

# Economic Well-Being

Children Living in Poverty  
Children in Families Headed by Single Parents  
Births to Teenagers

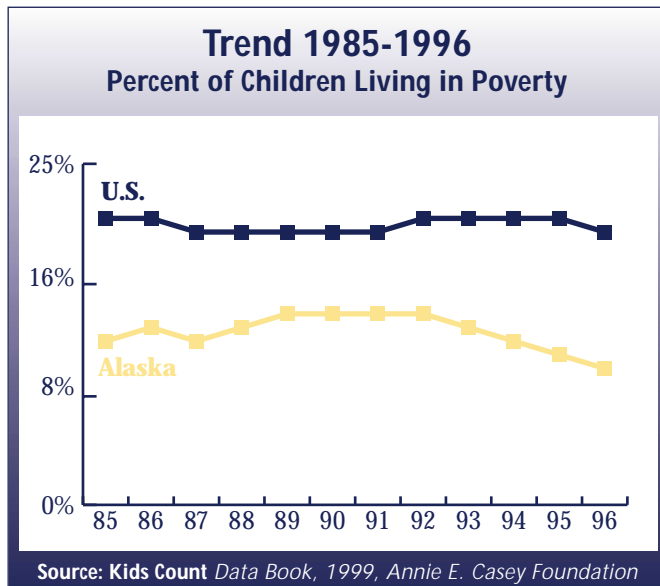




*Anyone who has ever struggled with poverty knows how extremely expensive it is to be poor.*

*James Baldwin,  
American writer*

# Children Living in Poverty



## Definition

The percentage of children (under age 18) in families with incomes below the poverty line, as measured by U.S. Bureau of the Census's poverty *threshold* figures. The poverty threshold is not adjusted for Alaska's higher living costs. Some analysts believe the figures (as shown in the trend graph) underestimate childhood poverty in Alaska. In fact, many people believe the current poverty threshold underestimates poverty throughout the United States. In late 1999, the census bureau was examining whether that threshold should be raised nationwide.<sup>1</sup>

*Data provided by Annie E. Casey Foundation and U.S. Bureau of the Census, unless otherwise noted*

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 they are adjusted for Alaska's higher costs of living. In 1999, for example, the poverty guideline for a family of four was \$16,700 in the Lower 48 and \$20,880 in Alaska.<sup>2</sup> (Neither the federal poverty threshold nor the poverty guidelines include the value of subsistence activities.)

## Significance of Indicator

Growing up poor hurts children in many ways. They are more likely to go hungry, which can hinder brain development. They are more likely to get inadequate medical care, to live in dangerous and unhealthy conditions, and to drop out of school.

## What About Alaska?

The percentage of Alaskan children living below the federal poverty threshold remained stable (between 10 and 12 percent) from 1985 through 1996. When we compare poverty in Alaska with poverty nationwide, it looks as if Alaska is doing relatively well. In fact, the national Kids Count program reported that in 1996 Alaska had the nation's lowest rate of children living in poverty.

However, as we just discussed, the poverty threshold used to track this indicator does not take into account the higher cost of living in Alaska.

