

# POVERTY & FAMILY SUPPORTS

FACT SHEET

## National Snapshot: Poverty Among Women & Families, 2011

September 2012

Census data released in September 2012 show that poverty rates started to stabilize in 2011 after several years of increases, as the economy slowly recovered from the Great Recession that began in late 2007 – but that left poverty among women and children at or near historically high levels. Poverty rates for all groups of women in 2011 were higher than for their male counterparts.

Though the data present a grim picture, they also show the importance of federal and state programs in alleviating poverty and hardship, even though not all of these programs are counted in the official poverty measure. Whether policy makers choose to maintain and strengthen programs that bolster the recovery and protect the most vulnerable – or cut those programs while expanding tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations – will play a crucial role in determining whether more women and families are lifted out of, or sink into, poverty in the years to come.

### What Does the Federal Poverty Rate Measure?

The official poverty rate reported by the Census Bureau measures the percentage of the U.S. population with total income below the federal poverty threshold for their family size (e.g., \$22,811 in 2011 for a family of four with two children). "Income" is calculated before taxes and includes only cash income, such as:

- Earnings
- Pension income
- Investment income
- Social Security
- Unemployment benefits
- Child support payments

A number of other federal and state benefits that help support low-income families are not counted as income under the official poverty measure. These include:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (formerly known as Food Stamps)
- Tax benefits (e.g., Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit)
- Housing subsidies

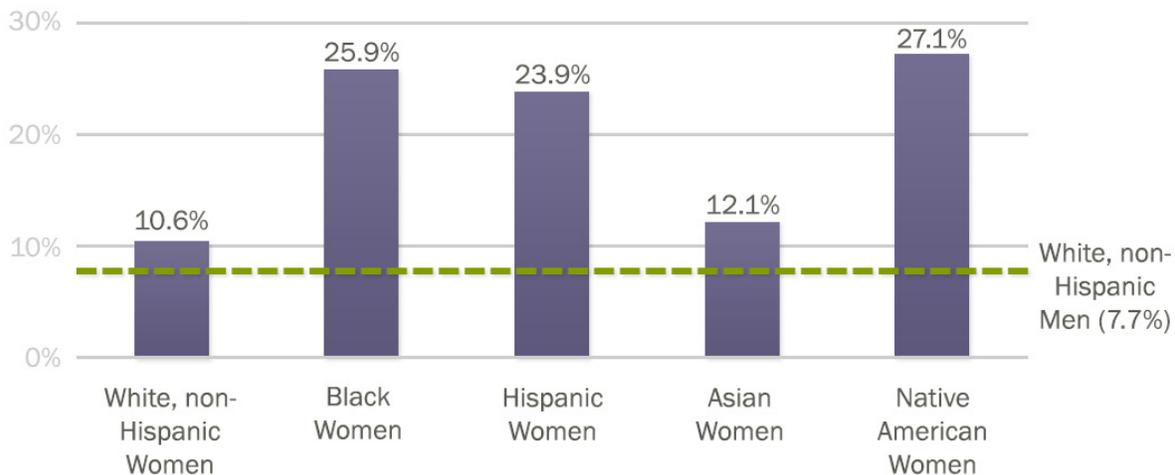
## Adult Women, 2011

- More than one in seven women, nearly 18 million, lived in poverty in 2011. About 44 percent of these women (nearly 8 million) lived in extreme poverty, defined as income at or below 50 percent of the federal poverty level. Nearly 1 in 15 women lived in extreme poverty in 2011.
- The poverty rate for women (14.6 percent) was 3.7 percentage points higher than it was for men (10.9 percent). The extreme poverty rate for women (6.4

percent) was 1.7 percentage points higher than it was for men (4.7 percent).

- Women in all racial and ethnic groups experienced higher poverty rates than white, non-Hispanic men. Poverty rates were particularly high, at about one in four, among black (25.9 percent), Hispanic (23.9 percent), and Native American (27.1 percent) women. Rates for white, non-Hispanic women (10.6 percent) and Asian women (12.1 percent) were also considerably higher than the rate for white, non-Hispanic men (7.7 percent).

