing fathers' incomes by raising state minimum wages and offering a state earned income tax credit.

Preventing Unwanted or Too-Early Fatherhood * Forty states report strategies to prevent unwanted or too-early fatherhood. These strategies include: school- or community-based programs; adding a male involvement component to teen pregnancy prevention activities and/or support for teens who are already fathers; developing curricula to teach responsible fatherhood; and addressing issues related to statutory rape.

Strengthening Fathers' Roles as Nurturers * Forty voluntary counseling for divorcing families; providing services to help resolve disputes and see that visitation occurs; using federal dollars to develop visitation strategies to promote the involvement of noncustodial parents (primarily fathers) with their children; efforts to enhance the parenting skills of incarcerated men or juveniles; attaching low-income, noncustodial fathers to the workforce; efforts to improve the workplace for fathers and families, for example, through state family and medical leave legislation or non-income-linked efforts to help fathers with parenting skills. No state reported any explicit strategies targeted to fathers raising children alone.

Promoting Public Awareness Thirty-nine states report public-awareness strategies. Three-quarters of these involve promotional activities, brochures, and the use of internet or public service announcements. The state vision of responsible fatherhood is, in part, defined by these public-awareness campaigns.

Building State and Local Leadership Capacity Around a Fatherhood Agenda * Twenty states reported explicit efforts to build leadership capacity to develop and implement a fatherhood agenda, including: leadership through interagency mechanisms and or statewide commissions or task forces; and efforts to build programmatic leadership through mini-challenge grants to communities. In some instances, these efforts are funded with reinvestment dollars from welfare savings.

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Department of Health and Human Services.

NATIONAL RESOURCES FOR ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD

Note: This list reflects the variety of institutions and organizations concerned about responsible fatherhood. Any of the groups have information sites on the Internet.

- **AT-HOME DAD**
Chat Group/Network/Newsletter/Play Groups
61 Brightwood Avenue
North Andover, MA 01845
Tel: (508) 685-7931
E-mail: athomedad@aol.com
WWW: <http://www.parentsplace.com/readroom/athomedad/>
Contact: Peter Baylies, Editor and Publisher
- **CENTER FOR FATHERS, FAMILIES, AND PUBLIC POLICY**
c/o Family Resource Coalition
200 South Michigan Avenue, 16th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604
Tel: (312) 341-0900
Fax: (312) 341-9361
Contacts: Kirk E. Harris, Institute Director and David Pate, Lead Consultant
- **COALITION OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS FOR YOUTH**
1055 Broadway, Suite 170
Kansas City, MO 64105
Tel: (816) 842-4246
Fax: (816) 842-7907
E-mail: ccfy@gkccf.org
Contact: Cindy Sesler Ballard, Executive Director
- **COMMISSION ON HEALTH CARE FINANCE**
2100 Martin Luther King Avenue, SE, Suite 302
Washington, DC 20020
Tel: (202) 727-0735
Fax: (202) 727-5645/(202) 610-3209
Contact: Paul Offner, Commissioner
- **FATHER-TO-FATHER PROJECT**
Children, Youth, and Family Consortium
University of Minnesota
12 McNeal Hall
1985 Buford Avenue

St. Paul, MN 55108

Tel: (612) 625-8285

Fax: (612) 626-1210

WWW: <http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Fathernet/ftf.htm/>

