The connection between family structure and entitlements affecting poor young children

by Peter Brandon

Peter Brandon is a research scientist at the IRP.

Introduction

Recent census figures show that the poverty rate for children under six is higher than the rate for any other age group in the United States. In 1991 it was double the rate for people aged 65 and over. Further, the numbers for each successive year show that the poverty rate for children under six has progressively worsened. By 1991, for instance, the rate had increased 33 percent over the rate in 1979.[1] These statistics, as well as studies indicating that preschoolers growing up poor are more likely to suffer emotional problems, commit crimes as juveniles, drop out of school, and experience single motherhood as teenagers, have caused much national consternation.[2] The facts have left the nation with a pervasive feeling that poor children are continually losing ground.[3]

Many blame the federal government for the perilous situation now facing poor children under age six. They argue that successive census figures on the poverty rate among children cried out for federal government interventions and that federal inaction has made poor children worse off. Others, while not blaming the federal government, demand immediate national policy responses.[4]

But before the federal government can act to improve the well-being of poor children, it needs to know what to act on. Although difficult to obtain, a dispassionate assessment is needed of what has truly gotten worse for poor children under age six, what has gotten better for them, and what has stayed the same. Additional federal efforts to aid poor children will fail if policymakers are uninformed about (1) the circumstances that make some poor children relatively better off or worse off than other poor children, and (2) indications of how today's poor children fare compared to yesterday's.

A useful step in this direction is to track the extent to which the federal government's major cash and noncash programs cover poor children.[5] Because few benchmarks exist to indicate whether poor children under age six are worse off today than they were in the past, tracing the fraction of poor children under the canopy of federal programs provides valuable information. Moreover, these trend analyses provide some insights into the differing causes of child poverty among mother-only families and two-parent families.[6]

To compare the extent to which cash and noncash benefits have covered poor children, I exploit data collected from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Although there is no single metric to contrast the well-being of children over time, the CPS at least provides a uniform source of data each March to analyze the proportion of poor children under age six (hereafter referred to as poor young children) who have medical coverage and who are dependent on public assistance, food stamps, and publicly subsidized housing.

The sample

To generate time series that show changes in the circumstances of poor young children, I pooled twenty-five years of the March supplements of the Current Population Survey (CPS).[7] For every March, starting in 1968 and ending in 1992, I identified young children who were living with their parents. These parents, aged sixteen or older, had to either head households or head subfamilies within households. To be classified as the head of a household or head of a subfamily within a household, a parent had to have at least one co-residing biological or adopted child younger than six. If the CPS lists a parent as the household head, I know her or his child is a member of the primary family within the household; if the parent is not the household head, but the parent and child live with others, they constitute a subfamily within the household, in which they may or may not be the only family with preschool-aged children.

I include subfamilies because many poor children are not necessarily living alone with their parents. I find that poor young children in mother-only and two-parent families often live in multiple-family households.[8]

The total sample of parents heading families or subfamilies with young children over the twenty-five years was 126,586. The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that heads of poor families are younger, less educated, predominately female, and more likely than heads of

Table 1
Selected Characteristics of Parents of Poor and Nonpoor Children under Age Six: 1968–1992

Variable	Poor	Nonpoor
Age (years)	28.7	31.9
Number of families per household	1.27	1.05
Received food stamps (%)	37	3
Received welfare (%)	40	2
Race (%)		
Non-Hispanic white	69	89
Black	27	7
Other	4	4
Married (%)	43	93
Female family head (%)	60	9
Completed schooling (years)	10.7	12.9
Number of children under age 6	1.50	1.36
Primary family of household (%)	81	98
Live in central city (%)	35	23
N =	24,445	102,141

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968–1992.

nonpoor families to receive public transfers. These statistics, although aggregates, certainly fail to indicate that the majority of the poor resemble an inner-city "underclass." Most are non-Hispanic white; most do not receive welfare; nearly two-thirds live outside of central cities; and they do not have significantly more preschool-aged children than the nonpoor.[9]

The large sample size makes it possible to identify poor children according to the official measure of poverty, adopted in 1969 (and slightly modified in 1981).[10] With this information on the poverty status of children and an adjusted sampling weight[11] I can analyze trends during the period in program participation among low-income families with children under age six. (Other demographic data, also collected every March, allow me to stratify the time series by the type of family in which the child lived.)[12]

