

PART II

Indicators of Children's Well-Being

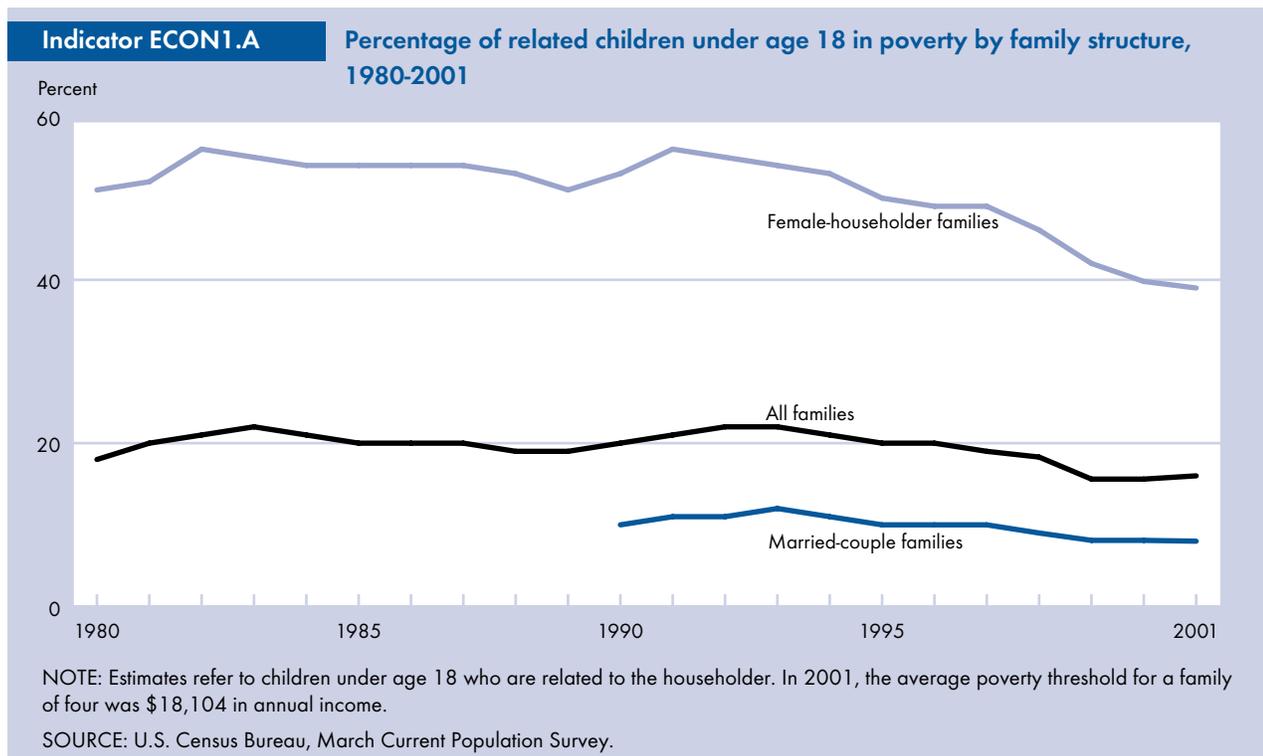
Part II: *Indicators of Children's Well-Being* contains data on key indicators that measure the health, security, and safety of the social environment in which children play, learn, and grow. Unlike the data presented in Part I of the report, which describe the changing context in which children live, the data in Part II offer insight into the condition of American children by providing information in four key areas of child well-being: economic security, health, behavior and social environment, and education.

Economic Security Indicators

The well-being of children depends greatly on the material well-being of their family. The Economic Security indicators presented in this section attempt to measure a family's ability to access basic material needs. The first two indicators measure the economic well-being of children through the family's access to income and the employment status of the resident parent or parents. The final three indicators measure the accessibility of three economic necessities—housing, food, and health care. Additional important indicators of children's economic well-being for which data are not available include measures of family income and poverty over longer periods of time, as well as homelessness.

Child Poverty and Family Income

Childhood poverty has both immediate and lasting negative effects. Children in low-income families fare less well than children in more affluent families for many of the indicators presented in this report, including indicators in the areas of economic security, health, and education. Compared with children living in families above the poverty line, children living below the poverty line are more likely to have difficulty in school,⁴⁰ to become teen parents,⁴¹ and, as adults, to earn less and be unemployed more frequently.⁴⁰ The child poverty rate provides important information about the percentage of U.S. children whose current circumstances make life difficult and jeopardize their future economic well-being.

