Rural Children At A Glance

1

Minority children are overrepresented in the count of poor children relative to their share of the population. In nonmetro areas in 2003, Black children were more than twice as likely to be poor as White children (44 percent vs. 18 percent). Nonmetro poverty rates for Black children and Hispanic children each declined 8 percentage points between 1990 and 2000, compared to only a 2 percentage point decline for White children. The ratio of Black child poverty to White declined over the decade, as did the ratio of Hispanic child poverty to White, narrowing the racial/ethnic gap in poverty.

In the South, 19 percent of nonmetro children were poor, compared with 18 percent in the nonmetro West and 16 percent in both the nonmetro Northeast and Midwest.

Nearly 46 percent of nonmetro children in mother-only families were poor in 2003, compared with 10 percent in two-parent families. Minority children in mother-only families had higher poverty than White children in such families: nonmetro rates were 59 percent for Black children, 56 percent for Hispanic children. 41 percent for Native American children. 42 percent for White children. Children in single-parent families tend to have more school-related, health, and behavioral problems and to live in families with lower incomes, complete fewer years of schooling, and earn less as adults.

Child Poverty Declined Between 1990 and 2000

The percentage of children living in poverty is perhaps the most widely used indicator of child well-being, in part because poverty is closely linked to a number of less desirable outcomes in areas such as health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency. Poverty rates for children in nonmetro areas have historically been higher than for children in metro areas, partly due to higher rural unemployment and a greater share of low-wage jobs in rural areas. During the 1990s, child poverty rates declined in large part due to welfare reform measures and an expanding economy, but the nonmetro poverty rate continued to exceed the metro rate.

Child poverty rates declined in the late 1980s, in the early 1990s in both metro and nonmetro areas, and peaked in 1993 at 22 percent in metro areas and 24 percent in nonmetro areas. Beginning in 1994, child poverty rates dropped substantially, down to 18 percent in metro areas and 21 percent in nonmetro areas in 2003. In the late 1990s, child poverty declined more rapidly in metro than in nonmetro areas, widening the residential poverty gap.

Child poverty rates vary across rural areas, increasing along a continuum of least to most rural. In 2000, rates ranged from 18 percent in nonmetro counties with populations of 20,000 or more and adjacent to an urban metro area to 23 percent in completely rural counties. Proximity to an urban area affected rural poverty rates, with nonadjacent counties having higher child poverty rates than adjacent counties, regardless of their population size.

Child poverty rates declined between 1990 and 2000. Rates fell the most—4 percentage points—in completely rural counties, compared with 2 percentage points in nonmetro counties of 20,000 or more population and adjacent to a metro area. The decline resulted in a more even distribution of poverty rates across rural areas.

Poverty rates of children under 18 years old by rural-urban continuum code, 1990-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural-urban Continuum</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonmetro</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Race/Ethnicity, Family Structure, and Region Affect Child Poverty

White child poverty rates are White minority children are overrepresented in the count of poor children relative to their share of the population. In nonmetro areas in 2003, Black children were more than twice as likely to be poor as White children (44 percent vs. 18 percent).
**Indicators of well-being for children under 18 by residence and poverty status, 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>All children</th>
<th>Poor children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>Nonmetro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children receiving:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food stamps</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANF</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hot lunch</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>78.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or reduced-price lunch</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children living in public housing</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on family income for the previous year.
Note: Households must meet a low-income threshold to qualify for food stamps, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and free or reduced-price lunches.

**Nonmetro Children Are More Likely Than Metro Children To Receive Government Food Assistance**

- In 2002, about the same share (16 to 17 percent) of nonmetro and metro children resided in households that were food insecure—that is, lacking consistent access to enough food for active, healthy living. A family’s ability to provide for children’s nutritional needs and secure access to adequate, nutritious food without relying on emergency feeding programs is linked to family income and other resources.
- In 2003, nonmetro children were more likely to receive food stamps (15 percent) than metro children (12 percent), among poor children, 52 percent in nonmetro areas received food stamps vs. 48 percent in metro areas. A greater share of nonmetro children received free or reduced-price lunches (40 percent) than metro children (37 percent); about 75 percent of poor children (both metro and nonmetro) received free or reduced-price lunches.

The proportion of children receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) was lower for nonmetro than for metro children; in 2003, 10 percent of nonmetro poor children received TANF, compared with 17 percent of metro poor children. Similar shares of poor children in nonmetro (15 percent) and metro areas (16 percent) lived in public housing projects.

**Rural Children At A Glance**

**Nonmetro child poverty rates, 2000**

- The number of children under age 18 in the United States increased from 65.6 million in 1990 to 72.1 million in 2000. The number of poor children in nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas increased by 3 percent, compared with an increase of 16 percent in metropolitan (metro) areas. A number of nonmetro counties lost population in the 1990s and the small increase in the number of children may reflect the outmigration of young families.

**Dimensions of Child Poverty in Rural Areas.** In rural areas, child poverty is higher than that of the general population, the Nation has much to gain from improving the economic conditions of children and their families. [www.ers.usda.gov/Agriculture/March2004/FoodReview/ChildPoverty.htm](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Agriculture/March2004/FoodReview/ChildPoverty.htm)

**FoodReview: Examining the Well-Being of Children—The theme for this issue is “America’s Children. Articles discuss the well-being of U.S. children, children’s diet quality, the problem of overweight children in the U.S., foodborne disease among children, the economics of breastfeeding, and food assistance programs that help children and their families. [www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/may2001](http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/FoodReview/may2001)**

**Defininitions**

- **Metro-nonmetro status**—Metropolitan (metro) and nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas are defined by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Estimates from the Current Population Survey (CPS) data, and the 2002 National Health Interview Survey identify metro and nonmetro areas based on OMB’s 1990 classification. Under the 1990 classification, metro areas include central counties with one or more cities of at least 50,000 residents or with an urbanized area of 50,000 or more and total area population of at least 100,000. Nonmetro counties are outside the boundaries of metro areas and have no cities with 10,000 residents or more. Data from the 2000 Census in this report are based on OMB’s 2003 definition of metro and nonmetro areas. Under the 2003 classification, metro areas are defined for all urbanized areas regardless of total area population. Outlying counties are classified as metro if they are economically tied to the central counties, as measured by the share of workers commuting to a daily city. The rural-urban continuum code distinguishes metro counties by total metro area size and nonmetro counties by degree of urbanization and proximity to metro areas. The terms “rural” and “nonmetro” are used interchangeably in this report. See [http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/PovertyRateNonmetro/](http://www.ers.usda.gov/briefing/rurality/PovertyRateNonmetro/)

**Data sources**

This report is based on data from the 1990 and 2000 Censuses of Population, the March 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS) data file, and selected previous years; and the 2002 National Health Interview Survey. To gauge the effects of parental characteristics on children’s economic well-being, the child’s record in the CPS data file was linked to the parent’s data record.

**Economic Research Service (ERS) website and contact person**

- For more information, contact Carolyn C. Rogers at ccregs@ers.usda.gov or 202-564-6534.

**United States Department of Agriculture**

- Economic Research Service

**Economic Information Bulletin Number 1**

- March 2005

