



## CHILDREN IN VULNERABLE FAMILIES: FACTS AND FIGURES

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This fact sheet looks at trends in some of the most significant risks facing families today: child maltreatment, domestic violence, children's disabilities, substance abuse, and parental mental illness.

While these challenges can occur in families at all income levels, many -- such as depression, domestic violence, and child abuse -- are disproportionately frequent among low-income families. More than 28.5 million children live in low-income households, which have annual incomes up to twice the federal poverty level, or about \$40,000 in 2005 for a family of four. Whether these challenges are associated with low income or a result of other factors, they are likely more difficult to cope with when a household has fewer resources. Also, because many of these risks occur in tandem, vulnerable families may require multiple services to achieve stability and security.

The data in this fact sheet are drawn from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Census Bureau, Child Trends Data Bank, and various Urban Institute publications, including "An Overview of Selected Data on Children in Vulnerable Families," by Jennifer Macomber, available at <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=311351>. Unless otherwise indicated, children are under age 18.

### Maltreatment, Foster Care, and Adoption

- Rates of child victimization and placement in foster care remained fairly steady between 1990 and 2004, while investigations of alleged abuse increased. In 1990, 36.1 children per 1,000 (2.3 million children) were investigated for abuse or neglect by child welfare agencies. Of these, 860,000 children were confirmed as victims of maltreatment. The rate of investigations increased in the past decade, reaching 47.8 children per 1,000 in 2004 (3.5 million children). Of these, about 870,000 children were confirmed as victims. There were 6.2 foster children per 1,000 children (400,000 children) in 1990 and 7.1 per 1,000 children (517,000 children) in 2004.
- Rates of victimization are highest for the country's youngest children and decline as they age. In 2004, 16.1 per 1,000 infants and toddlers (children under age 3) were victims of abuse or neglect (230,000 children). For children age 4 through 7, 13.4 children per 1,000 were victims of maltreatment in (190,000 children). For those age 8 through 11, 12 through 15, and 16 through 17 the rates were 10.9, 9.3, and 6.1 children per 1,000, respectively (160,000, 160,000, and 540,000 children).
- Relatives are generally the first placement option for maltreated children. Yet in 2002, 32 percent of the children social service agencies placed with a relative (often a grandparent) were living with someone who did not receive any type of payment for the child's care, such as foster care, Social Security, or Supplemental Security Income payments or

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families child-only benefits. Seventy-six percent of the maltreated children in relative care arrangements lived in low-income families.

- Adoptions from foster care increased substantially between 1995 and 2005, and the number of children waiting to be adopted appears to be on the decline. In 1995, approximately 26,000 children were adopted from foster care; by 2000, that number had reached 51,000, and it has remained steady through 2005. In 2000, 132,000 children were waiting to be adopted; by 2005, this number had declined to 114,000.
- Violence between intimate partners declined substantially between 1993 and 2001. In 1993, there were 5.8 nonfatal victimizations per 1,000 people age 12 or older, whereas by 2001 there were 3 per 1,000 people. Fatal victimizations also declined between 1993 and 2000, falling from 708 to 440 victims a year for men and from 1,581 to 1,247 victims a year for women. Forty-three percent of households where intimate partner violence occurred between 1993 and 1998 included children under the age of 12.

### **Disabilities**

- The portion of poor children -- those in households at or below the federal poverty level -- with "limitations" has fluctuated from 22 to 27 percent between 1998 and 2003. The number of affected poor children has ranged from 15.8 million to 19.9 million. Limitations include any type of constraint in normal physical activities due to health conditions and impairments, difficulty seeing, difficulty hearing, diagnosed learning disabilities, and circumstances requiring help with bathing or showering. The share of nonpoor children with limitations fluctuated between 17 and 19 percent during these years, or 11.9-13.6 million young people.
- The number of children receiving support through the Supplemental Security Income program, which provides monthly payments to families of blind and disabled children, has increased steadily over the past 30 years. In 2004, 993,000 blind and disabled children were receiving SSI payments. This represents a marked increase since 1975, when 107,000 children were receiving these payments. Also, the share of SSI recipients who are children increased from 2.5 percent in 1997 to 14 percent in 2004.
- The number of children receiving services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has increased substantially in recent years. The number of infants and toddlers getting help grew from 165,000 in 1994 to 231,000 by 2000. In the 1992–93 school year, 455,000 preschoolers received services under IDEA, whereas 600,000 children obtained assistance in 2000–01. For those age 6 through 21, the number receiving services rose from 4,500,000 in the 1991–92 school year to 5,800,000 by 2000–01.

### **Mental Health and Substance Abuse**

- The share of low-income children living with a parent with symptoms of poor mental health remained relatively stable between 1997 and 2002, fluctuating between 24 and 26 percent (affecting between 17.5 and 18.8 million children). For children in higher-income families, this share ranged from 10 to 11 percent (affecting between 7.2 and 8 million children).

- The share of poor parents who consume five or more drinks at one occasion weekly fluctuated between 4 and 5 percent between 1998 and 2003. The share of nonpoor parents who fell into this category also ranged from 4 to 5 percent in this period.
- In 2004, about 8 percent of Americans age 12 or older (19.1 million) reported current illicit drug use. This rate has been steady since 2002, but it declined slightly for youth age 12 to 17 in these years. Marijuana was the most common illicit drug in 2004 for people age 12 or older, with 14.6 million users.