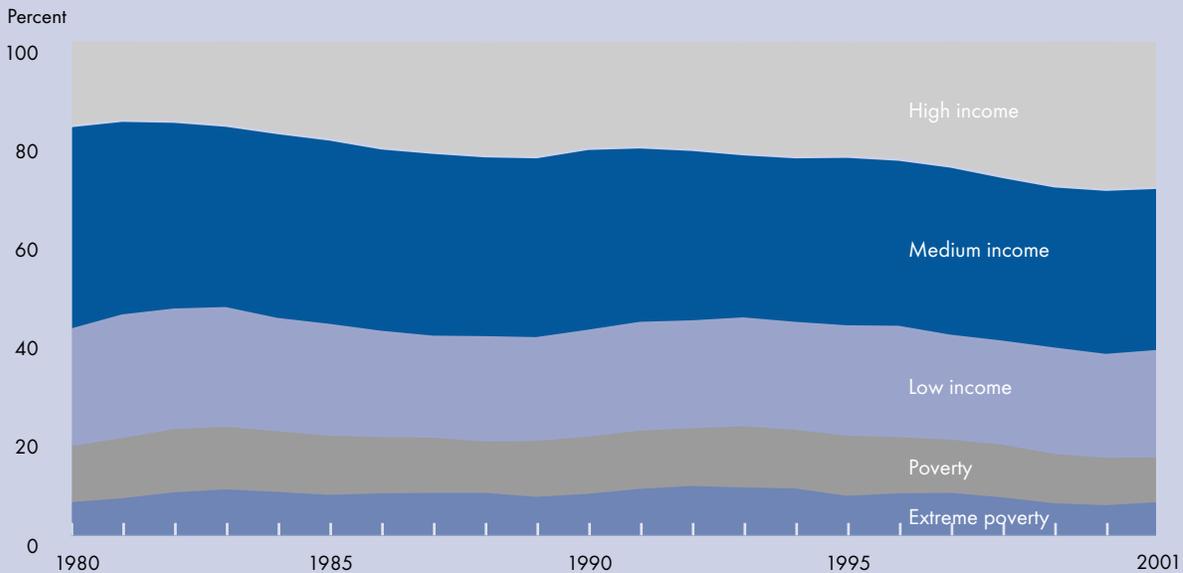


- The proportion of children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold was 16 percent in 2001. The official poverty rate for children has fluctuated since the early 1980s: it reached a high of 22 percent in 1993, decreased to 16 percent in 2000, and has remained stable since.⁴² In response to the National Academy of Sciences's recommendations, the U.S. Census Bureau is researching alternative poverty measures.⁴³
- The poverty rate for children living in female-householder families (no spouse present) also fluctuated since 1980, but experienced a steeper decline between 1993 and 2000 than did the rate for all children. In 1993, 54 percent of children living in female-householder families were living in poverty; by 2001, this proportion had decreased to 39 percent. This change is even more pronounced for Black children: the percentage of Black children living in female-householder families in poverty wavered around 66 percent until 1993 and has since declined to 47 percent in 2001.
- Children under age 6 are more likely to be living in families with incomes below the poverty line than children ages 6 to 17. In 2001, 18 percent of children under age 6 lived in poverty, compared with 15 percent of older children.
- Children in married-couple families are much less likely to be living in poverty than children living only with their mothers. In 2001, 8 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared with 39 percent in female-householder families.
- This contrast by family structure is especially pronounced among certain racial and ethnic groups. For example, in 2001, 10 percent of Black children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 47 percent of Black children in female-householder families. Twenty percent of Hispanic children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 49 percent in female-householder families.
- The poverty rate is much higher for Black or Hispanic children than for White, non-Hispanic children. In 2001, 9 percent of White, non-Hispanic children lived in poverty, compared with 30 percent of Black children and 27 percent of Hispanic children.

The full distribution of the income of children’s families is important, not just the percentage of children living in poverty. The rise in the number of children living in affluent families tells us that a growing proportion of America’s children live in households experiencing economic well-being. The growing gap between rich and poor children suggests that poor children may experience more relative deprivation even if the percentage of poor children is declining.

Indicator ECON1.B

Percentage of related children under age 18 by family income relative to the poverty line, 1980-2001



NOTE: Estimates refer to children under age 18 who are related to the householder. The income classes are derived from the ratio of the family’s income to the family’s poverty threshold. Extreme poverty is less than 50 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., \$9,052 for a family of four in 2001). Poverty is between 50 and 99 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$9,052 and \$18,103 for a family of four in 2001). Low income is between 100 and 199 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$18,104 and \$36,207 for a family of four in 2001). Medium income is between 200 and 399 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$36,208 and \$72,415 for a family of four in 2001). High income is 400 percent of the poverty threshold or more (i.e., more than \$72,416 for a family of four in 2001).⁴⁴

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, March Current Population Survey.

