



Economic Well-Being

Children Living in Poverty

What About Alaska?

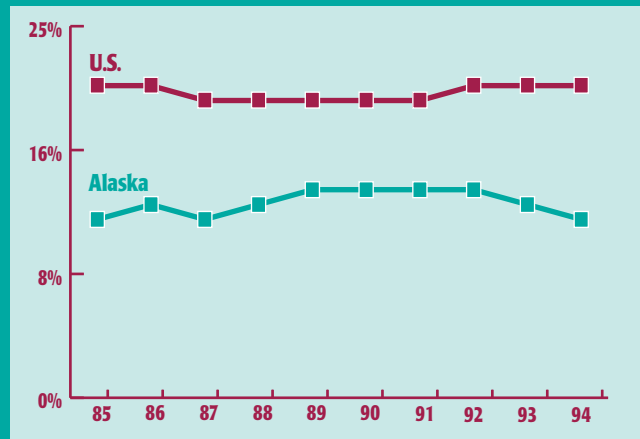
The national **Kids Count** Data Book reported that Alaska had the second lowest rate of poverty among children in the U.S. in 1994. But, as we just noted, some analysts believe that the poverty threshold figures used to calculate this indicator may be too low to reflect actual levels of poverty in higher cost areas like Alaska.

Under the higher poverty standard used for most low-income programs in Alaska—roughly 125 percent of the federal poverty threshold—12 percent of all Alaskans and 16 percent of Alaskan children under 19 lived at or below the poverty level in the early 1990s. Alaska's youngest children are most likely to be living in poverty. Nearly one in five Alaskan children (ages five and under) lived in poverty in recent years.⁴

Although Alaska's poverty rate remained relatively constant during the 1980s, the number of children living in poverty increased during the decade.

Alaska Native children are three times more likely to live in poverty than White children.⁵ In 1990, 40 percent of the Alaskan children and teenagers living in poverty were Native, as compared with 33 percent in 1980.⁶

Trend 1985-1994
Percent of Children in Poverty



Source: Kids Count Data Book, 1997, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Definition

This indicator shows the percentage of children (under age 18) in families with incomes below the poverty line. The national **Kids Count** program uses poverty *threshold* figures from the U.S. Bureau of the Census to calculate this indicator. The poverty threshold is not adjusted for Alaska's higher cost of living, so some analysts believe the figures (as shown in the graph above) underestimate poverty in Alaska.

Another federal agency, the Department of Health and Human Services, also annually issues poverty *guidelines*. It is those guidelines that are used in determining eligibility for

various low-income programs—and the guidelines are adjusted for Alaska's higher costs of living. In 1997, for example, the poverty guideline for a family of four was \$16,050 in the Lower 48 and \$20,070 in Alaska.¹ Neither the federal poverty threshold nor the poverty guidelines include the value of subsistence activities.

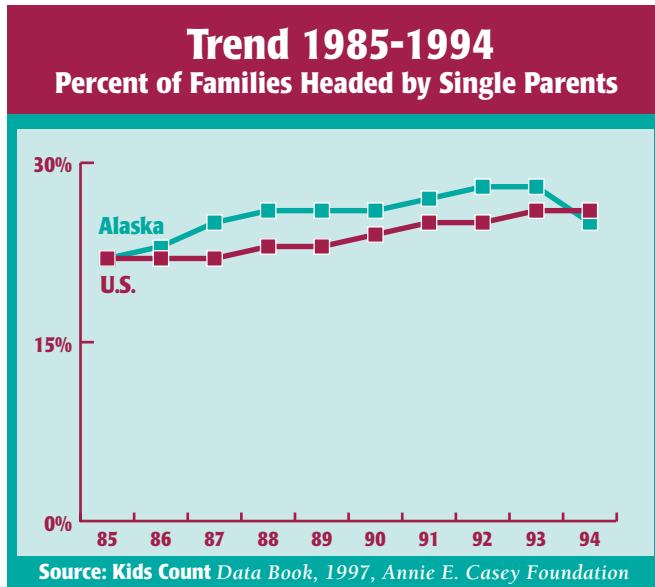
Significance and Impact

Poverty is nearly twice as common among children as among adults in the U.S., and the poverty rate among children has risen dramatically in the past 20 years.

A stunning 26 percent of all American children under the age of six (more than one in four) are poor, and more than half those young children live in families where both parents work.²

A growing body of research indicates that poverty can hinder the mental and physical development of children and reduce their ability to become productive adults.³

Children in Families Headed by Single Parents



all children under 18 in the United States lived with single parents. Of these, 35 percent lived with parents who had never married and 37 percent lived with divorced parents. Based on current rates, analysts project that half of all children today will spend at least some part of their childhood in single-parent families.

