

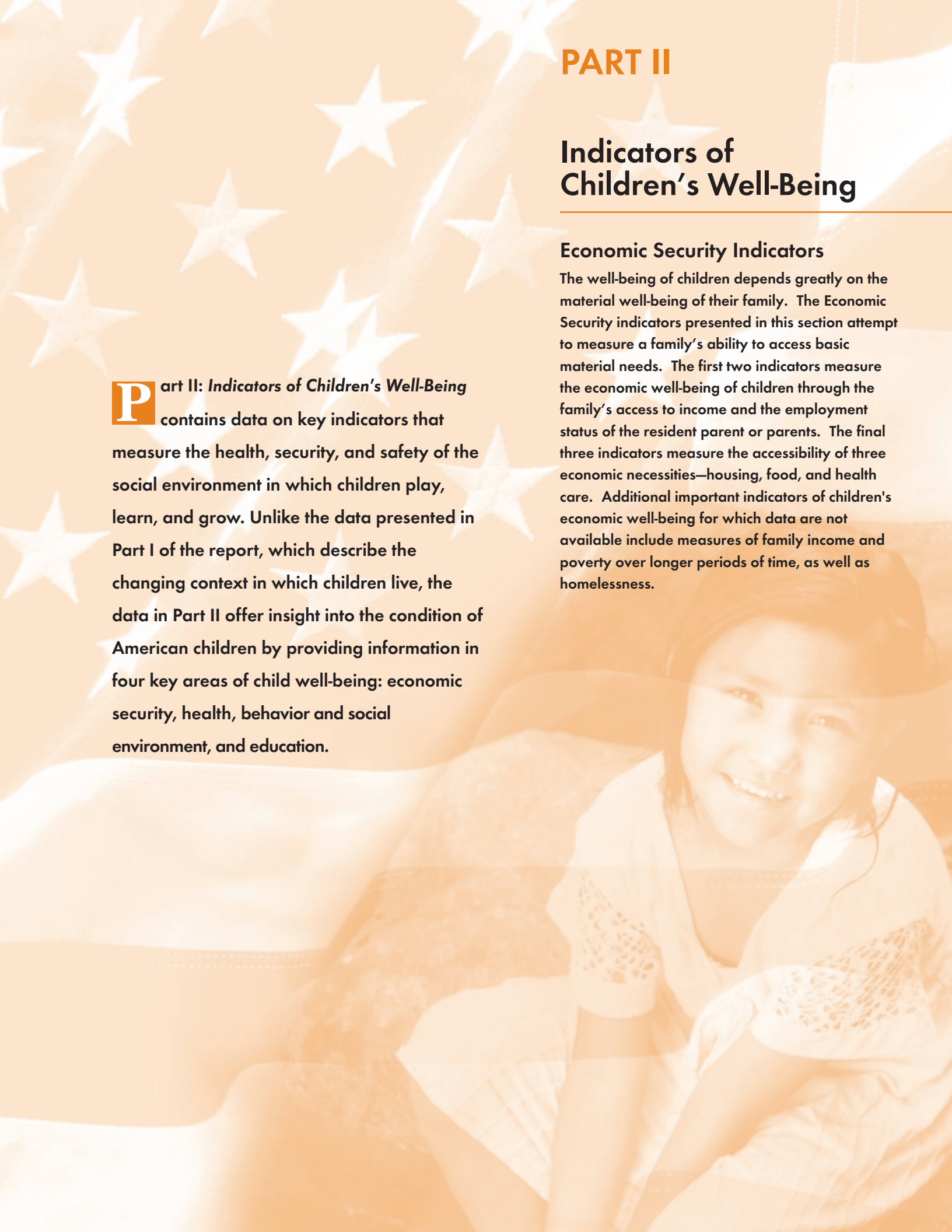
PART II

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.