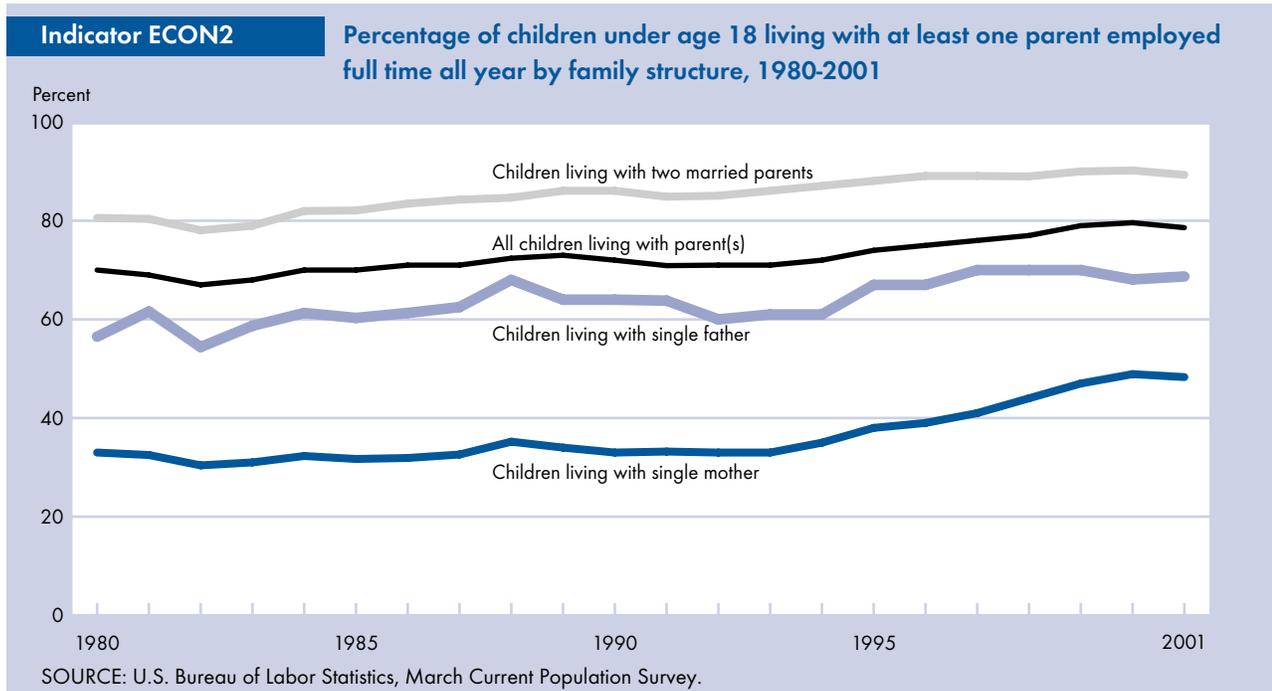
- In 2001, more children lived in families with medium income (33 percent) than in other income groups. Smaller percentages of children lived in families with low income and with high income (22 and 29 percent, respectively).
- The percentage of children living in families with medium income fell from 41 percent in 1980 to 33 percent in 2001, while the percentage of children living in families with high income rose from 17 to 29 percent.

- The percentage of children living in families experiencing extreme poverty was 7 percent in 1980. This percentage rose to 10 percent in 1992 and has gradually decreased to 7 percent in 2001. Concurrently, three times as many children lived in families with very high incomes in 2001 as in 1980 (13 and 4 percent, respectively).

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables ECON1.A and ECON1.B on pages 88-89. Endnotes begin on page 63.

Secure Parental Employment

Secure parental employment reduces the incidence of poverty and its attendant risks to children. Since most parents who obtain health insurance for themselves and their children do so through their employers, a secure job can also be a key variable in determining whether children have access to health care. Secure parental employment may also enhance children's psychological well-being and improve family functioning by reducing stress and other negative effects that unemployment and underemployment can have on parents.^{45,46} One measure of secure parental employment is the percentage of children whose resident parent or parents were employed full time during a given year.



- The percentage of children who had at least one parent working year round, full time fell slightly in 2001 to 79 percent. This was slightly below its peak of 80 percent reached the year before, but about the same as in 1999. Despite the decline, this proportion still remained quite high in its historical context. Since 1992, when the proportion was at its lowest point for the decade (71 percent), the trend in secure parental employment has paralleled the overall trend in employment, rising by about 10 percentage points to its peak in 2000.
- This past year, the change in secure parental employment was similar for children living in married two-parent and single-mother families. Over the decade, however, a disproportionate share of the increase in the percentage of children living with at least one parent employed full time all year was due to the increase in the percentage of children living with single mothers who are employed.
- In 2001, 89 percent of children living in married two-parent families had at least one parent who was a full-time, year-round worker. In contrast, 69 percent of children living with a single father and 48 percent of children living with a single mother had a parent who worked full time all year.
- Children living in poverty are much less likely to have a parent working full time all year than

children living at or above the poverty line (32 percent and 87 percent, respectively, in 2001). For children living with two married parents, 54 percent of children living below the poverty line had at least one parent working full time all year, compared with 92 percent of children living at or above the poverty line.

