

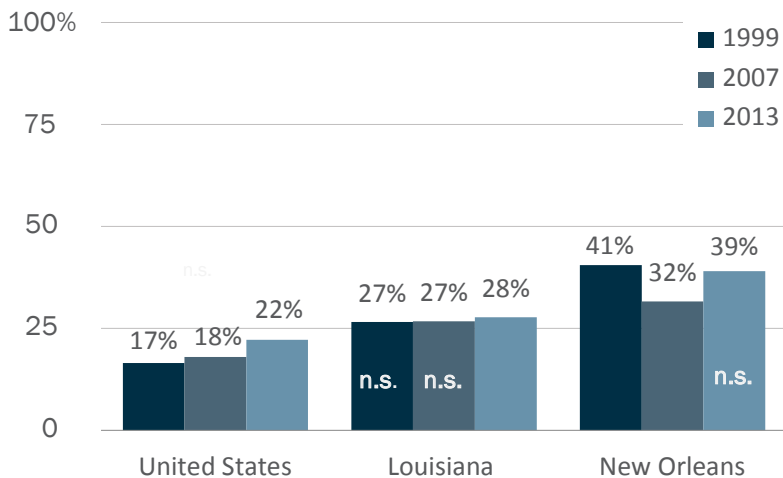
New Orleans Kids, Working Parents, and Poverty

Vicki Mack, The Data Center

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Roughly 78,000 children under 18 years of age live in New Orleans as of 2013. This is a sizable drop from 2000 when over 129,000 children lived in New Orleans.¹ While the number of children in New Orleans is significantly smaller than pre-Katrina, the poverty rate unfortunately is not. The child poverty rate in New Orleans dropped in 2007 but has since increased to the same level it was pre-Katrina. **Today, 39 percent of New Orleans children live in poverty.**

Child poverty rates



Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 SF3, the 2007 American Community Survey, and the 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

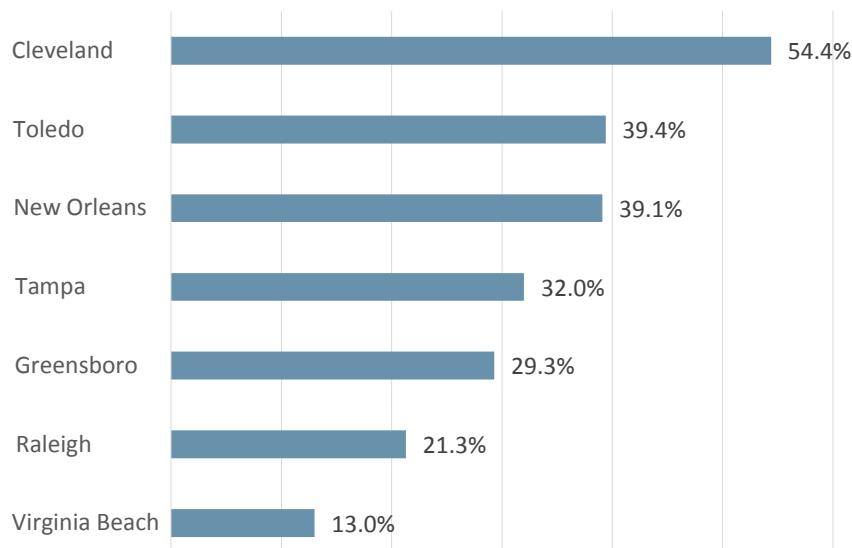
n.s. = On the 1999 bar, n.s. indicates change between 1999 and 2007 is not significant; on the 2007 bar, n.s. indicates change between 2007 and 2013 is not significant; and on the 2013 bar, n.s. indicates change between 1999 and 2013 is not significant.



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The child poverty rate in New Orleans is fully 17 percentage points higher than the national average. Moreover, it is higher than in many comparable U.S. cities. Among the 39 cities with populations between 275,000 and 600,000, New Orleans has the 9th highest child poverty rate. This is particularly concerning given that many of the cities with higher child poverty rates, such as Cleveland, are not experiencing an economic renaissance as in New Orleans.ⁱⁱ Moreover, child poverty in New Orleans is significantly higher than in many cities that New Orleans might aspire to be compared with, such as Tampa and Raleigh.

Child poverty rates in select mid-sized cities, 2013



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For a complete list of the 39 cities with populations between 275,000 and 600,000 and their child poverty rates, see the downloadable spreadsheet accompanying this brief.

Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Poverty's relationship to family structure

By definition, poverty for children is a function of their family's household income. In other words, the wages of adult family members determine whether children live in poverty.

Poverty definition

In this brief we use the official federal poverty definition to measure poverty. Using that measure, poverty status is determined by comparing a family's annual income to a set of poverty thresholds (in dollars) that vary by family size, number of children, and age of householder. If a family's pre-tax income is less than their given poverty threshold, then that family and every individual in it are counted as living in poverty.

Examples of poverty thresholds in 2013

One adult, one child
\$16,057



One adult, two children
\$18,769



Two adults, one child
\$18,751



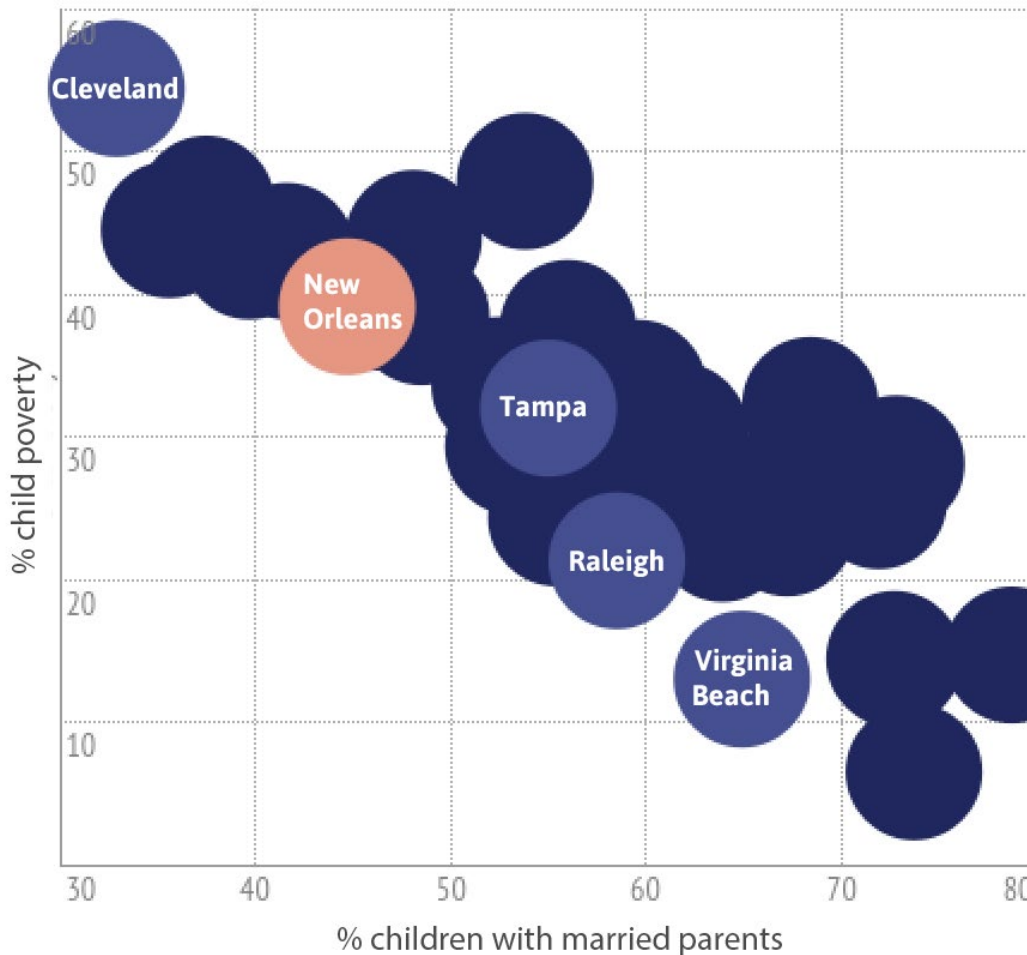
Two adults, two children
\$23,624



For a complete list of 2013 poverty thresholds, see the downloadable spreadsheet accompanying this brief.

Abundant research shows that family structures themselves are strongly tied to economic standing.ⁱⁱⁱ For example, higher-income, well-educated couples are more likely to marry, and to stay married, than low-income couples.^{iv} Thus, in cities with low child poverty rates, children are more likely to be living in married-couple families.

