

ES 4.1

HOUSING PROBLEMS

Housing is a major expense for most families; however, spending more than 30 percent of income on housing may compromise the budget for other essential goods and services. A home's physical condition, its safety, the level of crowding in a household, and the quality of the surrounding neighborhood can all affect children's well-being.⁴⁴ This section presents recent trends in both the cost burden and the physical quality of housing for all households with children under age 18 and for renter households with children and very low income.

Cost Burden. The share of all households (containing children) spending more than 30 percent of their incomes on housing increased from 15 percent in 1978 to 28 percent in 1995, while the share spending more than half their income on housing doubled from 6 percent in 1978 to 12 percent in 1995 (see Table ES 4.1). For renter households with children and very low income⁴⁵ the trend was similar, but housing expenses were a much higher share of income. Between 1978 and 1995, the percentage of renter households (with children and very low income) paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing rose from 59 percent to 68 percent (with the entire increase occurring between 1978 and 1983), while the percentage spending more than 50 percent rose from 31 percent to 38 percent.

Physical Problems. During this same period, the percentage of households (containing children) living in housing with moderate to severe physical problems⁴⁶ declined from 9 percent in 1978 to 7 percent in 1995.⁴⁷ For renter households (with children and very low income), the percentage living in housing with moderate to severe physical problems declined from 18 percent in 1978 to 13 percent in 1995.

Differences by Type of Family. Married-couple families with children are the least likely to experience housing with physical problems, followed by households with one or no adult and households with two or more adults who are not married. In 1995, for example, 6 percent of married-couple households with children, 10 percent of households with one or no adult, and 10 percent of households with two or more unmarried adults lived in housing with moderate to severe physical problems (see Figure ES 4.1.A). Similarly, among all households with children, married couples are the least likely to be paying over 30 percent of their income on housing. For example, in 1995, 21 percent of married-couple households paid over 30 percent, compared with 51 percent of households with one or no adult and 34 percent of households with two or more unmarried adults (see Figure ES 4.1.B).

⁴⁴ Moore, K., Zaslow, M.J., Coiro, M., Miller, S.M., and Magenheim, E. 1996. *The JOBS Evaluation: How Are They Faring? AFDC Families with Preschool-Aged Children in Atlanta at the Outset of the JOBS Evaluation*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation; Blackman, T., Evason, E., Melaugh, M., and Woods, R. 1989. "Housing and Health: A Case Study of Two Areas in West Belfast." *Journal of Social Policy* 18 (1): 1-26.

⁴⁵ Very low income households are those with incomes at or below one-half the median income in a geographic area.

⁴⁶ Physical problems include plumbing, heating, electricity, upkeep, and/or hallways. For detailed definitions of "moderate" and "severe" physical problems, see U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1997, *Current Housing Reports H150/95RV*, "American Housing Survey for the United States in 1995," Washington, D.C., pp. A-13 and A-14.

⁴⁷ This apparently downward trend may not be statistically significant.

Table ES 4.1

Percentage of households with children under age 18 in the United States having selected housing problems,^a all households and very low income^b renter households: selected years, 1978-1995

	1978	1983	1989	1993	1995
Household type					
All households with children					
Number of households (in thousands)	32,267	33,584	35,735	35,462	37,264
Percentage with					
Any problems	30	33	33	34	36
Moderate or severe physical problems	9	8	9	7	7
Crowded housing	9	8	7	6	7
Cost burden greater than 30 percent	15	21	24	27	28
Cost burden greater than 50 percent	6	11	9	11	12
Severe problems	8	12	10	11	12
Renter households with children and very low income					
Number of households (in thousands)	4,176	5,091	5,892	6,653	6,508
Percentage with					
Any problems	79	83	76	75	77
Moderate or severe physical problems	18	18	18	14	13
Crowded housing	22	18	17	14	17
Cost burden greater than 30 percent	59	68	67	67	68
Cost burden greater than 50 percent	31	38	36	38	38
Severe problems	33	42	33	34	32
Rental assistance	23	23	29	28	29

