



Basic Facts about Low-Income Children

Children 12 through 17 Years, 2014

Yang Jiang | Mercedes Ekono | Curtis Skinner

February 2016

Children under 18 years represent 23 percent of the population, but they comprise 32 percent of all people in poverty. Many more children live in families with incomes just above the poverty threshold.¹ Among all children, 44 percent live in low-income families and approximately one in every five (21 percent) live in poor families. Among our oldest children, adolescents age 12 through 17 years, 40 percent live in low-income families and 19 percent live in poor families. Being a child in a low-income or poor family does not happen by chance. Parental education and employment, race/ethnicity, and other factors are associated with children's experience of economic insecurity. This fact sheet describes the demographic, socio-economic, and geographic characteristics of adolescents and their parents. It highlights the important factors that appear to distinguish low-income and poor children in this age group from their less disadvantaged counterparts.



National Center for Children in Poverty

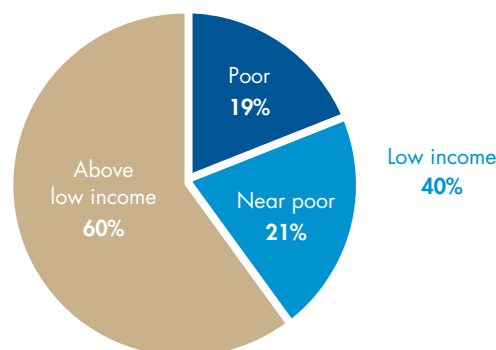
Mailman School of Public Health
Columbia University

How many adolescents, ages 12 through 17 years, live in low-income families in the United States?

There are more than 24 million adolescents age 12 through 17 years in the United States

- ◆ 40 percent—9.7 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 19 percent—4.6 million—live in poor families

Figure 1: Adolescents by family income, 2014



Note: Above low income is defined as at or above 200% of the federal poverty threshold (FPT), poor is defined as below 100% of FPT, and near poor is between 100% and 199% of the FPT. The low-income category includes both the poor and the near poor.

Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

215 W. 125th Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10027-4426
Ph. 646-284-9600

www.nccp.org

What is the 2014 federal poverty threshold (FPT)?²

- ◆ \$24,008 for a family of four with two children
- ◆ \$19,055 for a family of three with one child
- ◆ \$16,317 for a family of two with one child

Is a poverty-level income enough to support a family?

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income equal to about two times the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs.³ Families with incomes below this level, such as families making below the following incomes, are referred to as low income:

- ◆ \$48,016 for a family of four with two children
- ◆ \$38,110 for a family of three with one child
- ◆ \$32,634 for a family of two with one child

These dollar amounts approximate the average minimum income families need to make ends meet, but actual expenses vary greatly by locality. In 2014, the cost of meeting basic needs for a family of four required about \$85,800 per year in Boston, Massachusetts; \$61,500 in Akron, Ohio; \$57,200 in Tulsa, Oklahoma; and \$53,600 in McAllen, Texas.⁴

Has the percentage of adolescents living in low-income and poor families changed over time?