- In recent years, however, children living below the poverty line have become increasingly likely to have one or two parents working full time all year. In 1993, 21 percent of children below poverty had at least one parent working full time all year. In 2001, this statistic was 32 percent.
- Black, non-Hispanic children and Hispanic children were less likely than White, non-Hispanic children to have a parent working full time all year. About 73 percent of Hispanic children and 65 percent of Black, non-Hispanic children lived in families with secure parental employment in 2001, compared with 84 percent of White children.
- During the past two decades, the percentage of children living in married two-parent families in which both the mother and father worked full time all year has almost doubled, increasing from 17 to 32 percent.

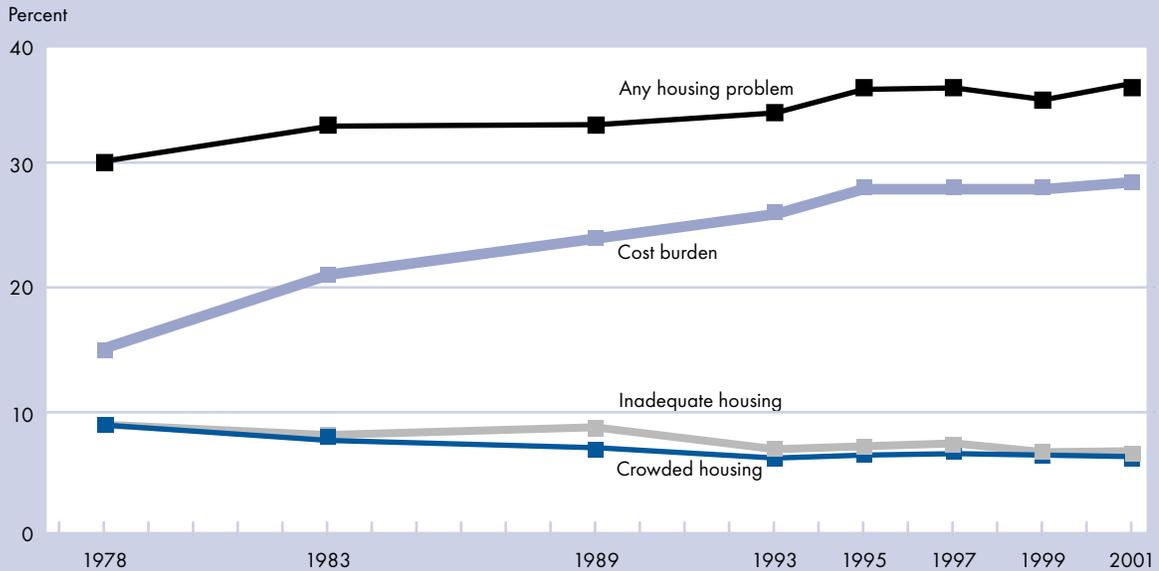
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table ECON2 on pages 90-91. Endnotes begin on page 63.

Housing Problems

Inadequate, crowded, or costly housing can pose serious problems to children’s physical, psychological, or material well-being.⁴⁷ The percentage of households with children that report that they are living in physically inadequate,⁴⁸ crowded, and/or costly housing provides an estimate of the percentage of children whose well-being may be affected by their family’s housing.

Indicator ECON3

Percentage of households with children under age 18 that report housing problems by type of problem, selected years 1978-2001



NOTE: Data are available for 1978, 1983, 1989, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2001.

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Annual Housing Survey and American Housing Survey. Tabulated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

- In 2001, 36 percent of U.S. households (both owners and renters) with children had one or more of three housing problems: physically inadequate housing, crowded housing, or housing that cost more than 30 percent of household income.⁴⁹
- The share of U.S. households with children that have any housing problems rose from 30 percent in 1978 to 36 percent in 1995 and has remained stable since.
- Inadequate housing, defined as housing with severe or moderate physical problems, has become slightly less common. In 2001, 7 percent of households with children had inadequate housing, compared with 9 percent in 1978.
- Crowded housing, defined as housing in which there is more than one person per room, has also declined slightly among households with children, from 9 percent in 1978 to 6 percent in 2001.
- Improvements in housing conditions, however, have been accompanied by rising housing costs. Between 1978 and 2001, the percentage of households with children with a cost burden—that is, paying more than 30 percent of their income for housing—rose from 15 percent to 28 percent. The percentage with

severe cost burdens, paying more than half of their income for housing, rose from 6 to 11 percent.

- Households that receive no rental assistance and have severe cost burdens or physical problems are defined as having severe housing problems.⁵⁰ In 2001, 11 percent of households with children had severe housing problems. Although the 1997, 1999, and 2001 data are not directly comparable with estimates for earlier years, severe housing problems increased from 8 percent in 1978 to 12 percent in 1995 because of a rise in the percentage of families reporting severe cost burdens.
- Severe housing problems are especially prevalent among very-low-income renters.⁵¹ In 2001, 31 percent of very-low-income renter households with children reported severe housing problems, with severe cost burden the major problem. Although the percentage of these families having severe housing problems has fallen since 1978, the number with such problems grew from 1.4 million in 1978 to 1.8 million in 2001, again because the number of households with severe cost burdens rose.