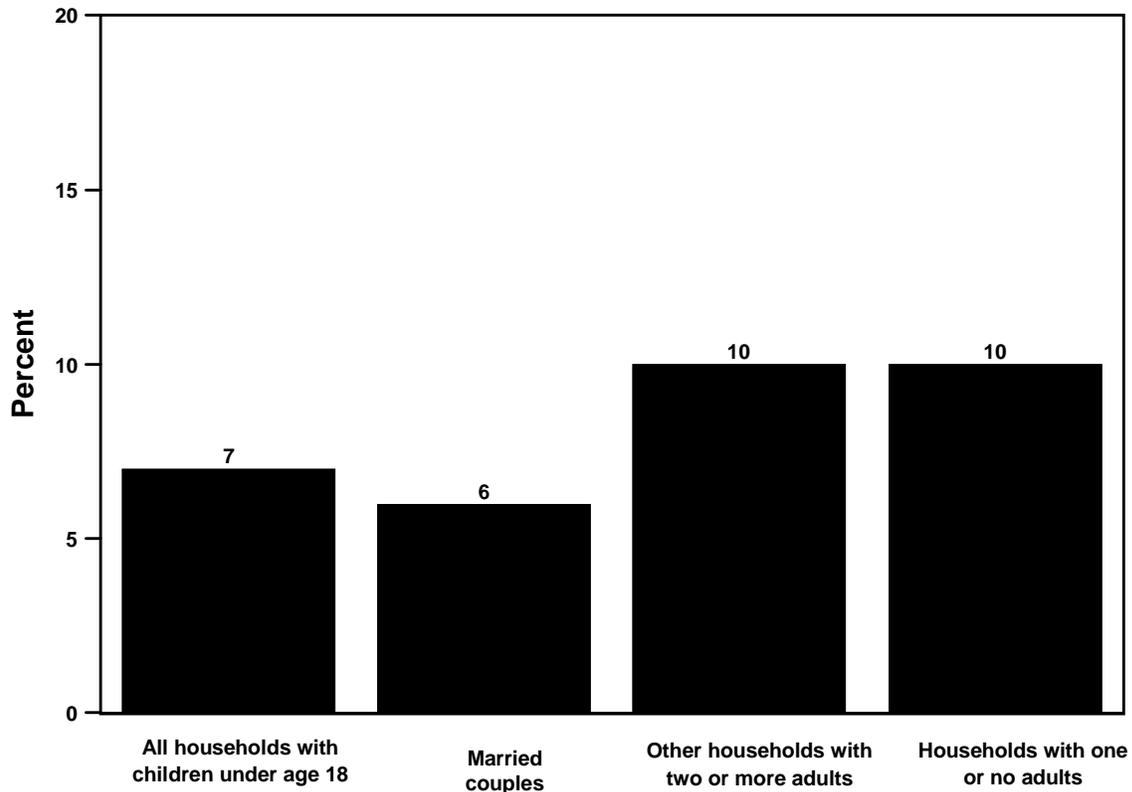
^aHousing problems include physical problems, excessive cost burden, and overcrowding. "Crowded" is defined as having more than one person per room. Physical problems include plumbing, heating, electricity, upkeep, and/or condition of apartment hallways. For detailed definitions of "moderate" and "severe" physical problems, see U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1997), Current Housing Reports H150/95RV, "American Housing Survey for the United States in 1995," Washington, D.C., pp. A-13 and A-14. Cost burden is the ratio of housing costs to reported household income.

^bVery low income households are those with incomes at or below one-half the median income in a geographic area.

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, tabulations of data from the American Housing Survey for the United States as published in America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 1998. Federal Inter-agency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office. Table ECON3.

