

Narrowing The Gap



Economic Inequality

Single Parent Households More Likely To Live In Poverty And To Be Headed By Females

Nationwide, single parents are more likely to live in poverty and these households are more likely to be headed by women. According to the [2015 American Community Survey](#), 53.7% of households living below the poverty line are headed by single parents. Within single-parent households in poverty, women head up 85.2%; only 14.8% are headed by men.

Median income reflects the same gender disparities. The median income for single-parent households headed by men was \$40,381 compared with \$25,274 for those headed by women according to the [2015 American Community Survey](#). Both of these contrast with married dual-parent households, whose median income was \$87,943.

Federal efforts to alleviate poverty for struggling families include [Earned Income Tax Credit](#), [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#), [Temporary Aid To Needy Families](#), [Women, Infants, and Children](#) program, and [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#). For families at risk of homelessness, [Opening Doors](#), a U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness program, coordinates services to keep families in stable housing which can help them maintain employment and lead to better economic outcomes.

What Our Research Shows: From The 2016 And 2015 NYC Equality Indicators Report

As in the rest of the United States, family composition can affect whether or not a household lives in poverty in New York City (NYC). Presumably, dual-parent households fare better economically than households headed by a single parent because they are more likely to have more than one income.

Based on the [2016 Center for Economic Opportunity \(CEO\) Poverty Report](#), we found roughly a third (33.0%) of single-parent households lived below the CEO poverty line (which is designed to take into account the high cost of living in NYC) in 2014, compared with 16.6% of dual-parent households. These findings are similar to those of the previous year. In 2013, 32.1% of single-parent households lived below the poverty line, compared to 17.3% of dual-parent households.

Child care expenses may account for some of the disparity between household types: single-parent households may have only one income to support child care and other basic needs, while dual-parent families may have more than one income earner to help with these costs. There are several efforts underway in NYC that seek to address this disparity. One is the NYC Administration for Children's Services' [EarlyLearn](#), which provides low or no cost child care to eligible families.

Educational Inequality

Early School Enrollment Increasingly Important In Households Headed By Single Parents

Affordability of child care can be a huge issue for many parents, especially single parents. According to [The Century Foundation](#), a large number of states (23 and the District of Columbia) have child care costs (based on costs for four-year-olds) exceeding what is "affordable" to many families (e.g., more than 10% of income for a married couple with children).

A policy solution many favor is publicly funded universal pre-kindergarten (pre-K). [New America](#) recommends every 3- and 4-year-old in America be enrolled in universal pre-K to ease costs of childcare for parents as well as to give children more developmental opportunities early in life. Emphasized is how crucial these programs are to children living below the poverty line, many of whom reside in single-parent households. At the federal level, the Obama administration spearheaded a national "Preschool for All," but this measure was defeated, according to [New America](#).

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In NYC we looked at the percentages of 3- and 4-year-olds living with one and two parents who are not enrolled in early education. In 2014 the city launched an ambitious [universal pre-K program](#) aiming to provide free, full-day pre-K to all city residents.

Based on 2014 data from the [American Community Survey](#), we found significant disparities in rates of enrollment based on family composition: more 3- and 4-year-olds living with one parent (46.4%) than two parents (36.1%) were not enrolled in school.

Single fathers were the least likely to enroll their 3- and 4-year-olds in early education. We found that more than half (54.2%) of children living with single fathers compared to slightly less than half (44.6%) of children living with single mothers were not enrolled in school. Since these data were collected, overall [enrollment rates](#) in pre-K have increased, tripling between 2013-2014 and 2015-2016; as new data are released we will see whether disparities have lessened as enrollment increased.

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In this issue of *Narrowing The Gap*, we focus on one of the groups adversely affected by inequality: **Single Parents**. Other issues will describe inequalities faced by children, immigrants, individuals currently in jail or on probation, individuals living in poverty, individuals with less than a high school diploma, individuals with a physical or intellectual disability, lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender/queer, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities, seniors, and women.