Contacts: Martha Farrell Erickson, Director and Michael Tratt, Coordinator

- **NATIONAL PRACTITIONERS NETWORK FOR FATHERS AND FAMILIES**

Families and Work Institute

330 Seventh Avenue

New York, NY 10001

Tel: (212) 465-2044 Extention 225

Fax: (212) 465-8637

WWW: <http://www.fatherhoodproject.org>

Contacts: James Levine, Director and Ed Pitt, Associate Director

- **THE FUNDERS COLLABORATIVE ON FATHERS AND FAMILIES**

c/o The Annie E. Casey Foundation

701 Saint Paul Street

Baltimore, MD 21202

Tel: (800) 222-1099 or (410) 223-2937

Fax: (410) 547-6624

WWW: <http://www.aecf.org>

Contact: Ellen Pagliaro, Planning Associate

- **INSTITUTE FOR MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES**

4545 42nd Street, NW, Suite 311

Washington, DC 20016

Tel: (202) 364-7111

Fax: (202) 363-3891

E-mail: instmhi@aol.com

WWW: <http://www.imhi.org/imhi>

Contact: Michael Benjamin, Executive Director

- **THE INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIBLE FATHERHOOD AND FAMILY
REVITALIZATION**

1146 19th Street, NW, Suite 800

Washington, DC 20036

Tel: (202) 293-4420

Fax: (202) 293-4288

E-mail: irffr@aol.com

Contact: Charles A. Ballard, President

- **MANPOWER DEMONSTRATION RESEARCH CORPORATION**

3 Park Avenue

New York, NY 10016

Tel: (212) 532-3200

Fax: (212) 684-0832

- WWW: <http://www.mdrc.org>
Contact: Gordon Berlin, Senior Vice President
- NATIONAL CENTER FOR FATHERING
10200 West 75th Street, Suite 267
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WWW: <http://www.upenn.edu/gse/ncoff/index.html>
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 - NATIONAL FATHERHOOD INITIATIVE
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WWW: <http://www.register.com/father>
Contact: Wade Horn, Ph.D., Director
 - PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES
2005 Market Street, Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: (215) 557-4400
Fax: (215) 557-4469
WWW: <http://tap.epn.org/ppv/>
Contact: Gary Walker, President
 - THE URBAN INSTITUTE
2100 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
Tel: 202-833-7200/(202) 857-8575
Fax: (202) 429-0687
E-mail: paffairs@ui.urban.org
WWW: <http://www.urban.org>
Contacts: Freya Sonenstein, for Fathering Issues and Elaine Sorensen, for Child

- Support Issues
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201
Tel: (202) 690-6806 or (202) 690-7507
Fax: (202) 690-6562
E-mail: mellgren@osaspe.dhhs.gov
Contact: Linda Mellgren, Social Science Analyst

For further information or questions regarding this web site, please email mailbox@ncoff.gse.upenn.edu



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Children at Risk: State Trends 1990-2000



Children at Risk State Trends 1990-2000

Summary and Findings

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The broad array of data presented in this *PRB/KIDS COUNT Special Report* is intended to illuminate state-by-state trends in the well-being of America's children from 1990 to 2000. States can also use these data to compare the status of their children with children in other states across several specific dimensions of child well-being.

Although the 11 measures used here can hardly capture the full range of conditions shaping children's lives, we believe these indicators reflect a wide range of factors affecting child welfare. Moreover, they permit legitimate comparisons because they are consistent across states and over time.

Despite the enormous wealth in the United States, our child poverty rate is among the highest in the developed world.

The measures shown here are a combination of "outcomes" and "risk factors." Although conceptually there are distinctions to be made between outcomes and risk factors, all of the measures used to rank states in this report are closely associated with problems for kids—either directly or indirectly.

The 11 key indicators of child well-being used here are from the 1990 Census and the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS) and reflect the best available state-level data for each indicator. However, it is important to recognize that no data are perfect. Therefore, we urge readers to focus on relatively large differences—both across states and over time within a state. Small differences may reflect random fluctuations rather than real changes in the well-being of children. In light of the sampling error in these estimates, the figures presented here are rounded to whole numbers to avoid giving readers a false sense of precision. In addition to standard errors, there are many other sources of error in any survey data. For more information, visit the U.S. Census Bureau's website at www.census.gov/c2ss/www/methodology/Accuracy.htm. For more information about the standard errors associated with the sample data used in this report, contact Kerri Rivers at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington, DC, at 202.483.1100.

We include data for the District of Columbia in this publication, but we do not include DC in our rankings. The District is so different from any state that the

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[Introduction](#)

- [Summary and Findings](#)

[Endnotes](#)

- [Definitions and Data Sources](#)

[State Contacts](#)

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[Introduction](#)

- [Summary and Findings](#)

[National Profile](#)

- [All State Profiles](#)

[Appendices](#)

- [Definitions and Data Sources](#)

[Entire Report](#)

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comparisons are not meaningful. It is more useful to look at changes in the District of Columbia over the 1990s or to compare the District with other large cities.¹

We did not create a composite index based on all 11 indicators because some key domains of child well-being, such as health status, are not reflected here.

