

Child Poverty High in Rural America

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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.

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This fact sheet is available online at http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu/FS_ruralpoverty_07.htm.

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.

TABLE 1. CHILD POVERTY IN NONMETROPOLITAN AREAS BY STATE: 2000 AND 2006¹

	2000 Census			2006 American Community Survey			Percentage point change in poverty rate from 2000 to 2006
	Population under age 18*	Population under age 18 below poverty	Percent of population under age 18 below poverty	Population under age 18*	Population under age 18 below poverty	Percent of population under age 18 below poverty	
U.S.	13,742,721	2,644,052	19.2	11,438,087	2,539,740	22.2	3.0
Alabama	332,749	87,110	26.2	315,767	79,674	25.2	-1.0
Alaska	112,840	15,180	13.5	58,151	10,623	18.3	4.8
Arizona	167,417	49,343	29.5	170,475	49,049	28.8	-0.7
Arkansas	331,938	81,708	24.6	268,053	76,256	28.4	3.8
California	282,892	62,521	22.1	171,300	31,532	18.4	-3.7
Colorado	167,164	24,106	14.4	145,922	26,889	18.4	4.0
Connecticut	34,966	2,336	6.7	65,900	5,993	9.1	2.4
Delaware	34,417	5,273	15.3	36,929	7,269	19.7	4.4
District of Columbia	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Florida	241,825	55,002	22.7	223,780	52,371	23.4	0.7
Georgia	651,551	150,267	23.1	431,248	116,169	26.9	3.8
Hawaii	84,919	14,387	16.9	86,148	12,651	14.7	-2.2
Idaho	220,968	34,694	15.7	129,965	21,886	16.8	1.1
Illinois	437,147	64,090	14.7	357,444	70,093	19.6	4.9
Indiana	428,843	49,635	11.6	341,268	61,289	18.0	6.4
Iowa	391,775	43,773	11.2	302,541	38,949	12.9	1.7
Kansas	297,659	42,243	14.2	238,686	42,697	17.9	3.7
Kentucky	498,717	127,783	25.6	408,818	113,363	27.7	2.1
Louisiana	296,626	92,517	31.2	295,332	101,521	34.4	3.2
Maine	188,129	28,321	15.1	110,490	22,713	20.6	5.5
Maryland	91,722	13,636	14.9	66,456	7,224	10.9	-4.0
Massachusetts	54,791	5,654	10.3	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Michigan	426,474	57,527	13.5	400,706	73,266	18.3	4.8
Minnesota	365,389	41,266	11.3	312,986	41,850	13.4	2.1
Mississippi	491,699	150,376	30.6	421,691	146,446	34.7	4.1
Missouri	437,843	88,848	20.3	359,316	80,212	22.3	2.0
Montana	150,910	30,806	20.4	139,063	25,559	18.4	-2.0
Nebraska	209,175	28,292	13.5	179,565	29,568	16.5	3.0
Nevada	65,920	8,101	12.3	61,564	6,803	11.1	-1.2
New Hampshire	115,543	10,126	8.8	99,757	9,627	9.7	0.9
New Jersey	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Mexico	229,836	68,609	29.9	177,750	53,420	30.1	0.2
New York	350,537	60,687	17.3	324,943	63,898	19.7	2.4
North Carolina	620,149	128,003	20.6	625,675	157,381	25.2	4.6
North Dakota	90,858	15,228	16.8	76,044	11,903	15.7	-1.1
Ohio	545,599	73,234	13.4	524,534	105,850	20.2	6.8
Oklahoma	336,924	77,161	22.9	306,953	82,274	26.8	3.9
Oregon	221,997	39,533	17.8	184,211	40,256	21.9	4.1
Pennsylvania	433,571	65,103	15.0	412,921	72,294	17.5	2.5
Rhode Island	13,897	1,668	12.0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
South Carolina	304,110	72,489	23.8	250,107	72,881	29.1	5.3
South Dakota	130,019	26,332	20.3	103,688	20,987	20.2	-0.1
Tennessee	426,258	83,870	19.7	366,279	92,079	25.1	5.4
Texas	827,383	205,766	24.9	731,057	199,362	27.3	2.4
Utah	170,771	22,891	13.4	85,087	12,562	14.8	1.4
Vermont	105,163	13,244	12.6	86,112	11,139	12.9	0.3
Virginia	334,054	56,893	17.0	221,537	42,472	19.2	2.2
Washington	250,389	49,332	19.7	173,282	36,469	21.0	1.3
West Virginia	227,053	62,977	27.7	168,863	49,293	29.2	1.5
Wisconsin	423,362	43,238	10.2	333,284	44,538	13.4	3.2
Wyoming	88,783	12,873	14.5	81,373	8,891	10.9	-3.6
Midwest	4,184,143	573,706	13.7	3,530,062	621,202	17.6	3.9
Northeast	1,227,909	179,817	14.6	1,105,189	185,913	16.8	2.2
South	6,047,175	1,450,831	24.0	5,138,545	1,396,035	27.2	3.2
West	2,214,806	432,376	19.5	1,664,291	336,590	20.2	0.7

N/A = Not applicable.

¹ Metropolitan areas are defined based on the 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