The official measure of poverty is well understood and yields a time series suitable for analyzing changes in the conditions of preschool children living in low-income families.[13] Nevertheless, problems associated with this measure limit the scope of this work. This definition of poverty does not account for local differences in the cost of living, nor does it adjust for receipt of noncash or in-kind benefits, such as medical insurance or public housing. It is simply an arbitrary standard which, when applied to annual pretax income, generates a uniform national poverty line. It does not therefore take into account whether a child lives in a family with income far below the poverty line or just below the poverty line. And it has the added disadvantage of combining into one group those children enduring persistent poverty and those children experiencing transitory poverty. The effects of chronic, long-term poverty on children are more serious and deserve separate study, but this index of poverty prohibits such work.[14]

Apart from the measure of poverty restricting the scope of this study, insufficient numbers of black and white parents with children under six within certain entitlement categories prevent some important racial comparisons. Specifically, too few black mother-only families reporting receipt of food stamps on a year-to-year basis prevents contrasting trends in the proportion of children in those families receiving food stamps with the proportion of white children in mother-only families receiving food stamps. Likewise, too few white two-parent families living in subsidized housing in each year precludes comparing that proportion with the equivalent proportion of black two-parent families living in subsidized housing.[15] Because the small sample sizes would yield unreliable estimates, I do not report any black-white comparisons here, except to note that comparisons of medical coverage[16] reveal that poor young white children living in two-parent families are the most likely group of children to lack medical coverage.

Finally, several time series are restricted because many of the questions on sources of noncash income were only added to the CPS survey after 1980. So, although I am confident that all measures are consistent over the entire twenty-five-year period, errors are possible owing to changes in sampling procedures and variable definitions.[17]

Changes occurring in entitlement coverage

In many respects, today's poor young children face different conditions from those confronted by poor young children twenty-five years ago or even a decade ago. Probably the most dramatic change has been their higher likelihood of living only with their mothers. (Undoubtedly, this change helps explain the high proportion of poor young children living in multiple-family households; see Table 1.)

Table 2 highlights this huge change. The majority of today's poor young children live in mother-only families. The figures for 1968 in Table 2 were reversed by 1992. Back then, about 33 percent of poor young children lived in mother-only families, and 67 percent of them were in two-parent families; in 1992, 62 percent lived in mother-only families and 38 percent were in two-parent families.[18]

Table 2
Percentage of Poor Children under Age Six Living in Mother-Only and Two-Parent Families

Year	Mother-Only	Two-Parent
1968	33.1%	66.9%
1969	34.0	66.0
1970	38.8	61.2
1971	43.8	56.2
1972	45.5	54.5
1973	49.7	50.3
1974	52.6	47.4
1975	46.8	53.2
1976	53.6	46.4
1977	58.8	41.2
1978	54.9	45.1
1979	57.9	42.1
1980	57.6	42.4
1981	54.4	45.6
1982	60.0	40.0
1983	58.3	41.7
1984	56.1	43.9
1985	57.2	42.8
1986	60.5	39.5
1987	64.6	35.4
1988	63.2	36.8
1989	66.9	33.1
1990	62.4	37.6
1991	65.3	34.7
1992	62.0	38.0
N = 24,445		

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968–1992.

Table 3
Percentage of Poor Children under Age Six Covered by Entitlements

	Noncash			Cash
Year	Medical Coverage	Subsidized Housing[a]	Food Stamps	Welfare
1968	--	--	--	25.3%
1969	--	--	--	24.6
1970	--	--	--	32.4
1971	--	--	--	38.2
1972	--	--	--	38.5
1973	--	--	--	43.6
1974	--	--	--	49.5
1975	--	--	--	40.0
1976	--	16.7%	--	40.8
1977	--	20.2	--	50.2
1978	--	18.7	--	45.4
1979	--	21.8	--	44.6
1980	*	22.4	58.5%	46.3
1981	68.9%	22.7	63.0	43.1
1982	70.0	23.9	60.6	43.5
1983	71.7	25.7	59.6	42.4
1984	71.1	25.2	56.5	41.0
1985	71.7	26.0	57.5	38.3
1986	73.3	29.3	58.5	45.7
1987	73.6	28.5	55.7	44.3
1988	72.5	28.1	57.3	45.9
1989	73.6	34.6	58.8	43.0
1990	74.3	31.8	60.0	41.1
1991	76.5	32.7	61.3	43.6
1992	75.6	32.7	64.6	47.4
N =	14,744	3,262	15,754	24,445

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968–1992.
-- Not available.
* Not computed.
[a] For those reporting living in rental housing only and paying for it.