Table 1 shows national changes from 1990 to 2000 in the 11 measures used in this report. Eight of the 11 measures improved between 1990 and 2000, although several decreased by only 1 percentage point. While these figures paint a relatively positive picture of changes in child well-being during the 1990s, the picture varies from state to state.

In the remainder of this section, each of the 11 indicators is discussed separately. This section offers some background about each indicator, how it is linked to child well-being, citations to related studies, and a discussion of the range of state changes.

With regard to the state pages that follow, it is important to keep in mind that a negative change (that is, a number preceded by a minus sign) is generally a sign of improvement because it indicates that a problem is diminishing. We point this out because negative signs often are associated with negative trends, but that is not the case here.

It is also important to recognize that the trends shown here are based on two data points: 1990 and 2000. In some cases there is reason to believe that recent trends—at the end of the 1990s—are different from trends that occurred earlier in the decade. These year-to-year fluctuations are not reflected in data from two points in time.

Table 1: National Changes in Child Well-Being, 1990-2000

	1990	2000	Percent Change 1990-2000
Percent of children living in poverty	18%	17%	-6%
Percent of children living in single-parent families	24%	30%	25%
Percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment	29%	28%	-3%
Percent of children living with a household head who is a high school dropout	22%	19%	-14%
Percent of children living in low-income working families	19%	22%	16%
Percent of children living in households without a telephone	8%	4%	-50%
Percent of children living in households without a vehicle	9%	7%	-22%
Percent of children who have difficulty speaking English (ages 5-17)	5%	6%	20%
Percent of teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19)	12%	11%	-8%
Percent of teens not attending school and not working (ages 16-19)	10%	9%	-10%
Percent of children living in "high-risk" families	13%	12%	-8%

SOURCE: Population Reference Bureau, tabulations of data from the U.S. Census Bureau.

Finally, some of the 1990 Census figures in this report differ from 1990 figures presented in the *KIDS COUNT- Data Books*, which are based on annual data from the Current Population Survey and other sources.

Percent of children living in poverty

The percentage of children living in poverty is perhaps the most global and widely used indicator of child well-being. This is partly due to the fact that poverty is closely linked to a number of undesirable outcomes in areas such as health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency.²

The data shown here are based on the official poverty measure as determined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. However, readers should note that a number of researchers are critical of the official measure,³ and public opinion polls suggest that the current poverty line (\$17,463 for a family of two adults and two children in 2000) is unrealistically low.⁴ The U.S. Census Bureau has recently started publishing a set of experimental poverty measures that incorporate many of the changes called for in a study by the National Academy of Sciences.⁵

Despite the enormous wealth in the United States, our child poverty rate is

among the highest in the developed world. One study that examined child poverty rates in 17 developed countries indicated that the child poverty rate in the United States was the highest among these countries (50 percent higher than the next highest country).⁶ This finding was reinforced by a recent United Nations study of industrialized nations.⁷ While the gap in the child poverty rate between the United States and other developed countries is partly a product of differences in private-sector income, the enormous differences in governmental efforts to alleviate child poverty greatly accentuate the disparities.

Nationally, the child poverty rate declined by 6 percent during the 1990s, with the rate falling from 18 percent in 1990 to 17 percent in 2000. However, the decline in poverty was not uniform across all states. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children in poverty decreased in 29 states, increased in 16 states and the District of Columbia, and remained about the same in 5 states. Alaska had the largest increase in child poverty (30 percent), but still had a relatively low child poverty rate in 2000 (13 percent). States with the largest decreases in child poverty rates during the 1990s were Colorado and South Dakota (33 percent each) and Minnesota (31 percent).

In 2000, there were 12.4 million children living in poverty in the United States. Louisiana and West Virginia had the highest child poverty rates (28 percent each), and New Hampshire had the lowest rate at 7 percent.

