

Four Million Children are Hungry in the United States

Food Research and Action Center

Hunger is a serious problem in the United States. Our surveys indicate that in the United States, approximately four million low-income children under age 12 in this country are hungry

in some part of one or more months in the past 12 months.

Although they may not be hungry every day of the month, or even every month of the year, the hunger affecting children in low-income families is not a one-time or infrequent occurrence. It is

characterized by food shortages in the household, and chronic insecurity about whether the family will have enough food.

Hunger affects 40 percent of the hungry children in some part of all 12 months of the year. Projections based on our survey data—conducted in 9 states

U.S. Income Distribution: Bad for the Poor, Good for the Rich

The U.S. has the worst income distribution of any of the OECD countries, according to a study released late last year.

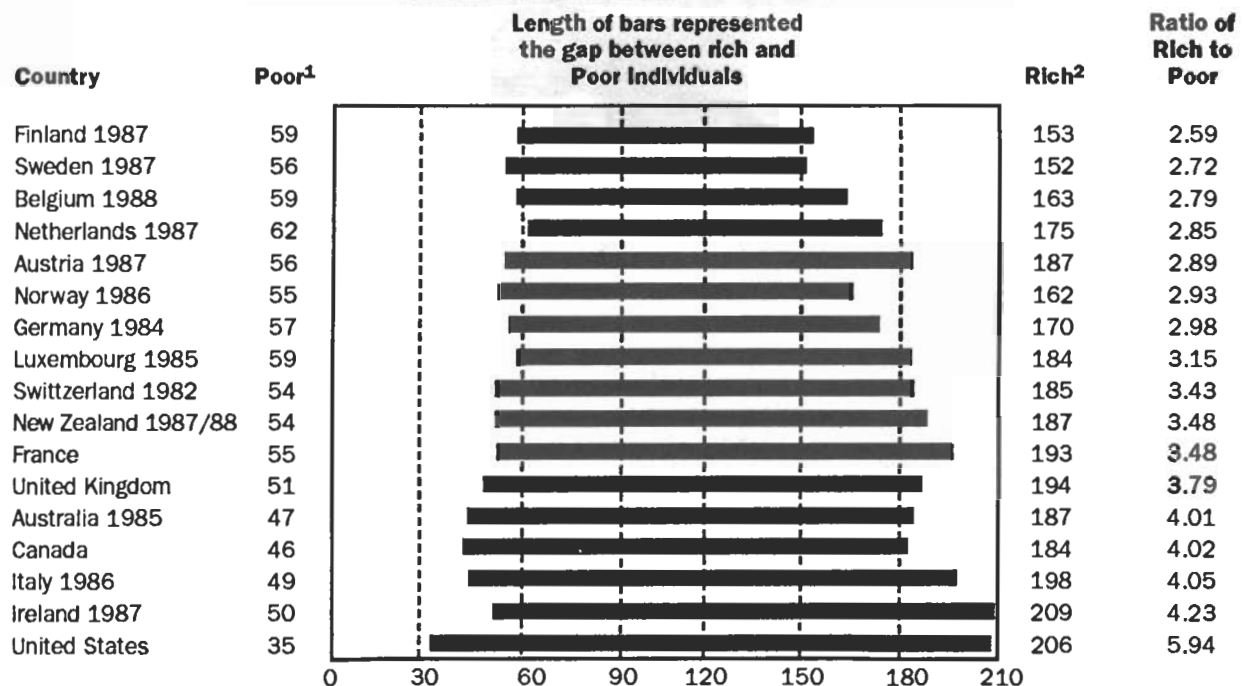
The study, "Income Distribution in OECD Countries" also showed that the gap between the rich and the poor increased in the 1980s for most countries including the United States. This was the decade in which tax cuts (principally for the rich, though this was not advertised) were supposed to raise everyone's incomes. Not surprisingly, especially in retrospect, it raised rich people's incomes.

The figure shows that the poorest 10 percent of people in the United States received only 35 percent of the median income, least of any country surveyed. The richest 10th in the United States received 206 percent of the median income, and the gap between the rich and the poor—indicated graphically by bar length—was greatest for the U.S. □

Atkinson, Anthony, Lee Rainwater and Timothy Smeeding. October, 1995. Luxembourg Income Study Working Paper Series, No. 120, "Income Distribution in Advanced Economies: Evidence from the Luxembourg Income Study." Published in Walferdange, LUXEMBOURG. Copies may be obtained by contacting Timothy Smeeding, Project Director, Maxwell School, 426 Eggers Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY, 13244-1090.

