

Status of Families

United Way of Tri-State



THE GOOD SIGNS

- In 1999, 67 percent of Tri-State area children under 18 lived with both parents.
- The region's marriages are up 20 percent from 1995 to 1997 and the divorce rate has declined from 1 in 2.5 marriages to nearly 1 in 3 marriages.
- Between 1994 and 1998 per capita incomes increased in every county across the Tri-State area.

THE CHALLENGES

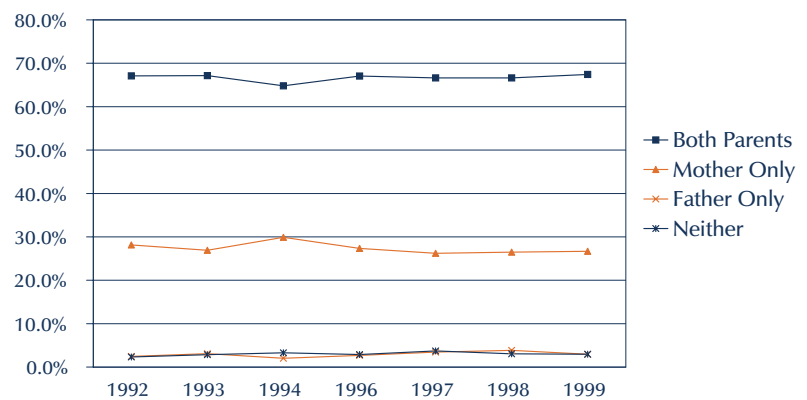
- In 1999, 17.3 percent of families were in poverty.
- In 1997, one-third of all births in the region were to unmarried mothers.
- 60 percent of the region's women with children under 18 are in the labor force.
- 42 percent of people in the labor force expect to care for an elderly relative in the next five years.

In 1997, the United Way of Tri-State published *Twenty Million Neighbors*, an analysis of social, economic and demographic trends in the Tri-State region. As part of a series of periodic updates, the United Way of Tri-State has identified the status of families as a focus for further investigation.

Families in the Tri-State area live in a variety of configurations. For the purposes of this study, the focus was primarily on families with children under 18. While detailed information about the make-up of households will not be available until the release of findings from the 2000 Census, the Current Population Survey offers a rough picture of the different living arrangements of children in the Tri-State area.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of children living with both parents, their mother or father only or neither. In 1999, 67 percent of children under 18 lived with both parents. Another 27 percent of children under age 18 lived with their mother, 3 percent lived with their father and 3 percent lived with neither. (The CPS does not specify whether or not the parents are married.) As shown in Figure 1, after a dip in the mid-1990s, the percentage of children living with both parents appears to have stabilized. The number of children per family remained stable during this period, at about 1.85.

Figure 1: Presence of Parents for Children Under 18 in the Tri-State Area



1992 to 1999 Current Population Survey.
Data for 1995 not available.

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE In 1997, 171,738 marriages and 60,405 divorces occurred in the Tri-State region. The number of marriages rose by nearly 20 percent from 1995, the number of divorces by just over 6 percent. The increasing rate of marriage compared to divorce has lowered the divorce rate in the Tri-State area from one in 2.5 marriages in 1995 to one in 2.8 marriages in 1997.

UNMARRIED PARENTHOOD Female-headed households are among the most vulnerable types of families. In 1998, the median income of a female-headed family was only 40.9 percent of the median income of a family headed by a married couple. And according to 1999 CPS data, only 3 percent of families in the Tri-State area receive any child support.

Between 1994 and 1997, the number of births to unmarried mothers in the Tri-State area declined by almost 15 percent, to just under 93,000. Births to unmarried mothers also declined as a percentage of all births. The percentage of all children who are born to unmarried mothers nevertheless remains high, at 33 percent, and is especially high in some of the region's urban counties (Figure 2).

Unmarried mothers gave birth to over 60 percent of the babies born in the Bronx in 1997.

There is notable variation across counties. In the Bronx, 63.2 percent of the births were to unmarried mothers and in Essex County, NJ, the rate was 48.1 percent. But even in those counties with the lowest percentages of births to unmarried women, i.e., Putnam, Hunterdon and Morris, unmarried mothers accounted for nearly 10 percent of all births.

TEENAGE PARENTHOOD Children born to teen mothers – in addition to being likely to grow up in poverty – are at greater risk of school failure, drug use, criminal behavior and their own teen pregnancy.