The trend in Table 2 showing that increasing numbers of poor young children live in mother-only families clearly argues for independent analyses based on family structure, since the numbers of poor young children in mother-only families will drive poverty patterns among all children under age six and will affect the locus of policy interventions. Thus, changes in public transfer coverage rates among poor young children are separately reported here for mother-only families and two-parent families.

The importance of separate analyses, based upon poor young children's family structure, is highlighted by Tables 3 and 4. Both report estimates of medical coverage among poor young children.[19] They differ, however, because Table 3 presents estimates for the entire sample, whereas Table 4 displays separate estimates for the sample of children living in mother-only families and those living in two-parent families.

If we only considered estimates from the first column of Table 3, we would conclude that poor young children are faring better, at least with respect to medical coverage. That is, since 1981 fewer poor young children have been without medical coverage. But these estimates are misleading. Table 4 presents the more informative results, which lead to very different conclusions.[20] It demonstrates that the previous estimates on medical coverage were correct only for poor young children in mother-only families. These children have consistently fared better (at least in this domain) than have poor young children in two-parent families.

Moreover, Figure 1 and Table 4 show a widening gap in medical coverage rates between the two groups of poor children. Before 1985 the gap was closing; coverage rates were rising among children in two-parent families and falling among children in mother-only families, but after that year the gap progressively widened. Poor young children in two-parent families in 1992 were nearly three times more likely to have no medical coverage than the comparative group in mother-only families and were worse off than they were in 1985. If one