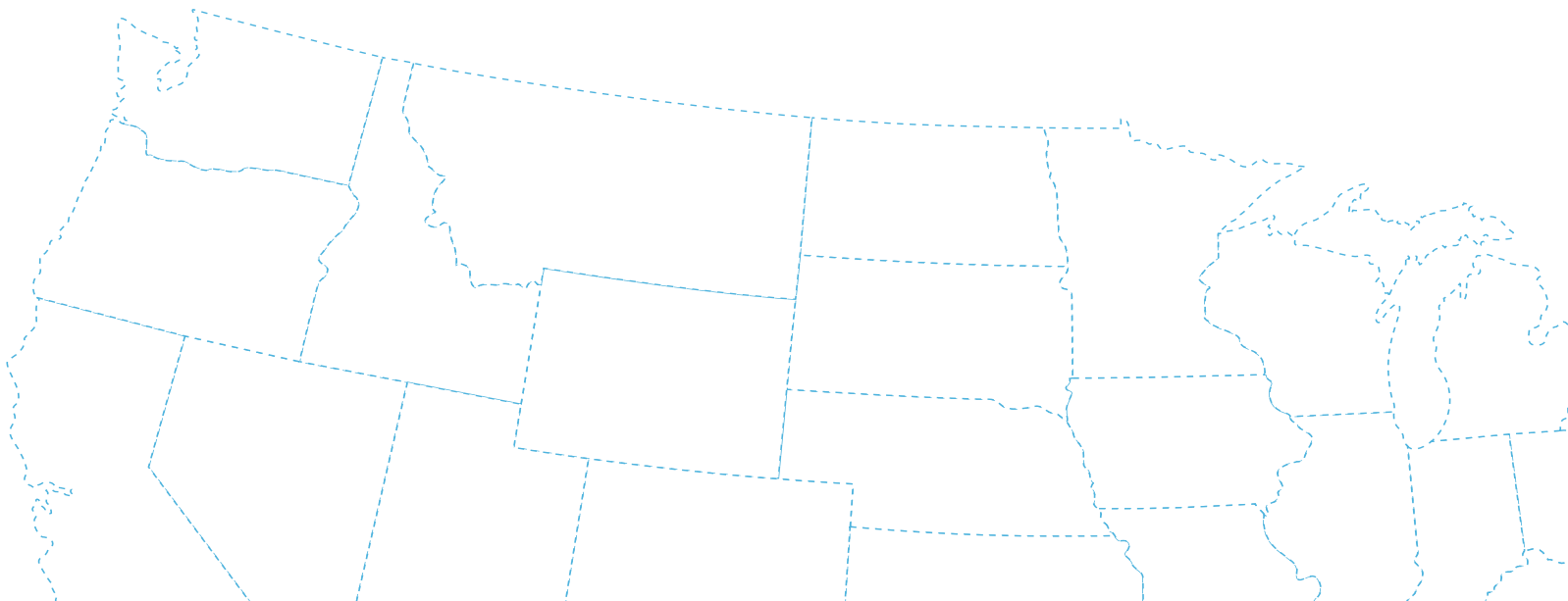
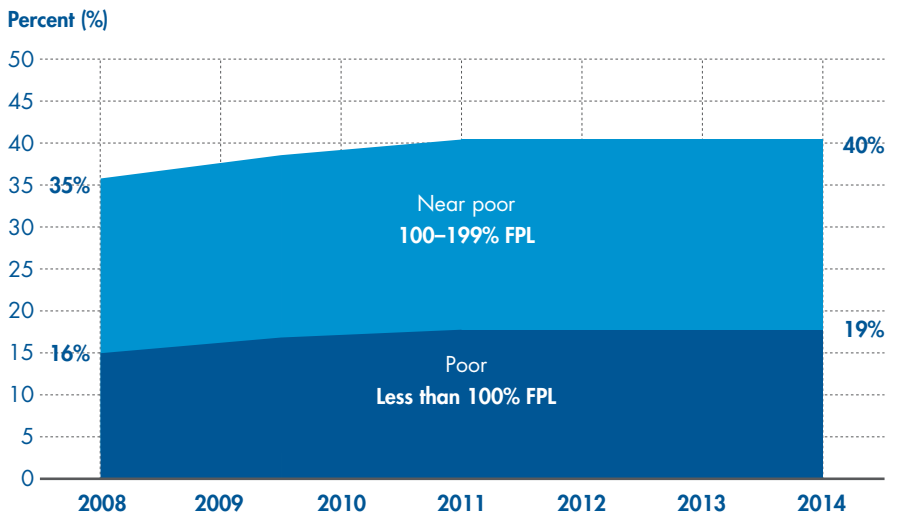
The percentage of adolescent children living in low-income families (both poor and near poor) has been *on the rise*—increasing from 35 percent in 2008 to nearly 40 percent in 2014 (Figure 2). During this time period, the

overall number of adolescent children age 12 through 17 years remained relatively constant, while the numbers who were low-income and poor increased by 13 percent and 21 percent, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage change of adolescents living in low-income and poor families, 2008–2014