Births to teens declined to 7.7 percent of all births in 1997, but still totalled 21,779.

Between 1994 and 1997 the percent of the region's children born to teen mothers declined slightly from 8.1 percent to 7.7 percent. This overall average, while declining, masks some significant variation among the counties in the region. In Essex County, 12.4 percent of all births were to teenage mothers, while in Putnam County only 2.0 percent of all births were to teenage mothers.

Even with the percentage of babies born to teenagers declining to 7.7 percent, this translates into 21,779 babies born to teenagers in the region in 1997.

WORKING PARENTHOOD Data from the 1992 and 1999 CPS comparing the marital status and labor force participation of parents show remarkable stability for the situation of fathers with children under age 18 and significant change for mothers in the Tri-State area. In 1992, 76 percent of all fathers participated in the labor force. In 1999, the percentage was exactly the same.

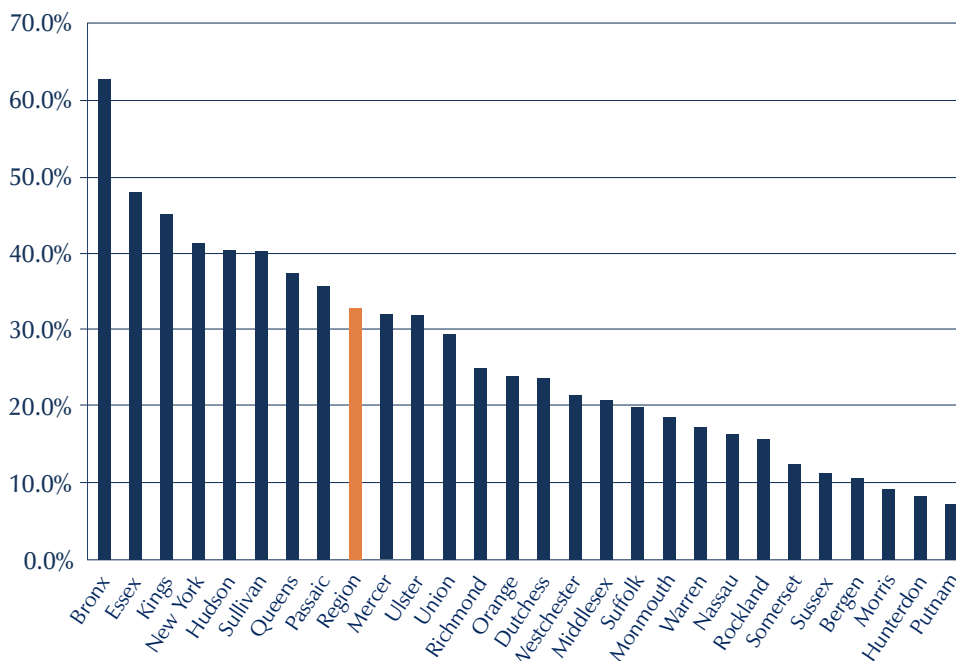
In 1992, 50 percent of all mothers with children under age 18 participated in the labor force; in 1999, 60 percent – an increase of 20 percent.

In both 1992 and 1999, 84 percent of working fathers were married. However, the percentage of working mothers who had never been married increased from 20 percent in 1992 to 24 percent in 1999.

MEETING FAMILY NEEDS: INCOMES IN THE REGION

One of the most important indicators of how well families in the Tri-State area are doing is the income available to meet family needs. Unfortunately, detailed family median income figures at the local level are only available from the Census. Per capita income, which is available on an

Figure 2: Percent of Total Births to Unmarried Mothers, 1997



annual basis, showed increases in every county across the region. When per capita income is held constant for inflation between 1994 and 1998, the increases ranged from 23.2 percent in Manhattan and 21.7 percent in Fairfield County to a low of 4.8 percent in the Bronx and 6.2 percent in Queens and Passaic County. Incomes ranged from \$72,194 per capita in Manhattan to \$19,841 in the Bronx (Figure 3).