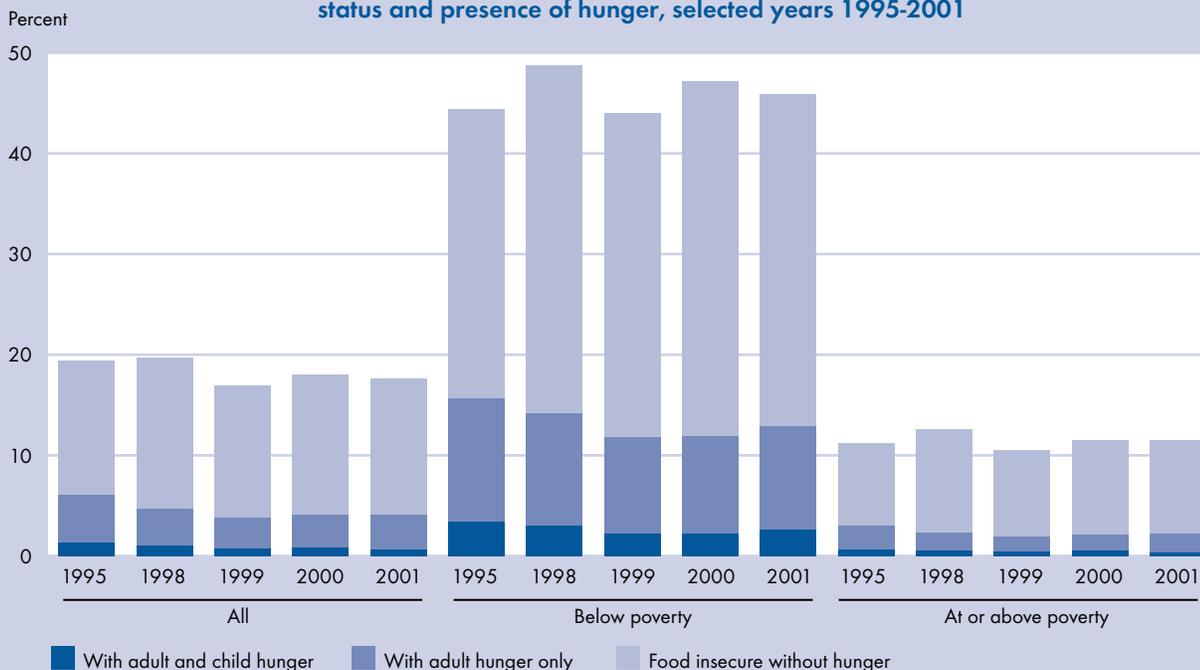
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table ECON3 on page 92. Endnotes begin on page 63.

Food Security and Diet Quality

Children’s good health and development depend on a diet sufficient in nutrients and calories. A family’s ability to provide for their children’s nutritional needs is linked to the family’s food security—that is, to its access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.⁵² Food-insecure households report difficulty obtaining enough food, reduced diet quality, anxiety about their food supply, increased use of emergency food sources or other coping behaviors, and, sometimes, reduced food intake and hunger. In most of these households, children’s eating patterns are disrupted to some extent, and in about 1 out of 4 food-insecure households, children’s food intake is reduced at times because the household cannot afford enough food. However, children—especially younger children—in U.S. households are usually protected from hunger even if adults are hungry because they lack sufficient resources for food. Only in the most severely food-insecure households are children as well as adults hungry due to the food insecurity in the household.⁵³

Indicator ECON4.A

Percentage of children under age 18 in food-insecure households by poverty status and presence of hunger, selected years 1995-2001



NOTE: Statistics are not shown for 1996 and 1997 because differences in screening procedures make them not comparable with the other years. These statistics should be compared across 2-year, 4-year, or 6-year periods to avoid seasonal effects that result from year-to-year alternation in the month in which the survey was conducted.

