

## Single Parenthood in the United States – A Snapshot (2013 edition)

**Prevalence:** Single parenthood is very common in the United States.<sup>1</sup> At a given time in 2012, 28% of children were living with a single parent.<sup>2</sup> Half or more of today's children will likely spend at least part of their childhood in a single parent family.<sup>3</sup>

**Gender:** Most single parents are single mothers. In 2012, 79% of single parents were single mothers,<sup>4</sup> and 86% of the children living with a single parent were living with their mother.<sup>5</sup>

**Marital Status:** The majority of single parents have been married or are married. In 2012, 56% of the children in single parent families were living with a parent who was separated, divorced, or widowed, 44% with a never-married parent.<sup>6</sup>

**Number of Children:** Most single parents have no more than two children. In 2012, 56% of single parents had one child, 29% two children.<sup>7</sup>

**Race & Ethnicity:** In 2012, 3% of single parents were Asian, 23% were Hispanic, 28% were Black, and 47% were non-Hispanic White.<sup>8</sup>

**Educational Attainment:** Most single parents have graduated high school, and a majority have attended college. In 2012, 84% of single parents had graduated high school, 53% had attended college, and 18% had at least a Bachelor's degree.<sup>9</sup>

**Employment:** At a given time in 2012, 54% of single parents were employed full-time, compared to 85% of fathers in two parent families and 48% of mothers in two parent families, and 13% of single parents were employed part-time, compared to 4% of fathers in two parent families and 15% of mothers in two parent families.<sup>10</sup> In 2011, 47% of single parents worked full-time all year long, and 26% were not employed at any time in the year.<sup>11</sup>

Low wages are very common for U.S. single parents, and much more common for single parents than for other U.S. workers.<sup>12</sup> In 2009, 39% of employed single mothers were in low-wage employment, with low wage defined as an hourly wage less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage.

**Income:** In 2011, median income for single mother families was \$25,353, 32% of the \$78,669 median income for two parent families; median income for single father families was \$38,167, 49% of the median for two parent families.<sup>13</sup>

**Poverty:** The poverty rate for children in single parent families is more than triple the rate for children in two parent families; a majority of poor children are children in single parent families. In 2011, 42% of children in single parent families were poor, compared to 13% of children in two parent families; children in single parent families accounted for 53% of poor children.<sup>14</sup>

Child poverty is linked to poor health and school dropout; to negative adult outcomes including joblessness; and to reduced economic output estimated to be about 4% of Gross Domestic Product.<sup>15</sup>

**Hardship – Hunger, Homelessness, No Health Care Coverage:** In 2011, 34% of single parent families were “food insecure,” and 12% used a food pantry.<sup>16</sup> In 2011, 12% of children in single parent families, and 27% of single parents, had no health care coverage.<sup>17</sup> Over 70% of the families in homeless shelters in 2010 were single parent families.<sup>18</sup>

**Social Assistance (“Welfare”) & Food Stamp (SNAP) Receipt:** In 2012, only 11% of the children in single parent families received cash public assistance, but 41% received Food Stamps.<sup>19</sup>

**Compared to Single Parent Families in Peer Countries:** The employment rate for U.S. single parents is above the average single parent employment rate in high income countries.<sup>20</sup> Despite the above average employment rate, the poverty rate for single parent families in the U.S. is far above the average poverty rate for single parent families in high income countries.<sup>21</sup> Less generous income support programs, and the greater prevalence of low wages in the U.S., help explain the exceptionally high poverty rate for single parent families in the U.S.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In this report, unless otherwise indicated, a “single parent” means a parent with a child(ren) below age 18 who is not living with a spouse or with the child’s other parent.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C2. Household Relationship and Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years, by Age and Sex: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>3</sup> See Blau, David & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *What Determines Family Structure*, IZA DP No. 4912 (April 2010); Blau, David & Wilbert van der Klaauw, *A Demographic Analysis of the Family Structure Experiences of Children in the United States*, IZA DP No. 3001 (August 2007); Heuveline, Patrick, et. al, *Shifting Childrearing To Single Mothers: Results From 17 Western Countries*, 29 *Population and Development Review* 47-71 (2003); Andersson, Gunnar, *Children’s Experience Of Family Disruption And Family Formation: Evidence From 16 FFS Countries*, 7 *Demographic Research* 343-364 (2002).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F1. Family Households, by Type, Age of Own Children, Age of Family Members, and Age, Race and Hispanic Origin of Householder: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Same source as in note 2.

<sup>6</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: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table FG5. One-Parent Unmarried Family Groups with Own Children Under 18, by Labor Force Status of the Reference Person: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F1. Family Households, By Type, Age Of Own Children, Age Of Family Members, And Age, Race And Hispanic Origin Of Householder: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F2. Family Households, By Type, Age Of Own Children, And Educational Attainment Of Householder: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Characteristics of Families – 2012*, available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Calculated by Legal Momentum based on household heads with related children under age 18, and using the U.S. Census Bureau CPS Table Creator at <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html>.

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<sup>12</sup> Albelda, Randy, and Michael Carr, *Low-Wage And Low-Income Workers In The U.S., 1979-2009* (2012), Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts, Center for Social Policy, Working Paper 2012-1, available at [http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=csp\\_pubs](http://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1059&context=csp_pubs).

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table F-10. Presence of Children Under 18 Years Old All Families by Median and Mean Income: 1974 to 2011*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/families/>.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C8. Poverty Status, Food Stamp Receipt, and Public Assistance for Children Under 18 Years by Selected Characteristics: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Dreyer, Benard, *To Create a Better World for Children and Families: The Case for Ending Childhood Poverty*, 13 *Academic Pediatrics* 83-90 (2013), available at <http://download.journals.elsevierhealth.com/pdfs/journals/1876-2859/PIIS1876285913000065.pdf>; 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>16</sup> U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2011* (2012), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf/>.

<sup>17</sup> Calculated by Legal Momentum based on household heads with related children under age 18, and using the U.S. Census Bureau CPS Table Creator at <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html>.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, *The 2010 Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress* (2011), available at <https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/2010HomelessAssessmentReport.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Table C8. Poverty Status, Food Stamp Receipt, and Public Assistance for Children Under 18 Years by Selected Characteristics: 2012*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/families/data/cps2012.html>.

<sup>20</sup> See Legal Momentum, *Worst Off – Single-Parent Families In The United States - A Cross-National Comparison Of Single Parenthood In The U.S. And Sixteen Other High-Income Countries* (2012), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/content/report-worst-%E2%80%93-single-parent-families-united-states>.

<sup>21</sup> Id.

<sup>22</sup> Id.