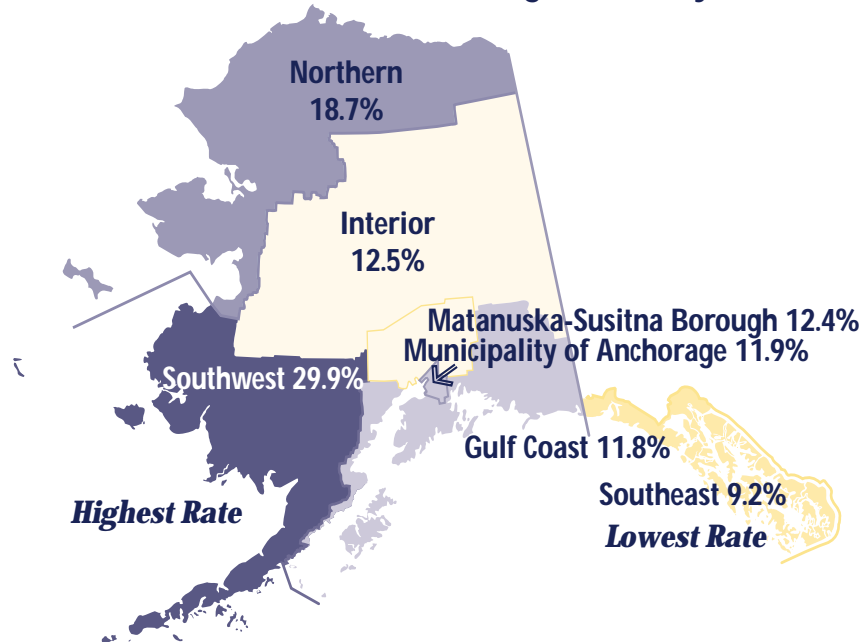
Even with no adjustment for Alaska's higher costs of living, some regions still have very high rates of poverty. The table and the map on page 30 show that poverty is most widespread among children (including all children up to age 18) in the Southwest region, where 30 percent lived in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold in 1995. That was three times higher than the poverty rate among children in the Southeast region. In other regions, the poverty rate varied from about 12 to 19 percent.

Alaska's population grew sharply between 1980 and 1995—and so did the number of children living in poverty, as the table below the map shows.

Poverty rates among school children (children from ages 5 to 17) in districts around the state were also very different in 1995. The table on pages 32 and 33 shows that between 30 and 40 percent of school children in several districts in the Interior, Northern, and Southwest regions lived in poor families in 1995. We also know (although the table does not show this level of detail) that among schools within the same district the share of children from poor families can be much higher than the overall district average.



## Percent of Alaska Children Living in Poverty\*, 1995



\*Based on federal poverty threshold figures; not adjusted for differences in living costs.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 1995.

Produced by the Applied Population Laboratory, University of Wisconsin - Madison, for the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Alaska.

## Children (Under 18) Living in Poverty, 1980, 1990, 1995

	Number of Children in Poverty						Child Poverty Rate (In Percentages)					
	1980	1990	# Change		1995	% Change		1980	1990	Annual Rate of Change		
			1980-1990	1980-1990		1990-1995	1990-1995			1980-1990	1990-1995	
<b>U.S.</b>	10,121,765	11,428,916	1,307,151	12.9%	14,665,019	3,236,103	28.3%	16.1	18.3	0.9	20.8	1.7
<b>Alaska</b>	15,444	19,284	3,840	24.9%	25,270	5,986	31.0%	12.1	11.4	-0.4	13.2	2.0
Muni. of Anchorage	4,424	6,172	1,748	39.5%	8,634	2,462	39.9%	8.3	9.5	0.9	11.9	3.1
Mat-Su Borough	949	1,423	474	49.9%	2,264	841	59.1%	15.3	10.5	-2.3	12.4	2.3
Gulf Coast	1,579	1,810	231	14.6%	2,648	838	46.3%	11.5	9.0	-1.6	11.8	3.8
Interior	3,027	3,384	357	11.8%	3,809	425	12.6%	14.4	11.7	-1.3	12.5	0.9
Northern	937	1,556	619	66.1%	1,747	191	12.3%	23.9	19.7	-1.2	18.7	-0.7
Southeast	960	1,498	538	56.0%	1,986	488	32.6%	5.8	7.3	1.6	9.2	3.2
Southwest	2,946	3,441	495	16.8%	4,180	739	21.5%	28.2	27.0	-0.3	29.9	1.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 and 1990 censuses and Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 1995

