



Center for Urban Child Policy

Advancing Public Policy to Improve the Well-Being of Children

THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN MEMPHIS: A SNAPSHOT OF FAMILIES, INCOME AND EDUCATION

Americans are concerned with the well-being of children, and research has shown that what happens in the first years of life lasts a lifetime. What do we know about the well-being of children in Memphis?

March 2009



1 in 4 Memphians (27%) are under 18. 1 in 10 (8%) are under 5.

In 2007, Memphis had a population of 619,769, including 166,707 children under the age of 18. 50,967 children are under age 5.

- » 3 in 4 children (73%) are Black and nearly 1 in 5 (16%) are White. 7 percent of children are Hispanic and 2 percent are Asian (ACS 2007, B01001).
- » Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in Memphis increased by almost 40,000 people, a growth rate of 6.5 percent, twice the national Hispanic growth rate. These figures may undercount a large undocumented population.

1 in 3 families with children in Memphis (34%) live on less than \$21,000 a year (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007).

- » In 2007, the federal poverty line for a family of two was \$13,690; for a family of three it was \$17,170; for a family of four it was \$20,650. The actual amount needed to support a family is closer to twice this income.

2 in 5 (42%) children in Memphis live in poverty. Over half (55%) are low-income (< 150% of Federal Poverty Line).

The number of children in families that are in poverty or are low-income is highest in southern states.

- » Child poverty in Memphis is over twice the national poverty rate (18%), and substantially higher than the poverty rate for children in Tennessee (23%).
- » One of every two children in Memphis lives in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (where 1 in 5 families lives in poverty).

3 in 5 children in Memphis (63%) live with a single parent.

1 in 4 Memphis households are comprised of families with children. 35 percent of children live with married parents (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006).

- » Younger children in Memphis are more likely to live with a single mother than are



older children.

- » In 2007, 3 out of 5 children in the city (60%) were born to single mothers (ACS, 2007).
- » 11% of children in Memphis live with grandparents (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006).

In Memphis, married couples earn three times as much as single mothers.

The median income for married couples in Memphis is \$66,923. The median income for a single mother is \$22,931 (ACS, 2007).

In Memphis, children raised by single mothers are five times as likely to live in poverty than children raised by married parents.

In both single mother and married parent families, parents' level of education explains much of the difference in family income.

- » 1 in 3 children in Memphis (34%) are born to mothers with less than 12 years of education (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).
- » 1 in 5 single mothers in Memphis (21%) have less than a high school diploma, and the majority of single mothers (59 percent) have a high school degree or less. By comparison, only 12 percent of married couples have less than a high school degree, and the majority of married couples (65 percent) have at least some college (ACS, 2007).
- » In Memphis, married couples are 3 times as likely to have completed college than are single mothers.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY:

More than half of all children in Memphis start life in families made vulnerable by poverty. National data suggests that these children start life at a developmental disadvantage that stays with them through school. They are less likely to build critical pre-reading and pre-math skills, and are more likely to experience instability at home. Children in Memphis score in the 20th percentile on national tests of kindergarten readiness, and achievement gaps between students from low and middle-income families grow wider through the school years.



In light of these concerns, policymakers and researchers agree on the need to focus on key proven best practices to improve child well-being and support healthy cognitive, social and emotional development in our youngest citizens:

- » Reduce infant mortality and poor birth outcomes through prenatal health care, teen pregnancy prevention programs and back to sleep campaigns.
- » Encourage effective parenting skills through home visiting, parent coaching and mentoring. Effective parenting includes breast-feeding, reading to children, protecting children from abuse, and choosing high quality child care.
- » Insure that all Memphis 3 and 4 year olds have access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Demographic Data included in this policy brief are independent estimates created by Katie Devlin and Frances Breland at the Center for Urban Child Policy utilizing 2006 State Health Department birth certificate data, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count and Right Start Census Data Online, 2007 American Community Survey data, or information from the Tennessee Department of Education unless otherwise specified. The Annie E Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Book can be found at <http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter> or <http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi>. American Community Survey data can be found at factfinder.census.gov and the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card can be accessed at www.k-12.state.tn.us.