Impact

A child growing up in a single-parent family is more likely to face problems in late adolescence and early adulthood.

- Twenty-nine percent of children living in one-parent households at age 14 will not graduate from high school by age 20; among children living in two-parent families, only 13 percent will fail to graduate.⁷
- Seventeen percent of young men from single-parent families go through extended periods of not working and not going to school, compared with 12 percent of young men from two-parent families.⁸
- Twenty-seven percent of young women from single-parent families give birth

while they are teenagers, compared with 11 percent of young women from two-parent families.⁹

- In 1992, 38 percent of divorced mothers and 66 percent of never-married mothers with children under 18 had incomes below the poverty line.¹⁰

What About Alaska?

The most current regional figures for Alaska are from the 1990 federal census. At that time, more than one in five (21.8 percent) of Alaskan families with children were headed by single parents, with the regional percentages varying from 19 in the Gulf Coast and Interior regions to nearly 33 percent in the Northern region.

Data from the national Kids Count program show that in 1994 Alaska was just about at the national average, with 25 percent of families headed by single parents. But the share of Alaska families headed by single parents has risen over the past decade, increasing about 14 percent between 1985 and 1994.¹¹

Definition

This indicator shows the percentage of families with children under age 18 (related to the family by birth, marriage, or adoption), headed by either women or men without spouses present in the home.

Significance

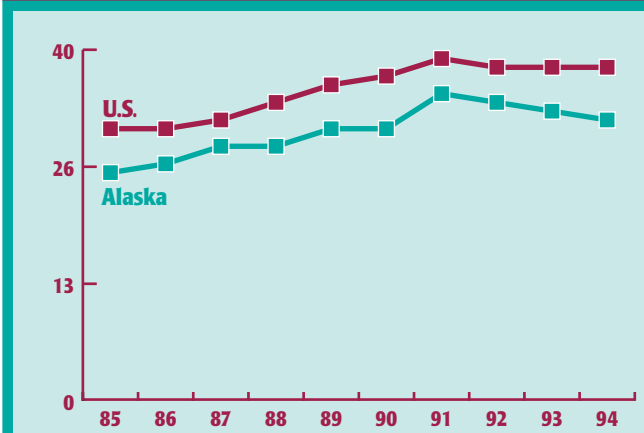
The percentage of families headed by single parents—usually women—has risen steadily over the past few decades and is a growing worry among policy makers and the public. In the early 1990s, over one quarter of

Births to Teens



Trend 1985-1994 Teen Birth Rate

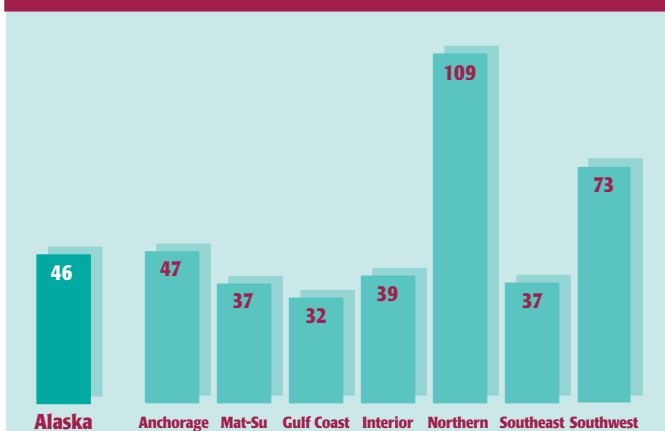
(Births per 1,000 Females, Ages 15-17)



Source: Kids Count Data Book, 1997, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Births to Single Teens

(Rate per 1,000 Females 15-19, 5-year average 1991-1995)



Source: Alaska Department of Labor; Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics

Definition

This indicator measures births per 1,000 girls ages 15-17. (Before 1993, the national Kids Count program calculated this indicator based on births to *single* teens 15-19. The Alaska regional graph is calculated with data based on that previous definition.)

Significance and Impact

Teenage childbearing reduces opportunities for both mothers and children. The adolescent mother is less likely to seek prenatal care (as shown in the Prenatal Care indicator on pages 12 and 13) and less likely to finish high school. She is more likely to be single, poor, isolated, and depressed.¹²

Failure in school, delinquency, emotional difficulties, and other problems are more common among children born to single, teenage mothers.¹³

What About Alaska?

From 1991-1995, Alaska's average rate of births to single teens (15-19) was 46 per 1,000 teenage girls, with regional rates as low as 32 and as high as 109.