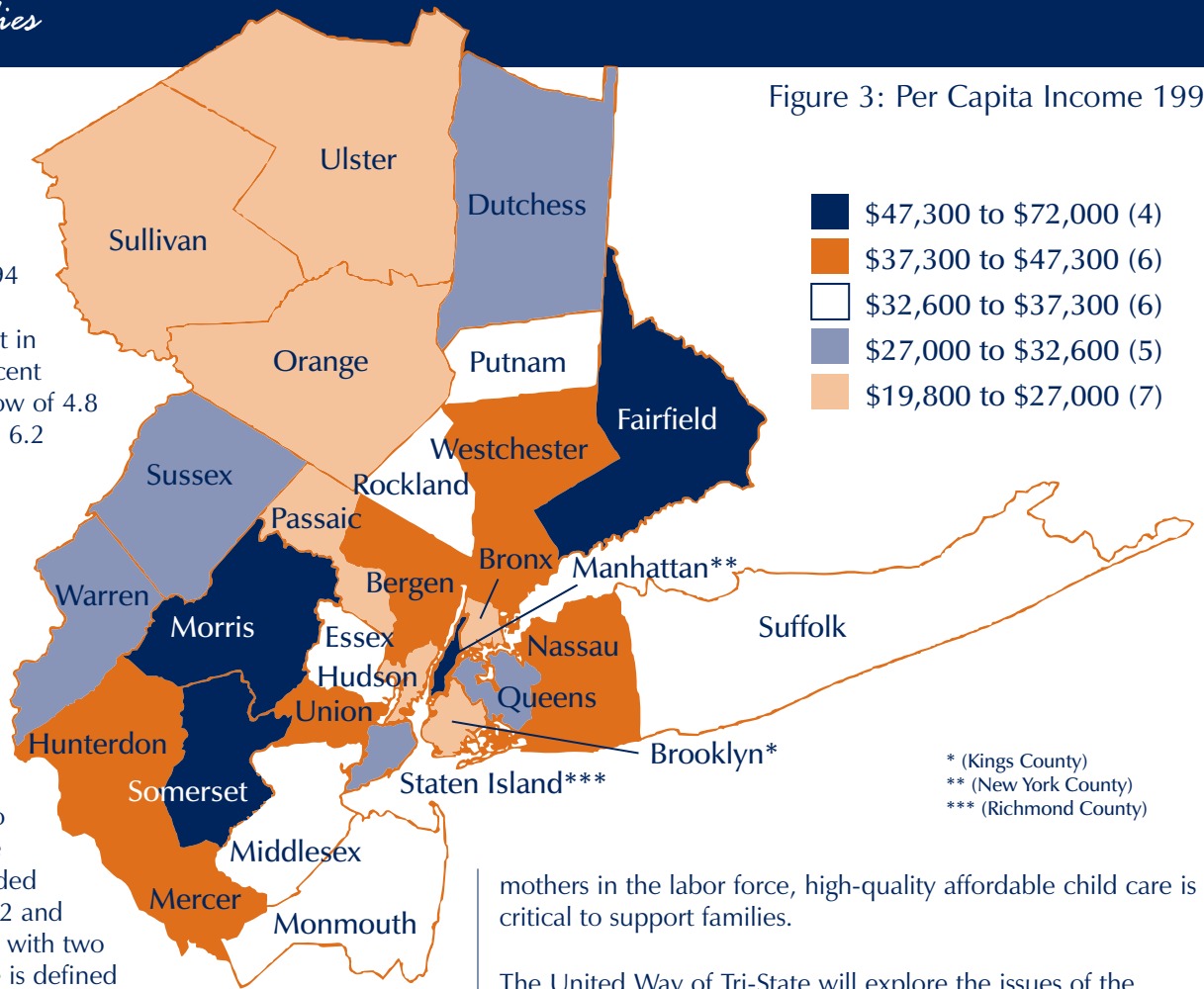
Despite this good news, 17.3 percent of families still had incomes below the poverty line, according to the 1999 CPS. This is the highest percentage recorded by the CPS between 1992 and 1999. For a single parent with two children, the poverty line is defined as \$14,150.

One of the consequences of rising incomes is the corresponding increase in the price of housing. The U.S. Conference of Mayors found a 15 percent rise in the number of families applying for shelter in America's cities in 2000. On February 8, 2001, the *New York Times* reported a substantial increase in the number of families seeking emergency shelter in New York City. On a typical night, 10,177 children and their 8,024 adult family members sought shelter – an increase of 10 percent in the last year.