Child poverty rates and married-couple families, 2013, in cities with populations between 275,000 and 600,000



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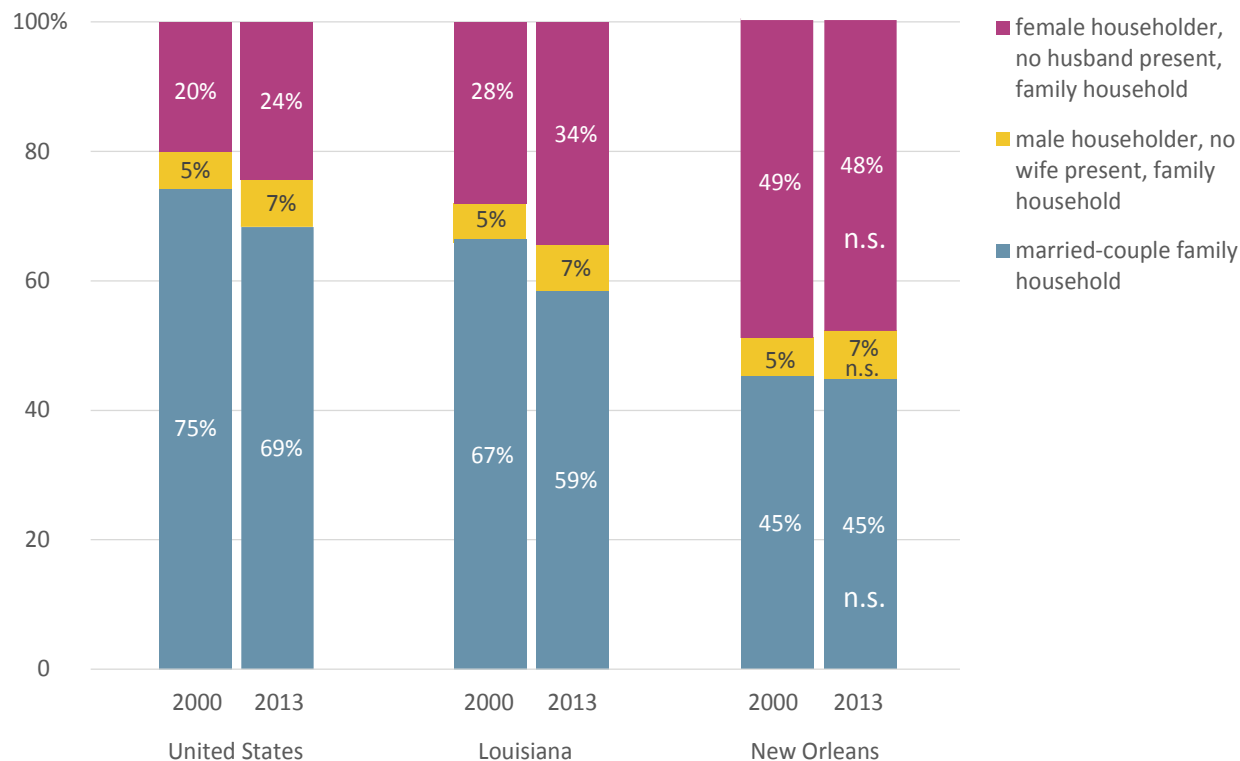
To explore data about child poverty and married-couple and single-parent families with children in all 39 cities, see the interactive that accompanies this brief.

Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2013 American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates

Note: The percentage of children living with married parents is from the universe of children living with at least one parent. The universe does not include children who live in households without a parent present, for example, children living with grandparents or other relatives.

This data is not intended to suggest that single-parent families cause child poverty or that marriage is a solution to poverty. To the contrary, Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson explains that a job is often one of the many prerequisites to a stable marriage.^{vii} Indeed, as the real earnings of many Americans have declined over the past 50 years, men who have borne the brunt of these changes have been decreasingly likely to marry.^{viii}

Children living with parents by family type



Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 SF3 and the 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

n.s. = change between 2000 and 2013 is not significant

Note: These percents do not include children living in households without a parent present, for example, children living with grandparents or other relatives. Percents may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

In New Orleans, the share of children in single-mother families has remained stubbornly high at roughly 48 percent since 2000. While the economic prospects for many mothers and children are not good in New Orleans, marriage is not likely to improve them, given that less than half of all working age, African American men have employment.^{viii} Singer Jesse James' 1988 song entitled *I Can Do Bad By Myself*, includes the lyrics, "I can do bad by myself. I don't need no help to starve to death." These lyrics may sum up the desirability of marriage for many New Orleans families in poverty.