	2008	2014	Percent change
Low income	8,602,051	9,678,777	13%
Poor	3,762,810	4,558,116	21%

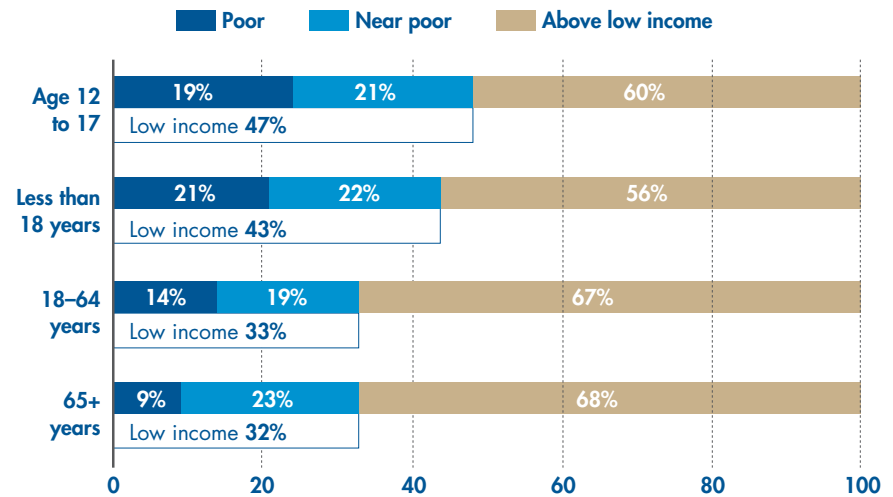
Figure 2: Adolescents living in low-income and poor families, 2008–2014



How do adolescents compare to the rest of the population?

The percentage of adolescents in low-income families surpasses that of adults. In addition, children ages 12 through 17 years are more than twice as likely as adults 65 years and older to live in poor families (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Family income by age, 2014



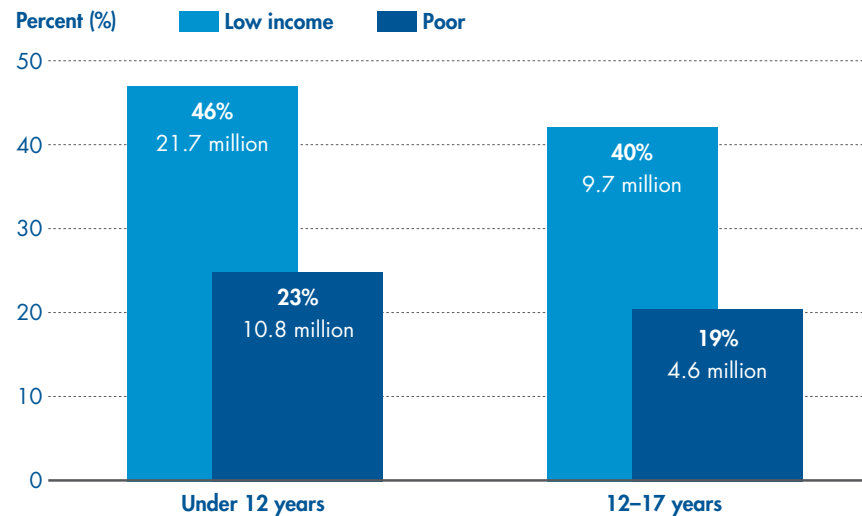
Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Does the percentage of children in low-income families vary by children's age?

The overall percentages of children under 18 years who live in low-income and poor families vary by age group. Adolescents are less likely to live in low-income families than younger children (Figure 4).