### Poverty Rates for Adults by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



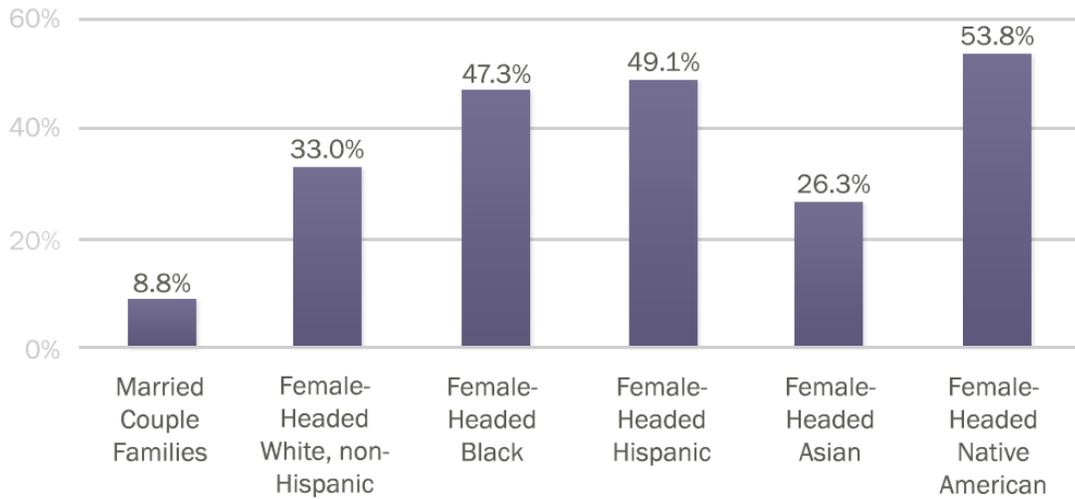
## Single Mothers and Children, 2011

- Over 16 million children lived in poverty in 2011, close to half of whom (45 percent) lived in extreme poverty.
- 21.9 percent of children were poor, almost twice the rate for adult men (10.9 percent). Poverty rates were particularly high, at more than one in three, for black (38.8 percent), Hispanic (34.1 percent), and Native American (38.2 percent) children. The poverty rate was 13.5 percent for Asian children and 12.5 percent for white, non-Hispanic children.
- The poverty rate for female-headed families with children was 40.9 percent, compared to 21.9 percent for male-headed families with children, and 8.8 percent for families with children headed by a married couple.

- Poverty rates were about one in two for black female-headed families with children (47.3 percent), Hispanic female-headed families with children (49.1 percent), and Native American female-headed families with children (53.8 percent). The poverty rate was 33.0 percent for white, non-Hispanic female-headed families with children and 26.3 percent for Asian female-headed families with children.

- More than half of all poor children (58.0 percent) lived in families headed by women.
- More than 600,000 (13.3 percent) of single women with children who worked full time, year round in 2011 lived in poverty.

## Poverty Rates for Families with Children by Marital Status, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011



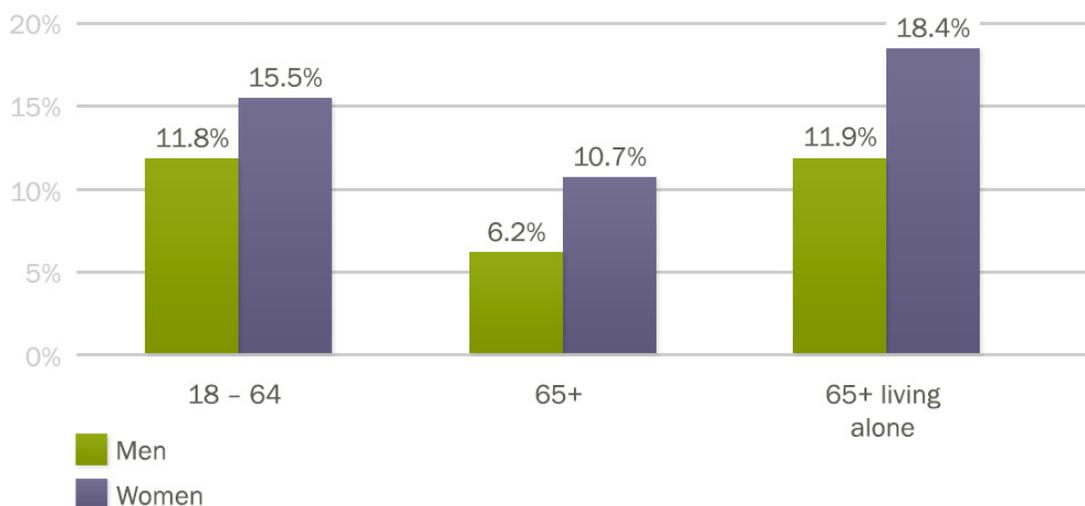
Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