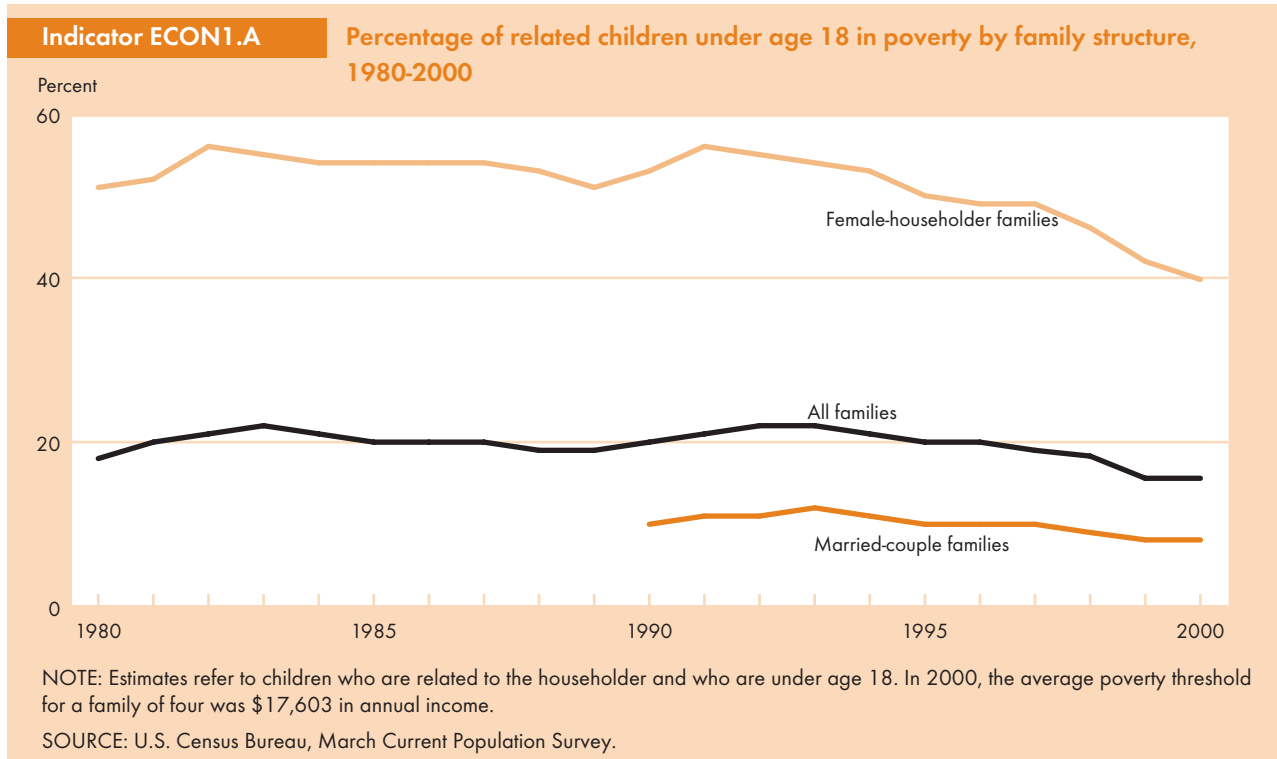
Economic Security Indicators

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,²² to become teen parents,²³ and, as adults, to earn less and be unemployed more frequently.²² 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.