- ◆ 40 percent of children age 12 through 17 years—9.7 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 19 percent of children age 12 through 17 years—4.6 million—live in poor families
- ◆ 46 percent of children under age 12 years—21.7 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 23 percent of children under age 12 years—10.8 million—live in poor families

Figure 4: Percentage of children in low-income and poor families by age, 2014



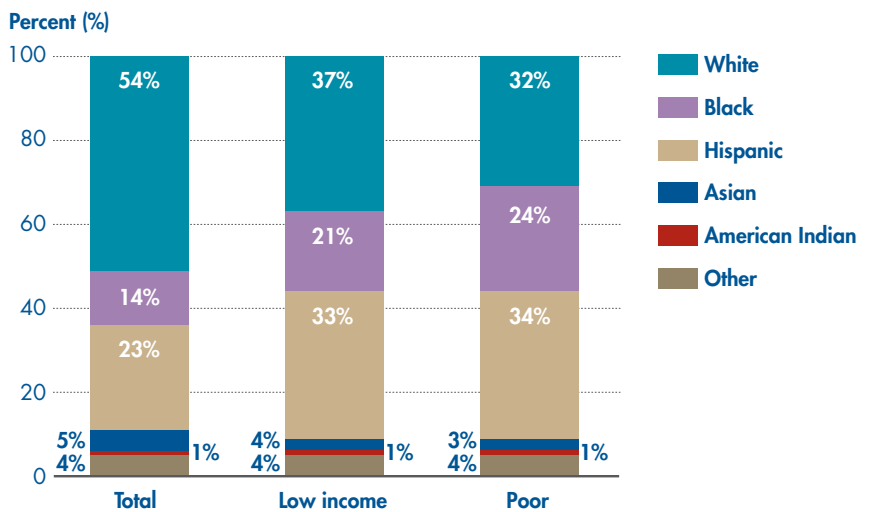
Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by race/ethnicity?

As Figure 5 illustrates, the percentages of low-income and poor adolescents vary by race and ethnicity: whites comprise the largest share of all low-income children (37 percent) while whites and Hispanics make up the largest shares of poor children (34 percent each).⁵

Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children are disproportionately low income and poor (Figure 6).

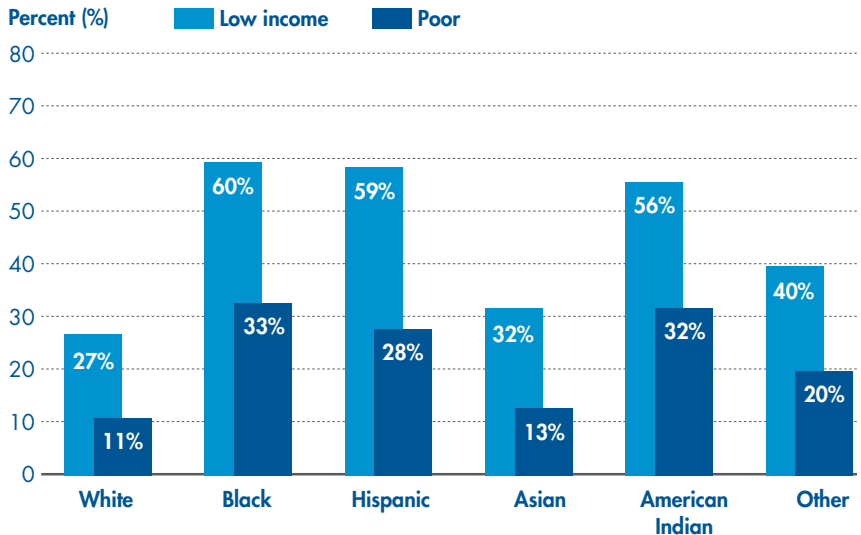
- ◆ 60 percent of black adolescents—2.0 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 59 percent of Hispanic adolescents—3.2 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 56 percent of American Indian adolescents—0.1 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 32 percent of Asian adolescents—0.4 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 27 percent of white adolescents—3.6 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 40 percent of adolescents of some other race—0.4 million—live in low-income families

Figure 5: Race/ethnicity among adolescents by family income, 2014



Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 6: Percentage of adolescents in low-income and poor families by race/ethnicity, 2014



Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by parents' nativity?⁶

- ◆ 52 percent of adolescents of immigrant parents—3.1 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 36 percent of adolescents of native-born parents—6.6 million—live in low-income families

What are the family characteristics of low-income and poor adolescents?