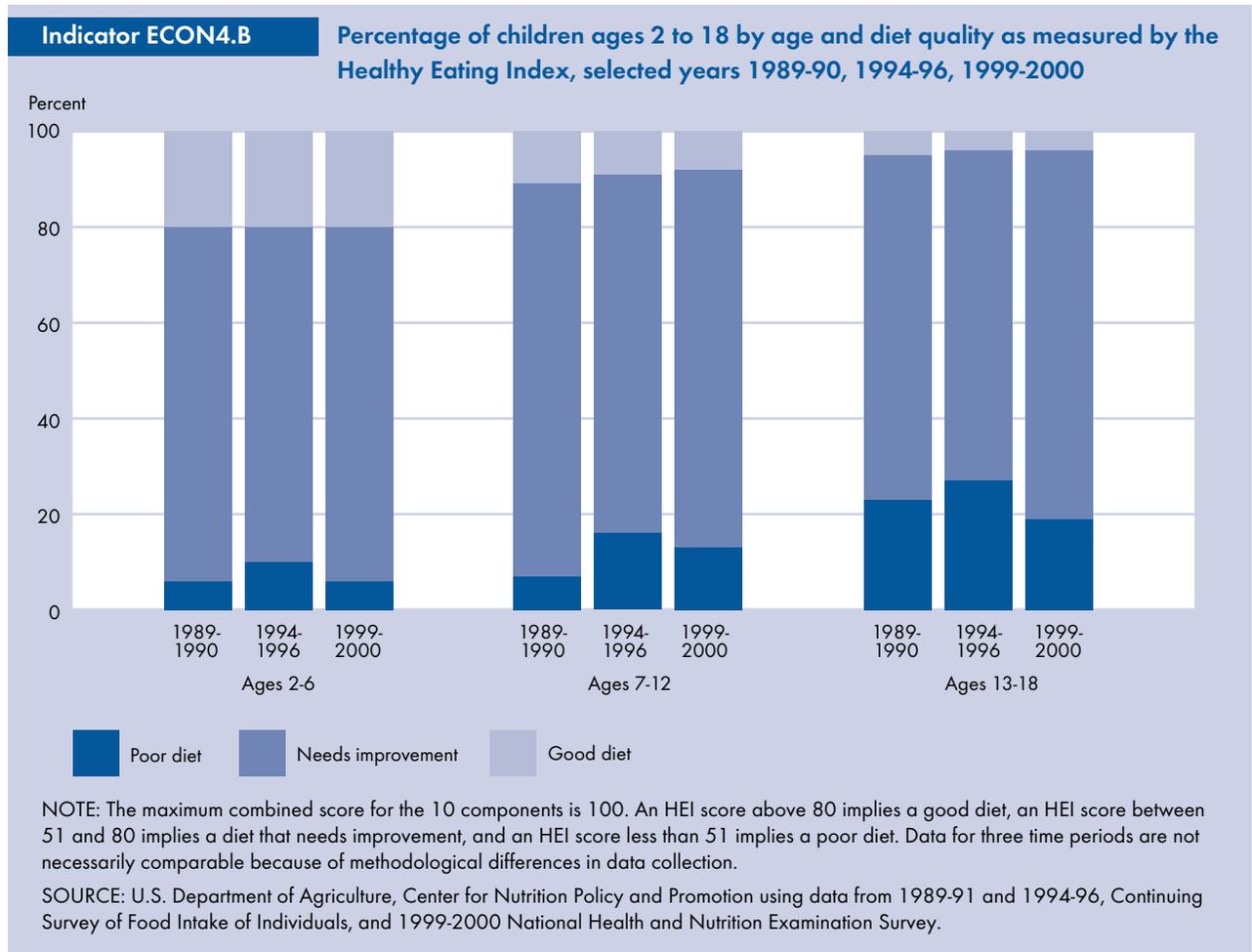
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service and Food and Nutrition Service.

- Just under half a million children (0.6 percent) lived in households with child hunger in 2001, statistically unchanged from 1999 and down from 1.3 percent in 1995. In 2001, 4.1 percent of all children lived in households classified as food insecure with hunger, up from 3.8 percent in 1999 but below the 1995 rate of 6.1 percent. In most of these households, however, hunger did not extend to the children.
- Children living in poverty are much more likely than others to experience food insecurity and hunger. In 2001, about 2.6 percent of the children living in poverty were in households with hunger among children, compared with 0.3 percent of children in households with incomes at or above

the poverty line. In 2001, nearly 45.9 percent of children living in poverty were in food-insecure households, compared with 11.5 percent of children living at or above the poverty line.

- Most food-insecure households do not report hunger among household members. For example, of the 17.6 percent of children who lived in food-insecure households in 2001, most (13.5 percent) lived in households classified as food insecure without hunger, 3.5 percent lived in households with hunger among adults only, and 0.6 percent lived in households with hunger among both adults and children.

The diet quality of children and adolescents is of concern because poor eating patterns established in childhood usually transfer to adulthood. Such patterns are major factors in the increasing rate of child obesity over the past decades and are contributing factors to certain diseases. The Healthy Eating Index (HEI) is a summary measure of diet quality. The HEI consists of 10 components, each representing different aspects of a healthful diet. Components 1 through 5 measure the degree to which a person's diet conforms to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Guide Pyramid serving recommendations for the five major food groups: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat/meat alternatives. Components 6 and 7 measure fat and saturated fat consumption. Components 8 and 9 measure cholesterol intake and sodium intake, and component 10 measures the degree of variety in a person's diet. Scores for each component are given equal weight and added to calculate an overall HEI score. This overall HEI score is then used to determine diet quality based on a scale established by nutrition experts.⁵⁴



- In 1999-2000, as in previous years, most children had a diet that was poor or needed improvement, as indicated by their HEI score.
- As children get older, their diet quality declines. In 1999-2000, among children ages 2 to 6, 20 percent had a good diet, 74 percent had a diet needing improvement, and 6 percent had a poor diet. For those ages 7 to 12, 8 percent had a good diet, 79 percent had a diet needing improvement, and 13 percent had a poor diet.
- The lower-quality diets of older children are linked to declines in their fruit and sodium scores.
- Children in families below poverty are less likely than higher-income children to have a diet rated as good. In 1999-2000, for children ages 2 to 6, 17 percent of those in poverty had a good diet, compared with 22 percent of those living at or above the poverty line.