# Children Living in Poverty (continued)

## Costs and Prevention

- Children growing up poor are less likely to have health insurance. An estimated 11 percent of Alaskan children had no health insurance during the late 1990s.<sup>3</sup>
- Poverty rates among American children in the 1990s are a third higher than they were two decades ago and 1.5 to 4 times higher than the rates among children in Canada and Western Europe.<sup>4</sup>
- Studies suggest that children who are poor during the first five years of their lives may not develop as well as other children during early and middle childhood.<sup>5</sup>
- More than four in ten American children either lived in poverty or near poverty in 1996. (The federal government defines families who are “near” poverty as those whose incomes are within 185 percent of the poverty threshold.) More than half these children live not in inner cities but in suburban or rural areas.<sup>6</sup>
- Poverty levels among “traditional” two-parent families nearly doubled in the last two decades.<sup>7</sup>
- An estimated 12 to 14 million American children lived in families with annual incomes below the federal government’s official poverty threshold in the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> (In 1999, that threshold was \$12,158 for a family of three and \$16,600 for a family of four.)
- Children who are extremely poor or who live below the poverty line for many years appear to do the worst in later years, as measured by things like failing to complete high school or getting into trouble with the law.<sup>9</sup> (The federal government defines families in “extreme” poverty as those with incomes that are 50 percent below the poverty threshold.)
- Children who are poor during their preschool and early school years are less likely to graduate from high school than children and adolescents who are poor only when they are older.<sup>10</sup>
- The rate of young children (those under age 6) living in extreme poverty doubled between 1975 and 1994.<sup>11</sup>
- Young children are more likely to be poor (including those who are extremely poor and nearly poor) than any other age group—and that disparity is growing.<sup>12</sup>
- Poverty among children costs the U.S. something between \$36 and \$177 billion per year, according to economists working with Nobel laureate Robert Solow.<sup>13</sup>



# Children Living in Poverty (continued)

## Estimates of Poverty<sup>a</sup> Among Alaska's School Children, By Regions and School Districts, 1995

School District	Estimated Population of Children 5 to 17	Estimated Number of Poor Children 5 to 17	Percent of School-Age Children Living in Poverty
<b>Alaska Total</b>	<b>135,847</b>	<b>15,224</b>	<b>11.2%</b>
<b>Anchorage</b>	<b>51,364</b>	<b>4,856</b>	<b>9.5%</b>
<b>Matanuska-Susitna</b>	<b>13,680</b>	<b>1,480</b>	<b>10.8%</b>
<b>Interior Region</b>	<b>22,587</b>	<b>2,467</b>	<b>10.9%</b>
Alaska Gateway	517	102	19.7%
Delta Greely	1,015	148	14.6%
Denali Borough	422	24	5.7%
Fairbanks North Star	18,283	1,519	8.3%
Galena City	138	18	13.0%
Iditarod Area	455	106	23.3%
Kuspuk	539	178	33.0%
Nenana City	106	9	8.5%
Tanana City	91	17	18.7%
Yukon Flats	429	158	36.8%
Yukon Koyukuk	592	188	31.8%
<b>Southeast Region</b>	<b>16,142</b>	<b>1,205</b>	<b>7.5%</b>
Alyeska Central School <sup>b</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a
Annette Island	479	87	18.2%
Chatham Region	566	71	12.5%
Craig City	351	2	0.6%
Haines Borough	432	54	12.5%
Hoonah City	225	11	4.9%
Hydaburg City	125	40	32.0%
Juneau Borough	6,175	399	6.5%
Kake City	168	14	8.3%
Ketchikan Gateway	3,089	176	5.7%
Klawock City	202	14	6.9%
Mt. Edgecumbe <sup>c</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a
Pelican City	47	4	8.5%
Petersburg City	715	54	7.6%



## Children Living in Poverty (continued)

### Southeast Region (cont.)

Sitka Borough	1,932	115	6.0%
Skagway City	157	3	1.9%
Southeast Island	724	93	12.8%
Wrangell City	553	55	9.9%
Yakutat City	202	13	6.4%

### Northern Region

<b>6,498</b>	<b>1,134</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	
Bering Strait	1,572	483	30.7%
Nome City	958	112	11.7%
North Slope Borough	1,917	81	4.2%
Northwest Arctic	2,051	458	22.3%

### Gulf Coast Region

<b>16,810</b>	<b>1,570</b>	<b>9.3%</b>	
Chugach	132	13	9.8%
Copper River	670	97	14.5%
Cordova City	492	25	5.1%
Kenai Peninsula Borough	11,339	1,167	10.3%
Kodiak Island Borough	3,298	230	7.0%
Valdez City	879	38	4.3%