Figure ES 4.1.A

Percentage of households with children under age 18 in the United States living in housing with moderate to severe physical problems:^a 1995

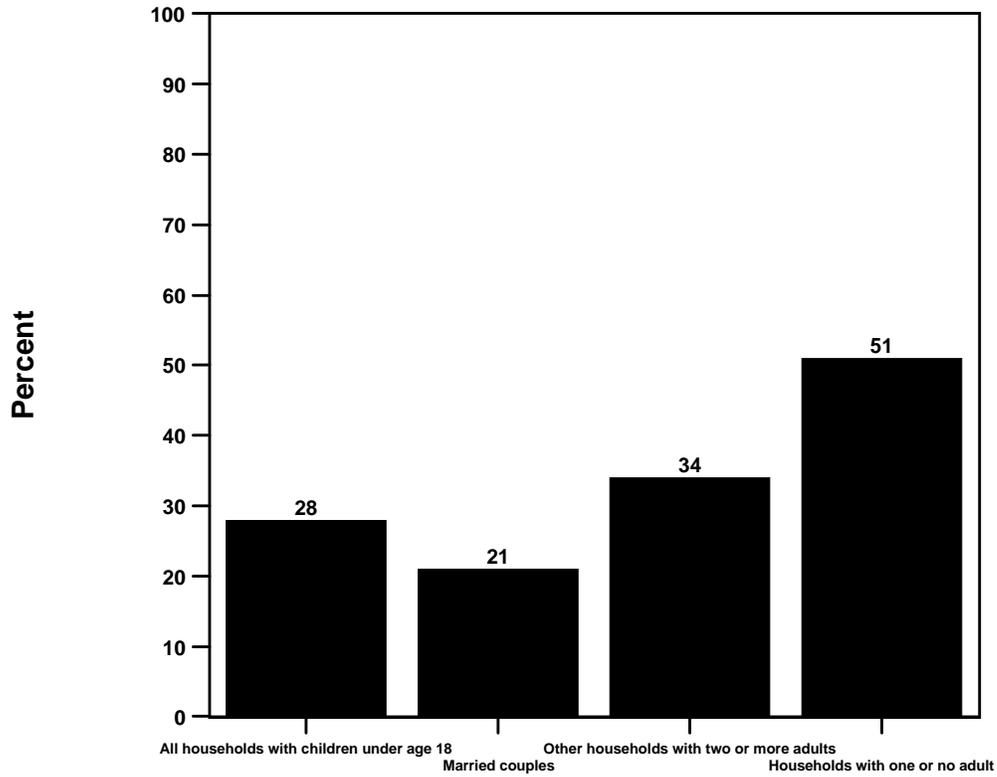


^aPhysical problems include plumbing, heating, electricity, upkeep, and/or condition of apartment hallways. For detailed definitions of “moderate” and “severe” physical problems, see U.S. Bureau of the Census and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (1997), Current Housing Reports H150/95RV, “American Housing Survey for the United States in 1995,” Washington, D.C., pp. A-13 and A-14.

Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, unpublished tabulations of data from the American Housing Survey for the United States, 1995.

Figure ES 4.1.B

Percentage of households containing children under age 18 and paying over 30 percent of their income on housing: 1995



Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, unpublished tabulations of data from the American Housing Survey for the United States, 1995.

ES 4.2

FOOD SECURITY⁴⁸

Children's good health and development depend on a diet sufficient in nutrients and calories. Food security has been defined as access at all times to enough nourishment for an active, healthy life. At a minimum, food security includes the ready availability of sufficient, nutritionally adequate and safe food, and the assurance that families can obtain adequate food without relying on emergency feeding programs or resorting to scavenging, stealing, or other desperate efforts to secure food.⁴⁹ A family's ability to provide for children's nutritional needs is linked to income or other resources and secure access to adequate, nutritious food.