Percent of children living in single-parent families

The percentage of children living in single-parent families has risen steadily over the past few decades and is a growing concern among policymakers and the public. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of children living with a single parent rose by more than 200 percent from 1960 to 2000.⁸ Reducing the number of single-parent families, particularly those resulting from births to unmarried women, is a prominent focus of federal and state welfare reform legislation.

Much of the public interest is linked to the fact that children growing up in single-parent households typically do not have access to the same economic or human resources as children growing up in two-parent families. For example, 40 percent of children in female-headed families were poor in 2000.⁹ Most single-parent families are headed by women, and the absence of fathers may have implications beyond economics. One recent study found that youths raised in fatherless families were much more likely to be incarcerated even after other factors, such as poverty, were taken into account.¹⁰

The long-term rise in divorce and single parenting has led some public officials to propose or enact policy interventions. For example, Louisiana has introduced a "covenant marriage" option, which makes it more difficult for couples to obtain a divorce. Several other state-level initiatives have focused on lowering the divorce rate. Oklahoma's governor has announced a \$10 million initiative to reduce his state's divorce rate by one-third. Utah has created a Commission on Marriage to promote marriage preparation classes for high school students, and several states have passed or are contemplating legislation that would reduce the cost of a marriage license for couples who take a marriage preparation course.¹¹ Even the federal government has become involved; the 1996 welfare reform law has a provision that rewards states for lowering out-of-wedlock births.

Most single-parent families are headed by women, and

the absence of fathers may have implications beyond economics. One recent study found that youths raised in fatherless families were much more likely to be incarcerated even after other factors, such as poverty, were taken into account.

It is important to understand that this report shows trends in single-parent families based on data for 1990 and 2000 only and does not necessarily reflect trends in the late 1990s. National-level data from other sources suggest that there was a rapid increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent families in the early 1990s followed by a slight decline late in the decade.¹²

The 1990 Census and the C2SS show that the percentage of children living in single-parent families increased from 24 percent in 1990 to 30 percent in 2000, a 25 percent increase. Of the 11 indicators examined in this publication, this is the only one that showed an increase in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. However, there was substantial variation in the magnitude of this increase, ranging from a low of 13 percent in New Jersey to a high of 60 percent in North Dakota.

In 2000, more than 21 million children lived in single-parent families. Mississippi had the highest percentage of children living in single-parent families (41 percent), followed by Louisiana (40 percent). The share of children in single-parent families was smallest in Utah (18 percent).

Research has shown that more educated parents limit television watching and encourage reading, studying, and other behaviors that may lead to more positive academic outcomes for children.

Percent of children living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment

In 2000, more than 19 million children did not have a parent in the household who worked full-time, year-round. Although many of these children were poor, the problems associated with this situation went beyond the effects of poverty. According to a recent report by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, "Secure parental employment may also enhance children's psychological well-being and improve family functioning by reducing stress and other negative effects that unemployment and underemployment can have on parents."¹³ The belief that children are better off when their parents work was a key premise of the 1996 welfare reform act.

Because a working parent offers children a strong, positive role model, a child who grows up in a family without a regularly employed parent does not experience the positive effects that such a parental figure offers. Also, some scholars note that the routinization of household schedules that typically accompanies full-time work is beneficial to children.

However, many parents who are unable to find regular employment end up working at temporary or part-time jobs that do not provide enough money to support a family, that are often at odd hours requiring unusual child-care arrangements, and that offer little overall stability.

Nationally, the percentage of children in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment declined slightly from 29 percent in 1990 to 28 percent in 2000. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children without a parent in the household who worked full-time, year-round increased in 13 states, decreased in 27 states and the District of Columbia, and stayed about the same in 10 states. Minnesota (17 percent decrease), Texas (16 percent decrease), and Louisiana (15 percent decrease) improved the most. North Dakota (21 percent increase), North Carolina (20 percent increase), and Hawaii (19 percent increase) experienced the largest increases.