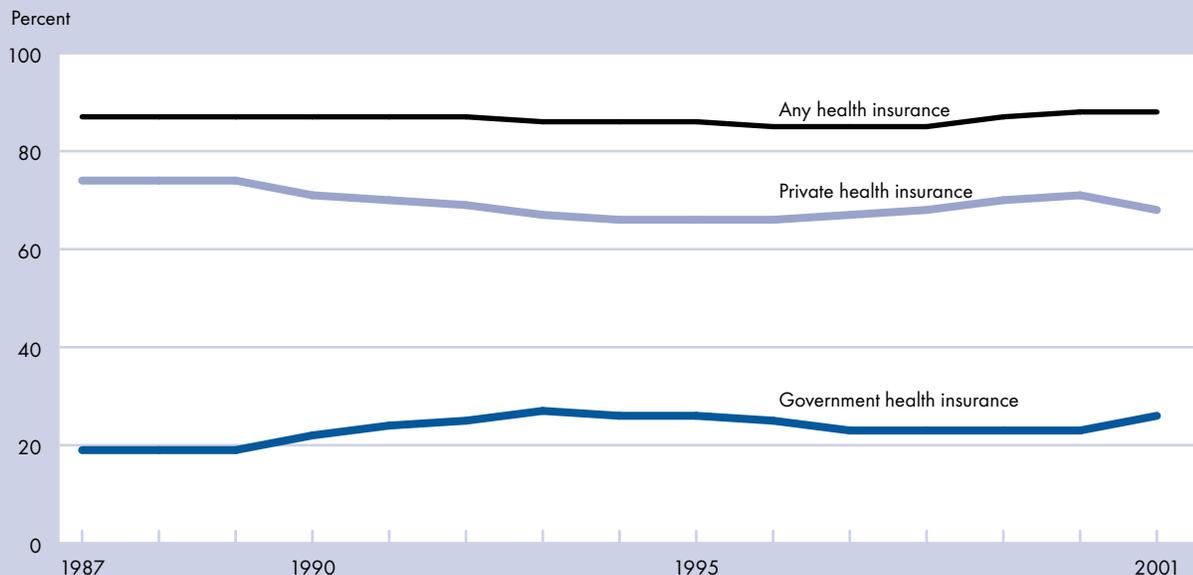
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables ECON4.A - ECON4.D on pages 93-95. Endnotes begin on page 63.

Access to Health Care

Children with access to health care have reasonable assurance of obtaining the medical attention needed to maintain their physical well-being. Access involves both the availability of a regular source of care and the ability of the child's family, or someone else, to pay for it. Children with health insurance (government or private) are much more likely than children without insurance to have a regular and accessible source of health care. The percentage of children who have health insurance coverage for at least part of the year is one measure of the extent to which families can obtain preventive care or health care for a sick or injured child.

Indicator ECON5.A

Percentage of children under age 18 covered by health insurance by type of health insurance, 1987-2001



NOTE: Government health insurance for children consists primarily of Medicaid, but also includes Medicare, SCHIP (the State Children's Health Insurance Programs), and CHAMPUS/Tricare, the health benefit program for members of the armed forces and their dependents. Estimates beginning in 1999 include follow-up questions to verify health insurance status. Estimates for 1999 through 2001 are not directly comparable with earlier years, before the verification questions were added. Children are considered to be covered by health insurance if they had government or private coverage any time during the year.