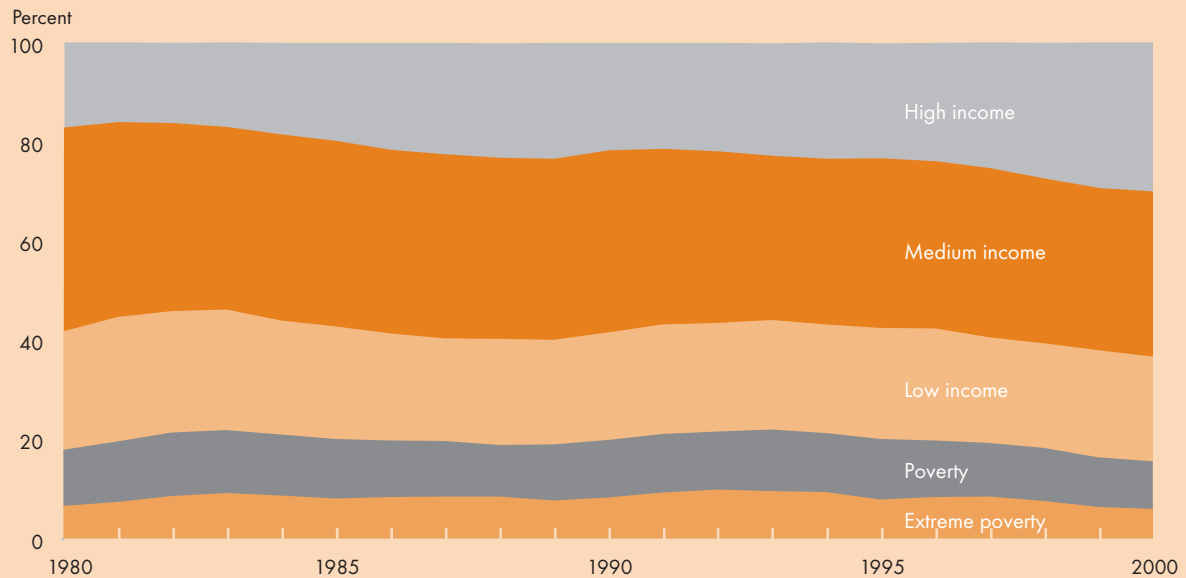


- The proportion of children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold was 16 percent in 2000. The official poverty rate for children has fluctuated since the early 1980s: it reached a high of 22 percent in 1993 and has since decreased to 16 percent, the lowest rate since 1979. In response to the National Academy of Science's recommendations, the Census Bureau is researching alternative poverty measures.²⁴
- This decrease in the poverty rate is also apparent for children living in female-householder (no spouse present) families. In 1980, 51 percent of children living in female-householder (no spouse present) families were living in poverty; by 2000, this proportion had decreased to 40 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 49 percent in 2000.
- 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 2000, 17 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 2000, 8 percent of children in married-couple families were living in poverty, compared with 49 percent in female-householder families.
- This contrast by family structure is especially pronounced among certain racial and ethnic groups. For example, in 2000, 8 percent of black children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 49 percent of black children in female-householder families. Twenty-one percent of Hispanic children in married-couple families lived in poverty, compared with 48 percent in female-householder families.
- The poverty rate is much higher for black or Hispanic children than for white, non-Hispanic children. In 2000, 9 percent of white, non-Hispanic children lived in poverty, compared with 30 percent of black children and 27 percent of Hispanic children.
- In 2000, 6 percent of all children lived in families with incomes less than half the poverty level, or \$8,802 a year on average for a family of four, while 26 percent of children lived in families with incomes less than 150 percent of the poverty level, or \$26,405 a year on average for a family of four.

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, 1980-2000



NOTE: Estimates refer to children who are related to the householder and who are under age 18. 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., \$8,802 for a family of four in 2000). Poverty is between 50 and 99 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$8,802 and \$17,602 for a family of four in 2000). Low income is between 100 and 199 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$17,603 and \$35,205 for a family of four in 2000). Medium income is between 200 and 399 percent of the poverty threshold (i.e., between \$35,206 and \$70,411 for a family of four in 2000). High income is 400 percent of the poverty threshold or more (i.e., more than \$70,412 for a family of four in 2000).²⁵

