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Basic Facts About Low-income Children

Children Aged 12 through 17 Years, 2013

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To find comparable information for all children, see [Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 18 Years, 2013](#); for infants and toddlers, see [Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 3 Years, 2013](#); for children in middle childhood, see [Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 6 Years, 2013](#); for adolescent children, see [Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children 12 through 17 Years, 2013](#).

Children under 18 years represent 23 percent of the population, but they comprise 33 percent of all people in poverty.¹ Among all children, 44 percent live in low-income families and approximately one in every five (22 percent) live in poor families. Among our oldest children – adolescents age 12 through 17 years – 41 percent live in low-income families and 19 percent live in poor families. Being a child in a low-income or poor family does not happen by chance. Parental education and employment, race/ethnicity, and other factors are associated with children experiencing economic insecurity. This fact sheet describes the demographic, socio-economic, and geographic characteristics of adolescents and their parents. It highlights the important factors that appear to distinguish low-income and poor children in this age group from their less disadvantaged

counterparts.

How many adolescent children age 12 through 17 years in the United States live in low-income families?

There are more than 24 million adolescents age 12 through 17 years in the United States.

- ◆ 41 percent – 9.9 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 19 percent – 4.7 million – live in poor families

Note: *Above low income* is defined as at or above 200% of the federal poverty threshold (FPT), *poor* is defined as below 100% of FPT, and *near poor* is between 100% and 199% of the FPT. The low-income category includes both the poor and the near poor.

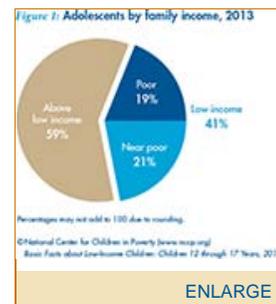


Figure 1: Adolescents by family income, 2013

What is the 2013 federal poverty threshold (FPT)?²

- ◆ \$23,624 for a family of four with two children
- ◆ \$18,751 for a family of three with one child
- ◆ \$16,057 for a family of two with one child

Is a poverty-level income enough to support a family?

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income equal to about two times the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs.³ Families with incomes below this level, such as families making below the following incomes, are referred to as low income:

- ◆ \$47,248 for a family of four with two children
- ◆ \$37,502 for a family of three with one child
- ◆ \$32,114 for a family of two with one child

These dollar amounts approximate the average minimum income families need to make ends meet, but actual expenses vary greatly by locality. In 2013, economic security for a family of four required about \$89,600 in Washington, DC; \$62,200 in Akron, Ohio; \$59,558 in Tulsa, Oklahoma; and \$50,725 in Tunica County, Mississippi.⁴

Has the percentage of adolescents living in low-income and poor families changed over time

The percentage of adolescent children living in low-income families (both poor and near poor) has been *on the rise* – increasing from 35 percent in 2007 to nearly 41 percent in 2013 (Figure 2). During this time period, the overall number of adolescent children age 12 through 17 years remained relatively constant, while the numbers who were low income and poor increased by 13 percent and 23 percent, respectively (Table 1).

	2007	2013	Percent change
Low income	8,895,322	9,871,965	13%
Poor	3,814,528	4,691,906	23%

Table 1: Percentage change of adolescents living in low-income and poor families, 2007-2013

How do adolescents compare to the rest of the population?

The percentage of adolescents in low-income families surpasses that of adults. In addition, children age 12 through 17 years are more than twice as likely as adults 65 years and older to live in poor families (Figure 3).

Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by children's age?

The overall percentages of children under 18 years who live in low-income and poor families vary by age group. Adolescents are less likely to live in low-income families than younger children (Figure 4).

- ◆ 41 percent of children age 12 through 17 years – 9.9 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 19 percent of children age 12 through 17 years – 4.7 million – live in poor families
- ◆ 46 percent of children under age 12 years – 21.9 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 23 percent of children under age 12 years – 11.1 million – live in poor families

Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by race/ethnicity?

As Figure 5 illustrates, the percentages of low-income and poor adolescents vary by race and ethnicity: whites comprise the largest share of all low-income children (38 percent) while whites and Hispanics make up the largest shares of poor children (33 percent each).⁵

Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children are disproportionately low income and poor (Figure 6).

- ◆ 28 percent of white adolescents – 3.7 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 61 percent of black adolescents – 2.1 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 60 percent of Hispanic adolescents – 3.2 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 33 percent of Asian adolescents – 0.4 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 58 percent of American Indian adolescents – 0.1 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 40 percent of adolescents of some other race – 0.4 million – live in low-income families

Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by parents' nativity?

- ◆ 53 percent of adolescents of immigrant parents – 3.1 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 37 percent of adolescents of native-born parents – 6.8 million – live in low-income families

What are the family characteristics of low-income and poor adolescents?