The Gap Between the Incomes of Rich and Poor Individuals

Numbers Given are Percent of Median in Each Nation



1. Relative income for individuals that are poorer than 90 percent of the individuals in the country and more affluent than 10 percent of the individuals, as a percent of national median.

2. Relative income for individuals that are more affluent than 90 percent of the individuals in the country and poorer than 10 percent of the individuals, as a percent of national median.

and the District of Columbia— indicate that on the national level, more than one and one half million (1.6 million) low-income children under age 12 are hungry in some part of all 12 months of the year.

More than four out of five (84 percent) hungry children were hungry in at least three months prior to the survey. This means that nationally, about 3.4 million low-income children under age 12 are hungry in some part of at least three months of the year.

An additional 9.6 million low-income children under age 12 are at risk of hunger in some part of one or more months in the past 12 months. They are members of low-income families that are usually able to provide for their children. They are vulnerable, however, and at risk of becoming hungry if an unexpected event— such as an illness in the family, an unusual expense, or a job loss— results in a reduction in the amount of money the family has to spend for food. On the household level, almost one-fifth (19 percent) of low-income families with at least one child under age 12 are hungry in some part of one or more months

of the past 12 months. An additional 50 percent are at risk of hunger.

A striking characteristic of hungry households and households at risk of hunger is how few economic resources they have. Three in five hungry households and about half of households at risk have incomes at or below the Federal poverty line (\$14,350 for a family of four in 1993).

While the majority of hungry families and families at risk of hunger is poor, a substantial portion of them is employed. At least one household member is employed in 60 percent of hungry households and almost half of hungry households have at least one full-time employee. Employment rates are even higher for families at risk of hunger.

Without benefits from the food stamp and WIC programs, many low-income families with children would either have less food or they would have considerably less money to spend on other necessities.

- Close to half (46 percent) of the amount hungry families spend on food is provided by food program

benefits.

- Food program benefits account for some 35 percent of the amount non-hungry families spend on food.

Parents in hungry families tend to cut the size of their own meals or skip meals before they allow food shortages to affect the children in the household.

Hungry children are more likely to have health problems than their non-hungry peers. Hungry children are also more likely than non-hungry children to miss school. Hungry households say they have much smaller support networks— fewer friends and relatives they can rely on— than non-hungry households. □

Adapted from "Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project, A Survey of Childhood Hunger in the United States," Food Research and Action Center, Washington, D.C., July 1995, pp. 8, 16. This report may be obtained free of charge by writing the Food Research and Action Center, 1875 Connecticut Ave., N.W., #540, Washington, D.C. 20009. Fax:(202)986-2525.

When Welfare Ends: Subsistence Strategies of Former Recipients

**Sandra K. Danziger and Sherrie
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When Michigan's General Assistance program was terminated in 1991, poverty advocates feared the ranks of the homeless would swell, while the state government expected lives to be improved by employment and private support. Neither of these assertions has fully borne out. Its termination provides some guidance about what will happen to poor people when government assistance is reduced.

General Assistance was a state-funded cash-assistance program throughout the 1970s and 1980s that provided aid for non-elderly impoverished adults without dependent children.

- Of those who received General Assistance (GA).
- Two of five recipients were women.
- Two of five recipients were over

age 40.

- One half the recipients were residents of Wayne County (Detroit).
- One recipient in 20 fit a widespread stereotype of a young urban African American male.

Most recipients had significant barriers to employment; Michigan's economy at the time of termination was running an official unemployment rate of 9.2 percent and Wayne County's was well over 10 percent.

When the GA program was last available, recipients could draw a maximum of \$160 in cash; they also had access to the state medical program associated with GA and they qualified for Food Stamps. Two years after GA termination:

- Only one-third (35%) of those not receiving disability payments did as well as when receiving GA. One-half of the people we interviewed were doing as well as when they had GA. This is partly because many received disability payments.

The expectation of Governor

Engler's administration was that GA termination would increase employment levels and force people to work to be self-sufficient. This ignores changes in Michigan's labor markets and in the ability of former recipients to acquire formal sector jobs.

- **Even though most people (76%) had previous work experience, only one in five was employed when we interviewed them the second time.** Janitorial and kitchen work dominated formal job opportunities after GA ended. One-third of the pre-termination jobs were in manufacturing.
- Those who were employed at the second survey had average wages of \$5.56 per hour and worked an average 35 hours per week.

The GA recipient population was characterized as "able-bodied" or "employable". Our surveys indicate that was simply not true for most.

- By June, 1993, about 15 percent of