

The Impact of the Recession on Single Mother Employment: Already High Unemployment Jumps Even Higher and More Single Mothers Reduced to Part-time Work

Single mothers have consistently experienced a far higher rate of unemployment than the population as a whole, and this pattern has continued during the economic downturn that began in December 2007. In 2007, the average monthly unemployment rate was 8.0 for single mothers compared to 4.6 for the population as a whole.¹ In 2009, the unemployment rate was 13.6 for single mothers compared to 9.3 for the population as a whole.

The single mother unemployment rate may have grown even higher than 13.6 in 2010. Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) will not publish the single mother unemployment statistic until the year is over, BLS does publish on a monthly basis the unemployment rate for “women who maintain families,” about two-thirds of whom are single mothers.² The average monthly unemployment rate for women who maintain families was 11.9 in the first seven months of 2010, compared to 11.5 in 2009.³

The economic downturn has also led to an increase in the fraction of employed single mothers who work only part-time from 18% in 2007 to 22% in 2009.

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(For further information, contact Timothy Casey, Senior Staff Attorney, tcasey@legalmomentum.org)

¹The single mother data cited here are the data for women with own children under 18 years with no spouse present reported in Table 5 of the annual Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) publication “Employment Characteristics of Families in (year),” the most recent edition of which is available at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/famee.pdf>. Total population unemployment rates are from the BLS table “Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population, 1940 to date,” available at <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/lf/aat1.txt>

²“Women who maintain families” include all women who rent or own a house and who live with a relative other than a spouse. The relative may be a parent or sibling, for example, as well as a minor child.

³ Unemployment rate data for women who maintain families retrieved from <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/srgate> using code LNU04000313.