Housing Inequality

National Homeownership Rates Vary Widely By Family Composition

Research suggests that the well-being of families is heavily impacted by the quality of their housing and the safety of their neighborhood. Homeownership can provide stability and greater engagement with the community. This is true for all families, but especially so for single-parent families. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Housing Vacancies and Homeownership Statistics (Table 17, 2015), 48.2% of single-parent families owned homes, compared to 79.6% of married dual-parent families. The overall national homeownership rate was 63.7%.

The 2015 homeownership rates were little changed from 2014, when 48.7% of single-parent families owned homes, compared with 80.3% of dual-parent families. The 2014 homeownership rate of 64.5% was similar to the 2015 one.

To encourage homeownership the Federal Housing Administration assists first-time homebuyers with loans, closing costs, and reducing down payments. These are considered the greatest obstacles to owning a home for all families, but especially so for single parents, with one income.

Services Inequality

National Rates Of Children's Participation In Extracurricular Activities By Family Composition

Research synthesized by the National Endowment for The Arts suggests that many positive outcomes have been associated with children's arts participation including greater success in school and more enhanced socio-emotional development. According to the 2011 U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of children participating in "Lessons" (broadly defined as art, music, dance, language, computers, or religious instruction taken after-school or on weekends) as an extracurricular activity varied by family composition. In one-parent families, the rate was 24.1%. In two-parent families, the rate was 32.2%.

The disparity is meaningful, especially in the face of decreased arts education instruction in schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' 2012 analysis of arts education in public schools, at the elementary level offerings in visual arts, dance, and drama/theatre have all declined.

"Raising a family is difficult enough. But it's even more difficult for single parents struggling to make ends meet. They don't need more obstacles. They need more opportunities."

-Bill Richardson, Former Governor, New Mexico

What Our Research Shows: From The 2016 And 2015 NYC Equality Indicators Report

Based on data from the Census' 2016 Current Population Survey, in NYC homeownership rates vary greatly by family composition. Approximately 14.1% of single parents indicated they owned their homes compared with 36.8% of those who indicated they were part of a two-parent household. The overall homeownership rate in the city was 32.9%.

The overall 2016 home ownership rate improved from 2015's rate of 31.0%. Single-parent 2016 homeownership rates also saw improvement from 2015's rate of 13.1%. However, dual-parent households saw a decline in homeownership in 2016 from 2015's rate of 39.5%.

In NYC, barriers to owning a home are sizable. NYC is considered a high-value real estate market, with 2015 median home prices reaching \$916,000 in Manhattan according to Corcoran Real Estate. The Neighborhood Housing Services of New York City administers a down payment assistance program for home purchases in any of the five boroughs. Buyers must be first time homebuyers and commit to living in the home for ten years.

What Our Research Shows: From The 2016 And 2015 NYC Equality Indicators Report

Based on our 2016 public survey of 3,003 people in the NYC area, 23.0% of single-parent and 29.0% of two-parent households had children who did not participate in arts activities at school or outside of school.

In 2015, single- and two-parent households indicated their child participated in arts activities at similar rates: 25.8% of children of single parents and 26.3% of children in two-parent households did not participate in arts activities.

In NYC there are a variety of initiatives aiming to provide age-appropriate developmental learning opportunities through the arts and other activities. The NYC Children's Cabinet strategizes about ways City agencies can better serve NYC children. A new program they designed to connect children to these opportunities is "Growing Up NYC." The goal of this program is to ensure all children have access to developmental opportunities regardless of their family composition, income, race, ethnicity, or gender.

Online support tools for parents complement the program, providing information vital to the needs of caregivers. "From even before your child is born until they set out for life on their own, *Growing Up NYC* will be there to help," said NYC Council Member Stephen Levin about the program.

The Equality Indicators is a project of the Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) of the City University of New York.

The project measures progress towards greater equality across six themes related to **Economy, Education, Health, Housing, Justice, and Services** using 96 indicators. Each indicator is scored from 1 to 100, where 1 represents the most inequality and 100 the least inequality. For more information please visit our website at equalityindicators.org and follow us on twitter [@equalityISLG](https://twitter.com/equalityISLG)