Parents' Education⁷

Higher levels of parental education decrease the likelihood that a child will live in a low-income or poor family. Among children with at least one parent with some college or additional education, 27 percent live in low-income and 11 percent in poor families. By contrast, among children whose parents have less than a high school degree, 82 percent live in low-income and 50 percent in poor families (Figure 7).

- ◆ 82 percent of adolescents with parents who have less than a high school degree—2.2 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 60 percent of adolescents with parents who have a high school degree but no college—2.9 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 27 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who has some college or additional education—4.6 million—live in low-income families

At the same time, significant shares of low-income and poor families with adolescent children are headed by parents with at least some college education, as shown in Figure 8.

Parents' Employment⁸

Adolescents with a full-time, year-round employed parent are less likely to live in a low-income family, compared to adolescents with parents who work part time or part year, or who are not employed (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Percentage of adolescents in low-income and poor families by parents' employment and education, 2014

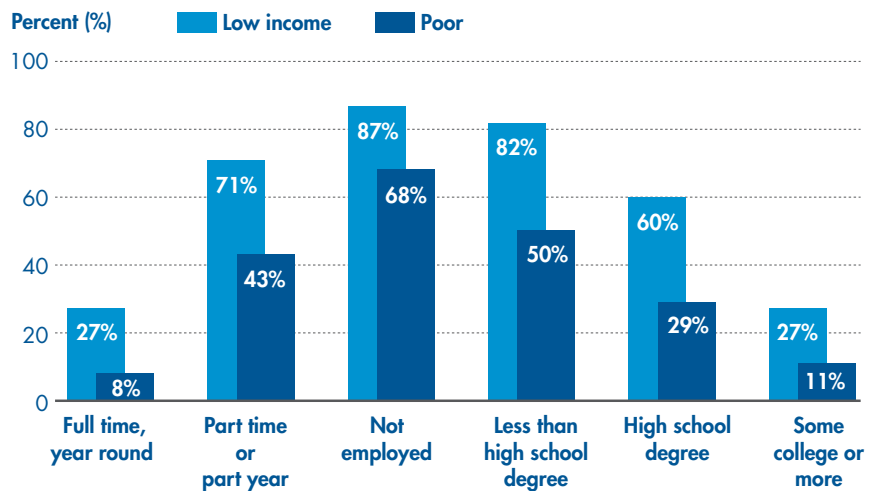
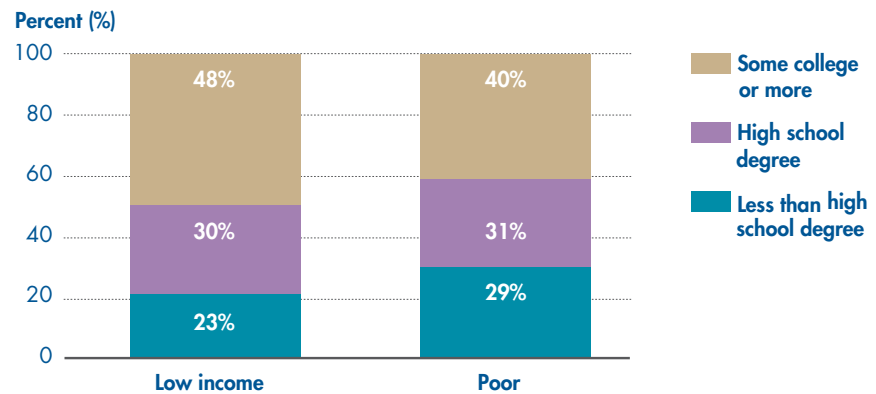


Figure 8: Parents' education among adolescents by family income, 2014



- ◆ 27 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who works full time, year round—5.0 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 8 percent of adolescents with at least one parent who works full time, year round—1.4 million—live in poor families
- ◆ 71 percent of adolescents with no parent who works full time, but at least one parent who works part time or part year—2.7 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 43 percent of adolescents with no parent who works full time, but at least one parent who works part time or part year—1.6 million—live in poor families
- ◆ 87 percent of adolescents with no employed parents—1.9 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 68 percent of adolescents with no employed parents—1.5 million—live in poor families

Nevertheless, many low-income and poor adolescents have parents who work full time. Over half of low-income and 31 percent of poor children in this age group live with at least one parent who worked full-time, year-round.