Remember that these regional figures include 18- and 19-year-old mothers, who since 1993 have been excluded from the national Kids Count indicator. As of 1992, the last year for which we have comparable national figures, Alaska's rate of births to single teens was close to the national average—43.7 per 1,000 girls (15-19) as compared with 42.5 per 1,000.¹⁴

Child Care



Significance

Safe, reliable, and affordable child care has often been hard for families to find in recent decades, as more and more mothers moved into the work place. Now, such child care is likely to become even harder to get, in the wake of federal welfare reform that limits how long individuals can collect welfare payments. According to the *Anchorage Daily News*, 4,000 Alaskan must move off the welfare rolls and into jobs by July 1998.¹⁵

Most of those moving off welfare nationwide will be able to qualify only for low-paying jobs. And for many working-poor and low-income parents, child care options are sharply limited. National studies indicate that working-poor families face several disadvantages, compared with higher-income families. The working poor:

- are more likely to work nonstandard hours, when most child care centers and family day care homes are closed
- spend a substantially higher proportion of their budgets on child care
- are the least likely to receive child care subsidies, and are often unaware of aid programs that do exist
- are more likely to rely on relatives for child care¹⁶

Recent studies indicate that working-poor parents are not happy with the child care choices they have.¹⁷

- Most single, poor, and teenage mothers would change their child care arrangements if they could.
- Parents who rely on relatives for child care are most likely to want to change arrangements; those using child care centers are least likely to want to change.
- Low-income parents are increasingly looking for child care centers for their older preschool children, citing improved child safety, learning opportunities, and reliability as reasons.

Potential Effects on Alaska's Children

As more Alaskan families move into the labor market, more children will be:

- in need of high-quality but low-cost care
- at risk of being abused or neglected because parents may turn more to informal and multiple child care providers and will likely be under more stress
- at risk for accidents if they don't have reliable and safe child care and if parents working nonstandard hours or rotating schedules supervise them less

Provisions of Welfare Reform

Information provided by Carla Timpone and Sherrie Goll of the Child Care and Development Fund

Several provisions of federal welfare reform (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) affect child care. Welfare is no longer considered an entitlement, and the new law eliminates federal guarantees of child care assistance for welfare recipients and of one year of transitional child care assistance for families leaving welfare. But to help parents meet the requirements for moving into the work force, Congress increased child care funding for families on welfare, moving off welfare, or at risk of going on welfare.

At the same time it eliminated some federal guarantees, Congress provided states with block grants and gave them the authority to determine their own child care programs. Alaska's child care programs:

- guarantee child care assistance to families on welfare
- guarantee one year of transitional child care help for families moving off welfare
- increase the number of children receiving meals in child care by expanding access to the child care food program



Child Care Licensing

One way to help make child care facilities safer and healthier for children is to require them to be licensed. In Alaska, the Division of Family and Youth Services licenses child care facilities. As of October 1997, 717 facilities—including child care centers and homes—with 15,543 available slots were licensed in various communities across the state. Almost half of Alaska's licensed child care facilities are in Anchorage.

Other state agencies are also involved in setting, monitoring, and enforcing standards for larger child care facilities. The Alaska Department of Education has a certification program for preschools for children ages 3 to 5 that is similar to DFYS's child care licensing program. The Department of Public

Summary of Alaska's Licensed Child Care Facilities and Their Capacity, October 1997

Region/City	Number of Homes	Capacity of Homes	Number of Group Homes	Capacity of Group Homes	Number of Centers	Capacity of Centers	Total No. All Facilities	Capacity of Facilities
Muni. Of Anchorage^a	256	1,445			103	6,333	359	7,778
Anchorage	235	1,329			103	6,333	338	7,662
Chugiak	3	18					3	18
Eagle River	18	98					18	98
Mat-Su	19	144	6	68	21	920	46	1,132
Bodenburg Butte	1	8					1	8
Houston					1	20	1	20
Palmer	6	46	2	24	10	443	18	313
Sutton	1	8			1	25	2	33
Wasilla	11	82	4	44	9	432	24	558
Interior	64	452	10	116	34	1,428	108	1,996
Delta Junction	1	8					1	8
Fairbanks	42	288	5	58	27	1,203	74	1,549
Fort Yukon					1	5	1	5
Healy	1	8			1	25	2	33
North Pole	20	148	5	58	5	195	30	401
Northern	1	8			5	326	6	334
Barrow					1	92	1	92
Kotzebue					1	94	1	94
Nome	1	8			2	105	3	113
Point Hope					1	35	1	3
Gulf Coast	57	452	5	60	19	994	81	1,506
Anchor Point	1	8					1	8
Cordova					2	88	2	88
Glennallen	1	6			1	30	2	36
Homer	11	92	1	12	1	50	13	154
Kenai	9	65	1	12	2	147	12	224
Kodiak	15	141			5	190	20	331
Nikishka					1	65	1	65
Seward	2	16			2	79	4	95
Soldotna	16	117	3	36	3	247	22	400
Sterling	2	15					2	15
Valdez					2	98	2	98

