

## Child Poverty

During the most recent year on record (1993, revised), more than a quarter of a million (226,841) Oklahoma children lived in poverty. Oklahoma children are poorer (25.4%) than the general population (18.3%).

One out of every four (25.4%) Oklahoma children lives in poverty. Oklahoma's youngest are Oklahoma's poorest (32.8%) with more than eighty-four thousand (84,255) infants, toddlers and preschoolers under the age of five living in poverty. Oklahoma led all other states in worsening poverty for young children over the last two decades.

During the most recent three years on record, the proportion of Oklahoma children living in poverty worsened from 21.7% (1990) to 25.4% (1993, revised), with comparable rates also worsening in the vast majority (60 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties.

Oklahoma child poverty has skyrocketed (from 15.7% to 25.4%) since 1980. Every day since 1980, almost twenty (average 19.7) children joined those who were already poor. Poverty for children worsened in almost every Oklahoma county (75 of 77) during the same period.

The rates of poverty for children were better than the average county rate (26.5%) in about half of Oklahoma's counties (38 of 77) and worse in about half of Oklahoma's counties (39 of 77). During this most recent period, the highest and worst rate of child poverty (45.9%) is found in Harmon County; the lowest and best (11.0%) is in Beaver County.

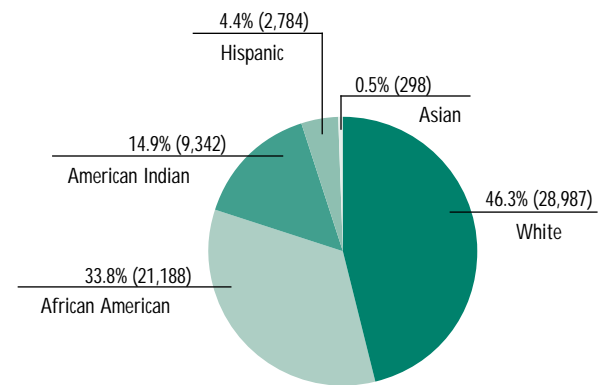
During Fiscal Year 1997, the average number of children living in families depending on public assistance, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), for basic needs each month dropped from just over seventy-eight thousand (78,021 or 9.0% of all children) to less than sixty-three thousand (62,599 or 7.1% of all children).

Oklahoma child poverty is racist. African American children (44.5% poor), American Indian children (34.8% poor) and children of Hispanic origin (35.8% poor) are more than twice as likely to be poor than White children (16.6% poor). About half (49.3%, excluding Hispanics) of Oklahoma child recipients of TANF are non-White. Hispanic children, recorded as a nationality rather than a race, comprise just over five percent (5.5%) of Oklahoma's child population. A slightly lower proportion of Oklahoma child recipients of TANF (4.4%) are counted as Hispanic.

Among countries with data available, the United States is the only wealthy industrialized country to have double-digit child poverty rates. Children in Oklahoma are more likely to be poor than children in most other parts of the United States. Oklahoma's child poverty ranking relative to other states has steadily worsened over the past decade and is among the worst (39th) in the nation for the most recent year compared (1995).

## Impact on Oklahoma

- ▶ *Poverty kills Oklahoma children.* Poor children are three times more likely to die during their childhood than non-poor children.
- ▶ *Children are limited by their family's low income status.* Being poor means living on an income which renders a family unable to purchase enough food for an adequate diet. One out of every three adolescents who live in poverty has no health insurance.
- ▶ *Poverty hurts Oklahoma children.* Poor children are more likely than non-poor children to eat an inadequate diet, to stay cold in the winter, and



Child Recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)  
By Race, Oklahoma, FY 1997

May not total 100% due to rounding

to receive little health care. Children represent twenty-five percent of the residents in Oklahoma's general population homeless shelters. Poor children are more likely to experience poor health, have out-of-wedlock births, experience violent crime, act out violently later in life and end up poor as adults.

- ▶ *The younger the child, the greater the harm.* The first years of a child's life are a formative period, crucial to emotional and intellectual development. Poverty for infants and toddlers poses serious threats to brain development. Poverty increases the risks of inadequate nutrition, poor health care, exposure to environmental toxins and substance abuse, maternal depression, trauma and abuse, and inadequate child care.

- ▶ *Poor children face bleak futures* Poor children are more likely to have reduced access to transportation, communication and quality education. Poor children are more likely than non-poor children to score low on standardized tests, drop out of school and face resulting severe economic and social consequences including less employment opportunity, poorer earning ability, higher rates of substance abuse, and higher unemployment.

- ▶ *Improving the outcomes requires community participation and planning.* Lowering poverty requires employment which provides parents with adequate wages to support their family. Access to medical care, child care, housing and transportation are essential for people to move successfully from welfare to work. Child poverty rates will decrease with community support for quality education, adequate nutrition, appropriate health care, and changes in behavior to reduce drinking, drug use, abuse, and premature sexual activity.

Child Poverty  
*Percent of Children Living in Poverty; Oklahoma: 1993,  
 Revised Estimates, State Rate: 25.4%,  
 Average of County Rates: 26.5%*

*Slightly more than one-third (81,084 children or 35.7%) of poor children live in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with just over one-third (36.4%) of Oklahoma's children.*

