

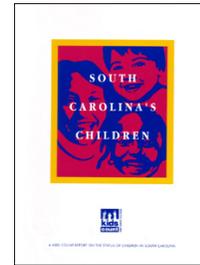
South Carolina's Children: A Kids Count Report

Client: South Carolina Kids Count

Size: 40 pages *including cover*

Sections: *Families* and *Economic Status*

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Content Sample

Section: Families

When families falter children suffer.

The Importance

Nothing is more important to a child than family. Families provide the basics for child growth and development, and these responsibilities require patience, perseverance, and a deep, lasting commitment.

Many families in South Carolina are struggling with poverty, unemployment, and a host of other difficult problems. When families falter, children suffer.

The Problems

Children and their families are a less prominent part of our communities.

Households with children made up only 39.9 % of all households in 1990, compared with 61.3% in 1960. When children are a less prominent part of the community, less attention is usually paid to them and their problems.

Families are going through stressful changes.

- In 1960, 4 of every 10 families with children lived in what were then considered "traditional" families, with the father employed and the mother not working outside the home. By 1990, only 2 in 10 families lived in this arrangement.
- The number of single-parent families has increased enormously. In 1960, 10.7% of children lived in single-parent families; by 1990, 25.1% lived with only one parent. This situation is even more common for African-American children, of whom 44.5% live with a single parent.
- The number of children who have parents newly involved in divorce each year increased substantially, from 6,741 children per year in 1970 to 13,793 children per year in 1990.
- The percentage of babies born to single mothers has tripled since 1950. Today, 3 out of every 10 babies in South Carolina are born to single mothers.
- In most families, both parents now work outside the home. In 1990, 66.7% of all mothers with children under age 6 and 78% of mothers with children age 6-17 years old were in the labor force.

Families are in crisis.

- **Too many parents are teenagers.** In 1990, 17.1% of all babies were born to mothers under the age of 20.
- **Too many parents are undereducated.** In 1990, 24% of babies were born to mothers who had not completed the 12th grade.
- **Too many families are poor.** More than 21% of children lived in poverty in 1990.
- **Too many parents abuse or neglect their children.** Between 10% and 25% of children are estimated to be victims of abuse or neglect during their lifetimes.

The Causes

Many families are struggling because their world is changing radically. These changes are putting additional burdens on parents while simultaneously eroding critical support from extended family, neighbors, community, and helping agencies. Some of the critical factors that erode family life are:

- limited employment opportunities
- low wages
- high cost of housing, medical care, day care, and transportation
- separation from grandparents and other relatives
- discrimination
- loss of supportive community relationships
- materialism and self-gratification
- weakening of commitment to marriage
- public policies that undercut families

To Strengthen the Family

Support should be available to families through such resources as:

- family planning services
- child care
- divorce and custody mediation
- mental health services
- health care
- job training and counseling
- financial planning and family budgeting
- job flexibility to meet family obligations
- parent training

A responsible, caring state that intends to compete with the rest of the nation must find ways to strengthen and support family life, because **strong families are our most fundamental infrastructure for development and progress. Responsible and caring parents should make support and love for their children and enhancement of family bonds their top priority.**

Section: Economic Status

Many parents are so financially stressed they cannot provide for their children's basic material needs, much less for enrichment activities.

The Importance

Too many of South Carolina's children lead lives limited by poverty and restricted economic opportunities. Many parents are so financially stressed they cannot provide for their children's basic material needs, much less for enrichment activities. As these children mature into adolescence, their development depends considerably on whether they are motivated by prospects of making a good living in a stable career.

The Problems

Family income in South Carolina is low compared to the United States.

The average income of both married couples and single-parent families with children in the state is only 85 % of the U.S. average.

One in five of South Carolina's children is poor.

In 1989, there were 190,873 poor children in the state under age 18; this number increased significantly during the 1990-'92 recession. Poverty is highest in single-parent families; 50% of children in single-parent families live in poverty, compared with 9.3% in two-parent families. Two-thirds of all poor children live in single-parent families. The poverty level for a family of three was \$11,570 in 1992.

Many children grow up in families just a paycheck away from poverty.

While 20.8% of children statewide live below the poverty level, an additional 26,500 have incomes between poverty and twice the poverty level. In South Carolina, the near-poor constitute a larger share of the population than in our country as a whole.

Long working hours are an increasing dilemma putting stress on families.

In 1990, 7 in 10 children under the age of 18 lived in families where either both parents or the single parent was in the labor force. This is a substantial increase compared with 4 in 10 in 1970. The labor force participation rate of women with children under 18 has increased from 51% in 1970 to 73% in 1990, and for women with children under the age of 6, from 44% in 1970 to 67% in 1990.

Half of all children in single-parent families are poor.

Today, 3 in 10 South Carolina children live in single-parent families, compared with 1 in 10 just 30 years ago. Numerous national studies say the increase in single-parent families is caused, in part, by low wages, which make it difficult for males to earn enough to keep a family of three or more out of poverty.

The Causes

Many workers in South Carolina are poor or near-poor because they face limited job availability, part-time or seasonal rather than full-time employment, and low wages. Employment and earnings have improved over the past few decades, but South Carolina started far behind the rest of the nation and is still struggling to catch up.

Males in South Carolina are employed at lower rates than in the United States as a whole.

The 59% employment rate of African-American males age 16 years and over in South Carolina is far below the 70% rate for white males in South Carolina and the 73% rate for white males in the United States. Female employment rates for African-Americans and whites in South Carolina are roughly the same as those for the United States -- between 52% and 55%. The increase in the female labor force reflects the attempt by families to offset declining or low wages, a cultural change in women's education and career goals, and the need for increasing numbers of single mothers to support their families.

Unemployment and low wages undermine families.

The hourly wage of South Carolina manufacturing workers was 69% of the national average in 1960, 74% in 1979, and 82% in 1990. The lower employment rates among males and the low wages of those who are employed make it extremely difficult for many of them to support a wife and children. This problem is quite severe for African-American males. Low wages for African-American women are an equally serious problem, especially when the woman is the single head of a household with children. Nationally, women earn about 70% of what men do.

Payments of child support are often deficient.

In South Carolina, over 80% of women receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) receive no child support payments. Of those who do receive any support, the average monthly amount ordered by the court in 1992 was only \$151. More than 250,000 children in the state are owed support by a non-custodial parent, but only half of these have court orders for support.

To Improve Economic Opportunities

South Carolina should continue to pursue increased jobs and wages. The economic recruitment activities of the Governor's Office, the State Development Board, and local economic development officials should continue, particularly the emphasis on attracting high-wage jobs with adequate benefits and the emphasis on rural areas of the state. The state's efforts to improve education and worker skills through education reform, vocational and technical education, higher education, and the special schools sponsored by the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education should likewise continue. Ultimately, it is up to each individual to invest the necessary effort, to build the essential skills, and to take advantage of the opportunities created.

South Carolina's human capital (i.e., South Carolina's workers) should be improved dramatically. Early and continued school success is an essential foundation for the economic development and job training efforts that will build national and international competitiveness.

Finally, career opportunities must be improved for young adults, especially African-Americans. It will take the concerted efforts of educators, employers, policy-makers, and local communities to overcome the obstacles of race and class discrimination, inadequate skills, limited personal contacts with employers, and hopelessness.