*Poverty and The Effects on Children and Parents Effects on Children*

For children of all ages, poverty has some devastating effects. Poor children are two times more likely than non-poor children to have stunted growth, iron deficiency, and severe asthma. A government study in 1996 showed that poverty placed children at greater risk of dying before their first birthdays than did a mother's smoking during pregnancy. Another study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that for every year a child spends in poverty, there is the chance that the child will fall behind grade level by age 18. In the 1994 book, Wasting America's Future, the Children's Defense Fund estimates that every year of child poverty at current levels will cost the nation at least $36 billion in lost future productivity alone, because poor children will be less educated and less effective workers. For parents struggling to raise a child, poverty adds extensive stress to the family. McLoyd (1990) states that economic hardship experienced by lower-class families is associated with anxiety, depression, and irritability. With those qualities may come a tendency on the part of parents to be punitive, inconsistent, authoritarian, and generally non-supportive of their children. The strain of poverty may also promote the use of disciplinary approaches that take less time and effort than approaches such as reasoning and negotiating. Spanking and forms of physical punishment are quick; they may relieve frustration and they don't demand much thinking in the midst of multiple worries and stress. Effects on Parents Families in poverty, when parents are working, are influenced by the kind of occupations in which the parents work. Kohn (1977) has found that lower-class parents look at their children's behavior with a focus on its immediate consequences and its external characteristics, whereas middle-class parents explore their children's motives and the attitudes expressed by their behavior. Kohn interpreted these differences as connected to the characteristics associated with the level of occupation. Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982) concur that parents' workplaces affect their perceptions of life and the way they interact with family members. Consequently, their parenting styles reflect aspects of their work life. Again, as you watch children play, you will see indications of these influences in their conversations, roleplaying, interactions, vocabulary, and perspectives. It is possible that parents from higher socioeconomic statuses—parents with enough money to be comfortable while raising their families—are more likely to show more warmth and affection, talk to their children more, be more democratic, be receptive to their children's opinions, and stress creativity, independence, curiosity, ambition, and self-control. Parents who are experiencing "financial strain, depression and anxiety, marital discord and disrupted parenting due to their circumstances may be harsher with, less supportive of, and more detached from their children" (Ryan, Fauth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006, p. 329). When you put yourself in the shoes of parents from lower socioeconomic statuses—parents without enough money to be comfortable while raising their families, with constant worries about how to feed, clothe, and shelter their children—you can begin to understand why their behavior might differ significantly from the behavior of parents from higher socioeconomic statuses. Poverty and Housing The information on poverty previously described looks even more bleak when reviewed in the context of housing costs. Rent increases have exceeded inflation and much low-income housing has been lost to decay, gentrification, and urban development. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition reported in 2004 that a fulltime minimum wage income continues to be inadequate to afford even the most modest two-bedroom home at fair market rent, and that it would take nearly three times the federal minimum wage to afford such rent. Even more discouraging are the data showing that "in only four counties in the U.S. can a full-time worker earning minimum wage afford a typical one-bedroom apartment". It is also reported that women, children, and the elderly are overrepresented among those with housing problems. Children are present in 93% of overcrowded households and 56 percent of households with multiple problems such as overcrowding, malfunctioning heating or plumbing systems, and health hazards (Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, 2003). Those health-related hazards include lead poisoning, asthma, asbestos, radon, and mold. Added to these problems is a huge lack of affordable housing, the leading cause of homelessness.

Excerpt from Early Childhood Education: Birth - 8: The World of Children, Families, and Educators, by A. Driscoll, N.G. Nagel, 2008 edition, p. 188-189. © \_\_\_\_\_\_ 2008, Merrill, an imprint of Pearson Education Inc. Used by permission.

*Child Poverty Rates and Family Structure (from National Conference of State Legislators)*

The U.S. Census Bureau released its annual household income report, [Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2011](http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p60-243.pdf) on September 12.The report presents data on income, poverty and health insurance coverage in the United States.
Research shows children in families receiving child support payments are less likely to be poor. Because of the connection between child support and poverty, federal and state child support professionals can use the data to develop priorities and projects that will best serve families.

**Child Poverty**

Census Bureau data from the report indicate that the number and rate of children living in poverty has leveled off. There were 16.1 million (21.9 percent) children under 18 years old living in poverty in 2011. In 2011, 7.3 million children, or 9.8 percent, were living in deep poverty (those with income below one-half of the federal poverty threshold). Of all children in poverty 45 percent were children in deep poverty. Child poverty rates are highest among black, Latino, and American Indian children. Across the states, official child poverty rates range from 9 percent in New Hampshire to 31 percent in Mississippi. Although the economy is recovering, the child poverty rate rose in seven of the last 10 years.

**Employment and Earnings**

Employment and earning statistics give child support professionals an idea of whether noncustodial parents are working and earning income to pass on to their children. Between 2010 and 2011, the number of men working full time, year-round with earnings increased by 1.7 million to about 58 million. That number is 5 million fewer than in 2007, the year before the most recent recession. The number of women working full time, year-round increased by 0.5 million to about 43.7 million, but was 1.9 million fewer than in 2007.
Real median household income declined between 2010 and 2011, a second consecutive annual decline. The real median income for all households was 8.1 percent lower in 2011 than in 2007 and 8.9 percent lower than the median household income peak in 1999. The real median earnings of both men and women working full time, year-round declined 2.5 percent between 2010 and 2011. Women continue to have lower median earnings. Women who worked full time, year-round earned 77 percent ($37,118) of that for men working full-time, year-round ($48,202).

**Health Insurance**

The percent of people without health insurance coverage declined from 16.3 percent in 2010 to 15.7 in 2011.The number and percentage of children without health coverage remained level in 2010 and 2011 at 7 million children, or 9.4 percent. Children 12 to 17 had a higher uninsured rate than those under 12. Children in poverty were more likely to be uninsured (13.8 percent) than all children.
 All state agency-processed child support cases must include an order for the child’s medical support to include establishing and enforcing private or public health care coverage; cash payments by either parent to fund premiums, co-payments and extraordinary or uncovered medical expenses; or cash payments for Medicaid cost reimbursement. Health insurance coverage statistics assist child support professionals in understanding whether parents and children have health insurance and can be used to target medical support efforts.

**Family Structure**

Family structure is important to the well-being of children. Parents and family life influence a child’s well-being throughout early development and into adulthood. The family unit plays an instrumental role in cognitive, social and emotional development. Research shows that children born into intact married parent families are more likely to thrive economically, socially and psychologically. Having children outside of marriage is associated with higher child poverty, poorer educational outcomes for children, and greater public costs, including increased child support enforcement expenditures.
 According to the Census, children in married households are the least likely to be in poverty, at 11 percent.2 Children living in single-mother households have poverty rates more than twice that of children in single father homes (48 percent vs. 22 percent). Forty-seven percent of children living in different-sex cohabiting households experience poverty. Children of same-sex cohabiting households experience poverty at a rate of 29 percent, regardless of parents’ sex.