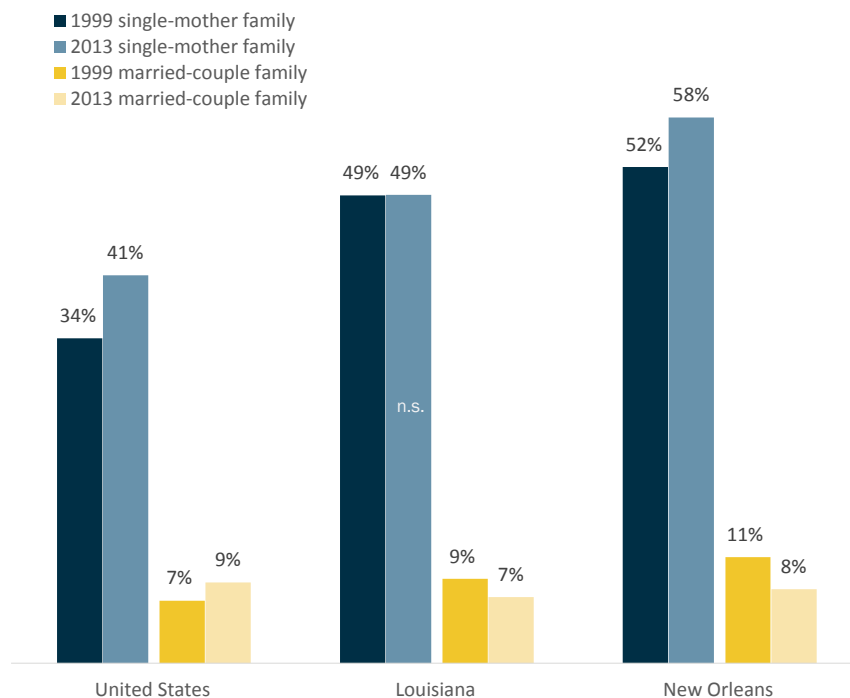
Although overall poverty and child poverty have remained unchanged in New Orleans since 1999, the economic status of married-couple families has improved, while the economic status of single-mother families has worsened. The poverty rate for single-mother households in New Orleans increased from 52 percent in 1999, to 58 percent in 2013, while the poverty rate for married-couples with children fell from 11 percent to 8 percent.

All told, the poverty rate for single-mother families in New Orleans—at 58 percent—is much higher than the national average of 41 percent.

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According to Census 2013 data, 154 children in New Orleans live in group quarters, down from 623 children in 2000. Regardless of the type of group quarter that children may live in, research shows that children living in group quarters are less likely to make normal progress through school than children living in households.^{ix}

Poverty status for families with children by type

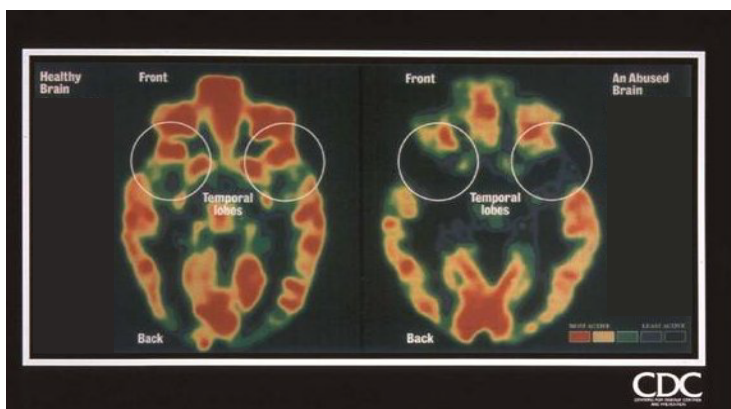


Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 SF3 and the 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

n.s. = change between 1999 and 2013 is not significant

Poverty's relationship to healthy brain development

High poverty levels among New Orleans children are concerning for the long-term economic prospects of the city because of poverty's effect on child brain development. Scientific research shows that child poverty can lead to chronic, toxic stress that disrupts the architecture of the developing brain. Children in poverty are much more likely to experience exposure to violence, chronic neglect, and the accumulated burdens of economic hardship. This kind of chronic stress causes prolonged activation of the stress response system, which in turn can disrupt the development of brain architecture, leading to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation.^x In short, scholars argue that poverty may be the single greatest threat to children's healthy brain development.^{xi}