In 2000, there were 19.1 million children living in families where no parent had full-time, year-round employment. Alaska had the highest percentage of children without a parent who worked full-time, year-round in 2000 (43 percent), and New Hampshire had the lowest percentage (19 percent).

Percent of children living with a household head who is a high school dropout

The human resources parents bring to a family have important implications for the socialization of their children. Parents without a high school diploma are less likely to provide their children with an environment that is educationally stimulating. Research has shown that more educated parents limit television watching and encourage reading, studying, and other behaviors that may lead to more positive academic outcomes for children.¹⁴ Children with well-educated parents also score higher on standardized tests, are more likely to visit libraries, and are more likely to read books in their free time.¹⁵

While this measure does not provide a complete picture of the education levels of every adult in a household, the education of the household head is closely related to the general education level in a household. Also, this measure is useful because it can be applied to all children, regardless of their living arrangements.

Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children living with a household head who is a high school dropout declined from 22 percent to 19 percent, reflecting a long-term, nationwide trend of improved high school graduation rates. However, there were five states where the percentage of children living with a household head who is a high school dropout increased: Alaska (27 percent), Wyoming (10 percent), Colorado (7 percent), Oklahoma (5 percent), and New Mexico (4 percent). Among the states with the most improvement on this indicator were South Dakota (46 percent decrease), Vermont (43 percent decrease), and Hawaii (41 percent decrease).

Nationwide in 2000, there were 13.5 million children living in families where the household head was a high school dropout. In 2000, California, at 29 percent, had the highest percentage of children living in households where the household head was a high school dropout, followed by Texas, at 28 percent. South Dakota had the lowest rate at 7 percent.

Percent of children living in low-income working families

While parental work and income are widely viewed as beneficial to children, many low-income working families do not earn enough money to provide health care, child care, and other critical services that working families need.¹⁶

During the 1990s, the number of children in low-income working families (at least one parent worked 50 or more weeks a year, but family income was below 200 percent of the poverty threshold) increased from 10.8 million to 14.2 million. In 1990, 19 percent of all children were living in low-income working families; by 2000, the figure had risen to 22 percent.

This measure is more difficult to interpret than the other measures included in this report. If the number of working-poor families is increasing because parents are moving from long-term welfare dependency to work, then an increase is probably a positive change for children. On the other hand, if an increase means more of the parents who are working full-time, year-round are not able to lift their families out of "poverty," then this reflects a worsening situation for children.

Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children who lived in low-income working families increased in 34 states and the District of Columbia, decreased in 11 states, and stayed about the same in 5 states. The 3 states with the largest decreases were Utah (23 percent), followed by Idaho and South Dakota (21 percent each). The states with the largest increases in the percentage of kids in low-income working families were California and Maryland (50 percent each), Connecticut (44 percent), and Nevada (42 percent). The District of Columbia also had a 50 percent increase in this measure over the decade.

Nationwide in 2000, there were 14.2 million children living in low-income working families. In 2000, New Mexico (33 percent) had a higher percentage of children living in low-income working families than any other state, and Alaska (11 percent) had the smallest share of children in low-income working families.

Percent of children living in households without a telephone

The direct impact on children of living without a telephone at home is difficult to assess. However, it is noteworthy that 18 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds who have dropped out of high school do not have a phone at home, compared with 4 percent of teens who have not dropped out of school.¹⁷ While the cause-and-effect relationship is unclear, this statistic underscores the disadvantages faced by children without a phone at home. Moreover, outreach programs that rely on telephone contact miss a significant segment of needy kids. For example, a recent court decision in Texas found that the high rate of "phonelessness" among low-income families confounded state efforts to provide medical assistance.¹⁸

Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children living in households without a telephone decreased in every state and the District of Columbia. States that improved by 75 percent or more between 1990 and 2000 include Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Vermont, and Washington. Indiana showed the least improvement, with an 11 percent decrease. Most states reduced rates of phonelessness by at least 50 percent over the decade.

Nationally, about 2.6 million children (4 percent) lived in households without a telephone in 2000.¹⁹ New Mexico stands out as the only state where more than 10 percent of children lived in households without a telephone in 2000. Maine had the lowest rate at less than 0.5 percent.

