

Women's Poverty in the United States, 2011 *Poverty Rate Remains High, Gender Poverty Gap Grows*

2011 Poverty Rate Fourth Highest In Past 45 Years

The poverty report for 2011 released today by the Census Bureau¹ indicates that the poverty rate was 15.0% in 2011, slightly less than the 15.1% rate in 2010, 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, 46.2 million people were poor in 2011, 16.1 million children (<age 18), and 30.1 adults.² The child poverty rate was 21.9%, the adult poverty rate 12.8%.

Women Still More Likely To Be Poor Than Men

Adult women had a higher poverty rate than adult men in 2011 as they have had in every year since official poverty measurement began in the 1960's. The poverty rate for women was 14.6% compared to 10.9% for men. Women were 34% more likely to be poor than men, an increase from the 29% gender poverty gap in 2010. There were 17.7 million poor women compared to 12.4 million poor men. 59% of poor adults were women. About one of every seven women was poor, compared to about one of every nine men. Single mothers were 87% more likely to be poor than single fathers, aged women were 73% more likely to be poor than aged men, and employed women were 38% 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 2011

	Women	Men	Increased incidence of poverty among women compared to men
All adults (18 or above)	14.6	10.9	34%
Age 65 or above	10.7	6.2	73%
Single parents	40.9	21.9	87%
Worked	8.0	5.8	38%
Not High School grad	33.2	23.7	40%
High School grad only	17.4	12.4	40%
College less than 4 yrs	12.6	9.2	37%
College 4 yr degree	5.4	4.8	13%

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.³ In 2011, 41% of poor households were found by the federal government to be “food insecure.”⁴ 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.⁵

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 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 15 high income countries in the study.⁶

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 2010, child care expenditures for employed mothers with child care costs averaged \$138 a week.⁷

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 over 40 years ago. If the poverty standard were adjusted to reflect the 20% increase in real household median income since 1967, many more women (and men) would be counted as poor.

(9/12/2012. For further information, contact Timothy Casey, tcasey@legalmomentum.org)

ENDNOTES

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011* (2012), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p60-243.pdf>. Additional poverty data are available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/cpstables/032012/pov/toc.htm#>.

² Poverty is measured by comparing annual income with a federal poverty standard that is updated annually for inflation. In 2011, the official poverty guidelines were \$10,890 for an individual, \$14,710 for a family of two, \$18,530 for a family of three, \$22,350 for a family of four, and \$22,350 plus \$3,820 for each additional person beyond four for larger family sizes.

³ Boushey & Gunderson, *When Work Just Isn’t Enough*, EPI Briefing Paper (June 2001), available at <http://www.epi.org/page/-/old/briefingpapers/hardshipsbp.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Household Food Security in the United States 2011* (2012), available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/884525/err141.pdf>.

⁵ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *Hardship in America, Part 1: Majority of Poor Children Live in Households with Major Hardships* (2011), available at <http://www.offthechartsblog.org/hardship-in-america-part-1-majority-of-poor-children-live-in-households-with-major-hardships>.

⁶ Legal Momentum, *Poverty Rates for Single Mothers Are Higher in the U.S. than in Other High-Income Countries* (2011), available at <http://www.legalmomentum.org/our-work/women-and-poverty/resources--publications/single-mothers-poverty-higher-us.pdf>.

⁷ 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 2010*, available at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/childcare/data/sipp/2010/tables.html>.