

CENTER FOR FAMILY POLICY AND PRACTICE

23 NORTH PINCKNEY STREET, SUITE 210 – MADISON, WI 53703
PHONE 608.257.3148 – FAX 608.257.4686 – WWW.CFFPP.ORG

POLICY BRIEFING

FEBRUARY 2007 _ VOL. 9, NO. 1

Record Numbers in Severe Poverty; Public Assistance Rates Increase Despite Reduction in Welfare Rolls

An analysis of 2005 census figures conducted by the McClatchy Newspapers found that nearly 16 million U.S. residents are living in severe poverty and that the percentage of severely poor Americans is at a 32-year high. Severe poverty was defined in 2005 as a family of four with two children and an annual income of less than \$9,903, or less than \$5,080 a year for individuals. The analysis also found that:

- Severe poverty rose by 26% from 2000 to 2005. 43% of the 37 million individuals in poverty in 2005 were in severe poverty in terms of their income.
- Since 2000, the severely poor population has grown more than any other segment of the population.
- Approximately 1 in 3 severely poor individuals are under the age of 17. Nearly 2 out of 3 are female.

Another analysis by the Associated Press found that while the number of people receiving cash benefits under TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) has dropped by 59% since welfare reform was initiated in 1996, many families have not been able to move into employment without other forms of public assistance. The analysis found that:

- Nearly 1 in 6 people rely on some form of public assistance, a rate that is higher than at any time since the government started tracking on this measure 20 years ago.
- In 2005, approximately 5.1 million individuals received monthly benefits from TANF, representing a 60% drop over the ten years since TANF began.
- During this same period, the number of individuals receiving Medicaid benefits increased by 36.7%, Food Stamp recipients increased by .5% and Social Security Insurance (SSI) beneficiaries rose by 6.9%.

The McClatchy Newspapers information is available at <http://www.realcities.com/mld/kwashington/16760690.htm> and the Associated Press story is available at <http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/headline/nation/4580163.html>.

Young African-Americans Face Persistent Disproportionate Representation in Juvenile Justice System

A recent report from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, *And Justice for Some: Differential Treatment of Youth of Color in the Juvenile Justice System*, documents the specific points at which the juvenile justice system itself contributes to higher involvement of African-American youth than white youth. The report is an update of a 2000 report (See May 2000

Policy Briefing at www.cffpp.org for a summary of that report which has remarkably similar findings). African-American youth are overrepresented in all stages of the juvenile justice system. Much of the overrepresentation results from actions taken at different points in the system that are generally more harsh for African-American youth than for white youth. Among these actions are the decision to make the initial arrest; the decision to hold a youth in detention pending investigation; the decision to refer a case to juvenile court; the decision to waive a case to adult court; the prosecutor's decision to pursue a case; and the judicial decision and subsequent sanction.

Among the report's findings:

- African-American youth were disproportionately arrested in 26 of 29 arrest categories in 2004.
- Even when referred for the same type of offense, African-American youth were more likely to be formally charged in juvenile court than were white youth.
- African-American youth charged with drug offenses constituted 29% of cases overall, but 41% of cases waived to adult court.
- For all offense categories, and most pronounced for drug offenses, African-American youth were overrepresented among cases referred for commitment to a locked institution. White youth were more likely to be placed on probation.
- White youth made up 67% of the juvenile court referral population, but 60% of those detained. In contrast, African-American youth were 30% of the referred population but 37% of the detained population.
- The report includes a striking list of "accumulated disadvantage" based on these figures. From 2002 to 2004, African Americans were:
 - 16% of youth.
 - 28% of juvenile arrests.
 - 30% of referrals to juvenile court.
 - 37% of the detained population.
 - 34% of youth formally processed by the juvenile court.
 - 30% of adjudicated youth.
 - 35% of youth judicially waived to criminal court.
 - 38% of youth in residential placement.
 - 58% of youth admitted to state adult prison.

The report is available at: http://www.nccdcr.org/nccd/pubs/2007jan_justice_for_some.pdf

New Resources Provide Valuable Information for Practitioners and Advocates

Several resources have been created that can provide readers with useful information, from statistics on income and poverty to a website that brings many resources together in an effort to inform the public while at the same time allowing for the exchange of ideas and opinions.

- The Children's Defense Fund has created a glossary of terms used in research and evaluation that could be a valuable tool for practitioners who are increasingly required to understand and conduct program evaluations. The glossary is intended to be a quick reference guide and future briefs will be prepared to provide more detailed information on particular types of research and evaluation designs. The guide, *A Glossary of Research Terms for Out-of-School Time Program Practitioners*, is available at http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2007_01_05_FS_ResearchGlossary.pdf.
- *Inclusion* is a policy think tank devoted to promoting social and economic inclusion through policy papers, research, op-eds, and a blog. According to the Inclusion website,

the virtual think tank “takes an approach that is deliberately experimental by think-tank standards. The site combines conventional think-tank content—policy reports, data, charts and graphs—with blog-style opinion and information aggregation. The site allows readers to comment, not only on blog entries, but also on policy reports and other traditional content. We believe strongly that a think tank needs to be a forum for sharing and refining ideas, including ones that may not be fully formed, but could be helped along and improved by the insights of others.” The website for Inclusion is www.inclusionist.org.

- The Workforce Alliance website offers several ways to stay updated and informed on issues of employment, education and training. *Washington Updates* is a bi-monthly newsletter that covers developments in federal workforce development. This month, it includes an analysis of funding for education and training in President Bush's Fiscal Year 2008 Budget. You can also sign up for regular email updates, view their *Training Policy in Brief* which profiles 13 federal programs that support training and education, and visit their *Action Center*, an on-line resource for advocating for a skilled workforce. The website address is www.workforcealliance.org.

Census Tracks Daily Activities of Children as Measure of Well-Being

A recent U.S Census Bureau report, *A Child's Day: 2003 (Selected Indicators of Child Well-Being)*, examined the daily activities of children according to characteristics of their family such as the family's income and education. It adds insight into one aspect of disparities in well-being of children based on the status of their family. The report found that:

- 50% of 6- to 11- year olds and 59% of 12- to 17-year olds who had a parent with an advanced degree participated in sports, compared to 17% of children between 6 and 11 years old and 30% of children 12 to 17 years old who had a parent who did not finish high school.
- 45% of children 6 to 17 years old whose family income was below the poverty level participated in any kind of extracurricular activity (clubs, sports or lessons), compared to more than 70% of children whose family income was 200% of the poverty level or higher.
- Nearly 75% of children aged 12 to 17 were on-track academically (performing at or above grade level) in 2003, compared to 68% in 1994. There was a disparity according to income, however. 69% of children living in families below the poverty level were on-track academically, compared to 78% of children from families with incomes above 200% of the poverty level.

The report is available at: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/p70-109.pdf>.