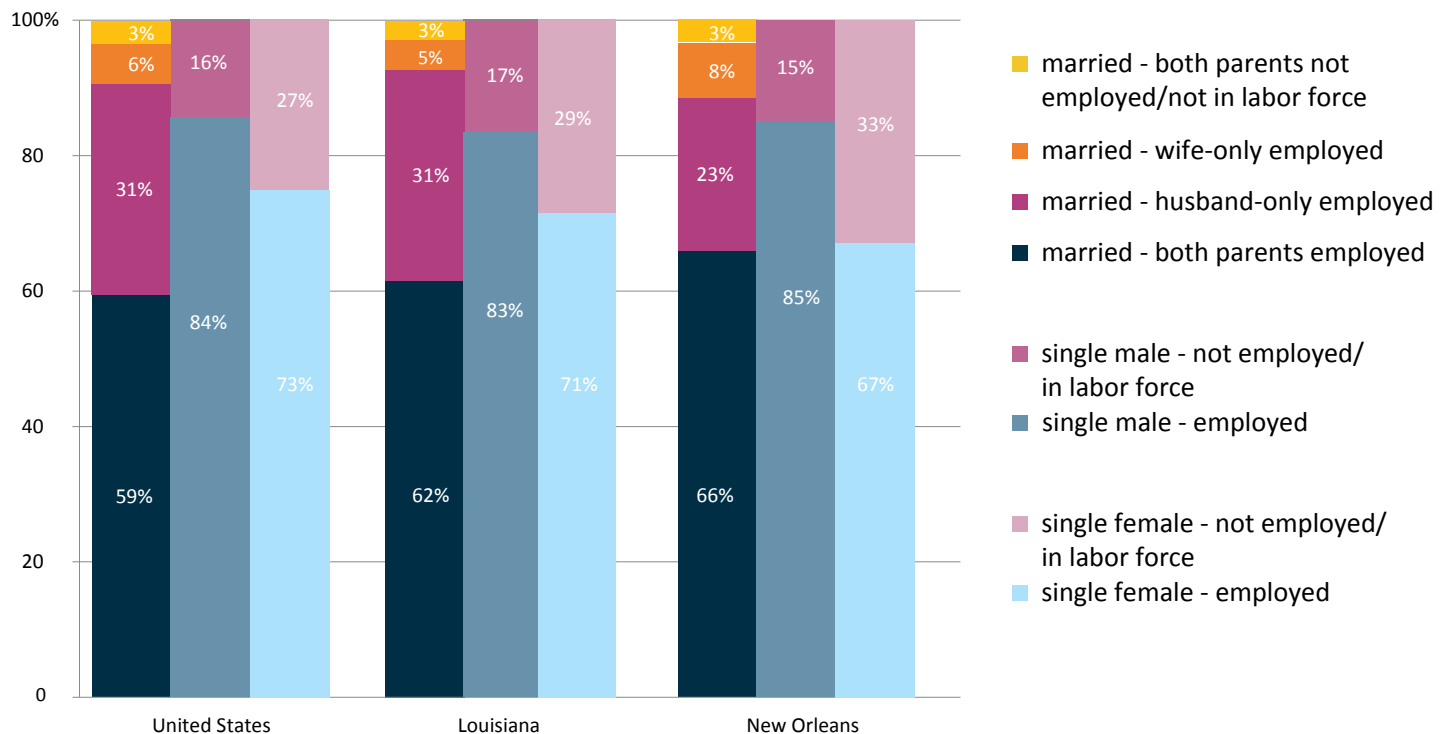
"In short, scholars argue that poverty may be the single greatest threat to children's healthy brain development."

Working families with children

Despite high poverty rates, single mothers in New Orleans are more likely to be employed than not. All told, 67 percent of New Orleans' single mothers are working.

To be sure, *all* parents of children under 18 in New Orleans are more likely to be working than not. Of all families with children in New Orleans, 82 percent have at least one working parent. And both parents are working in 66 percent of all married-couple families with children.