Family Structure

Forty-six percent of adolescents in low-income families—4.5 million—and 36 percent of adolescents in poor families—1.6 million—live with married parents. Children who live with married parents are much less

likely to be poor or low-income compared to children who live with a single parent.

- ◆ 28 percent of adolescents residing with married parents—4.5 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 10 percent of adolescents residing with married parents—1.6 million—live in poor families

- ◆ 63 percent of adolescents residing with a single parent—5.2 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 36 percent of adolescents residing with a single parent—2.9 million—live in poor families

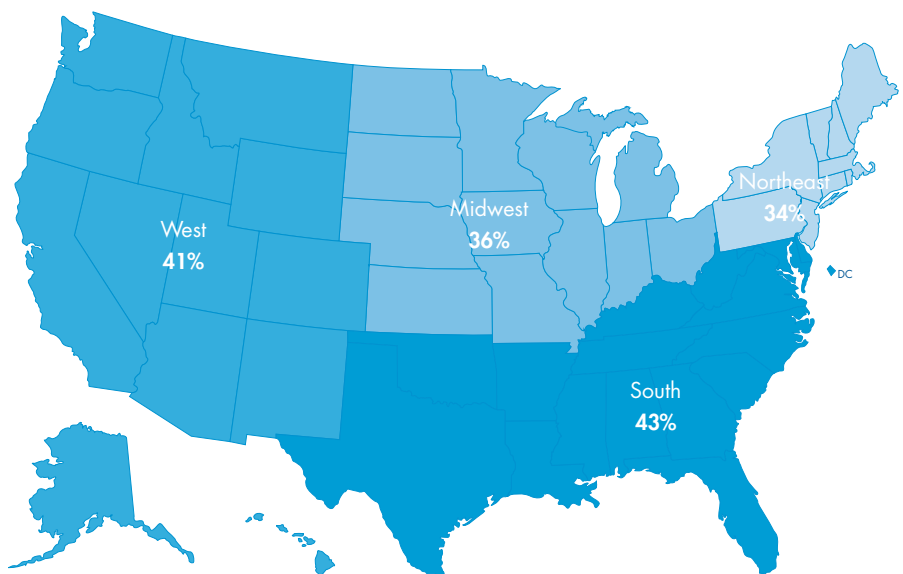
Does the percentage of adolescents in low-income families vary by where they live?

Region

The percentage of adolescents in low-income families varies substantially by region.

- ◆ 43 percent of adolescents in the South—4.0 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 41 percent of adolescents in the West—2.4 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 36 percent of adolescents in the Midwest—1.9 million—live in low-income families
- ◆ 34 percent of adolescents in the Northeast—1.4 million—live in low-income families

Figure 9: Percentage of adolescents in low-income families by region, 2014



Residential Instability and Home Ownership

Research suggests that stable housing is important for healthy child development.⁹ However, adolescents living in low-income families were about two times as likely as other children to have moved in the past year and more

than three times as likely to live in families that rent, rather than own, a home (Figure 10).

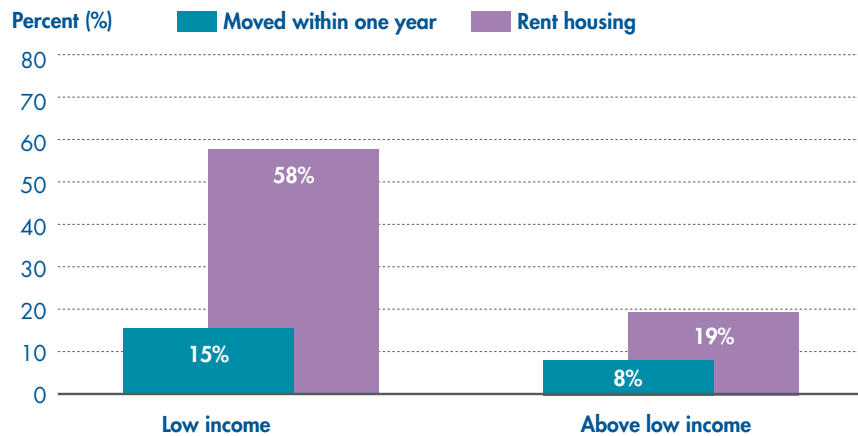
- ◆ 15 percent of adolescents in low-income families—1.4 million—moved in the last year