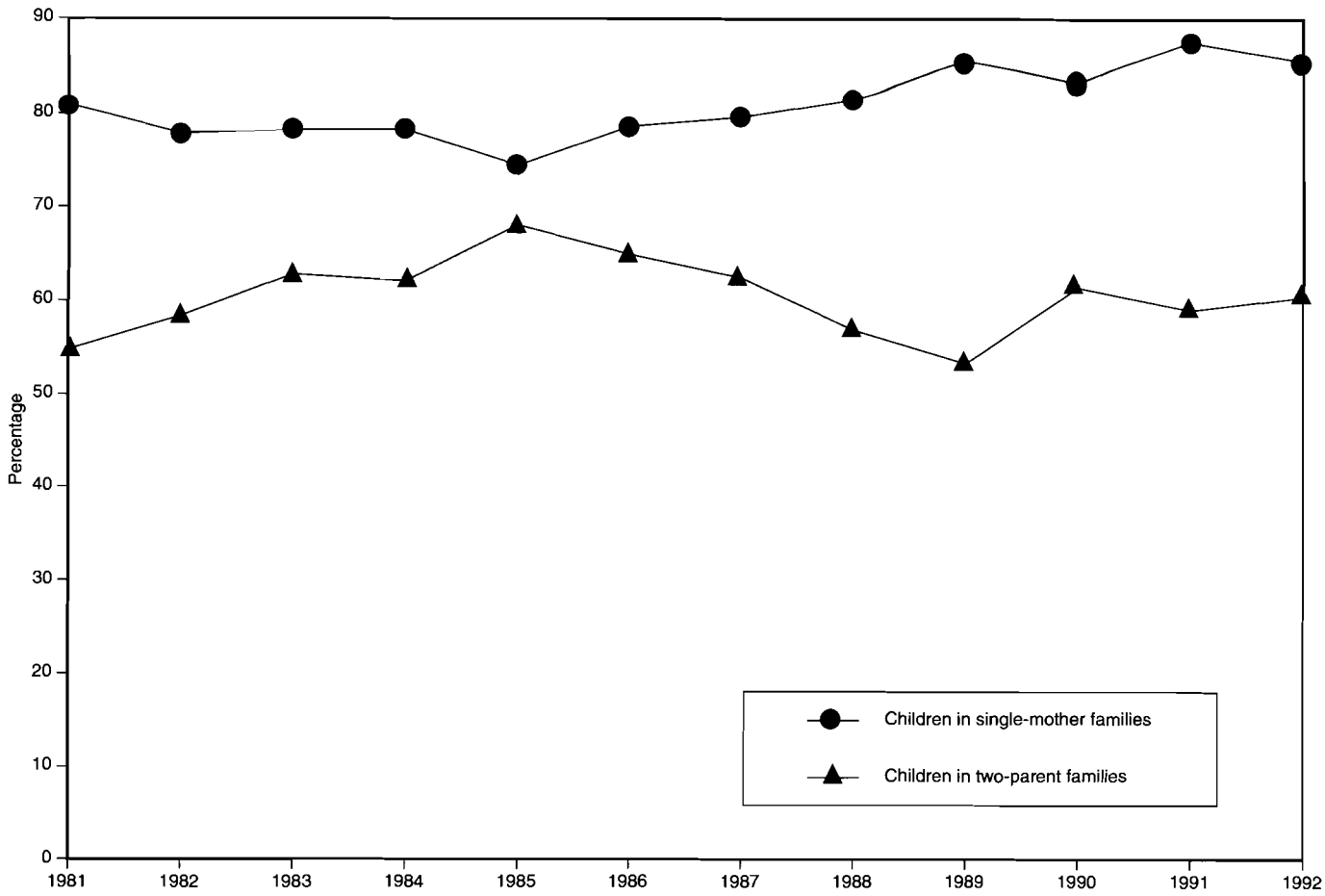

Figure 1. Poor Children under Six with Medical Coverage

estimate that 2.2 million poor children under six lived in two-parent families[21] in 1991 is accurate, this means that about 869,000 of those children lacked medical coverage.

Table 4 reveals another piece of information about welfare receipt that is concealed in column 4 of Table 3.[22] Mother-only households, where the majority of poor young children now live, have become less likely since 1981 to receive welfare. So welfare participation rates among mother-only families have slowly decreased, even though increasing numbers of poor children live in mother-only families. These poor children are, however, much more likely to have mothers who receive welfare than are their counterparts in two-parent families (63.2 percent compared to 18.3 percent).[23]

The time-series findings also show that poor children under age six in mother-only families have become more likely, if they live in rental housing, to live in publicly subsidized housing.[24] In 1992, about 38 percent of poor children under age six lived in mother-only families that received some form of public housing subsidy. In the late seventies, less than 30 percent lived in subsidized housing. In contrast, among poor young children living in two-parent families, only about 23 percent received housing subsidies in 1992. But especially since 1982, they too have become increasingly more likely to reside in publicly subsidized housing.

These estimates underscore the great difficulty in knowing whether the nation's poor children are now better off or worse off. If estimates indicate that more children now live in violent, dysfunctional neighborhoods, then most would think today's children are worse off. Yet, if estimates mean that more children now live in alternatives to inner-city housing projects, then many would say that today's children are better off. Scant data prevent me from analyzing this question further.

The last set of trends, concerning the proportion of young children living in families that receive food stamps, again demonstrates the need to examine mother-only and two-parent families separately.

Table 4
Percentage of Poor Children under Six Covered by Entitlements, by Family Type