Child Care (continued)



Safety, the Division of Fire Prevention, and the Department of Environmental Conservation also regulate important aspects of child safety.¹⁸

Adding Facilities

Like other states, Alaska will need more good child care as time goes on. The Municipality of Anchorage is the only local government in Alaska that has the authority to license day care centers; it also helps the state issue licenses for homes offering child care in Anchorage. Such partnership licensing agreements between the state and other local communities could help make child care more readily available—because it would allow for quicker on-site evaluations of facilities. Local organizations could perform those evaluations in communities where DFYS does not have adequate licensing staff, a field office, or travel funds to send inspectors.¹⁹

Summary of Alaska’s Licensed Child Care Facilities and Their Capacity, October 1997 (cont.)

Region/City	Number of Homes	Capacity of Homes	Number of Group Homes	Capacity of Group Homes	Number of Centers	Capacity of Centers	Total No. All Facilities	Capacity of Facilities
Southwest	2	12			5	179	7	191
Aniak	1	6			1	20	2	26
Bethel	1	6			1	75	2	81
Dillingham					1	30	1	30
St. Paul					1	24	1	24
Unalaska					1	30	1	30
Southeast	60	463	12	142	38	2,001	110	2,606
Craig	1	8			1	47	2	55
Haines	4	30	1	12	2	48	7	90
Juneau	26	204	5	58	17	1,147	48	1,409
Ketchikan	10	75	3	36	6	224	19	335
Klawock	1	8					1	8
Metlakatla					1	41	1	41
Mount Edgecombe					1	22	1	22
Petersburg	1	8			1	90	2	98
Sitka	10	79			8	345	18	424
Skagway			1	12	1	37	2	49
Thorne Bay			1	12			1	12
Ward Cove	1	8					1	8
Wrangell	6	43	1	12			7	55
Total^b	459	2,976	33	386	225	12,181	717	15,543

^a The Municipality of Anchorage has authority to license day care centers, and the municipality also assists the state in issuing licenses for homes offering child care. This is the only municipal level licensing partnership in Alaska.

^b The table does not include child care facilities on military posts.

Source: Facilities Management System, Division of Family and Youth Services, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

Another potential way of making it easier to add child care facilities would be to create one set of standards and one statewide

licensing agency for child care and full-day preschool programs.²⁰

¹Annual Update of the HHS Poverty Guidelines. Department of Health and Human Services, in Federal Register, March 10, 1997 (Volume 62, Number 46).

²J. K. Knitzer and J. L. Aber, "Young children in poverty: Facing the facts." In *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 1995, 65 (2), 174-176.

³*Kids Count in Nebraska*, 1995

⁴*Invest in Our Children: An interim report from the child health planning work group to the governor and the people of Alaska*, Volume II: "Needs Assessment and Demographic Profile of Alaska's Children," Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, October 1994, p. 12.

⁵*Invest in Our Children: Strategic Plan*, p. 17.

⁶*Healthy Alaskans 2000: Changing the course of Public Health for the Decade*, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, February 1994, p. 135.

⁷*Patterns, Causes, and Consequences of Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing: What Can Government Do?*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty, IRP Special Report, Welfare Reform in the 104th Congress, Congressional Forum II, SR #64, May 1995, p. 29.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹*Kids Count Data Book*, 1997

¹²*Adolescent Health: Volume II*, "Background and effectiveness of selective prevention and treatment services." Congress of the United States, Office of Technology Assessment, OTA-H-466, Washington

D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, November 1991., p.323-356.

¹³*Adolescent Health:Volume II*, p. 323-356.

¹⁴*Kids Count Data Book*, 1995

¹⁵L. Ruskin (May 4, Sunday, 1997). "State agencies brace for a launch of next year's welfare reform." *Anchorage Daily News*, p.B-8

¹⁶*New findings on children, families, and economic self-sufficiency: Summary of a research briefing.* (<http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/findings/dochild.html>); Board on Children and Families (1995) *Child care for low-income families: Summary for two workshops.* (p.4) D.A. Phillips (Ed.) Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

¹⁷Board on Children and Families, *New findings on children, families, and self-sufficiency: Summary of a research briefing.* Hofferth, (1995), p.16.

¹⁸*The Governor's Conference on Youth and Justice*, 1996, p. 161.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