www.nwlc.org 

## Women 65 and Older, 2011

- Among people 65 and older, more than twice as many women (2.5 million) as men (1.1 million) lived in poverty in 2011.
- The poverty rate for women 65 and older was 10.7 percent, 4.5 percentage points higher than the poverty rate for men 65 and older (6.2 percent).
- 18.4 percent of women 65 and older living alone lived in poverty, compared to 11.9 percent for men 65 and older living alone.
- Poverty rates were particularly high, at about one in five, for black (20.8 percent) and Hispanic (19.7 percent) women 65 and older. The poverty rate was 8.5 percent for white, non-Hispanic women 65 and older, 13.3 percent for Asian women 65 and older and 15.6 percent for Native American women 65 and older.

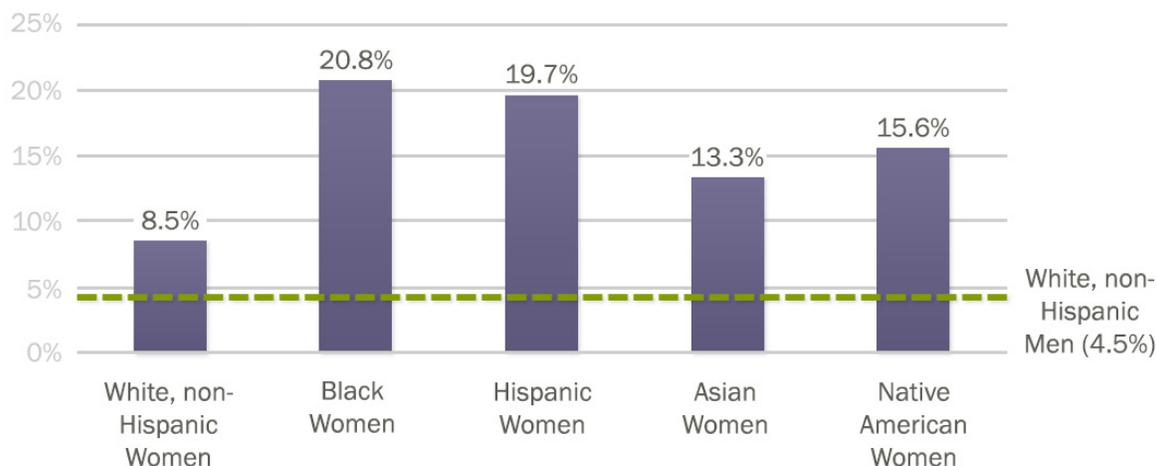
## Poverty Rates for Adults by Gender and Age, 2011



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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## Poverty Rates for Adults 65 and Older by Gender, Race, and Ethnicity, 2011



Source: Census Bureau, Current Population Survey

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### Impact of Income Support Programs, 2011

Census data also show that poverty and hardship would have been substantially worse without the income support provided by federal and state programs. For example, in 2011:

- Social Security prevented 21.4 million people from falling into poverty, including 1.1 million children.
- Unemployment insurance benefits (both state benefits and federal emergency benefits) prevented 2.3 million people from falling into poverty, including 600,000 children.

If the official poverty measure counted non-cash and after-tax benefits as income, the poverty rate would be lower. For example, in 2011:

- Counting income families receive from the Earned Income Tax Credit would have lifted 5.7 million people above the poverty line, including 3.1 million children.
- If the value of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits (food stamps) were counted as income in the poverty measure, 3.9 million fewer people would have been below the poverty line, including 1.7 million children.

SOURCE NOTE: All data are from the 2012 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.