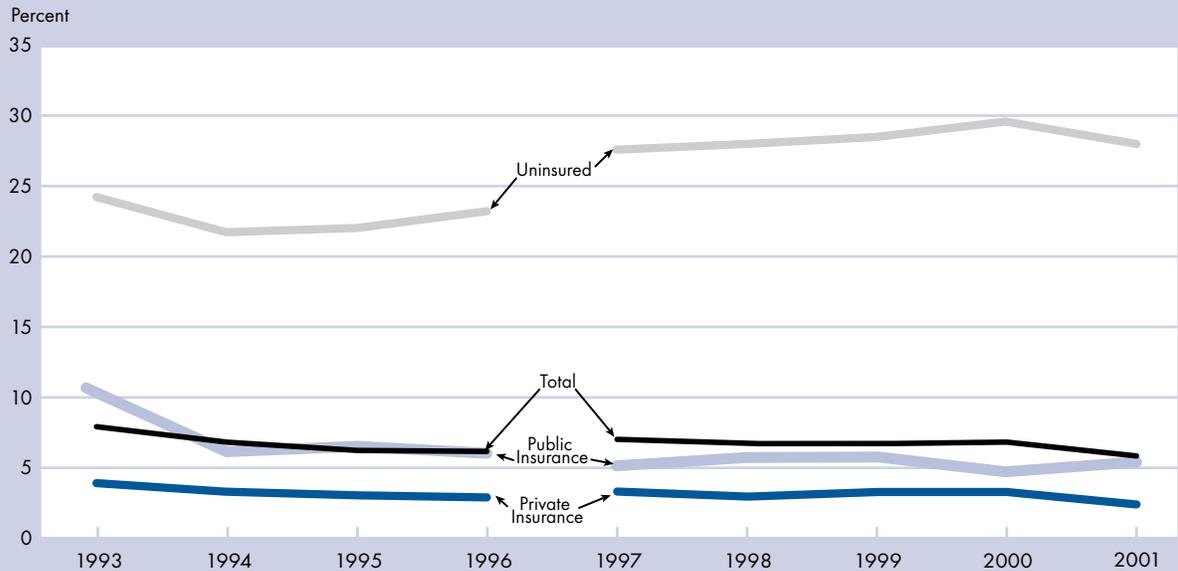
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, March Current Population Survey.

- In 2001, 88 percent of children had health insurance coverage at some point during the year, maintaining the all-time high established in 2000. However, between 85 and 88 percent of children have had health insurance in each year since 1987.
- The number of children who had no health insurance at any time during 2001 was 8.5 million (12 percent of all children), which was similar to 2000.
- The proportion of children covered by private health insurance decreased from 74 percent in 1987 to 66 percent in 1994, then increased to 70 percent in 1999, but dropped down to 68 percent in 2001. During the same time period, the proportion of children covered by government health insurance grew from 19 percent in 1987 to a high of 27 percent in 1993. Government health insurance decreased until 1999 and then began to climb again to 26 percent in 2001.⁵⁵
- Hispanic children are less likely to have health insurance than either White, non-Hispanic or Black children. In 2001, 76 percent of Hispanic children were covered by health insurance, compared with 93 percent of White, non-Hispanic children and 86 percent of Black children.
- Overall rates of coverage are about the same by child's age. However, the type of insurance does vary by the age of the child: government-provided insurance decreases but private health insurance increases with age.

The health of children depends at least partially on their access to health services. Health care for children includes physical examinations, preventive care, health education, observations, screening, immunizations, and sick care.⁵⁶ Having a usual source of care—a particular person or place a child goes for sick and preventive care—facilitates the timely and appropriate use of pediatric services.^{57,58} Emergency rooms are excluded here as a usual source of care because their focus on emergency care generally excludes the other elements of health care.⁵⁹

Indicator ECON5.B

Percentage of children under age 18 with no usual source of health care by type of health insurance, 1993-2001



NOTE: Emergency rooms are excluded as a usual source of care. A break is shown in the lines because in 1997, the National Health Interview Survey was redesigned. Data for 1997-2001 are not strictly comparable with earlier data.
SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey.

- In 2001, 6 percent of children had no usual source of health care, which is the lowest rate recorded since 1993.
- There are differences in the percentage of children having no usual source of care by type of health insurance coverage. In 2001, children with public insurance, such as Medicaid, were more likely to have no usual source of care than were children with private insurance (5 percent and 2 percent, respectively).
- Uninsured children are much more likely to have no usual source of care than are children who have health insurance. Children who were uninsured were nearly twelve times as likely as those with private insurance to have no usual source of care in 2001.

- In 2001, 12 percent of children in families below the poverty line had no usual source of care, compared with 4 percent of children in higher-income families.
- Older children are slightly more likely than younger children to lack a usual source of health care. In 2001, 6 percent of children ages 5 to 17 had no usual source of care, compared with 4 percent of children ages 0 to 4.

Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables ECON5.A and ECON5.B on pages 96-97. Endnotes begin on page 63.

Indicators Needed

Economic Security

Economic security is multifaceted, and several measures are needed to adequately represent its various aspects. While this year's report provides some information on economic and food security, additional indicators are needed on:

- *Economic security.* Changes in children's economic well-being over time need to be anchored in an average standard of living context. Multiple measures of family income or consumption, some of which might incorporate estimates of various family assets, could produce more reliable estimates of changes in children's economic well-being over time.
- *Long-term poverty among families with children.* Although good Federal data are available on child poverty and alternative measures are being developed (see Indicators ECON1.A and ECON1.B, Child Poverty and Family Income, and the discussion of alternative poverty rates on page 89), the surveys that collect these data do not capture information on long-term poverty. Long-term poverty among children can be estimated from existing longitudinal surveys, but changes to current surveys would be needed to provide estimates on a regular basis. Since long-term poverty can have serious negative consequences for children's well-being, regularly collected and reported data are needed to produce regular estimates.
- *Homelessness.* At present, there are no regularly collected data on the number of homeless children in the United States, although there have been occasional studies aimed at estimating this number.