

More poor kids in more poor places, study finds

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Persistent high poverty is most prevalent among children, with those living in rural America disproportionately impacted, according to researchers from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire.

"Nearly 22 percent of America's children live in poverty, compared with 14 percent of the total population. Poverty is scattered and geographically concentrated, and it ebbs and flows with economic cycles. However, in some parts of the country, poverty has persisted for [generations](#)," the researchers said.

Areas with persistent high [child poverty](#) are defined as places where child [poverty rates](#) have been greater than 20 percent at the start of each decade since 1980.

The key findings include:

- Between 1980 and 2009, 706 U.S. counties (23 percent) experienced persistent high child poverty. Only half as many counties had persistent high poverty across ages.
- Since the onset of the [recession](#), poverty levels in these persistent child poverty counties have sharply increased. Prior to the recession, 61 percent of persistent child poverty counties had more than 30 percent of children living in poverty. Now, it is 68 percent.

- Counties with persistent child poverty are disproportionately concentrated in rural areas; 81 percent of such counties are nonmetropolitan while only 65 percent of all U.S. counties are nonmetropolitan.
- Overall, 26 percent of the rural [child population](#) resides in counties whose poverty rates have been persistently high. This compares with 12 percent of the children in [urban counties](#).
- Counties with persistent child poverty cluster in Appalachia, the Mississippi Delta, other areas of the Southeast, parts of the Southwest, and in the Great Plains.

The researchers found that high child poverty is evident in the Southeast, particularly in the [Mississippi Delta](#) and in the Atlantic coastal plain. Poverty levels are also high in the central Appalachian coalfields and in the Ozarks. Additional child poverty hot spots exist in the Southwest along the Rio Grande and in Texas–New Mexico. Although child poverty is generally limited on the [Great Plains](#), a pocket of high child poverty is apparent in the Native American regions of the Dakotas. In contrast, there are far fewer occurrences of high child poverty in the Northeast and Midwest.

"The problems that all poor people struggle with are often exacerbated by the isolation and lack of support services in [rural areas](#)," the researchers said.

The research was conducted by Beth Mattingly, director of research on vulnerable families at the Carsey Institute and research assistant professor of sociology at UNH; Ken Johnson, senior demographer at the Carsey Institute and a professor of sociology at UNH; and Andrew Schaefer, a doctoral student in sociology at UNH and research assistant at the Carsey Institute.

This analysis is based upon decennial census data from 1980, 1990, and

2000, as well as American Community Survey five-year estimates (ACS) released in 2009. "High" child poverty is 20 percent or more of the children living in poverty in a county. "Persistent" poverty is high poverty rates in three consecutive decades: 1980, 1990, 2000, as well as 2009. Demographic data for each county are from the U.S. Census Bureau's "U.S.A. Counties Data Files." The complete Carsey Institute report about this research is available at <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/CarseySearch/search.php?id=176>.

Provided by University of New Hampshire

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