### Southwest Region

<b>8,766</b>	<b>2,512</b>	<b>28.7%</b>	
Aleutian Region	15	1	6.7%
Aleutians East	431	44	10.2%
Bristol Bay	254	7	2.8%
Dillingham City	597	41	6.9%
Kashunamiut	212	79	37.3%
Lake and Peninsula	502	116	23.1%
Lower Kuskokwim	3,601	1,072	29.8%
Lower Yukon	1,781	755	42.4%
Pribilof Island	88	19	21.6%
Saint Marys City	157	36	22.9%
Southwest Region	596	196	32.9%
Unalaska City	110	10	9.1%
Yupiiit	422	136	32.2%

<sup>a</sup>Based on federal poverty threshold figures; not adjusted for differences in living costs.

<sup>b</sup>State-run correspondence school with students statewide. Poverty figures not available.

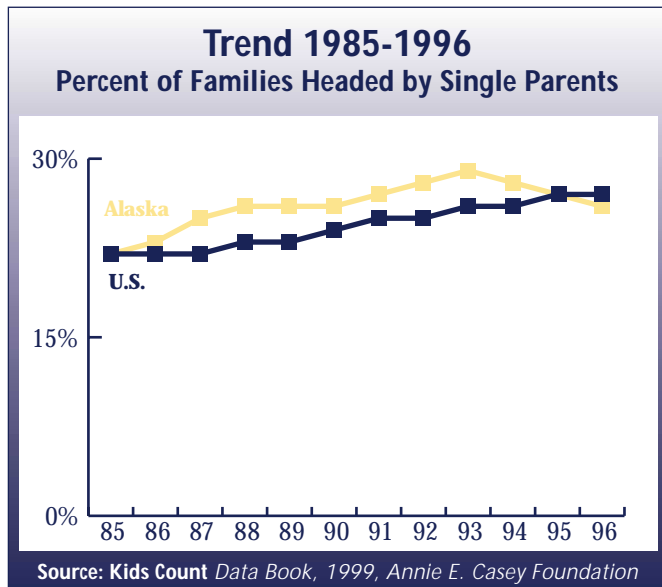
<sup>c</sup>State-operated boarding high school in Sitka, with students from throughout rural Alaska.

**Note:** Regional percentages may be substantially lower or higher than percentages of individual districts within a region, since the regional figures are weighted averages of all districts in the region.

**Source:** U.S. Bureau of the Census, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 1995. Available online at [www.census.gov/hhes](http://www.census.gov/hhes)



# Children in Families Headed by Single Parents



## What About Alaska?

In 1996, more than one in four American families (27 percent) were headed by single parents—overwhelmingly women. The share of single-parent households in Alaska has been higher than the national average for much of the past decade, but it began dropping in recent years. By 1996, Alaska's rate was 26 percent, just under the national average. This drop improved Alaska's ranking among the states from 42 in the late 1980s to 20 in 1996.

The most recent regional estimates available for this indicator are from the 1990 federal census, which is now almost 10 years old. At the beginning of the decade, one in three families in the Northern region were headed by single parents, while fewer than one in five families in the Gulf Coast and Interior regions were single-parent households.

## Costs and Prevention

- Single parents are more likely to be poor, young, and with jobs that don't pay much or no jobs at all. They're also more likely to need welfare or other support programs, because there are no second breadwinners or caregivers in the house.<sup>14</sup>

- About 70 percent of single parents have low incomes, compared with 31 percent of two-parent households. Most children of single parents with low incomes lack access to regular health care and other social services.<sup>15</sup>
- Nationally, 50 percent of children born outside marriage live in families with incomes below the poverty level, compared with 14 percent of children born within marriage.<sup>16</sup>
- Parents raising children alone are much more likely to describe themselves as aggravated—angry and feeling that their children are hard to care for and costing them too much of their own lives. About 16 percent of children with single parents have “aggravated” parents, as compared with 7 percent of all children. Growing up with parents who are often aggravated can hurt cognitive, social, and emotional development in young children.<sup>17</sup>
- Studies show (not surprisingly) that single mothers on welfare are at considerable risk of depression. Depressed parents aren't able to provide emotional support for their children and tend to use harsher discipline. Children of depressed parents in turn tend to have more behavioral problems, to do more poorly in social situations and in school, and to be in poorer health than their counterparts with parents who aren't depressed.<sup>18</sup>

## Definition

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.