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

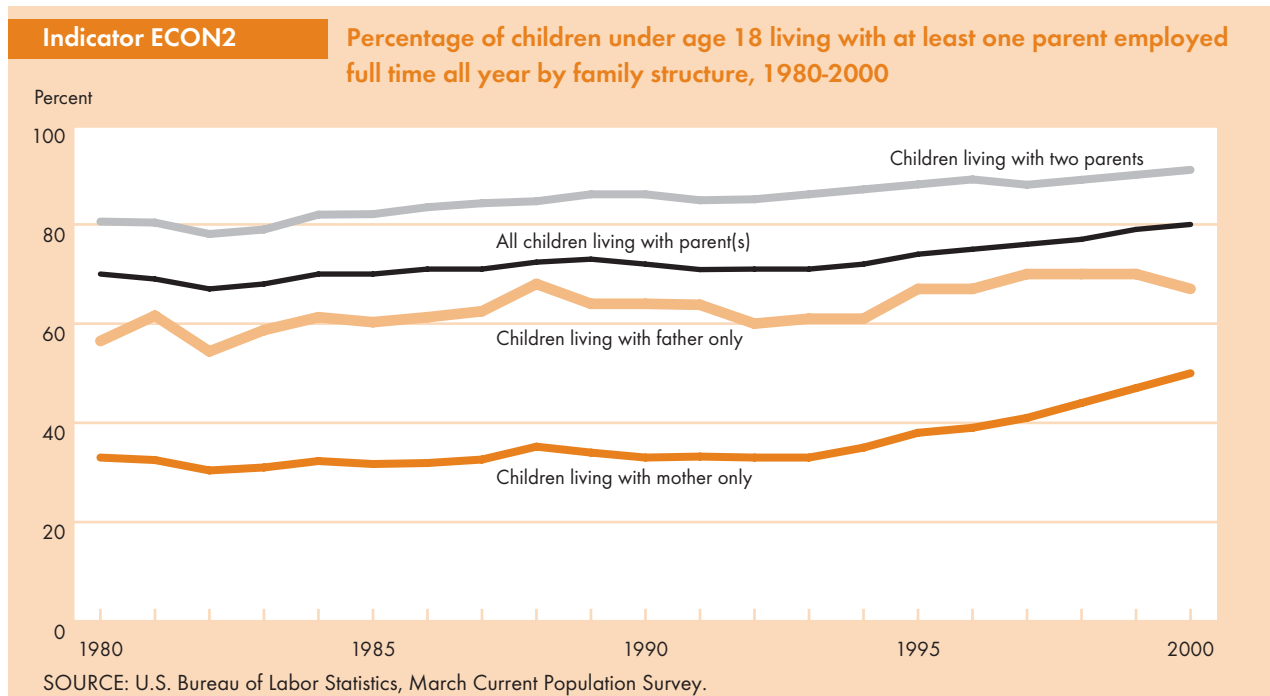
- In 2000, more children lived in families with medium income (34 percent) than in other income groups. Smaller percentages of children lived in families with low income and with high income (21 and 30 percent, respectively).
- The percentage of children living in families with medium income fell from 41 percent in 1980 to 34 percent in 2000, while the percentage of children living in families with high income rose from 17 to 30 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 6 percent in 2000. Concurrently, three times as many children lived in families with very high income in 2000 than 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 79-80. Endnotes begin on page 59.

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.^{26,27} One measure of secure parental employment is the percentage of children whose resident parent or parents were employed full time during a given year.



- Since 1990, the trend in secure parental employment has paralleled the overall trend in employment. The percentage of children who had at least one parent working full time all year continued to increase in 2000 to 80 percent from 79 percent in 1999.
- 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, which increased from 33 percent in 1993 to 50 percent in 2000.
- In 2000, 91 percent of children living in two-parent families had at least one parent who was a full-time, year-round worker. In contrast, 67 percent of children living with a single father and 50 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 (35 percent and 89 percent in 2000, respectively). For children living with two parents, 59 percent of children living at or below the poverty line had at least one parent working full time all year, compared with 94 percent of children living above poverty.
- 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. By 2000, this statistic had risen to 35 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. However, the proportions of black, non-Hispanic children and Hispanic children with a parent employed full time all year have increased much faster than for white, non-Hispanic children. Between 1993 and 2000, the percentage of children who had a parent working full time all year increased from 49 percent to 69 percent for black, non-Hispanic children, and from 57 percent to 72 percent for Hispanic children. In comparison, the percentage of white, non-Hispanic children that had a parent working full time all year increased from 79 percent to 85 percent during the same period.
- During the past two decades, the percentage of children living in two-parent families in which both the mother and father worked full time all year has almost doubled, increasing from 17 to 33 percent.