Percent of children living in households without a vehicle

While policymakers and economists increasingly extoll the need to think about regional, national, and global economies, many families living in our poorest neighborhoods find it extremely difficult to work or shop outside their immediate community because they have neither a car nor access to reliable public transportation. Although many moderate- and upper-income families have more than one vehicle, half of the children in low-income urban areas live in households that do not have a car.²⁰ In light of a welfare reform approach that requires most parents in low-income families to work, it is difficult to overstate the importance of having a dependable vehicle. C2SS

data show that 88 percent of workers used private vehicles to get to work in 2000.²¹

While communication and transportation are among the most obvious types of connections that are missing for many families living in poor neighborhoods, they often reflect more serious levels of isolation. Such isolation leaves these families disconnected from economic opportunity, meaningful social support systems, and the services and institutions that help families succeed.

Nationally, the percentage of children living in households without a vehicle fell from 9 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2000. The percentage of children without access to vehicles decreased in 35 states and the District of Columbia, stayed about the same in 11 states, and increased in only 4 states—Indiana (33 percent), Hawaii (25 percent), Arizona (17 percent), and Rhode Island (17 percent). States with the most improvement include Colorado, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Vermont, each with at least a 50 percent decrease.

In light of a welfare reform approach that requires most parents in low-income families to work, it is difficult to overstate the importance of having a dependable vehicle. C2SS data show that 88 percent of workers used private vehicles to get to work in 2000.

In 2000, there were about 5 million children living in households without a vehicle. The states with the smallest share of children without access to vehicles were Idaho, Maine, and South Dakota, with 1 percent each. In contrast, 23 percent of children in New York lacked access to a vehicle in 2000. In New York and possibly a few other states, the relatively high percentage of children living in households without a vehicle reflects the high concentration of people in urban areas where reliable public transportation is easily available.

Percent of children who have difficulty speaking English (ages 5-17)

The wave of immigration to the United States between 1990 and 2000, especially from Mexico and other non-English-speaking countries, has resulted in an increase in the number of children who have difficulty speaking English. The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics reports that “children who speak languages other than English at home and who also have difficulty speaking English may face greater challenges progressing in school and, once they become adults, in the labor market.”²² Difficulty speaking English may be partially responsible for high dropout rates among immigrant children.²³

In the C2SS, ability to speak English is determined for individuals who speak a language other than English at home. The measure is defined as the share of children ages 5 to 17 who do not speak English at home and speak English less than “very well.” This includes children who speak English “well,” “not well,” or “not at all.” Questionnaire responses on the ability to speak English represent either the person’s own perception of his or her English-language ability or, in the case of most children, the perception of another household member.

Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of children who have difficulty speaking English increased in 18 states, decreased in 11 states and the District of Columbia, and stayed about the same in 21 states. Delaware,

Kansas, Louisiana, and West Virginia showed the most improvement on this indicator, while Nebraska and Oklahoma showed the largest increases in children with difficulty speaking English. (We urge readers to use caution when interpreting these figures because some of the changes seen in this indicator may be due to small sample sizes and/or small base percentages.) Nationally, the percentage of children with difficulty speaking English increased slightly, from 5 percent to 6 percent, over the decade.

Nationwide in 2000, there were almost 3 million children ages 5 to 17 who had difficulty speaking English. California had the highest percentage of children with difficulty speaking English (14 percent), and West Virginia had the lowest rate (less than 0.5 percent).

Percent of teens who are high school dropouts (ages 16-19)

Graduating from high school is critical for both going to college and finding a good job. In many school systems around the country, a high percentage of students stay in school and graduate on time. However, many students attend schools where graduating on time with a solid education is more the exception than the rule. In high-poverty neighborhoods in large cities (neighborhoods with poverty rates above 20 percent), for example, one-fifth of 16- to 19-year-olds were high school dropouts in 1999.²⁴

Teens who drop out of high school find it difficult to achieve financial success. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation indicate that high school dropouts are about three times as likely to slip into poverty as those who have finished high school.²⁵ Also, as a report from the U.S. Department of Education concludes, "In terms of employment, earnings, and family formation, dropouts from high school face difficulties in making the transition to the adult world."²⁶ As America moves further into the 21st century, when advanced skills and technical knowledge will be required for most well-paying jobs, the prospects for those who have not completed high school will be even more dismal.

