

## **Tracking Child Well-Being in U.S. Cities: Results from the American Community Survey**

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New poverty estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey indicate that about 18 percent of children nationwide were living in poverty in 2004. However, estimates from the American Community Survey (or ACS, a nationwide annual survey of households conducted by the Census Bureau) show that child poverty rates in 2004 varied widely in cities around the country, from less than 15 percent in San Francisco, Virginia Beach, and Wichita, Kan. to more than 45 percent in Atlanta, Detroit, and Long Beach, Calif.. The ACS estimates also show that over one-third of states had statistically significant increases in their child poverty rates between 2000 and 2004.

This poster will summarize the findings of a forthcoming report on the well-being of children in the 50-largest cities in the United States. In this analysis, special emphasis will be given to understanding the types of city environments that are both favorable and unfavorable for children. We will first analyse decennial census data to develop a framework for the analysis, creating categories of cities based on population size, the change in the child population from 1990 to 2000, racial/ethnic composition, or other characteristics. Then using the ACS data, we will analyze recent trends in child well-being for different categories of U.S. cities. We will also compare trends in the well-being of children nationwide with trends based on a 50-city average to see if conditions for children in cities have improved or worsened relative to children in the United States as a whole.

### ***Data and Methods***

Our analysis compares the well-being of children across cities for five key indicators of child well-being:

- Children living in poverty;
- Children living in single-parent families;
- Teens ages 16 to 19 who are high school dropouts;
- Children ages 5 to 17 with difficulty speaking English; and
- Children with no parents in the labor force.

Although these five measures are not intended to capture the full range of conditions shaping children's lives, we believe that these indicators reflect many of the key factors indicative of or affecting child welfare. Moreover, the measures are consistent across cities and over time.

We will primarily use data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) for this analysis. The ACS is a nationwide annual survey designed to provide communities with reliable and timely demographic, housing, social, and economic data each year. The 2000 to 2004 ACS surveys provide information for states and geographic areas with 250,000 or more

people. Starting in 2006, ACS data will be available for areas with populations of 65,000 or more. By 2010, pending continued Congressional funding, the Census Bureau will provide annual, five-year averages of ACS data for communities across the country. This analysis provides a preview of the type of information that will later be available for local communities across the United States.

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