

Single Mother Poverty Rates Remain Exceptionally High Even When Food Stamps and Earned Income Credits are Counted

The official poverty rate for single mother families has been exceptionally high every year since official poverty measurement began in the 1960's.¹ Families are counted as poor if their annual family income is less than the annual poverty threshold amount. The current poverty guideline for a family of three is \$18,350.

The official income definition used in poverty calculation has been criticized for excluding Food Stamps and federal Earned Income Credits (EIC). On the other hand, the official definition has also been criticized for including income spent on work expenses and taxes which is therefore unavailable for a family's basic needs.

Table 1 shows single mother poverty rates under four alternative income definitions: the official definition; the official definition minus expenditures on work expenses (including child care) and on income, payroll, or property taxes; the official definition plus Food Stamps and the EIC; and the official definition minus expenditures on work expenses and taxes but plus Food Stamps and the EIC.² The rates are for the three most recent years for which data are now available.

	Official Income	Official Income - Work Expenses & Taxes	Official Income + Food Stamps & EIC	Official Income + Food Stamps & EIC - Work Expenses & Taxes
2007	38%	45%	30%	36%
2008	39%	46%	31%	37%
2009	40%	45%	29%	34%

Excluding work and tax expenses increases measured poverty, while counting Food Stamps and the EIC reduces measured poverty. However, the single mother poverty rate is exceptionally high under each definition.

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¹ See Legal Momentum, *Single Mothers Since 2000: Falling Farther Down* (January 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-since-2000.pdf>

² The Table 1 poverty rates are the rates for persons in female-headed primary families, no spouse present, with related children under age 18, as calculated by Legal Momentum using the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey (CPS) Table Creator II, available at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpssc/apm/cpssc_altprov.html.