

Born Poor: Inequality among Ethnoracial Minorities and Immigrants

In 2010, 46.2 million people were poor in the United States. This is the largest number ever recorded in the 52 years in which the government has reported poverty statistics. Poverty rates were especially high among children (22%). For this research we examine poverty rates among newborns during a period of unprecedented increases in the share of children born to households particularly vulnerable to poverty, such as single mothers (over 40%) and minority parents (nearly 50%). The study of newborn and child poverty merits attention because of a growing and substantial body of research that links poverty with lower levels of child well-being. For a variety of reasons, when compared with children born into more affluent families, children born into poor families are more likely to have low academic achievement, to drop out of school, and to have health, behavioral, and emotional problems. These linkages are particularly strong for children born into families in deep poverty, and who are trapped in poverty for an extended period of time. These disadvantages can persist throughout the life course of a child, resulting in lower levels of education and income as an adult. Because of the negative and potentially long-term effects of poverty on newborns and children it is important to be able to identify and measure the extent of children being born into impoverished conditions. Our research focuses on newborns born into poverty. We have two primary objectives. First, using the new fertility question on the *American Community Survey* (ACS) for the years 2005-2009, we identify infants born into families with incomes below the poverty line. For the first time we will be able to provide up-to-date estimates of the number and share of children being born into poverty. Second, we document the extent and etiology of poverty among America's racial minority and immigrant newborns. This research links past-year fertility with past-year poverty in the ACS, while also providing an unusual opportunity to track infant poverty over the pre-recessionary and recessionary periods.

Because detailed information about infants and the households they are born into is unavailable from the birth registration system and the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), until recently obtaining reliable socio-economic data about infants and the families they are born into was problematic. To identify newborns born into impoverished families we utilized the new fertility question on the ACS. We use the annual data from the 2005 through 2009 ACS microdata files to first identify and estimate the number of newborns. This is done using the age variable and defining newborns as anyone < 1 year old. Once the newborns are identified, we use the poverty variable in the ACS to determine if the newborns are part of a family that falls below the poverty threshold. We can then link the newborn data with the parent and household information by merging the newborn files with the mother and household files. The new ACS fertility question that asks "Has this person given birth to any children in the past 12 months?", along with ACS individual and household id variables, helps to ensure that data for newborns are accurately linked with their proper mother and household. By linking newborn data to mother and household data we are then able to estimate the magnitude and share of children born into poverty by a variety of demographic characteristics, including race, immigration status and marital status of the mother.

Child poverty rates have been on the rise in recent years. Extensive research on child poverty suggests that exposure to poverty in the early stages of life is one of the major factors that can negatively affect children's development, and that children born into racial minority or single mother families are particularly susceptible. Our research contributes to this important body of work by highlighting a new method that provides for the first time up-to-date estimates on the number of children born into poverty, and etiology of poverty among America's racial minority and immigrant newborns before and after the Great Recession.