

Reducing Child Poverty in Ohio

Brief Prepared by Randy Leite, Ph.D., March 2007

Child & Family Issue Brief

For the last several decades, the federal poverty level has been the standard by which economic need has been determined. In 2007, the federal poverty level for a family of four is \$20,650.¹ Living in or near poverty has been shown to be associated with numerous problematic outcomes in children including reduced academic achievement, heightened drop-out rates, increased physical and mental illness, greater exposure to crime (both as offender and victim), and lower levels of educational attainment, employment, and marital success as adults.

Despite considerable attention over the past four decades, child poverty rates in Ohio have remained fairly high and have increased dramatically over the past five years. This models national trends. As a result, there has been an ongoing public debate about strategies and approaches to reducing childhood poverty rates. This debate has encouraged substantial poverty research that offers support for a number of approaches to addressing the problem. Research suggests three factors contribute to child poverty rates: 1) changes in state and federal economies, 2) changes in family characteristics, and 3) changes in the behavior of parents.²

(1) *Federal Register*, Vol. 72, No. 15, January 24, 2007, pp. 3147–3148

(2) Nichols, A. (2006). *Understanding recent changes in child poverty*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute

Key Facts about Child Poverty in Ohio:¹

- 36% of children live in low-income families. Low income families are those whose income is below 200% of the poverty level; the amount generally considered required for a family to meet its basic needs.
- Only 19% of children in low-income families do not have a working parent. 47% of all low-income children have at least one parent who is employed full-time, year round.
- 82% of children whose parents do not have a high school degree live in low-income families. 52% of children whose parents have a high school degree, but no college education live in low-income families.
- 54% of children in low-income families live with a single parent.
- 28% of white children live in low-income families. 52% of Latino children live in low-income families. 68% of black children live in low-income families.
- 40% of children under age 6 live in low-income families. 33% of children age 6 or older live in low-income families.
- 8% of children have no health insurance coverage.
- 24% of workers in earn poverty-level wages or below.

(1) *United States Census Bureau. Annual Social and Economic Supplement of the U.S. Current Population Survey from 2004, 2005, and 2006*

INDICATOR	Poor Children	Non-Poor Children
Health Outcomes		
Reported to be in excellent health	37.4%	55.2%
Low birth weight	1.0%	0.6%
Infant mortality	1.4%	0.8%
Lead poisoning	16.3%	4.7%
Stunted growth	10.0%	5.0%
Cognitive Outcomes		
Developmental delay	5.0%	3.8%
Learning disability	8.3%	6.1%
School Achievement Outcomes		
Grade retention	28.8%	14.1%
High school dropout	21.0%	9.6%
Other Outcomes		
Teenage non-marital childbirth	11.0%	3.6%
Unemployed at age 24	15.9%	8.3%
Experienced food insufficiency at least once in past year	15.8%	1.6%
Repeated cases of child abuse	5.4%	0.8%

These outcomes develop as a result of the influence of poverty on:

Child health and nutrition: Poor children are less likely to receive consistent health care and are more likely to skip meals or eat less nourishing foods.