	Noncash						Cash	
	Medical Coverage		Subsidized Housing[a]		Food Stamps		Welfare	
Year	Mother-Only	Two-Parent	Mother-Only	Two-Parent	Mother-Only	Two-Parent	Mother-Only	Two-Parent
1968	--	--	--	--	--	--	57.7%	7.8%
1969	--	--	--	--	--	--	55.2	9.7
1970	--	--	--	--	--	--	58.8	12.5
1971	--	--	--	--	--	--	71.1	11.7
1972	--	--	--	--	--	--	73.0	9.9
1973	--	--	--	--	--	--	63.8	15.1
1974	--	--	--	--	--	--	76.4	18.7
1975	--	--	--	--	--	--	72.1	10.2
1976	--	--	21.9%	7.7%	--	--	66.1	11.2
1977	--	--	24.6	14.7	--	--	71.2	21.4
1978	--	--	23.9	13.3	--	--	69.7	17.5
1979	--	--	27.5	11.2	--	--	68.8	10.1
1980	*	*	29.9	9.9	69.3%	48.7%	69.6	15.5
1981	81.0%	54.8%	29.0	13.0	70.7	51.2	66.2	11.4
1982	77.9	58.4	31.1	9.4	72.3	44.9	67.4	8.8
1983	78.3	62.8	30.8	22.2	68.8	47.3	61.6	16.0
1984	78.3	62.1	42.7	11.2	69.0	44.2	66.2	10.4
1985	74.5	68.1	34.0	13.1	60.2	52.3	55.2	11.4
1986	78.7	65.0	36.3	17.6	67.2	42.5	64.0	17.7
1987	79.7	62.4	36.0	15.3	65.6	36.2	61.4	12.5
1988	81.7	56.9	34.5	17.7	65.0	44.5	64.8	13.3
1989	85.5	53.3	44.3	19.8	71.6	36.5	61.8	11.1
1990	83.3	61.5	39.0	15.5	69.8	49.7	61.1	10.7
1991	87.5	59.0	58.0	17.0	70.8	53.3	62.4	12.3
1992	85.4	60.5	38.4	23.3	68.7	58.7	63.2	18.3
N =	8,863	5,881	2,566	696	9,447	6,307	14,018	10,427

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968–1992.
-- Not available.
* Not computed.
[a] For those reporting living in rental housing only and paying for it.

The third column in Table 3 leaves two impressions about food stamp receipt among the families of poor children under age six that are only partially correct. The column indicates that (1) during the 1980s and early 1990s, the majority of poor young children lived in families that received food stamps, and (2) participation rates among these families were steady over this period. But again these impressions are erroneous, because they only represent the dynamics of food stamp participation rates among young children living in mother-only families.

The estimates in Table 4 establish that among poor young children living in mother-only families, food stamp receipt was indeed high and steady over this period. This was not the case for poor children living in two-parent families. There were times during this twelve-year interval when the majority of poor two-parent families were not receiving food stamps. Moreover, from 1984 onward, receipt of food stamps among these families fluctuated greatly.

The trends also suggest a closing of the gap in food stamp coverage between the two groups of children. Since 1989 food stamp coverage rates between the two groups have been converging. Given the consistent rate of food stamp use among mother-only families over this period, the convergence is obviously due to growing use among two-parent low-income families.

Explaining variability and stability in coverage

These results show that the year-to-year oscillations in the proportion of poor young children covered by the three noncash benefits (Food Stamps, Medicaid, and subsidized housing) occur among poor children living in two-parent families, not among poor children living in mother-only families.[25] This point is crucial to understanding patterns of noncash entitlement coverage among poor young children over time.

The forces obscuring the variability in the numbers of poor young children in two-parent families covered under the three noncash benefits are: (1) the gradual increase in the number of children in mother-only families, and (2) the persistently high level of poverty among young children in mother-only families, thereby sustaining their high rates of coverage.[26] Until family structure is taken into account (Table 4), these forces swamp periodic swings in noncash benefit coverage rates among poor young children in two-parent families.

Moreover, these same two forces are responsible for the stubbornly high and yet stable estimates of entitlement coverage among poor young children in mother-only families. With economic prosperity during the 1960s, the poverty rate among children fell overall, but the numbers of poor children in mother-only families remained steady. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, the proportion of children who were poor and in mother-only families significantly increased and continued to increase regardless of the performance of the U.S. economy.

Thus a major reason why entitlement coverage rates are unwaveringly high and uniform over time among poor children in mother-only families is that these families' livelihoods are not tied to the workings of the U.S. economy. The means of maintaining this insulation from market forces must have been through detachment from the labor market. Table 5 confirms that, indeed, this is what happened.

Table 5 shows that, on average over the last 25 years, between 60 and 65 percent of poor single mothers with young children have remained detached from the labor force. The other 35 to 40 percent of single mothers were either working[27] or looking for work over this period.