Indeed, ongoing changes in the U.S. economy over the past quarter century have increased the financial costs of dropping out of high school. Between 1973 and 1999, for example, the average hourly wage (adjusted for inflation) of high school dropouts fell 24 percent.²⁷ The deterioration of wages among poorly educated workers has hit the youngest workers the hardest, and this factor often is implicated in the deterioration of family formation and family stability among young adults.²⁸

Nationwide, the percentage of high school dropouts fell from 12 percent in 1990 to 11 percent in 2000. Between 1990 and 2000, the percentage of teens who dropped out of high school fell in 27 states and the District of Columbia, stayed about the same in 7 states, and increased in 16 states. States with the most improvement include Hawaii, Maine, and North Dakota, each with a 40 percent or greater decrease in the percentage of high school dropouts. The percentage of high school dropouts increased most dramatically in New Mexico (31 percent), Arizona (27 percent), and Wyoming (25 percent).

In 2000, there were 1.6 million teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 who were high school dropouts. Arizona had the highest high school dropout rate at 19 percent, and North Dakota had the lowest rate at 3 percent.

About the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey and the American Community Survey

The Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS) is a special nationwide

survey of 700,000 households that the U.S. Census Bureau conducted during calendar year 2000, using the questionnaire and methodology from the American Community Survey (ACS). The ACS, when fully implemented, is designed to provide social, economic, and housing data for states and communities annually. Such local-area data currently are collected once every 10 years in the long form of the decennial census.

The year 2000 presented a special opportunity for the ACS. Having data from the ACS and the census in the same year allowed the U.S. Census Bureau to benchmark the ACS data against the decennial census. The Bureau conducted the C2SS to compare results for states and selected communities with data from the long form of the 2000 Census. The C2SS also was undertaken to demonstrate the operational feasibility of conducting the ACS at the same time as the decennial census.

However, the C2SS provides an additional benefit: For each state and for communities of at least 250,000 people, it provides the first detailed data on social, economic, and housing characteristics since the 1990 Census—a full year before the U.S. Census Bureau releases official results for all states from the 2000 Census long form.

Results from the C2SS can be compared with 1990 Census results on many characteristics, allowing users to track trends over the decade. However, there are some important differences between the C2SS data and results from the census long form. First, unlike Census 2000, which has a specific reference date (population defined as of April 1), C2SS results reflect annual averages of monthly data. Second, the C2SS uses a “de facto,” or “current,” residence rule; persons are counted at a temporary residence if they are staying there for more than 2 months. By contrast, the census counts people at their “usual residence” as of the reference date.

Other differences between the two surveys include data collection elements (such as the way interviewers are trained and the nature of follow-up for nonresponse), the population figures that are used as control totals, population coverage, weighting, and even the wording and design of some questions.

Assuming that it receives government funding, the U.S. Census Bureau will begin nationwide implementation of the ACS in 2003 by surveying about 3 million households annually. Beginning in mid-2004, the public can expect to receive census-type data (annual social, economic, and housing characteristics) for every state and for communities of 65,000 or more. Later in the decade, the U.S. Census Bureau will provide estimates for smaller communities and population areas. These estimates also will be updated annually.

By 2010, when the ACS is scheduled to replace the census long form, demographic and socioeconomic information will be available yearly for every community in the nation. This increased availability of data for local communities will provide state and local decision-makers such as governors, mayors, and legislators with up-to-date information about their states and local areas. These data will be useful in guiding legislation and formulating social services and other programs for constituents. The information also will be useful for policy analysts and scholars.

One of the purposes of this publication is to highlight the kinds of analyses that will be possible when the ACS becomes fully operational in 2003. The C2SS data used here show the kind of information that will be available every year, assuming that the ACS is fully implemented.

More information about the C2SS is available at www.census.gov/c2ss/www/. Details about the ACS are available at www.census.gov/acs/www/.

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