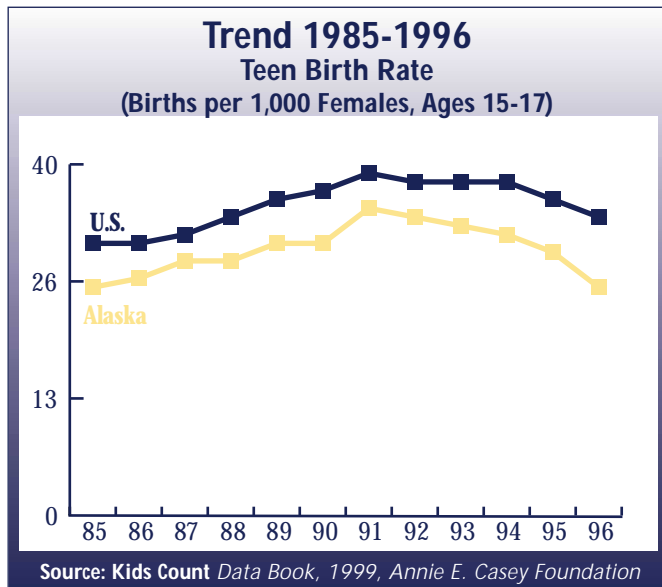
## Significance of Indicator

A number of studies have shown that children who grow up with just one parent face many disadvantages when compared with children who grow up with both parents.

Data provided by Annie E. Casey Foundation, unless otherwise noted



# Births to Teenagers



more likely to be poor and unmarried. Many don't get good prenatal care. They're more apt to drop out of school and to have either low-paying jobs or to rely on welfare. Their children in turn grow up poor, often without good health care and without many of the benefits other children enjoy.

## What About Alaska?

The birth rate among teenage girls in Alaska and nationwide has been dropping since 1991, after climbing in the late 1980s. Recent figures show the national birth rate continued to drop in 1997.

Alaska's birth rate has consistently been below the national average, and in 1996 was 26 per 1,000 girls ages 15 to 17, compared with 34 per 1,000 nationwide.

The birth rate among teenage girls varies sharply within regions of the state, as the adjacent bar graph shows. On average from 1992 through 1996, the statewide birth rate among girls 15 to 19 was 52 per 1,000. The rate was highest in the Northern region (105 per 1,000) and the lowest in the Mat-Su Borough (46).

Alaska's teen birth rate has dropped not only among younger girls (15-17) but also older girls (18-19), as the tables on page 36 show. The birth rate for girls 15 through 19 dropped from 80 per 1,000 in 1992 to 50 in 1997—a decline of 40 percent. Birth rates among teenagers of all races were lower in 1997 than they had been in 1992. The 1997 birth rate was highest among Alaska Native teenagers (84 per 1,000) and lowest among White teenagers (38 per 1,000).

Consistent with national trends, the vast majority (77 percent) of teen births in Alaska in 1997 were to unmarried teens. Among Alaska teenagers who had babies that year, nearly 20 percent already had other children.