- ◆ 8 percent of adolescents in families with above the low-income threshold—1.2 million—moved in the last year
- ◆ 58 percent of adolescents in low-income families—5.6 million—moved in the last year

million—live with a family that rents a home

- ◆ 19 percent of adolescents in families with above the low-income threshold—2.9 million—live with a family that rents a home

Figure 10: Residential instability and home ownership among adolescents by family income, 2014



Are adolescents in low-income families covered by health insurance?

Consistent with research suggesting older children in general are particularly at risk of being uninsured, low-income and poor adolescents are more likely to be without health insurance coverage than their younger counterparts.¹⁰ Approximately 11 percent living in low-income families and 10 percent living in poor families report no insurance coverage of any kind (Figure 11).¹¹ Public insurance reaches more than one-half (65 percent) of low-income and over three-fourths (77 percent) of poor adolescents, while private health insurance covers close to one-third (30 percent) of low-income and 18 percent of poor adolescents (Figure 12).

- ◆ 11 percent of adolescents living in low-income families—1.0 million—are uninsured
- ◆ 30 percent of adolescents living in low-income families—2.9 million—are covered by private insurance
- ◆ 65 percent of adolescents living in low-income families—6.3 million—are covered by public insurance

Figure 11: Percentage of children uninsured in low-income and poor families by age, 2014

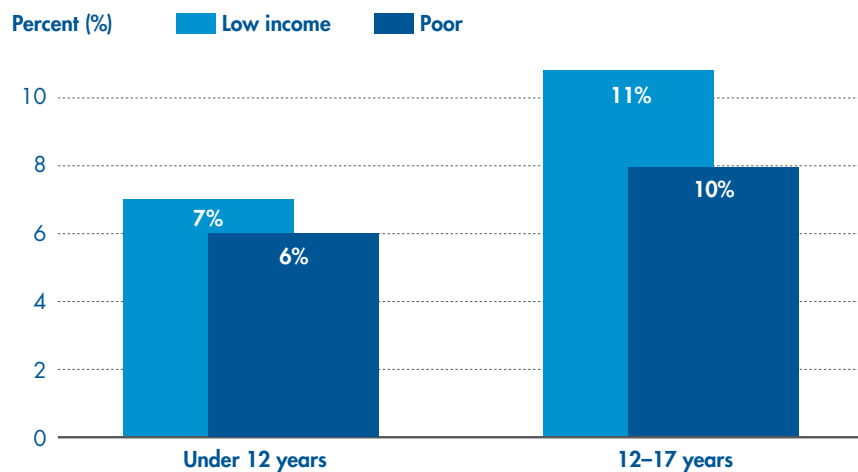
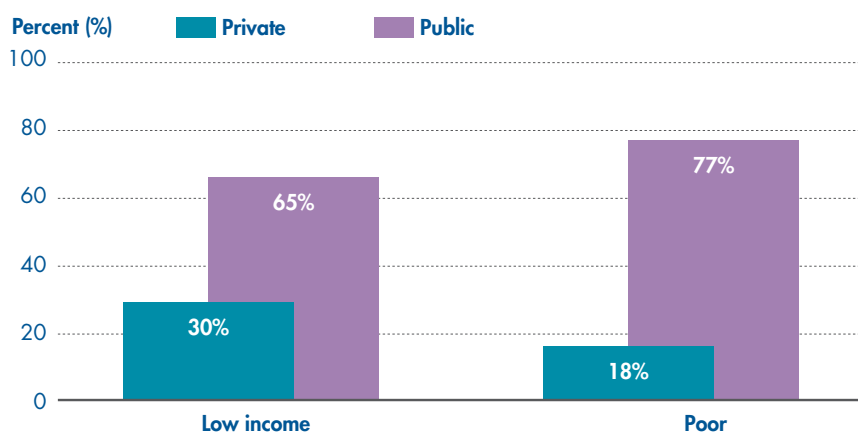