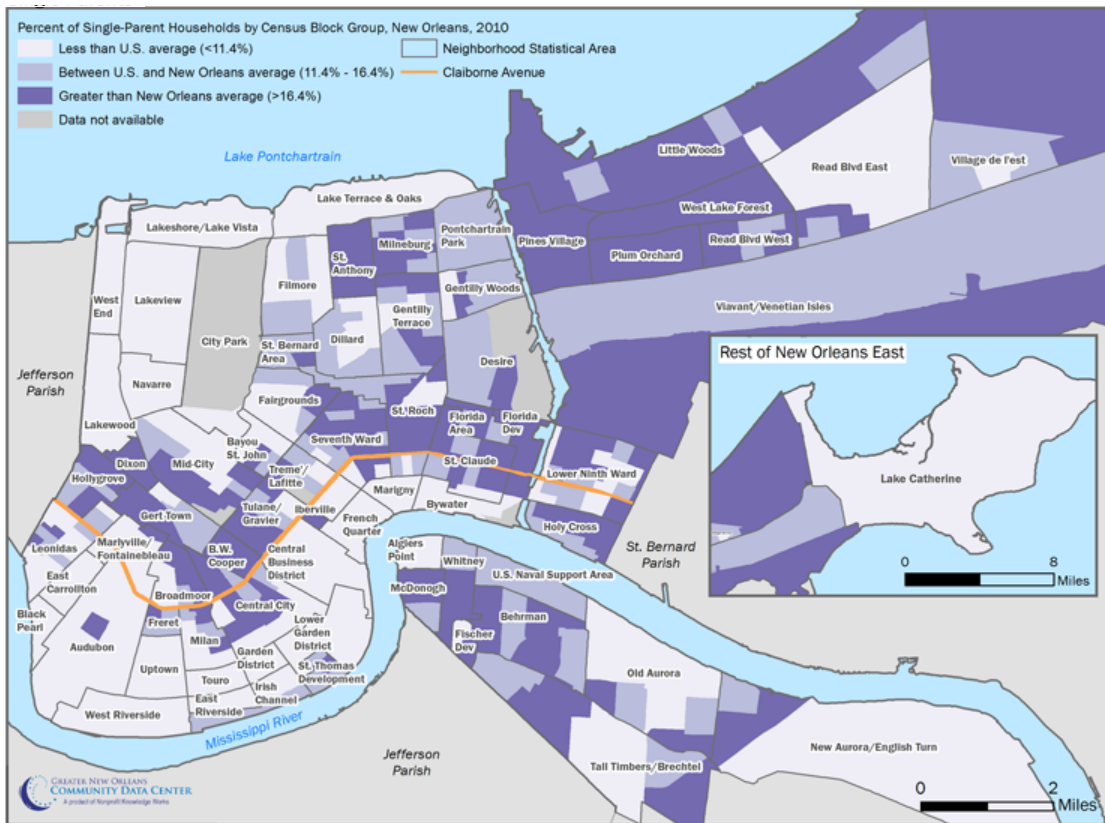
Employment status of parents with children by family type, 2013



Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the 2013 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Given that 82 percent of New Orleans families with children have at least one working parent, how could it be that 39 percent of all New Orleans children live in poverty? The answer may lie partially in the large number of low-wage jobs offered in the New Orleans area. A larger share—12 percent—of full-time, year-round workers in the New Orleans metro earn less than \$17,500 per year, as compared to only 8 percent nationally. And female workers who live in the city of New Orleans itself are more likely than male workers to earn low wages. According to 2013 Census data, more than 64,000 working women in New Orleans earned less than \$17,500 in the prior 12 months through either full-time or part-time work.

Percent of Single-Parent Households by Census Block Group New Orleans, 2010



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For maps of low-wage workers, households with no vehicle, commuting by public transit, cost-burdened renters, adults with low educational attainment, and grandparents as caregivers, see our Geographies of Poverty collection at <http://www.datacenterresearch.org/maps/poverty/>

Source: THE DATA CENTER analysis of data from 2010 Census

Scholars at Harvard University's National Scientific Council on the Developing Child assert, "The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the healthy development of the next generation. But, poverty can derail healthy development by causing excessive or prolonged activation of stress response systems in the body (especially the brain), with damaging effects on learning, behavior, and health across the lifespan."^{xiii}

More than one out of every three children in New Orleans lives in poverty – and this despite the fact that the vast majority of New Orleans children have at least one parent working. If we want to further our progress in building a healthy, prosperous, and resilient post-Katrina New Orleans, leaders will need to focus not only on job creation, but on quality job creation. Jobs must offer reasonable wages, some level of job security, and the prospect of work progression.^{xiv} In addition, the poor need to be connected to those quality jobs.