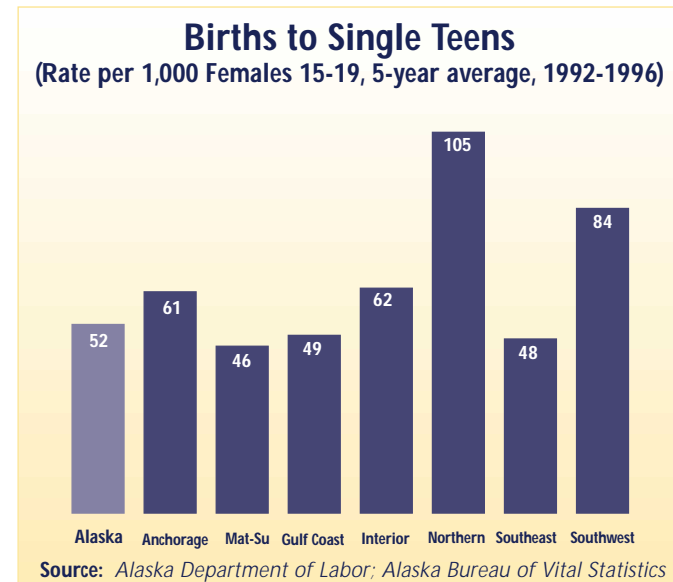
## Definition

The national Kids Count program measures the rate of births per 1,000 girls 15 to 17 (regardless of whether they are single or married). Our regional indicator measures the rate of births per 1,000 *single* girls 15 to 19 (which is how the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics reports the data).

## Significance of Indicator

Teenage mothers start with a lot of strikes against them. They aren't much more than children themselves. They're much

*Data provided by Annie E. Casey Foundation and Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics, unless otherwise noted*



# Births to Teenagers (continued)

## Births Per 1,000 Alaska Teens (15-19), By Race\*

	Number of Girls 15 -19 1999	Birth Rate			Percent Change		
		1992	1996	1997	92-96	92-97	96-97
White	15,453	70.8	39.8	37.5	-43.8	-47.0	-5.8
Alaska Native	4,553	124.4	88.9	83.5	-28.5	-32.9	-6.1
Black	989	81.8	68.1	68.8	-16.8	-15.9	1.0
Asian and Pacific Islander	916	87.9	48.8	63.3	-44.5	-28.0	29.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,911</b>	<b>80.0</b>	<b>51.5</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>-35.6</b>	<b>-37.3</b>	<b>-2.5</b>

\* Teens of Hispanic origin can be of any race.

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics Annual Report, 1992, 1996, and 1997.

## Trends in Births to Alaska Teens

	1992	1996	1997	Percent Change		
				92-96	92-97	96-97
Birth Rate for Younger Teens (per 1,000 females ages 15-17)	39.7	26.9	26.1	-32.2	-34.3	-3
Percent of Teen Births to Unmarried Teens	70%	77.3%	76.6%	10.4	9.4	-0.9
Percent of Teen Births that are Repeat Births	n/a	18.6	19.5	n/a	n/a	n/a
Teen Births as a Percent of all Births	10.9%	10.9%	11.2%	0	2.8	2.8

Source: Alaska Bureau of Vital Statistics Annual Report, 1992, 1996, and 1997.

## Costs and Prevention

- The birth rate among both younger (15-17) and older (18-19) teens nationwide has dropped steadily since 1991, with the sharpest drop among Black teenagers. Analysts credit more widespread use of birth control and fewer teenagers having sexual relations.<sup>19</sup>

- The birth rate among teenagers in the U.S. in the early 1990s was twice that in any other developed country and almost 10 times as high as the rate in Japan or the Netherlands.<sup>20</sup>
- One in five American girls have babies before they are 20 years old.<sup>21</sup>

- Less than 25 percent of teenagers who have babies are married. As recently as 1960, that figure was 85 percent.<sup>22</sup>
- Teenagers who use contraception the first time they have sexual relations are much less likely to become teenage mothers than those who do not—less than 24 percent as compared with more than 40 percent.<sup>23</sup>



