Poverty by the Numbers:
MORE WHITE CHILDREN IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES THAN ANY OTHER RACIAL GROUP

NEW YORK CITY – By the sheer numbers, and contrary to some common stereotypes about the country’s poor, America has more white children living in low-income families than any other race. More than 12.1 million white children live in low-income families; compared to:

- 10.7 million Hispanic children;
- 6.5 million black children;
- 1 million Asian children;
- 400,000 American Indian children; and
- 1.3 million children of other races.

At the same time, black and Hispanic children are more likely to live in low-income families than white children. Sixty-four percent of black children and 63 percent of Hispanic children lived in such families compared to 31 percent of white children. The statistics are revealed in newly-released fact sheets from the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), based at the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University.

“Poverty and low-income affects children of all races. The notion held by some that poverty is not a white problem is simply false,” says Vanessa Wight, PhD, demographer at NCCP. “In addition to race, we studied a range of factors associated with children’s experiences of economic insecurity, including their parents’ education, employment, and where they live.”

Some of the other statistics revealed by NCCP:

- Children represent 24 percent of the overall U.S. population, yet they comprise 34 percent of all people living in poverty.

- There are more than 72 million children under age 18 in the United States: of those, 31.9 million live in low-income families (44% of all children); and 15.5 million live in poor families (21% of all children). Low income ($44,700 for a family of four) is defined by NCCP as being twice the official federal poverty level ($22,350 for a family of four).

- The percentage of children in low-income families varies by where they live: it’s highest in the South, where 48 percent of children live in low-income families, compared to:
- 45 percent of children in the West;
- 42 percent in the Midwest; and
- 36 percent of children in the Northeast.

- A little more than half (51 percent) of children in rural areas live in low-income families, compared to 42 percent in urban areas.

“Winding up in a low-income or poor family does not happen by chance,” says Wight. “These data help us understand who America’s poor really are, and to recommend better policies aimed at helping them.”

One of the things NCCP recommends are strategies that help parents succeed in the labor force, which will in turn, help their children. “Low earning workers need higher wages but policies such as earned income tax credits and child care assistance are critical to supporting income growth for low-wage workers,” says Dr. Wight. “These workers also need access to benefits that many higher-wage earners enjoy, such as health insurance and paid sick leave.”


The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is one of the nation’s leading public policy centers and is dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.