

Women’s Poverty in the United States, 2013
Poverty Rate Declines But Remains High, Gender Poverty Gap Persists
By Timothy Casey*

The poverty report for 2013 recently released by the Census Bureau¹ indicates that the poverty rate was 14.5% in 2013, lower than the 15.0 rate in 2011, but well above the 12.3% rate in 2006, the year prior to the beginning of the ‘Great Recession.’ The continued high poverty rate reflects the Great Recession’s continuing negative impact on employment and income. Overall, 45.3 million people were poor in 2013, 14.7 million children (<age 18), and 30.7 million adults.² The child poverty rate was 19.9%, the adult poverty rate was 12.8%.

Women Still More Likely To Be Poor Than Men

Adult women had a higher poverty rate than adult men in 2013 as they have had in every year since official poverty measurement began in the 1960’s. The poverty rate for women age 18 or over was 14.5% compared to 11.0% for men age 18 or over. Women were 32% more likely to be poor than men, the same gender poverty gap as in 2012. About one of every seven women was poor, compared to about one of every nine men. Single mothers were 101% more likely to be poor than single fathers, aged women were 71% more likely to be poor than aged men, and employed women were 31% more likely to be poor than employed men. At every level of educational attainment women were substantially more likely to be poor than men.

POVERTY RATES FOR ADULT WOMEN AND MEN IN 2013³			
	Women	Men	Increased incidence of poverty among women compared to men
All adults	14.5	11.0	32%
Age 65 or above	11.6	6.8	71%
Single parents	39.6	19.7	101%
Worked	8.0	6.1	31%
Not High School grad	33.1	23.4	41%
High School grad only	16.0	11.8	36%
College less than 4 yrs	12.6	8.3	52%
College 4 yr degree	5.5	4.6	20%

Poverty Is Strongly Associated With Real Hardship

A 2001 study found that about 30% of the poor experienced critical hardship, defined as being evicted, having utilities disconnected, doubling up in others’ housing due to lack of funds, or not having enough food to eat; and that an additional 30% to 45% experienced other serious hardships.⁴ In 2013, 42% of poor households were found by the federal government to be “food insecure.”⁵ In

2010, 52% of poor children lived in households that experienced one of more of the following hardships: hunger; overcrowded living conditions; failure to pay rent or mortgage on time; failure to receive needed medical care.⁶

Poverty Is Much More Common In The U.S. Than In Other High Income Countries

Cross-national studies of poverty in high income countries consistently find that the U.S. has exceptionally high relative poverty rates for both women and men. Legal Momentum's own recent study found that in the mid-2000s the poverty rate for U.S. single mothers was almost twice the average single mother poverty rate in the other 16 high income countries in the study.⁷

The Official Poverty Measure Ignores Child Care Costs

Poverty is measured based on gross income. If poverty were measured based on income net of child care expenditures, many more women (and men) would be counted as poor. In 2012, child care expenditures for employed mothers with child care costs averaged \$143 a week.⁸

The Official Poverty Measure Ignores The Rise In Living Standards Since It Was Created

There is a broad consensus that poverty should be defined relative to contemporary living standards. However, the official U.S. poverty line has not been adjusted in response to the rise in real income since it was formulated a half century ago. If the poverty standard were adjusted to reflect the 40% increase in real median family income over this period, many more women (and men) would be counted as poor.

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ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013*, available at <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>. Additional poverty data are available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/incpovhlth/2013/index.html>.

² Poverty is measured by comparing annual income with a federal poverty standard updated annually for inflation. In 2013, the official poverty guidelines were \$11,490 for an individual, \$15,510 for a family of two, \$19,530 for a family of three, \$23,550 for a family of four, and \$23,550 plus \$4,020 for each additional person beyond four for larger family sizes.

³ The table's poverty rates by level of educational attainment are for persons age 25 or over.

⁴ Boushey & Gunderson, *When Work Just Isn't Enough*, EPI Briefing Paper (June 2001), available at <http://www.epi.org/page/-/old/briefingpapers/hardshipsbp.pdf>.

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States 2013*, available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1565415/err173.pdf>.

⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Hardship in America, Part 1: Majority of Poor Children Live in Households with Major Hardships* (2012), available at <http://www.offthechartsblog.org/hardship-in-america-part-1-majority-of-poor-children-live-in-households-with-major-hardships>.

⁷ 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* (Dec. 2012), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/sites/default/files/reports/worst-off-single-parent.pdf>.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Table 6 Average Weekly Child Care Expenditures of Families with Employed Mothers that Make Payments, by Age Groups and Selected Characteristics: Spring 2011*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/childcare/data/sipp/2011/tables.html>.