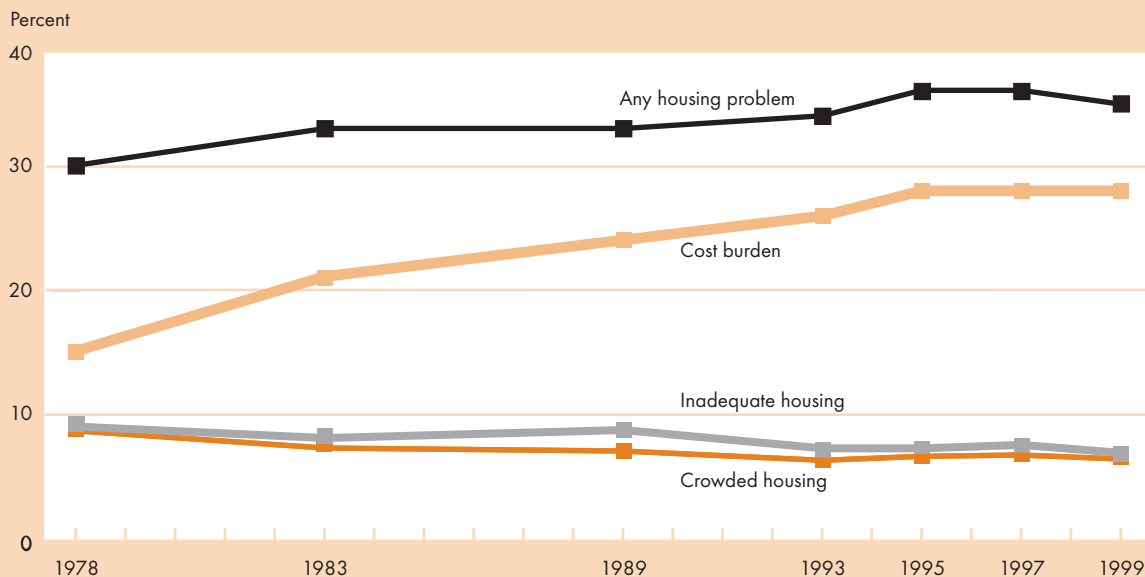
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table ECON2 on pages 81-82. Endnotes begin on page 59.

Housing Problems

Inadequate, crowded, or costly housing can pose serious problems to children’s physical, psychological, or material well-being.²⁸ The percentage of households with children that report that they are living in physically inadequate,²⁹ 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 1978-99



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

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 1999, 35 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.³⁰
- The share of U.S. households with children that have any housing problems rose between 1978 and 1995 and has since stabilized.
- Inadequate housing, defined as housing with severe or moderate physical problems, has become slightly less common. In 1999, 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 7 percent in 1999.
- Improvements in housing conditions, however, have been accompanied by rising housing costs. Between 1978 and 1999, 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.³¹ In 1999, 11 percent of households with children had severe housing problems. Although the 1997 and 1999 data are not directly comparable to 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.³² In 1999, 29 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 1999, again because the number of households with severe cost burdens rose.

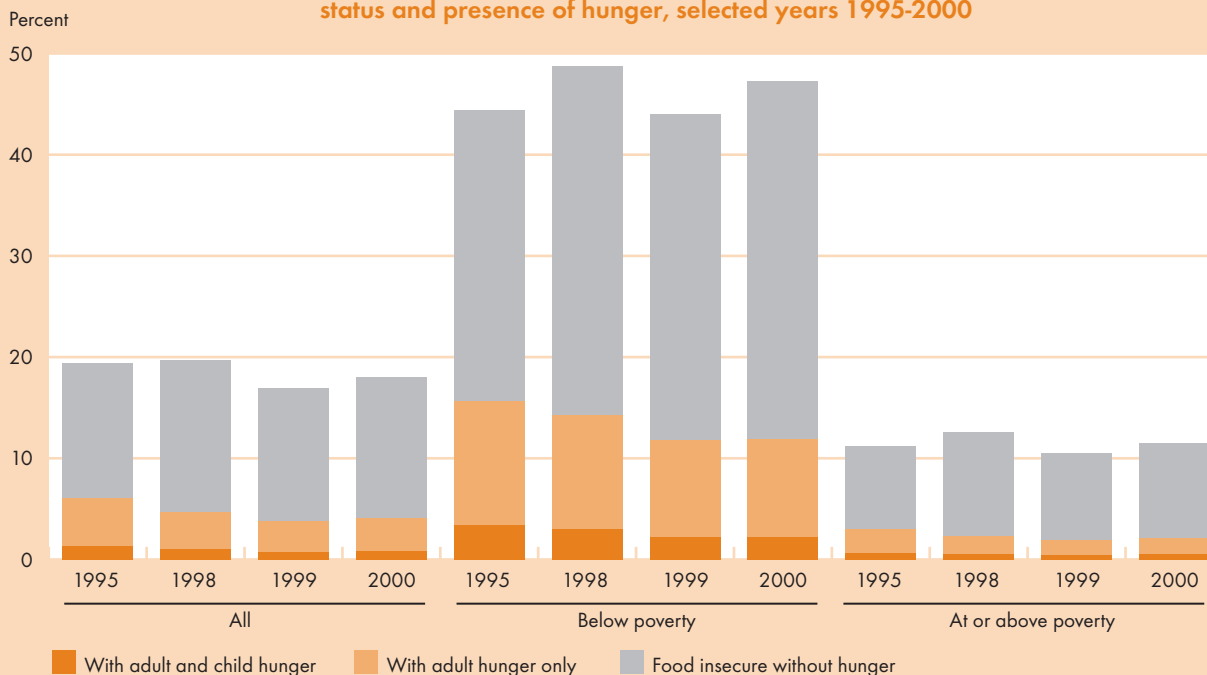
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Table ECON3 on page 83. Endnotes begin on page 59.

