Child Poverty High in Rural America

WILLIAM P. O’HARE AND SARAH SAVAGE

On Aug. 28, 2007, new data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey show that 22 percent of rural children are living in poverty, up from 19 percent in 2000. On average, rates are highest in the nonmetropolitan South (27 percent) and have climbed the most in the nonmetropolitan Midwest (by 3.9 percentage points).

The child poverty rate is the most widely used indicator of child well-being because poverty is closely linked to undesirable outcomes in areas such as health, education, emotional welfare, and delinquency.

Table 1 shows child poverty rates for each state—and how child poverty rates have changed between 2000 and 2006 for the children living outside metropolitan areas in each state. (Data are collected in 2000 and 2006, but they actually reflect poverty in 1999 and 2005.) The data shown here are based on the official poverty measure as determined by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. The official poverty measure consists of a series of income thresholds based on family size and composition. The 2006 poverty threshold was $20,444 for a family of two adults and two children.

In 2003 the official definition of counties located in nonmetropolitan areas changed, which reduced the areas and population considered to be “rural.” It is important to acknowledge this modification; however the change in definition has little impact on the poverty rates examined here.

Key results include:

- The rural child poverty rate in 2006 ranges from a low of 9.1 percent in Connecticut to a high of nearly 34.7 percent in Mississippi.
- Rural child poverty rates increased between 2000 and 2006 in 37 of the 47 states where rural data was available (data were unavailable in 3 states and the District of Columbia).
- In 19 states, the increase in the rural child poverty rate was higher than the increase in the overall U.S. child poverty rate (3.0 percent) between 2000 and 2006.
- The state with the biggest percentage point increase in rural child poverty between 2000 and 2006 was Ohio (+6.8 percentage points), followed by Indiana (+6.4 percentage points), and Maine (+5.5 percentage points).
- Ten states showed a decrease in the rural child poverty rate, led by Maryland with a 4.0 percentage point decrease.
- Five states (Ohio, Indiana, Maine, Tennessee, and South Carolina) experienced increases of 5 percentage points or more in rural child poverty between 2000 and 2006.
- Three states (Mississippi, Louisiana, and New Mexico) all had rural child poverty rates above 30 percent in 2006, which reflects the pervasive child poverty problem in the rural South as well as areas with high percentages of minority populations.

AUTHORS

Dr. William P. O’Hare (bbohare@comcast.net) is a Rural Fellow at the Carsey Institute and a Senior Fellow with the KIDS COUNT project at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Sarah Savage (ssavage@cisunix.unh.edu) is an Evaluation Fellow at the Carsey Institute and a Ph.D. student in sociology at UNH.

This fact sheet is available online at http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/FS_ruralpoverty_07.htm.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Region</th>
<th>2000 Census Population under age 18 * below poverty</th>
<th>2006 American Community Survey Population under age 18 * below poverty</th>
<th>Percentage point change in poverty rate from 2000 to 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>13,742,721 2,644,052</td>
<td>11,438,087 2,539,740</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>332,749 87,110 19.2</td>
<td>315,767 79,674 25.2</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>112,840 15,180 13.5</td>
<td>58,151 10,623 18.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>167,417 49,343 29.5</td>
<td>170,475 49,049 28.8</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>331,938 81,708 24.6</td>
<td>268,053 76,256 28.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>282,892 62,521 22.1</td>
<td>171,300 31,532 18.4</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>167,164 24,106 14.4</td>
<td>145,922 26,889 18.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>34,966 2,336 6.7</td>
<td>65,900 5,993 9.1</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>34,417 5,273 15.3</td>
<td>36,929 7,269 19.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>241,825 55,002 22.7</td>
<td>223,780 52,371 23.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>651,551 150,267 23.1</td>
<td>431,248 116,169 26.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>64,199 14,387 16.9</td>
<td>86,148 12,651 14.7</td>
<td>-2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>220,968 34,694 15.7</td>
<td>129,965 21,886 16.8</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>437,147 64,090 14.7</td>
<td>357,444 70,093 19.6</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>428,843 49,635 11.6</td>
<td>341,268 61,289 18.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>391,775 43,773 11.2</td>
<td>302,541 38,949 12.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>297,659 42,243 14.2</td>
<td>236,868 42,697 17.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>498,717 127,783 25.6</td>
<td>408,818 113,363 23.7</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>296,626 92,517 22.7</td>
<td>295,332 101,521 34.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>188,129 28,321 15.1</td>
<td>110,490 22,713 20.6</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>91,722 13,636 14.9</td>
<td>66,456 7,224 10.9</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>54,791 5,654 10.3</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>426,474 57,527 13.5</td>
<td>400,706 73,266 18.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>365,389 41,266 11.3</td>
<td>312,986 41,850 13.4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>491,699 150,376 30.6</td>
<td>421,691 146,446 34.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>437,843 88,848 20.3</td>
<td>359,316 80,212 23.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>150,910 30,806 20.4</td>
<td>139,063 25,559 18.4</td>
<td>-2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>209,175 28,292 13.5</td>
<td>179,565 29,568 16.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>65,920 8,101 12.3</td>
<td>61,564 6,803 11.1</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>115,543 10,126 8.8</td>
<td>99,757 9,627 9.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>229,836 68,609 29.9</td>
<td>177,750 53,420 30.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>350,537 60,687 17.3</td>
<td>324,943 63,898 19.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>620,149 128,003 20.6</td>
<td>625,675 157,381 25.2</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>90,858 15,228 16.8</td>
<td>76,044 11,903 15.7</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>545,599 73,234 13.4</td>
<td>524,534 105,850 20.2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>336,924 77,161 22.9</td>
<td>306,953 82,274 26.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>221,997 39,533 17.8</td>
<td>184,211 40,256 21.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>433,571 65,103 15.0</td>
<td>412,921 72,294 17.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>13,897 1,668 12.0</td>
<td>N/A N/A N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>304,110 72,489 23.8</td>
<td>250,107 72,881 29.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>130,019 26,332 20.3</td>
<td>103,688 20,987 20.2</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>426,258 83,870 19.7</td>
<td>366,279 92,079 25.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>827,583 205,766 24.9</td>
<td>731,057 199,362 27.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>170,271 22,891 13.4</td>
<td>85,087 12,562 14.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>105,163 13,244 12.6</td>
<td>86,112 11,139 12.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>334,054 56,893 17.0</td>
<td>221,537 42,472 19.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>250,389 49,332 19.7</td>
<td>173,282 36,469 21.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>227,015 62,977 28.3</td>
<td>168,863 49,293 29.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>423,362 43,238 10.2</td>
<td>333,284 44,538 13.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>88,783 12,873 14.5</td>
<td>81,373 8,891 10.9</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A = Not applicable.

Metropolitan areas are defined based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s definitions as of June 2003. The full list of U.S. counties and cities/towns used to define metropolitan areas is available online at http://www.census.gov/population/estimates/metro-city/03mfips.txt.

* for whom poverty is determined