17.3 percent of families in the Tri-State area live in poverty.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE In September 2000, the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement released a report calculating the cost of meeting minimal family needs (housing, child care, food, health care, etc.). For a family of three in the Bronx, the study found an income of \$44,208 was required to achieve self-sufficiency – or 3 times the income defined as poor. One of the causes for the differential is the cost of child care. Child care costs consumed 32 percent of the estimated \$44,208 self-sufficiency wage, or \$1,234 per month. The federal poverty calculation does not incorporate child care costs; in the 1960s, it implicitly assumed an at-home spouse providing "free" child care. With an increasing percentage of

Figure 3: Per Capita Income 1998



mothers in the labor force, high-quality affordable child care is critical to support families.

The United Way of Tri-State will explore the issues of the working poor more fully in the next update.



IMMIGRATION The high level of immigration to the Tri-State area means that a growing number of families in the region include both immigrant and US-born members. In 1999, at least 33 percent of children in the Tri-State area had a foreign-born parent compared with 30 percent in 1994, according to the CPS. In New York City, 46.7 percent of births were to foreign-born mothers. The Dominican Republic, Mexico, Jamaica and China topped the list of most common countries of origin for women giving birth in the City.

ABUSE & NEGLECT: FAMILIES IN CRISIS In the tri-state region, 37,695 substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect were reported in fiscal year 1998. This translates into 7.7 cases per thousand children in the region. Data on substantiated cases of abuse and neglect vary greatly between the counties of the Tri-State region. While some correlation can be drawn between poverty and abuse, in other cases poverty would not explain the high rate of substantiated abuse cases – as in Fairfield County, 15.9 per thousand, and Dutchess County, 12.2 per thousand. Such variations suggest not only differences in

the incidence of abuse and neglect but also in local responses to the problem.

Children may be removed from their homes for a number of reasons, including allegations of abuse, the death or imprisonment of a parent, the voluntary placement by parents overwhelmed by their children's behavior, or changes in policies determining when it is appropriate to remove a child from his or her home. Whatever the reason, out-of-home placement in foster care or group homes signals a family in crisis.

**1 child in 50 in New York City
lived in foster or group home care
in 1999.**

Across the region, 43,373 children were in foster care in 1999. New York City alone accounted for 80.3 percent of this total, while it makes up only 36.7 percent of the children in the region. Over the last five years the total number of New York City children in foster care has declined from 40,454 to 34,841 – down 13.4 percent. However, 34,841 children translates into approximately 1 child in 50 living in foster care in New York City – over 7 times the rate of the rest of the region. Excluding NYC, 2.7 children per 1,000 in the region's other counties of New York and New Jersey were in out-of-home placements. In Fairfield County, 5.3 children per 1,000 were in out-of-home placements.

In 1999, researchers at the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that substance abuse contributed to 7 out of 10 cases of child maltreatment. Furthermore, children under age 5 are most likely to be abused or neglected by a substance-abusing parent, becoming the fastest growing segment of the foster care population.

Implications for Family Needs

Education and Job Training: There is continued need to help parents in low-income families increase their earning power through access to better-paying jobs. Opportunities for education and job training can help them develop marketable skills. Employers can help by providing access to jobs with increased earning potential.

Family-Centered Programs: Much government funding is targeted to the needs of individuals, making it difficult for service providers to address the needs of the family as a group. Private-sector funding allows service providers to create and sustain such family-centered programs.

Child Care: As the number of working mothers grows, child care has become a critical issue for families at all income levels. Especially urgent is the need to make adequate, affordable child care more available to low-income working parents.

Teen Opportunities: Continued support for programs that give teenagers opportunities for education, achievement and employment will help sustain the progress that has been made in reducing the region's teen birth rate.

Substance Abuse Treatment: At the core of many family problems, such as poverty and child abuse, is an alcohol- or drug-abusing parent. Getting such parents into treatment is crucial to the survival of their families and the protection of their children.

Elder Care: Family caregivers need guidance in making use of – and would benefit from better coordination of – services for the elderly. There is also a need to develop new services in communities – especially in suburban and rural areas – where elderly populations are growing.

Services to Immigrants: The steady increase in the number of immigrant families in the region is creating new service needs – for example, for family-centered English language and literacy instruction.



ANDWICH GENERATION

In addition to caring for children, parents are also confronted with the needs of elderly family members. According to a 1997 survey by The Families and Work Institute, 25 percent of people in the labor force provided elder care in the prior year, and 42 percent expected to provide elder care in the next five years. The region's population of those over 85 increased 27.3 percent between 1990 and 1998 and was the fastest growing segment of the population in the Tri-State area.



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