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.³³ 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, hunger. Previous reports of *America’s Children* included the number of children in households where at least one member (either an adult or a child) experienced food insecurity or hunger. However, children—especially younger children—in such households are usually protected from substantial reductions in food intake. Thus, this report introduces an additional measure: the number of children in households where at least one child registered hunger at some time during the year because the household lacked sufficient money for food.³⁴

Indicator ECON4.A

Percentage of children under age 18 in food-insecure households by poverty status and presence of hunger, selected years 1995-2000



NOTE: These statistics are based on a new measure of hunger among children in U.S. households, replacing the measure previously reported in *America’s Children*. Data are not shown for 1996 and 1997 because differences in screening procedures make them not comparable to the other years. Year-to-year deviations from a consistent downward trend include a substantial 2-year cycle that may result from a seasonal influence on reported prevalence rates. To avoid a potential bias related to season of survey, rates for 2000 are compared to 1998 throughout this report.

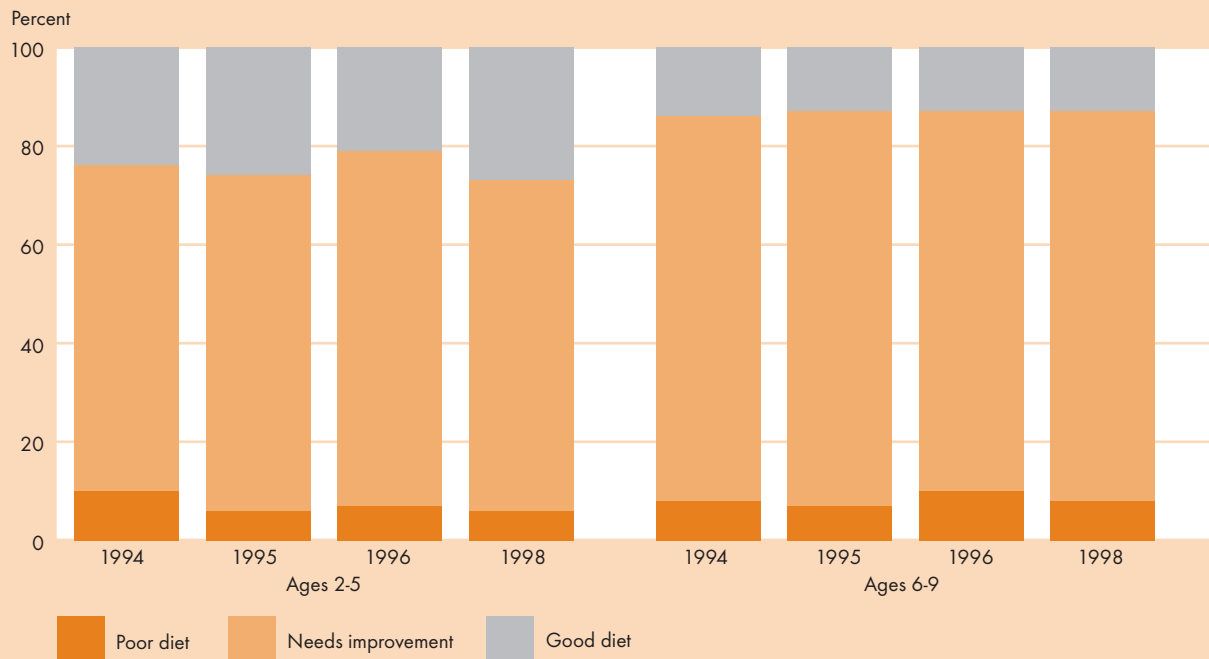
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service and Food and Nutrition Service.

