

## Many Children with Married Parents are Low Income

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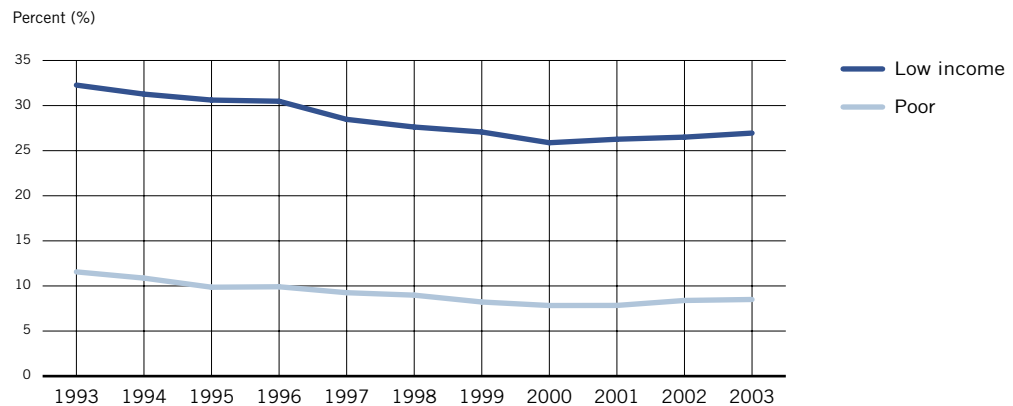
### Overview

Recent public policy initiatives have encouraged low-income parents to marry as a means of attaining economic security. But, the data tell a more complex story. Marriage does not guarantee economic security. Not only do the majority of children in single-parent families have parents who were previously married, but over a quarter of children with married parents are low income.

After a decade of decline, the low-income<sup>1</sup> rate among children with married parents<sup>2</sup> has been rising since 2000.

- 27% of children with married parents are low income.
- 9% of children with married parents are poor.

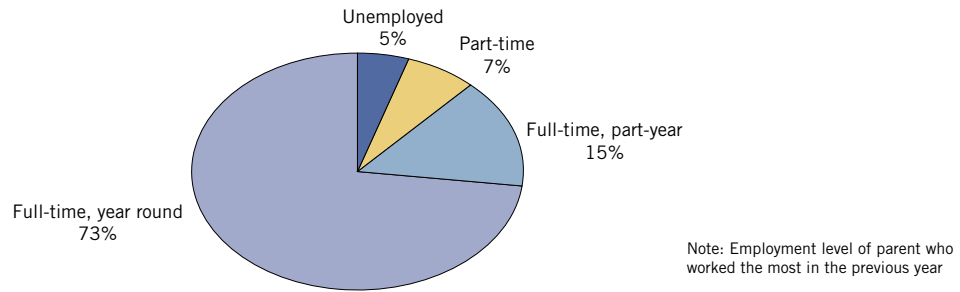
### Percent of children with married parents who are low income or poor



Employment levels are high among low-income, married parents.

- 95% of children with low-income, married parents have at least one employed parent.
- 73% of children with low-income, married parents have at least one parent who is employed full-time, year-round.<sup>3</sup>
- 41% of children with low-income, married parents have two employed parents.<sup>4</sup>

**Parental employment among children of low-income, married parents, 2003**



**Service jobs are common among low-income, married parents.**

- 26% of low-income, married parents hold jobs in the service industry.
- Workers in service occupations are not only likely to have lower earnings and fewer opportunities for full-time employment, but they are also less likely to receive benefits such as health insurance, paid vacation, or holiday time.<sup>5</sup>

