
Children and Poverty in Michigan

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Scope of the Problem

Children in Michigan are more likely to live in poverty than are individuals in any other age group in Michigan. During the past two decades there has been a substantial increase in the number and percentage of poor children under age 18 in Michigan. These figures and trends parallel poverty statistics and trends for the United States as a whole.

In Michigan, the key facts about child poverty include the following [4,5]:

- Over 440,000 children under age 18 live in poverty in Michigan, and *the number living in poverty has increased by over 126,000 since 1979*. The child poverty rate in Michigan grew by 36.6 percent from 1979 to 1998.
- Michigan has reduced its child poverty rate by over 30 percent since 1993, but recent improvements in the middle and late 1990s have not yet offset the longer-term increases in child poverty since 1979.
- *15.4 percent of Michigan's children under age 18 live in poverty*, that is, in families below the federal poverty line (\$13,737 for a family of three in 2000).
- *23.3 percent of young children under age 5 live in poverty in Michigan*. In the United States as a whole, 23.1 percent of young children live in poverty.
- The child poverty rate in Michigan substantially exceeds—often by 200 to 300 percent—the poverty rate for children in other major Western industrialized countries.

Why Is Preventing Child Poverty Important in Michigan?

The detrimental effects of poverty on the well being of children have been examined in hundreds of studies. These studies consistently show that children who live in poverty are more likely than children in middle and high income families to experience material deprivation and poor health, die during childhood, score lower on standardized tests, be retained a grade, and drop out of school [1,2,3,5]. Children who live in poverty are also more likely to:

- have out-of-wedlock births
- experience violent crime
- end up as poor adults and suffer other undesirable outcomes.

Table 1 presents child outcomes for Michigan based on data from the 1999 National Survey of American Families. The results parallel national findings regarding outcomes for children living in poverty. Children living in poverty in Michigan fare less well on a wide range of indicators than Michigan children who are not living in poverty.

8 percent of children in Michigan live in extreme poverty (income below 50% of the poverty level).

41.8 % of young children in Michigan live in or near poverty, in families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line.

Fewer children in poverty will mean more children entering school ready to learn, better child health, and less stress on the juvenile justice system.

**Table 1. Outcomes for Children in Michigan
By Age of Child and Poverty Status of Family**

Child Indicator	Michigan Children Ages 0-5		Michigan Children Ages 6-17	
	Below 100% of poverty level	At or above 100 % of poverty level	Below 100% of poverty level	At or above 100% of poverty level
Health status of child				
Confident can get medical care if needed: Extremely or very confident	68.2%	76.9%	45.0%	73.6%
Current health status: Excellent/very good	76.8%	86.8%	60.7%	85.3%
Has health condition that limits activity	13.8%	2.1%	24.7%	9.3%
Number of emergency room visits last year: One or more visits	39.6%	33.4%	30.7%	20.1%
Number of mental health visits last year: One or more visits	8.4%	1.8%	11.9%	7.9%
Food difficulties faced by family				
Cut/skip meals for lack of money	16.8%	7.2%	28.8%	9.1%
Food bought didn't last: Often/sometimes	38.3%	12.5%	49.3%	14.8%
Worried whether food would run out: Often/sometimes	48.4%	15.9%	56.2%	19.4%
Home ownership/School Moves				
Residence owned by someone in household	31.7%	81.2%	38.1%	83.4%
Changed school at least once in past 12 months	n.a.	n.a.	28.7%	13.6%
Child's behavior				
Does poorly at school work: Never True	n.a.	n.a.	52.0%	66.7%
Often acts too young for his/her age	n.a.	n.a.	10.4%	2.4%
Has been sad or depressed: Never True	n.a.	n.a.	47.6%	61.3%
Child much harder to care for than most: None of the time	60.8%	75.9%	67.1%	76.7%
Child enrichment activities				
Participated in clubs last year (Ages 11-17)	n.a.	n.a.	43.1%	66.8%
Child took lessons after school last year				
Times in past month took child out: About once per day	15.7%	26.1%	n.a.	n.a.
A family member reads to child every day	45.6%	50.5%	n.a.	n.a.

Source: 1999 National Survey of American Families, CrosstabMaker, Authors' calculations

Can Child Poverty Be Addressed in Michigan?

Michigan's success in lowering the child poverty rate in the mid to late 1990s indicates that state, local, and private practices and policies can have an impact on the material well being of children. This *briefing report* describes a number of potential policies that Michigan can consider to address the needs of parents who face barriers to employment and to provide support to parents who are employed, but still face economic hardships. Private sector employers and government at the federal, state, and local levels can all play important roles in increasing family income and economic security for Michigan's children.