The detachment of single mothers from the labor market is understandable. Basically they have had only two choices: work for low wages, usually with few medical benefits, or receive welfare, accompanied by food stamps and Medicaid. As Table 5 displays, most opted for the latter choice. Moreover, even if wages grew moderately, without additional enhancements to family income, like regular child support payments or low-cost child care, juggling work and family demands would have been difficult.[28]

While separation from the labor market has contributed to high and uniform entitlement coverage among poor young children in mother-only families, just the opposite holds for poor children living in two-parent families. Table 5 shows that poor two-parent families stay attached to the labor market, thereby making them vulnerable to its performance. In economic downturns, when jobs are scarce and wages are stagnant, the number of children in two-parent families in poverty rises; ergo, entitlement coverage rates for poor young children in two-parent families rise as well (not shown in table). Thus, variability in noncash entitlement coverage rates for these children is linked to their families' sustaining levels of earnings high enough to enable them to forgo means-tested public transfers.

Hence, maintaining earnings high enough to combat poverty is the issue confronting these two-parent families, not protracted unemployment. Table 5 shows that, in contrast to single mothers, the majority of poor two-parent families are working families or families seeking work. The table also indicates that a sizable minority of these families report that both parents work, and a smaller group state that one parent is employed and the spouse is presently unemployed.[29] Only a small group of these low-income two-parent families say that both parents are detached from the labor market, though that number holds steady at around 10 percent.[30]

Conclusion

Federal government interventions aimed at improving the well-being of poor children under age six need clear targets. One way to sight those targets is to gauge the extent to which the existing safety net of entitlements covers all poor young children. Results here show that the current patchwork of entitlements inadequately protects poor children in two-parent families, chiefly because their parents work. Thus, even though these parents work, they and their children remain poor and subject to uncertainties, such as no medical coverage.

One way of raising a substantial portion of the nation's poor young children out of poverty, therefore, is through policies that reward the efforts of two-parent families. Ensuring that working-poor two-parent families who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) receive it is as important as an effort to expand the credit, which acts as a wage increase. (See Karl Scholz's article in this issue on the EITC.) Other policy efforts deserving serious debate include expanding medical coverage to protect working-poor two-parent families, not just the poor on welfare; revising the rules governing the dependent care tax credit, while expanding child care subsidies for low-income families; and raising the minimum wage.[31] Finally, providing incentives to low-wage workers for additional training, especially given the concern over skill depletion in sectors of the U.S. economy, is worth serious consideration.

Reducing poverty among children under age six is a costly proposition. But properly targeted policies are a wise investment if the costs of breakups in two-parent homes due to financial pressures are reduced, and the costs to society due to young poor children lacking health care are avoided. ■

Table 5
Attachment to the Labor Force among Parents of Poor Children under Age Six, by Family Type

	Poor Mother-Only Families			Poor Two-Parent Families[a]				
	Employed	Unemployed	NILF	Both Employed	One Employed/ Other Unemployed	One Employed/ Other NILF	One Unemployed/ Other NILF	Both NILF
1968	29.8%	5.2%	64.9%	15.8%	4.5%	70.3%	4.0%	4.7%
1969	34.4	3.6	61.9	16.0	5.2	68.2	2.9	7.7
1970	28.7	7.4	63.9	14.6	5.7	66.4	6.8	6.0
1971	20.8	7.4	71.8	14.9	6.1	60.6	6.1	11.8
1972	24.5	7.6	67.9	16.9	4.6	65.2	5.5	7.0
1973	22.7	9.2	68.1	16.1	5.6	60.3	8.1	9.8
1974	28.0	3.3	68.6	14.9	5.8	58.3	7.4	13.2
1975	24.6	9.9	65.5	12.2	9.3	58.3	8.6	10.5
1976	25.0	10.0	65.0	14.6	8.2	54.7	9.9	10.7
1977	20.0	14.3	65.7	16.7	5.4	50.0	13.4	12.1
1978	26.0	10.9	63.0	18.0	7.9	53.2	9.8	10.0
1979	29.3	10.7	60.0	19.5	5.8	54.9	9.1	9.4
1980	26.0	11.3	62.7	15.7	4.3	52.0	12.3	12.5
1981	25.2	10.8	63.9	17.3	7.3	52.7	11.0	9.8
1982	24.9	14.4	60.7	19.8	8.8	46.7	14.9	6.3
1983	22.9	16.2	60.9	15.2	8.9	49.0	14.8	8.4
1984	22.2	16.7	61.1	19.4	7.6	49.0	12.1	9.6
1985	26.2	13.9	59.8	19.0	6.0	48.1	14.4	10.0
1986	23.8	17.3	58.9	18.3	8.4	46.3	15.4	9.9
1987	27.7	14.2	58.1	19.6	9.1	47.9	10.5	10.3
1988	23.7	11.4	64.9	18.8	8.5	47.2	11.0	12.2
1989	30.0	12.8	57.1	21.5	9.5	51.8	4.9	10.9
1990	30.7	11.9	57.4	20.2	9.0	51.5	7.2	10.8
1991	29.2	10.7	60.0	17.3	8.8	53.0	8.5	10.8
1992	27.6	10.3	62.1	15.3	8.6	48.7	13.2	11.8
N =			14,018					10,427