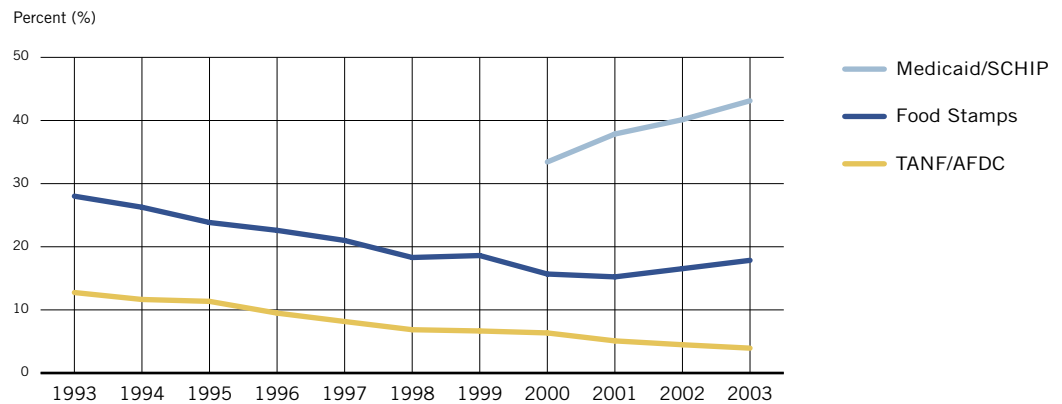
**Education levels are lower among married parents who are low income.**

- 55% of children with low-income, married parents do not have a parent with any college education.
- Only 18% of children with higher-income, married parents do not have a parent with any college education.

**Public health insurance and food stamp use is on the rise among children of low-income, married parents.**

- 43% of children with low-income, married parents receive public health insurance.<sup>6</sup>
- 18% of children with low-income, married parents receive food stamps.

**Public benefits utilization among children of low-income, married parents**



## Policy Implications

Given that more than one in four children with married parents is low income and that almost 60 percent of children in single-parent families have previously married parents, promoting marriage alone will not eliminate economic insecurity among America's families.

Policy strategies include:

**Increase wages.** Because many low-income, married parents are in service-industry jobs, increasing the minimum wage will increase their earnings. Programs that increase working families' incomes, such as the federal Earned Income Tax Credit, further boost wages to help parents support their families through employment.

**Increase access to higher education.** Reversing the recent trend toward providing tax subsidies for education—which favor higher-income families—over traditional subsidized loans and grants<sup>7</sup> could make education more accessible to low-income families.

## Endnotes

*Estimates in this fact sheet were prepared by Heather Koball and Ayana Douglas-Hall, based on the U.S. Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economics Supplements, March 1994-2004.*

1. Low income is defined as twice the poverty level, or \$38,700 for a family of four in 2005.
2. Married parents include step parents, as well as biological and adoptive parents, of the child.
3. Parental employment is the employment level of the parent in the household who maintained the highest level of employment in the previous year. Full-time/year-round is defined as working at least 50 weeks and 35 hours per week for the majority of those weeks. Part-time is defined as working less than 35 hours per week for the majority of weeks worked. Full-time, part-year is defined as working fewer than 50 weeks and working full-time in the majority of weeks worked.
4. This includes all married parents who worked full-time or part-time. Thirty-five percent of low-income, married couples include two employed parents with at least one parent employed full-time, year-round; 8% include two parents both employed part-time, part-year.
5. Nelson, J. I. (2004). Work and benefits: The multiple problems of service sector employment. *Social Problems*, 41(2), pp. 240-256.
6. Rates of receipt of public benefits derived from survey data are not comparable to those derived from administrative data (e.g., the figures reported in NCCP's 50-State Policy Database). Beginning in the 2001 Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the U.S. Current Population Survey, which collected data for 2000, new questions on SCHIP were added that more accurately measured health insurance coverage. Comparisons to coverage rates prior to 2000 may not be accurate.
7. Maag, E. & Fitzpatrick, K. (2004). *Federal financial aid for higher education: Program and prospects*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute <[www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410996\\_federal\\_financial\\_aid.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410996_federal_financial_aid.pdf)>.