Parents' Education⁷

Higher levels of parental education decrease the likelihood that a child will live in a low-income or poor family. Among children with at least one parent who has some college or additional education, 28 percent live in low-income and 12 percent in poor families. By contrast, among children whose parents have less than a high school degree, 83 percent live in low-income and 49 percent in poor families (Figure 7).

- ◆ 83 percent of adolescents with parents who have less than a high school degree – 2.2 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 60 percent of adolescents with parents who have a high school degree but no college – 2.9 million – live in low-income families

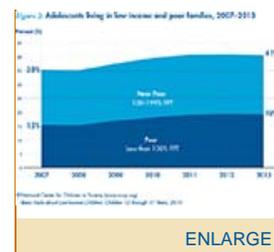


Figure 2: Adolescents living in low-income and poor families, 2007-2013

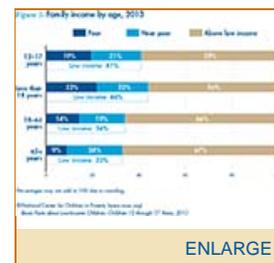


Figure 3: Family income by age, 2013

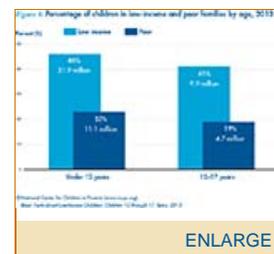


Figure 4: Percentage of children in low-income and poor families by age, 2013

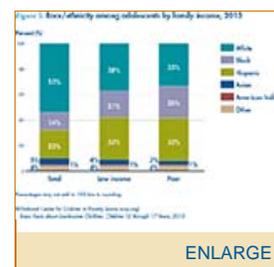


Figure 5: Race/ethnicity among adolescents by family income, 2013

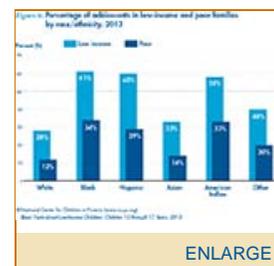


Figure 6: Percentage of adolescents in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity, 2013

- ◆ 28 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who has some college or additional education – 4.7 million – live in low-income families

At the same time, significant shares of low-income and poor families with adolescent children are headed by parents with at least some college education, as shown in Figure 8.

Parents' Employment ⁸

Adolescents with a full-time, year-round employed parent are less likely to live in a low-income family, compared to adolescents with parents who work part time or part-year or who are not employed (Figure 7).

- ◆ 28 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who works full time, year round – 5.0 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 8 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who works full time, year round – 1.4 million – live in poor families
- ◆ 71 percent of adolescents with no parent who works full time, but at least one parent who works part time or part year – 2.9 million –live in low-income families
- ◆ 43 percent of adolescents with no parent who works full time, but at least one parent who works part time or part year – 1.7 million –live in poor families
- ◆ 88 percent of adolescents with no employed parents – 2.0 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 69 percent of adolescents with no employed parents – 1.5 million – live in poor families

Nevertheless, many low-income and poor adolescents have parents who work full time. About half of low-income and 30 percent of poor children in this age group live with at least one parent who worked full time, year round.

Family Structure

Forty-seven percent of adolescents in low-income families – 4.6 million – and 37 percent of adolescents in poor families – 1.7 million – live with married parents. Children who live with married parents are much less likely to be poor or low income, compared to children who live with a single parent.

- ◆ 29 percent of adolescents residing with married parents – 4.6 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 11 percent of adolescents residing with married parents – 1.7 million – live in poor families
- ◆ 64 percent of adolescents residing with a single parent – 5.2 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 37 percent of adolescents residing with a single parent – 3.0 million – live in poor families

Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by where they live?

Region

The percentage of adolescents in low-income families varies substantially by region.

- ◆ 34 percent of adolescents in the Northeast – 1.4 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 37 percent of adolescents in the Midwest – 2.0 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 44 percent of adolescents in the South – 4.0 million – live in low-income families
- ◆ 42 percent of adolescents in the West – 2.5 million – live in low-income families

Residential Instability and Home Ownership

Research suggests that stable housing is important for healthy child development. ⁹ However, adolescents living in low-income families were about two times as likely as other children to have moved in the past year and more than three times as likely to live in families who rent, rather than own, their homes (Figure 10).

Figure 6: Percentage of adolescents in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity, 2013

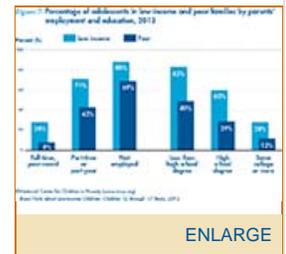


Figure 7: Percentage of adolescents in low-income and poor families by parents' employment and education, 2013