Raising a mother out of poverty can have a powerful rippling effect on society, particularly in New Orleans where almost 50 percent of the children living with parents live with a single mom. Women also contribute to the incomes of 74 percent of the married-couple families with children in New Orleans. Therefore, increasing mothers' access to education, job training, and quality child care are some of the ways to ensure that a large number of children successfully transition to adulthood.^{xv}

Innovation is needed to break the cycle of poverty that grips poor families. Innovative approaches will recognize that the parents' situations matter and that to improve outcomes for poor children, we must address the needs of them and their parents. One innovative program in Atlanta sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation uses a two-generation approach to give children access to a high-quality early childhood education, while also helping parents to get better jobs and build stronger families.^{xvi} This two-generation approach and others like it across the country, are still in their infancy.^{xvii} However, theoretical justification for these programs is strong, their early results are promising, and the time is ripe for innovation, experimentation, and further study.^{xviii}

COST OF LIVING AND REASONABLE WAGES

Given the current cost of living in New Orleans, two sources estimate that a single worker needs a wage of roughly \$22 per hour to provide for one child.^{xix} Even a single worker with no children needs \$14.85 per hour to live in New Orleans.^{xx}

Data Sources/Methodology

All data is from the Census 2000 Summary File 3 (SF3) and American Community Survey 2007, and 2013 (single-year files). Statistical tests of significance were computed at the 95% confidence level for all data from the American Community Survey and Census 2000 SF3.

An “n.s.” indicates that differences between two time periods are not significant, and therefore are the result of sampling variability rather than real change in characteristics of the population.

The significance tests require both estimates and their standard errors.

Standard errors for the ACS estimates were calculated using formulas in Appendix 3 of “What General Data Users Need to Know” available at: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Downloads/handbooks/ACSGeneralHandbook.pdf>.

Standard errors for Census 2000 SF3 data were calculated using formulas from Chapter 8 of the Technical Documentation available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2000/doc/sf3.pdf>.

Standard errors for Census 2000 and Census 2010 SF1 data are zero.

The test for significance was calculated using formulas in Appendix 4 of “What General Data Users Need to Know.”

Technical Notes

Data on children living with parents by family type, and employment status of parents with children by family type represent only families with a child under 18 years of age who is a son or daughter by birth, stepchild or an adopted child of the householder. Data on poverty status for families with children by type represent families with any child under 18 years of age who is related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. The Census’ tabulation of “related” children was selected for the calculation of poverty status to ensure comparability between 2000 and 2013 data.

About the Author

Vicki Mack is Senior Research Fellow at The Data Center.

Dr. Mack is an expert in developmental psychology and juvenile delinquency who has examined community-based programs designed to serve youth, the social and demographic factors associated with juvenile delinquency, and juvenile offenders’ responsiveness to interventions. She joined The Data Center in 2013 after holding positions as a statistician and data dissemination specialist for the U.S. Census Bureau. She held faculty positions at Clark Atlanta University and University of Michigan–Dearborn, where she taught statistics and psychology. Dr. Mack also has seven years of direct service experience in the fields of juvenile delinquency, foster care, and developmental disabilities. She has a PhD from Wayne State University and an MHA in healthcare administration from Bellevue University.

About The Data Center

The Data Center is the most trusted resource for data about greater New Orleans and Southeast Louisiana. Since 1997, The Data Center has been an objective partner in bringing reliable, thoroughly researched data to conversations about building a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable region. The Data Center (formerly known as the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center) became the local authority for tracking post-Katrina recovery with The New Orleans Index, developed in partnership with the Brookings Institution, Metropolitan Policy Program. Now a biennial publication, The New Orleans Index is the go-to resource for national and local media, decisionmakers across all levels of government, and leaders in the private and nonprofit sectors. The Data Center’s expertise in compiling, analyzing, and publishing the most relevant, high-impact data has made it a leader in helping communities and decisionmakers understand the rapid pace of demographic, economic, and environmental change in Southeast Louisiana.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

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