Figure 12: Type of health insurance coverage among adolescents by family income, 2014



Endnotes

This fact sheet is part of the National Center for Children in Poverty's demographic fact sheet series and is updated annually. Unless otherwise noted, analysis of the 2014 American Community Survey (ACS) was conducted by Yang Jiang and Mercedes Ekono of NCCP. Estimates include children living in households with at least one parent and most children living apart from both parents (for example, children being raised by grandparents). Children living independently, living with a spouse, or in group quarters are excluded from these data. Children age 14 years and under living with only unrelated adults were not included because data on their income status were not available. Among children who do not live with at least one parent, parental characteristics are those of the householder and/or the householder's spouse. We would like to thank Renée Wilson-Simmons for her advice on this fact sheet and Suma Setty for data checks and proofreading. Special thanks to Diana Gazzia for layout and production.

1. In this fact sheet, poverty is defined as family income less than 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold, as determined by the U.S. Census Bureau; low income is defined as family income less than 200 percent of the poverty threshold.

2. The U.S. Census Bureau issues the poverty thresholds annually. Thresholds vary by family size and composition. See www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/threshld/ for the complete 2014 poverty thresholds.

3. Cauthen, Nancy K. & Fass, Sarah (2008). *Measuring Income and Poverty in the United States*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Retrieved January 2016 from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_825.pdf.

4. Estimates from the Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator. Retrieved January 2016 from <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>.

5. In the most recent ACS, parents could report children's race as one or more of the following: "White," "Black," "American Indian or Alaska Native," or "Asian and/or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander." In a separate question, parents could report whether their children were of Hispanic origin. For the data reported, children whose parent reported their race as White, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Asian and/or Hawaiian/Pacific Islander and their ethnicity as non-Hispanic are assigned their respective race. Children who were reported to be of more than one race were assigned as Other. Children whose parent identified them as Hispanic were categorized as Hispanic, regardless of their reported race.

6. The variable "native-born parents" is defined to mean that both parents in the family were born in the U.S. or its territories, or born abroad to American parent(s). The variable "immigrant parents" is defined to mean that at least one parent in the family is either a U.S. citizen by naturalization or is not a citizen of the U.S.

7. Parents' education is defined as the education level of the most highly educated parent living in the household. Parents can either have no high school degree, a high school degree but no college, or some college or more.

8. Parents' employment is defined as the employment level of the parent in the household who maintained the highest level of employment in the previous year. Parents can either have no employment in the previous year, part-year or part-time employment, or full-time, year-round employment. Part-year or part-time employment is defined as either working less than 50 weeks in the previous year or less than 35 hours per week. Full-time, year-round employment is defined as working at least 50 weeks in the previous year and 35 hours or more per week.

9. Aratani, Yumiko (2009). *Homeless Children and Youth*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Retrieved January 2016 from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_888.pdf.

10. People can report more than one type of insurance coverage. Children not covered by private or public health insurance at the time of the survey are considered uninsured.

11. Schwarz, Susan Wile (2009). *Adolescent Mental Health in the United States*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Retrieved January 2016 from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_878.pdf.

To find comparable information for all children, see *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 18 Years, 2014*; for infants and toddlers, see *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 3 Years, 2014*; for young children, see *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children under 6 Years, 2014*; for children in middle childhood, see *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children 6 through 11 Years, 2014*.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jiang, Y., Ekono, M., & Skinner, C. (2016). *Basic Facts about Low-Income Children: Children 12 through 17 Years, 2014*. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.