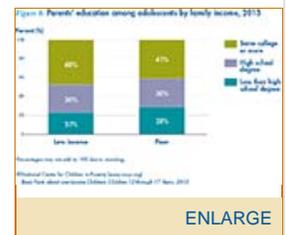


Figure 8: Parents' education among adolescents by family income, 2013



Figure 9: Percentage of adolescents in low-income families by region, 2013

- ◆ 16 percent of adolescents in low-income families – 1.6 million – moved in the last year
- ◆ 8 percent of adolescents in families above the low-income threshold – 1.2 million – moved in the last year
- ◆ 57 percent of adolescents in low-income families – 5.6 million – live with families who rent their homes
- ◆ 19 percent of adolescents in families above the low-income threshold – 2.7 million – live with families who rent their homes

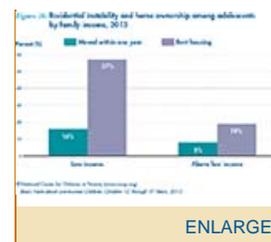


Figure 10: Residential instability and home ownership among adolescents by family income, 2013

Are adolescents in low-income families covered by health insurance?

Consistent with research suggesting older children in general are particularly at risk of being uninsured, low-income and poor adolescents are more likely to be without health insurance coverage than their younger counterparts.¹⁰

Approximately 13 percent living in low-income families and 12 percent living in poor families report no insurance coverage of any kind (Figure 11).¹¹ Public insurance reaches more than one-half (61 percent) of low-income and nearly three-fourths (74 percent) of poor adolescents, while private health insurance covers close to one-third (30 percent) of low-income and 19 percent of poor adolescents (Figure 12).

- ◆ 13 percent of adolescents living in low-income families – 1.3 million – are uninsured
- ◆ 30 percent of adolescents living in low-income families – 3.0 million – are covered by private insurance
- ◆ 61 percent of adolescents living in low-income families – 6.1million – are covered by public insurance

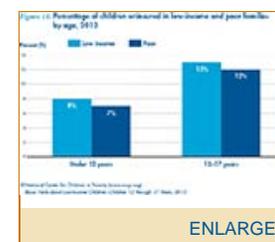


Figure 11: Percentage of children uninsured in low-income and poor families by age, 2013



Figure 12: Type of health insurance coverage among adolescents by family income, 2013

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Endnotes

This fact sheet is part of the National Center for Children in Poverty's demographic fact sheet series and is updated annually. Unless otherwise noted, analysis of the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) was conducted by Yang Jiang and Mercedes Ekono of NCCP. Estimates include children living in households with at least one parent and most children living apart from both parents (for example, children being raised by grandparents). Children living independently, living with a spouse, or in group quarters are excluded from these data. Children age 14 years and under living with only unrelated adults are not included because data on their income status are not available. Among children who do not live with at least one parent, parental characteristics are those of the householder and/or the householder's spouse. We would like to thank Renée Wilson-Simmons, NCCP director, for her advice on this fact sheet. Special thanks to Telly Valdellon for layout and production.

1. In this fact sheet, poverty is defined as family income less than 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold, as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau; low income is defined as family income less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold.
2. The U.S. Census Bureau issues the poverty thresholds annually. Thresholds vary by family size and composition. See <https://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/> for the complete 2013 poverty thresholds.
3. Cauthen, Nancy K. & Fass, Sarah. (2008). *Measuring Income and Poverty in the United States*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.
4. Estimates from the Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator. Retrieved November 2014 from <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/?gclid=CODoyqHhlsICFVNp7AodSnoAWg> .
5. In the most recent ACS, parents could report children's race as one or more of the following: "White," "Black," "American Indian or Alaska Native," or "Asian and/or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander." In a separate question, parents could report whether their children were of Hispanic origin. For the data reported, children whose parent reported their race as White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian and/or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and their ethnicity as non-Hispanic were assigned a non-Hispanic category of their race. Children who were reported to be of more than one race were assigned as Other. Children whose parent identified them as Hispanic were categorized as Hispanic, regardless of their reported race.
6. The variable "native-born parents" is defined to mean that both parents in the family were born in the U.S. or its territories, or born abroad to American parent(s). The variable "immigrant parents" is defined to mean that at least one parent in the family is either a U.S. citizen by naturalization or is not a citizen of the U.S.
7. Parents' education is defined as the education level of the most highly educated parent(s) living in the household. Parents can either have no high school degree, a high school degree but no college, or some college or more.
8. Parents' employment is defined as the employment level of the parent in the household who maintained the highest level of employment in the previous year. Parents can either have no employment in the previous year, part-year or part-time employment, or full-time, year-round employment. Part-year or part-time employment is defined as either working less than 50 weeks in the previous year or less than 35 hours per week. Full-time, year-round employment is defined as working at least 50 weeks in the previous year and 35 hours or more per week.
9. Aratani, Yumiko. (2009). *Homeless Children and Youth*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Retrieved November 2014 from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf.
10. People can report more than one type of insurance coverage. Children not covered by private or public health insurance at the time of the survey are considered uninsured.
11. Schwarz, Susan Wile. (2009). *Adolescent Mental Health in the United States*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Retrieved November 2014 from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_878.pdf.

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