Source: Current Population Survey, March Supplements, 1968–1972.

Note: NILF = Not in labor force.

[a]The category consisting of both parents being unemployed is very small and was omitted from this table.

[1]See National Center for Children in Poverty, *Five Million Children: 1993 Update* (New York: Columbia University, School of Public Health, 1993); U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 175, *Money Income of Households, Families, and Persons in the United States: 1991* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1992).

[2]Sara McLanahan and Karen Booth, "Mother-Only Families: Problems, Prospects, and Politics," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 51 (August 1989), 557–580, available as IRP Reprint No. 611.

[3]For a listing of recent efforts reporting on the status of children, see footnote 1 in Robert Haveman and Barbara Wolfe, "Children's Prospects and Children's Policy," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 7 (Fall 1993), 153–174, available as IRP Reprint No. 698.

[4]See National Commission on Children, *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1991).

[5]The programs examined are public assistance, which includes Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and General Assistance (GA); Food Stamps; Medicaid; and subsidized housing. Each is a major program. In 1992, for instance, recipients of AFDC numbered 13.6 million; of Food Stamps, 25.4 million. The number of recipients of Medicaid in fiscal year 1991 was over 27 million, and the number of households that are expected to have received federal housing assistance in 1993 totals 5.7 million. See U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *1993 Green Book: Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means* (Washington, D.C: U.S. GPO, 1993).

[6]The author thanks Robert Hauser for his helpful criticisms, Jay Dixon for assistance with the CPS data, and participants of an IRP seminar for comments.

[7]For a description of the CPS, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Current Population Survey: Design and Methodology*, Technical Paper 40 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1978).

[8]Ancillary analyses of these data show that over the last ten years about 45% of poor young children in mother-only families lived in multiple-family households. For poor young children in two-parent families, about 10 to 15% lived in multiple-family households.

[9]See *The Urban Underclass*, ed. Christopher Jencks and Paul E. Peterson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991).

[10]In the CPS data, a modified index provides a range of income cutoffs or "poverty thresholds" adjusted to take into account family size, number of children, and age of the family householder or unrelated individual. The poverty cutoffs are updated every year to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index. For a detailed explanation of the poverty definition, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 166, *Money Income and Poverty Status in the United States: 1988* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1989).

[11]To generate a set of statistics that validly describes conditions facing children, without possessing data on each individual child, I use the following procedure: I take each parent's supplemental weight (this is a number attached to each person record in the CPS for the purpose of producing "supplemental" estimates on family characteristics) and multiply it by the number of children under age six within their family. This calculation produces a new weight reflecting the number of children under age six within the family. Estimates produced using this new weight reflect the conditions that the children face.

[12]Single-parent family types include children living in father-only, mother-only, and relative-only families. The CPS sample provides reliable estimates of poverty only for children living in the dominant form of single-parent families—single-mother families.

[13]These estimates are for related children and do not reflect data on unrelated or foster children. See National Center for Children in Poverty, *Five Million Children: 1993 Update.*

[14]See Patricia Ruggles, *Drawing the Line: Alternative Poverty Measures and Their Implications for Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1990); A. B. Atkinson, "On the Measurement of Poverty," *Econometrica*, 55 (1987), 749–764. A panel of the Committee on National Statistics of the National Academy of Sciences has been studying statistical issues in the measurement of poverty and will release its report late in 1994 (see Robert Haveman, "Changing the Poverty Measure: Pitfalls and Potential Gains," *Focus* 14:3 [Winter 1992–93], 24–29).