Members of food-insecure households are at risk of hunger, that is, the uneasy or painful sensation caused by a lack of food. The following indicator measures food insecurity on a scale that indicates increasing levels of severity of food insecurity and accompanying hunger. Food-insecure households without hunger report having difficulty obtaining enough food, reduced quality of diets, anxiety about their food supply, and increased resort to emergency food sources and other coping behaviors, but do not report hunger to a significant degree. However, food-insecure households with moderate and severe hunger report increasing difficulty obtaining food and decreased food intakes.⁵⁰

- The percentage of children living in households experiencing food insecurity has remained fairly stable since 1995. In 1995, 12.8 percent of children lived in households experiencing food insecurity. This rose slightly to 13.0 percent in 1996 and then decreased to 11.3 percent in 1997. This stability is also evident for children in homes with incomes below the federal poverty level and for children in homes with incomes at or above the poverty level (see Table ES 4.2).
- In 1997, 4.2 percent of children lived in households experiencing food insecurity with moderate or severe hunger; 3.5 percent experienced food insecurity with moderate hunger and 0.7 percent experienced severe hunger (see Figure ES 4.2 and Table ES 4.2).
- Poor children are much more likely than others to live in households experiencing food insecurity with moderate to severe hunger. In 1997, 11.1 percent of children in homes with incomes below the federal poverty level lived in households experiencing food insecurity with moderate to severe hunger, compared to 2.1 percent of children in non-poor households.
- Most food-insecure households do not report actual hunger for household members. In 1997, 11.3 percent of all children and 26.8 percent of poor children lived in households experiencing food insecurity without hunger evident.
- The number of children who actually experience hunger themselves, even though they may live in a food-insecure household where one or more family members experience hunger, is believed to be significantly smaller than the total number of children living in such households. This is because in most such households the adults go without food, if necessary, so that the children will have food.

⁴⁸ We wish to thank the Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, for providing a draft of the text as well as the statistics used in this section.

⁴⁹ Life Sciences Research Office and American Institute of Nutrition. 1990. *Core Indicators of Nutritional State for Difficult to Sample Populations*. Bethesda, Md.: Life Sciences Research Office and American Institute of Nutrition.

⁵⁰ See the note to Table ES 4.2 for a description of the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey and for details on the food security scale.

Table ES 4.2

Percentage of children under age 18 in the United States living in households experiencing food insecurity, by severity and poverty status: 1995-1997

Poverty level	1995	1996	1997
All children			
Food insecure without hunger	12.8	13.0	11.3
Food insecure with moderate or severe hunger	6.2	6.2	4.2
Food insecure with moderate hunger	5.2	5.2	3.5
Food insecure with severe hunger	1.0	1.0	0.7
Children below poverty line			
Food insecure without hunger	26.6	28.7	26.8
Food insecure with moderate or severe hunger	15.7	17.4	11.1
Food insecure with moderate hunger	12.8	13.9	9.2
Food insecure with severe hunger	2.9	3.5	1.9
Children at or above poverty line			
Food insecure without hunger	7.9	8.5	6.7
Food insecure with moderate or severe hunger	3.0	3.1	2.1
Food insecure with moderate hunger	2.6	2.8	1.8
Food insecure with severe hunger	0.4	0.3	0.3