## Births to Teenagers (continued)

- Girls who grow up in intact, two-parent families are less likely to have babies when they are teenagers.<sup>24</sup>
- The daughters of teenage mothers are much more likely to give birth themselves when they become teenagers. Almost 33 percent of the daughters of teen mothers have babies before age 20, as compared with 11 percent of other teens.<sup>25</sup>
- Girls whose mothers did not graduate from high school are more than twice as likely to become teenage mothers.<sup>26</sup>
- Adults who had teenage mothers are nearly three times more likely to serve prison sentences.<sup>27</sup>
- Job opportunities for teenage parents are limited because they typically have little education and few skills. Also, their parenting responsibilities limit their ability to look for and hold jobs.<sup>28</sup>
- More than 40 percent of women who had babies when they were teenagers report still living in poverty when they are 27.<sup>29</sup>
- About 30 percent of teenagers who had babies during 1995 and 1996 smoked cigarettes while they were pregnant.<sup>30</sup> Smoking during pregnancy is known to contribute to babies with low birth weights and other health risks.
- Children of teenage parents often aren't as healthy as children of older parents.<sup>31</sup>
- Children born to young teenage mothers are much more likely to be abused and neglected than those born to older mothers.<sup>32</sup>
- Teenagers having babies directly cost taxpayers an estimated \$6.9 billion each year—more than \$2,800 per teen mother. This figure excludes indirect costs that may be just as high—including, for example, lost economic productivity.<sup>33</sup>
- If teenagers who have children when they're 17 or younger would wait until they were at least 20 or 21, the U.S. could save about \$1 billion annually in costs of foster care and about \$100 million annually in costs of child abuse investigations.<sup>34</sup>
- Research indicates that children of young teenage mothers have much less chance of being successful as young adults—in earning degrees, getting good paying jobs, and establishing families.<sup>35</sup>



# Notes for Economic Well-Being Section

<sup>1</sup> *Anchorage Daily News*, " Census Bureau to redefine poverty," October 18, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *1999 Poverty Guidelines*. Available online at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/99poverty.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *Kids Count Data Book* 1999. Baltimore, Maryland, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> G. J. Duncan, W.J. Yeung, J. Brooks-Gunn, and J.R. Smith, " How much does childhood poverty affect the life chances of children?" *American Sociological Review* 63, 406-423, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Columbia University School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty, " Child poverty rate remains high despite booming U.S. economy," *News and Issues* 8, (1), 3, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> See note 5.

<sup>7</sup> See note 5.

<sup>8</sup> J. Brooks-Gunn and G. J. Duncan, " The effects of poverty on children," *The Future of Children* 7, (2), 55-71. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> See note 8.

<sup>10</sup> See note 8.

<sup>11</sup> Columbia University School of Public Health, National Center for Children in Poverty, " Long-term young child poverty trends: Alarming growth, changing demographics, working families in poverty." Available online at: <http://cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/nccp/reports/longterm.html>

<sup>12</sup> See note 11.

<sup>13</sup> See note 11.

<sup>14</sup> Urban Institute, *Snapshots of America's Families: Income and Hardship*. 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Urban Institute, *Snapshots of America's Families: Children's Environment and Behavior*, 1999. Here "low income" is defined as a 1996 annual income of \$31,822 or less for a family of four.

<sup>16</sup> See note 15.

<sup>17</sup> Urban Institute, *Snapshots of America's Families: Adults' Environment and Behavior*. 1999.

<sup>18</sup> See note 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Anchorage Daily News*, " Births to high-school girls fall to record low," October 26, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> K.A. Moore, D. Meyers, D.R. Morrison, C. Nord, B. Brown, and B. Edmonston, " Age at first childbirth and later poverty," *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 3, (4), 393-422. 1993.

<sup>21</sup> K.A. Moore, A.K. Driscoll, and L.D. Lindberg, *A Statistical Portrait of Adolescent Sex, Contraception, and Childbearing*. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> Robin Hood Foundation, 1996 study, cited in National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *While the Adults Are Arguing the Teens Are Getting Pregnant: Overcoming Conflict in Teen Pregnancy Prevention*. 1998.

<sup>23</sup> See note 21.

<sup>24</sup> See note 21.

<sup>25</sup> See note 21.

<sup>26</sup> See note 21.

<sup>27</sup> See note 20.

<sup>28</sup> See note 20.

<sup>29</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *When Teens Have Sex: Issues and Trends*, *Kids Count* Special Report, 1998.

<sup>30</sup> R.A. Maynard (Ed.), *Kids Having Kids: Economic Costs and Social Consequences of Teen Pregnancy*. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, 1997.

<sup>31</sup> See note 30.

<sup>32</sup> See note 22.

<sup>33</sup> See note 30.

<sup>34</sup> See note 30.

<sup>35</sup> See note 30.