[15]Black-white comparisons are possible by aggregating data over several years. For the period 1976–83, 18.9% of poor children in white mother-only families lived in publicly subsidized housing; the percentage increased to 32.4 in the period 1984–92. Poor young children in white two-parent families reflected very little change, from 11.3% to 14.9%. Over the earlier time span, 40.2% of children in black mother-only families lived in subsidized housing, and this grew to 48.6% in the more recent period. The percentage of children in subsidized housing in black two-parent families actually dropped, from 28.5% in 1976–83 to 24.7% in 1984–92. The most striking result is that the percentage of children in white mother-only families who lived in publicly subsidized housing nearly doubled over this time span.

[16]Available upon request from the author.

[17]A notable example is the revision of income questions in 1980, which allowed 46 separate types of income other than earnings to be identified. Until then, these 46 income types were combined into eight original income types prior to imputation for missing responses. For a description of the change, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, March 1988 Tape Technical Documentation* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1989).

[18]For a discussion of problems surrounding mother-only families, see Irwin Garfinkel and Sara S. McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986); Donald J. Hernandez with David E. Myers, *America's Children: Resources from Family, Government, and the Economy* (The Population of the United States in the 1980s: A Census Monograph Series) (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1993).

[19]Children classified as having medical coverage are those whose parents reported having public or private health care coverage. Thus, they had Medicare or Medicaid coverage, military health care coverage, or private coverage, bought privately or provided by employers or unions. The analyses also identify those children covered by health insurance even when their parents may not have it.

[20]The results on health insurance coverage reflect coverage over the previous calendar year. The estimates are inaccurate if respondents gained or lost their health insurance coverage by the time of the survey.

[21]See National Center for Children in Poverty, *Five Million Children: 1993 Update.*

[22]Welfare here consists of Aid to Families with Dependent Children and General Assistance.

[23]For more discussion on these trends in welfare participation among mother-only families, see Robert Moffitt, "Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System: A Review," *Journal of Economic Literature*, 30 (March 1992), 1–61, available as IRP Reprint No. 668; Peter Brandon, "Trends over Time in the Educational Attainments of Single Mothers," *Focus* 15:2 (Summer and Fall 1993), 26–34.

[24]Two questions deal with public and low-cost housing on the March CPS supplement questionnaire. These questions differ from other questions covering noncash benefits because they establish current recipiency status in March of the current year rather than recipiency during the previous year. Heads of households or subfamilies who own homes, who are buying homes, or who pay no cash for housing are excluded from the analyses. Thus, the subsample comprises those respondents renting housing.

[25]For welfare, the only cash benefit examined, the decline in coverage rates among families with poor children under age six is not linked to changes in the distribution of children's poverty among mother-only and two-parent families. Very few two-parent families receive welfare. (See Anne E. Winkler, "AFDC-UP, Two-Parent Families, and the Family Support Act of 1988: Evidence from the 1990 CPS and the 1987 NSFH," IRP Discussion Paper No. 1013-93, 1993.) The downward trend in welfare participation is related to policy changes in the AFDC program and real benefit levels slowly eroding over time, providing an incentive for some single-mothers to take low-wage jobs.

[26]Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, "One Fifth of the Nation's Children: Why Are They Poor?" *Science*, September 8, 1989, pp. 1047–1053.

[27]Working could mean either part-time or full-time work.

[28]Several scholars have written about the conflict that single mothers face between parenting and working. See Irwin Garfinkel, "The Role of Child Support Insurance in Antipoverty Policy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 479 (May 1985), 119–131. For a discussion of child care in single-parent families, see David T. Ellwood, *Poor Support: Poverty in the American Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), pp. 176–178.

[29]Table 5 has one omitted category for two-parent families: those in which both parents are unemployed. The percentage of two-parent families reporting that both parents were unemployed was minute, but it too reflects fluctuations in the business cycle. (Over the years, the CPS has altered its measure of employment status. I take account of these changes to ensure comparability of estimates across all years.)

[30]For a discussion of poverty rates in two-parent families, see David T. Ellwood, *Poor Support*, pp. 83–87.

[31]The true impact of increases in the minimum wage on different types of workers is controversial. See Lawrence Katz and Alan Krueger, "The Effect of the Minimum Wage on the Fast-Food Industry," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 46 (October 1992), 6–21, available as IRP Reprint No. 674.