

## Single Motherhood in the United States – A Snapshot (2012)

**Prevalence:** Single motherhood is very common. Around half of today's mothers will spend at least some time as the sole custodial parent.<sup>1</sup> At any one time, almost one quarter of mothers are single mothers.<sup>2</sup>

**Characteristics:** Around 45% of single mothers have never married, around 55% are divorced, separated or widowed.<sup>3</sup> Half have one child, 30% have two.<sup>4</sup> About two fifths are White, one third Black, one quarter Hispanic.<sup>5</sup> One quarter have a college degree, one sixth have not completed high school.<sup>6</sup>

**Employment:** At any one time, about two thirds of single mothers are also working outside the home, a slightly greater share than the share of married mothers who are also working outside the home.<sup>7</sup> However, only two fifths of single mothers are employed full-time the entire year, and a quarter are jobless the entire year.<sup>8</sup>

**Income:** Half of single mother families have an annual income less than \$25,000.<sup>9</sup> Median income for single mother families is only one third the median for married couple families.<sup>10</sup> Only one third of single mothers receive any child support, and the average amount these mothers receive is only about \$300 a month.<sup>11</sup>

**Poverty:** Two fifths of single mother families are poor, triple the poverty rate for the rest of the population.<sup>12</sup> The majority of poor children are in single mother families.<sup>13</sup> Child poverty is linked to school dropout; to negative adult outcomes including joblessness and ill health; and to reduced economic output estimated to be about 4% of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>14</sup>

**Hardship:** Two fifths of single mother families are "food insecure,"<sup>15</sup> one seventh use food pantries,<sup>16</sup> one fifth have no health insurance,<sup>17</sup> one third spend more than half their income on housing.<sup>18</sup> Three quarters of homeless families are single mother families.<sup>19</sup>

**Welfare & Food Stamp Receipt:** Although two fifths of all single mothers are poor, only one tenth of all single mothers receive cash welfare assistance.<sup>20</sup> Two fifths of all single mothers receive Food Stamps.<sup>21</sup>

**Compared to Single Mothers in Peer Countries:** The single mother poverty rate in the U.S. is far above the average in high income countries<sup>22</sup> even though the single mother employment rate in the U.S. is also above the average.<sup>23</sup> Less generous income support programs in the U.S. help explain the exceptionally high poverty rate for single mother families in the U.S.<sup>24</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, David Blau & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *What Determines Family Structure*, IZA DP No. 4912 (April 2010); David Blau & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *A Demographic Analysis of the Family Structure Experiences of Children in the United States*, IZA DP No. 3001 (August 2007); Patrick Heuveline et. al, *Shifting Childrearing To Single Mothers: Results From 17 Western Countries*, 29 *Population and Development Review* 47 – 71 (March 2003).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex: 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C3. Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years and Marital Status of Parents, by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin and Selected Characteristics of the Child for All Children: 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010.html>.

<sup>4</sup> The figures cited in the text are those for household heads in female-headed primary families with no spouse present and with related children under 18 as calculated by Legal Momentum using the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey Table Creator (CPS Table Creator) available at [http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps\\_table\\_creator.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstc/cps_table_creator.html).

<sup>5</sup> Same source as in note 3.

<sup>6</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Characteristics of Families – 2010*, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F-10. Presence of Children Under 18 Years Old by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/families/>.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2009* (December 2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-240.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Legal Momentum, *Single Mother Poverty in the United States in 2010* (September 2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mother-poverty-2010.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Id.

<sup>14</sup> Center for American Progress, *The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States – Subsequent Effects of Children Growing Up Poor* (2007), available at [http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/pdf/poverty\\_report.pdf](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/01/pdf/poverty_report.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Same source as in note 12.

<sup>16</sup> Id.

<sup>17</sup> Same source as in note 4.

<sup>18</sup> Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, *The State Of The Nation's Housing 2011* (2011), available at <http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/jchs.harvard.edu/files/son2011.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Same source as in note 12.

<sup>20</sup> 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>.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Janet Gornick & Markus Jantti, *Child Poverty in Upper-Income Countries: Lessons from the Luxembourg Income Study* (Revised May 2009), available at <http://www.lisdatacenter.org/wps/liswps/509.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Lane Destro & David Brady, *Does European-Style Welfare Generosity Discourage Single Mother Employment?* (August 2010), available at <http://www.lisproject.org/publications/liswps/548.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Same source as in note 22.