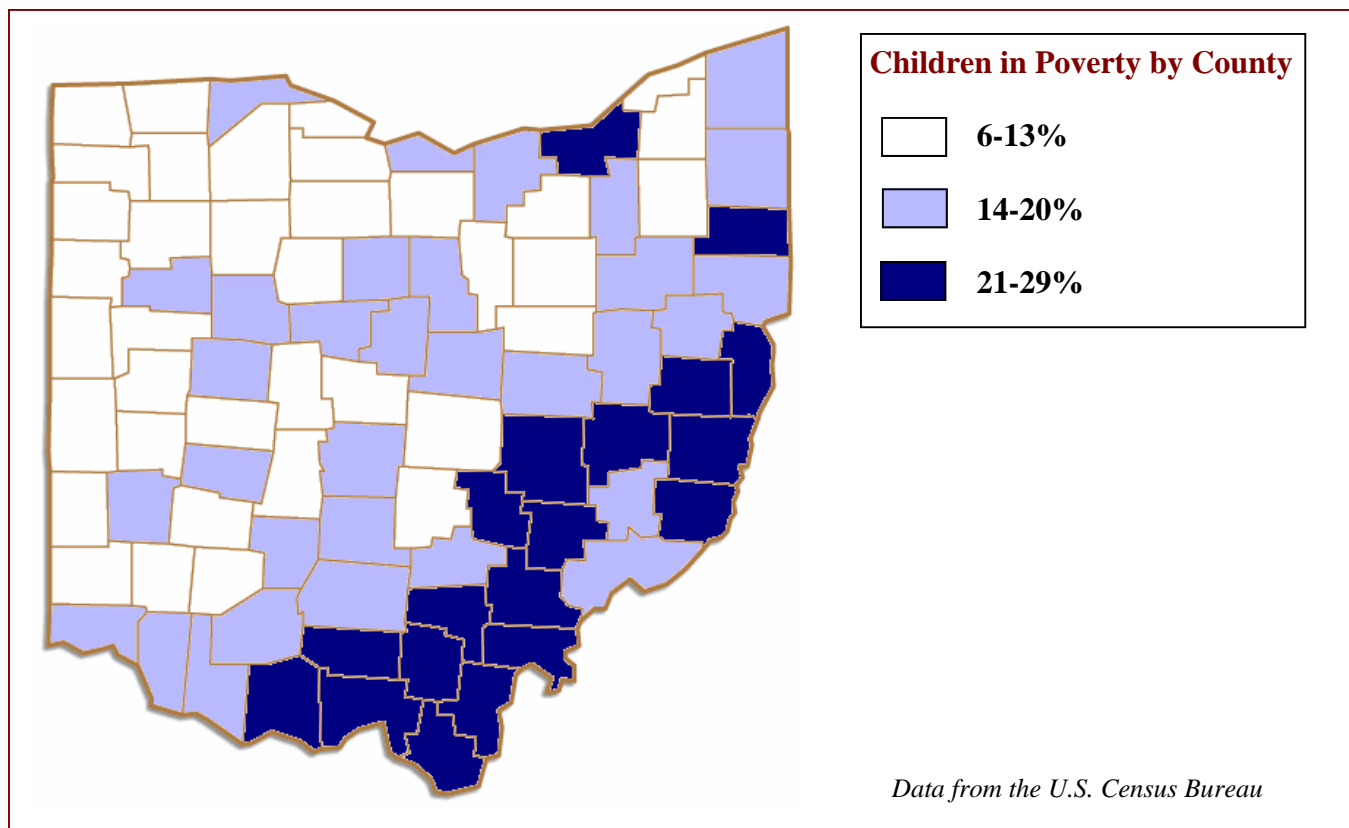
Child’s home environment: Poor children are less likely to have opportunities for learning and emotional warmth in their home environments and are more likely to live in lower-quality housing.

Parental interactions with children: Poor children are less likely to receive authoritative parenting and more likely to receive harsh discipline.

Parental mental health: Poor children are more likely to live with less healthy parents.

Neighborhood conditions: Poor children are more likely to live in neighborhoods that experience higher crime, include fewer social interactions among neighbors, offer fewer child development resources, and exhibit higher levels of population density.

Brooks-Gunn, J. & Duncan, V. (1999.) *The effects of poverty on children.* In *Poverty and Children.* Washington, D.C.: *The Future of Children.*



Recommendations for Ohio:

Make wages work

- Break the cycle of hardship by strengthening education and job training for adults living in or near poverty.
- Expand low-wage worker access to health insurance, sick time, and family medical leave.

Help low-income families keep more of what they earn

- Implement a state earned income tax credit in addition to the federal earned income tax credit.
- Increase state tax thresholds to achieve lower income tax rates for those living near poverty.



Help low-income families amass savings and assets

- Expand individual development accounts.
- Expand low-wage earners' access to credit through alternative community development financial institutions.
- Expand opportunities for low-income parents to attend school and job training programs while maintaining government support.

Strengthen support systems for low-income families

- Improve child support enforcement and assurance.
- Ensure that all eligible children receive food stamps.
- Ensure that all eligible children are enrolled in health insurance programs.
- Improve unemployment insurance for low-wage employees.
- Develop a system of access to affordable and stable child care arrangements.
- Increase access to high quality child care and preschool programs for low-income families.
- Promote equitable distribution of resources across school districts in Ohio.

Encourage low-income parents to develop and maintain family environments

- Provide further incentives for paternity establishment.
- Provide support and incentives for low-income fathers to remain involved in their children's lives.

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