- Over half a million children (0.8 percent) lived in households with child hunger in 2000, down from 1.0 percent in 1998. In 2000, 4.1 percent of all children lived in households in which at least one person experienced food insecurity with hunger, down from 4.7 percent in 1998.
- Children living in households with incomes below poverty are much more likely than others to experience food insecurity and hunger. In 2000, about 2.2 percent of the children living in poverty were in households with hunger among children, compared with 0.5 percent of children living at or above poverty. In 2000, 11.9 percent of children living in poverty were part of households with hunger among adults or children, compared with 2.1 percent of children living at or above poverty.
- Most food-insecure households with children do not report hunger among household members. For example, although 18 percent of households were food insecure in 2000, less than 1 percent reported adult and child hunger.
- In 2000, 13.9 percent of all children and 35.3 percent of children in poverty lived in households classified as food insecure without hunger.

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 to 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.³⁵

Indicator ECON4.B

Percentage of children ages 2 to 9 by age and diet quality as measured by the Healthy Eating Index, selected years 1994-1998



NOTE: The maximum combined score for the 10 components is 100. An HEI score above 80 implies a good diet, an HEI score between 51 and 80 implies a diet that needs improvement, and an HEI score less than 51 implies a poor diet.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Continuing Survey of Food Intakes by Individuals.

- In 1998, most children had a diet that was poor or needed improvement, as indicated by their HEI score.
- The proportion of children ages 2 to 5 with good diets improved from 21 percent to 27 percent between 1996 and 1998, more than the reversing decline from 1995 to 1996.
- The diet quality of children ages 6 to 9 changed little between 1996 to 1998.
- As children get older, their diet quality declines. In 1998, among children ages 2 to 5, 27 percent had a good diet, 67 percent had a diet needing improvement, and 6 percent had a poor diet. For those ages 6 to 9, 13 percent had a good diet, 79 percent had a diet needing improvement, and 8 percent had a poor diet.
- The lower-quality diets of older children are linked to declines in their fruit and sodium consumption scores.
- Children in families below poverty are less likely than higher-income children to have a diet rated as good. In 1998, for children ages 2 to 5, 22 percent of those in poverty had a good diet, compared with 29 percent of those living above the poverty line.

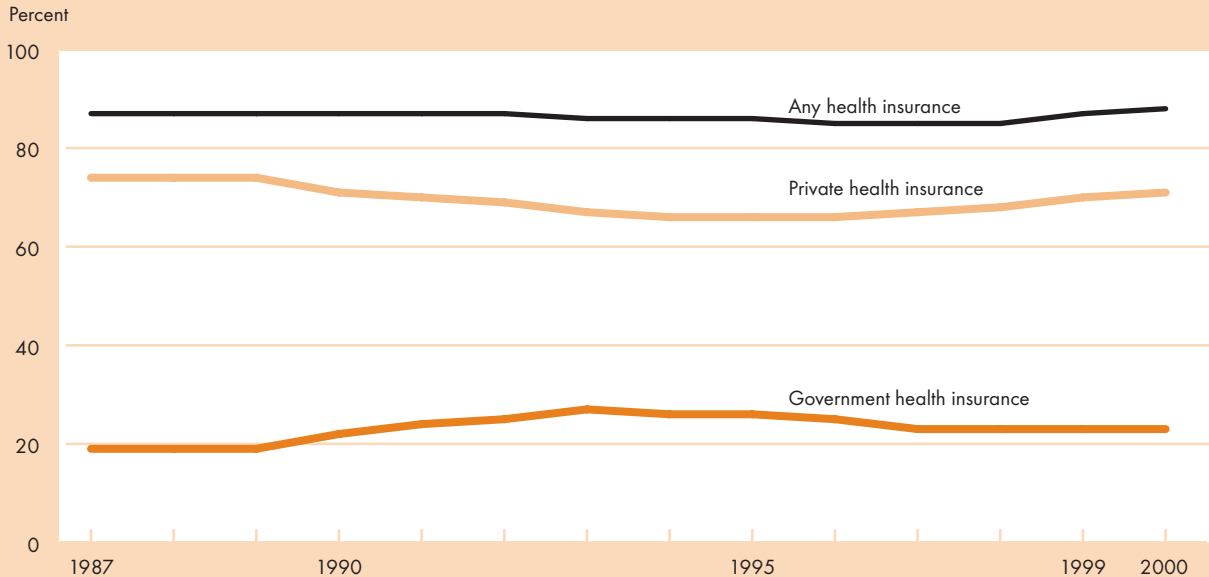
Bullets contain references to data that can be found in Tables ECON4.A - ECON4.D on pages 84-86. Endnotes begin on page 59.

