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AS DECADE’S END NEARS, 20 PERCENT MORE
AMERICAN CHILDREN LIVE IN POVERTY
South leads nation in percentage of poor/low income families

New York City – As the end of the decade nears 20 percent more American children are living in poverty than in 2000, and the South leads the nation in the number of children living in low-income and poor families, according to researchers at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health.

NCCP says that 44 percent of children in the South – 12.2 million – live in low-income families; compared to 41 percent of children in the West; 38 percent of children in the Midwest; and 34 percent of children in the Northeast.

“These are challenging economic times for America’s families. Low- and moderate-income workers are seeing their wages stagnate or decline, while the cost of basic necessities continues to rise,” says NCCP’s Vanessa Wight, PhD, who co-authored the report with research analyst Michelle Chau. “We are particularly concerned about the profound effect economic hardship can have on children. We found that children’s poverty rates vary greatly, depending on where people live.”

The U.S. federal poverty level (FPL) for 2009 is $22,050 for a family of four; low-income is considered anything below two times FPL. The findings are detailed in “Basic Facts About Low-income Children,” NCCP’s multi-part annual collection of analyses on low-income families, available free online at http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_892.html.

While children make up a quarter of America’s population, they account for more than 40 percent of the overall low-income population, explains Wight. NCCP analyzed a variety of factors that distinguish low-income and poor children from their less disadvantaged counterparts. In addition to geographic location, other factors contribute significantly to a child’s experiences with economic insecurity. Among them:

Race:
27 percent of white children – 11.2 million – live in low-income families.
61 percent of black children – 6.4 million – live in low-income families.
57 percent of American Indian children – 0.3 million – live in low-income families.
42 percent of children of some other race – 0.9 million – live in low-income families.

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Health insurance:
16 percent of children living in low-income families – 4.9 million – are uninsured.
32 percent of children living in low-income families – 9.5 million – are covered by private insurers.
49 percent of children living in low-income families – 14.6 million – are covered by Medicaid.
22 percent of children living in low-income families – 6.5 million – are covered by their state’s Children Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

Parental education:
25 percent of children with at least one parent who has some college or more education – 11.9 million – live in low-income families.
85 percent of children with parents who have less than a high-school degree – 7.2 million – live in low-income families.
60 percent of children with parents who have no more than a high school degree – 10.7 million – live in low-income families.

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The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center 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.