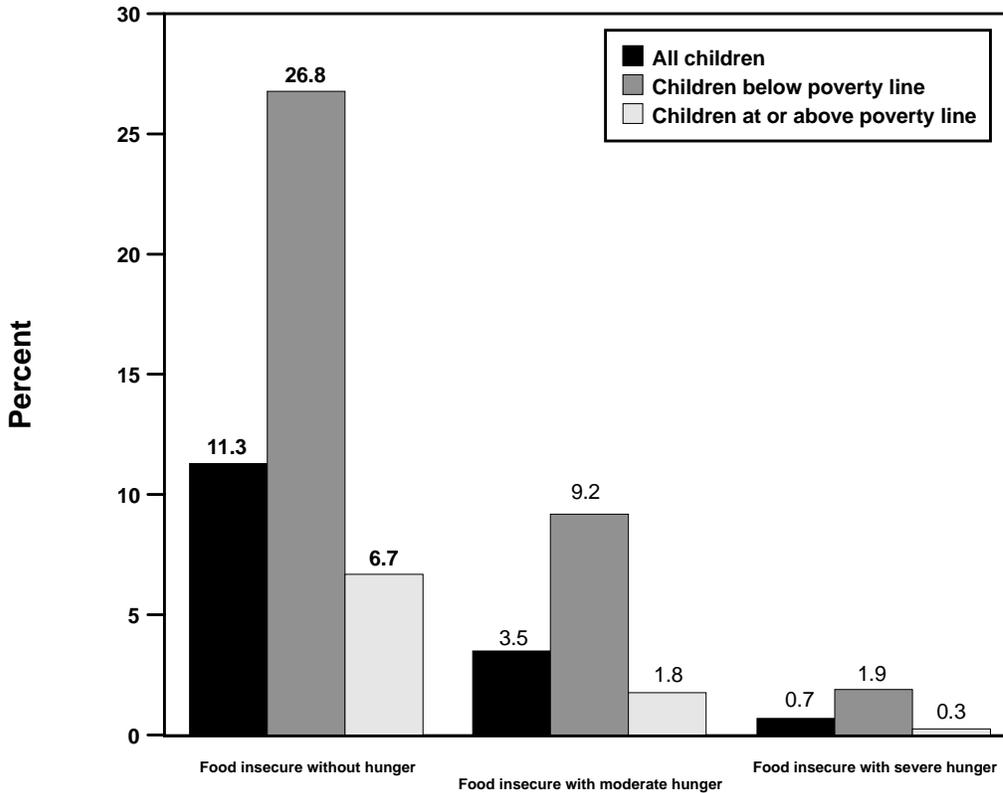
Note: The Food Security Supplement is a new survey instrument developed through a long and rigorous process. The content of the survey is based on material reported in prior research on hunger and food insecurity and subjected to extensive testing by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. It was developed through the consensus of nearly 100 experts convened at the 1994 Food Security Measurement and Research Conference convened jointly by the National Center for Health Statistics of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The survey was further developed, tested, and refined in the next year by conferees, members of a federal interagency working group, and survey method specialists from the Census Bureau's Center for Survey Method Research. The survey contains a systematic set of questions intended to identify levels of food insecurity on both a 12-month and a 30-day basis. Data presented in this report are 12-month data. Approximately 53,700 households completed the April 1995 basic CPS questionnaire and were invited to answer the Food Security Supplement. Of these, 44,730 households completed the supplement, implying a noninterview rate of 16.7 percent below the basic CPS sample. The respondents completing the supplement included households at all income levels, both above and below the federal poverty thresholds. Special weights were computed to adjust the final supplement sample for the demographic characteristics of supplement noninterviews.

The food security scale provides a near-continuous measure of the level of food insecurity and hunger experienced within each household. A categorical measure based on the scale classifies households according to four designated levels of household food security: food-secure, food-insecure without hunger, food-insecure with moderate hunger, and food-insecure with severe hunger. Food-secure households are households that do not report a significant number of instances of difficulty obtaining enough quality food. Food-insecure households without hunger report having difficulty obtaining enough food, reduced quality of diets, anxiety about their food supply, and increasing resort to emergency food sources and other coping behaviors, but do not report hunger to a significant degree. Food-insecure households with moderate hunger report food insecurity and significant instances of hunger for one or more adults and, in some cases, for children. Food-insecure households with severe hunger report food insecurity and significant instances of hunger for adults and children. For a detailed explanation of the new USDA/DHHS Food Security Measurement scale, see Household Food Security in the United States in 1995 (USDA, Food and Nutrition Service, 1997).

Source: Food Security Supplement to the April 1995, September 1996, and April 1997 Current Population Survey, as published in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 1999*. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Table ECON4.A.

Figure ES 4.2

Percentage of children under age 18 in the United States living in households experiencing food insecurity, by severity and poverty status: 1997



Source: Food Security Supplement to the April 1997 Current Population Survey, as published in America's Children: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 1999. Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Table ECON4.A.