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, 1987-2000



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 and 2000 are not directly comparable with earlier years, before the verification questions were added.

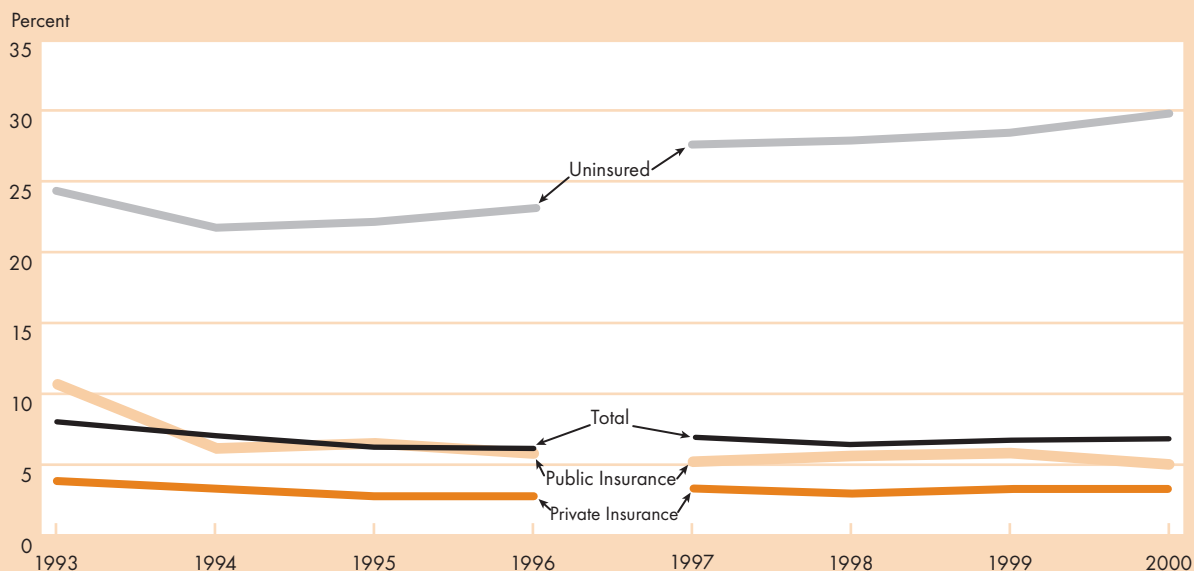
SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, March Current Population Survey.

- In 2000, 88 percent of children had health insurance coverage at some point during the year. 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 2000 was 8.4 million (12 percent of all children). This was significantly lower than the 1999 number and percent of 9.1 million and 13 percent.
- The proportion of children covered by private health insurance decreased from 74 percent in 1987 to 66 percent in 1994 and then increased to 71 percent in 2000. 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; it has since decreased to 23 percent in 1997 and has been fairly stable.³⁶
- Hispanic children are less likely to have health insurance than either white, non-Hispanic or black children. In 2000, 75 percent of Hispanic children were covered by health insurance, compared with 93 percent of white, non-Hispanic children and 87 percent of black children.
- Overall rates of coverage do not differ 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.³⁷ 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.^{38,39} 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.⁴⁰

Indicator ECON5.B

Percentage of children under age 18 with no usual source of health care by type of health insurance, 1993-2000



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 1997-2000 are not strictly comparable with earlier data.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health Interview Survey.

- In 2000, 7 percent of children had no usual source of health care. Between 1993 and 2000, this overall percentage remained relatively stable.
- There are differences by health insurance coverage in the percentage of children having no usual source of care. In 2000, 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 3 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 nine times as likely as those with private insurance to have no usual source of care in 2000.

- In 2000, 12 percent of children in families below the poverty line had no usual source of care, compared with 6 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 2000, 8 percent of children ages 5 to 17 had no usual source of care, compared with 5 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 87-88. Endnotes begin on page 59.

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 Indicator ECON1, Child Poverty and Family Income, and the discussion of alternative poverty rates on page 80), 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.