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**Children's economic well-being during the  
Great Recession**

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We use data from the Current Population Survey on parental employment, family poverty, and food security to examine the impact of the recession on child well-being during the 2007-2009 recession. We estimate changes in child poverty and food insecurity by family structure, parental education, and race/ethnicity. Our results, using data for the first two years of the recession, show that the impact of the recession was widespread. Changes in food security were larger than changes in poverty, indicating that many families with earnings above the poverty line are experiencing serious financial difficulty. Children in married and cohabiting parent families and Hispanic children experienced the largest increases in poverty rates, while families with highly-educated parents experienced the smallest. Despite the disproportionate concentration of job loss among men, we find that single parent families were not spared, especially during the second year of the recession.

## **Introduction**

The current recession is the longest and deepest since the Great Depression and unemployment rates are likely to remain elevated in the near future. Child poverty and food insecurity in the United States, high even during times of economic prosperity, have increased. This paper provides updated estimates of child economic well-being in married, cohabiting, and single parent families and identifies any disparate impact of the current economic downturn on the well-being of American children.

We use recently released data in the Current Population Survey (CPS) to study how families fared during the first two years of the recession which began in December 2007. As the source of monthly employment and annual social and economic data, the CPS is ideally suited to studying the recent recession. No other data source provides timely information on the economic status of American families. In addition to these strengths, new information on family relationships allows researchers to capture detailed information about family structure.

## ***Background***

### *The 2007-2009 Recession*

The 2007 recession, commonly referred to as the “Great Recession”, is exceptional in its depth, length, and breadth. Over a two and a half year period following the start of the recession, more than half of all adults in the labor force experienced a spell of unemployment, involuntary part-time work, or reductions in pay or hours worked (Taylor, Morin, et al. 2010). When the recession began in December 2007, just 5 percent of U.S. workers were unemployed (see Figure 1). By June 2009, when the recession officially ended, unemployment had risen to 9.5 percent. The weak recovery that followed brought little relief to workers, as unemployment continued to rise, exceeding 10 percent in October 2009 and improving little over the next year. Now, more than three years after the recession started, nearly 14 million adults, or 9.1 percent of adults in the labor force, are out-of-work, and another 8.4 million are working part-time because they could not find full-time employment (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). Unemployment rates have attained levels not seen in nearly four decades, while long-term unemployment (of at least 26 weeks) have exceeded levels experienced in all recessionary periods since 1979. The long-term unemployed accounted for approximately 30 percent of the unemployed population in 2009 and over 40 percent in 2010 (Allegretto and Lynch 2010).

[Figure 1 about here]

Although the impact of the recession has been felt widely across American society, some groups of Americans have been hit particularly hard (Jacobsen and Mather 2010; Taylor, Morin, et al. 2010). The gendered nature of job losses has been widely noted. When the recession first began, job losses were concentrated in the male-oriented construction and manufacturing industries. By the official end of the recession in June 2009, only the education and health

services sector appeared to have been spared. As a result, approximately three-quarters of the jobs lost during the course of the official recession were positions held by men (Boushey 2009; Şahin, Song, and Hobijn 2010). The unemployment gap between male and female workers has diminished with declines in government employment and the addition of new jobs in manufacturing during the slow recovery (Boushey 2011; Şahin et al. 2010).

Already disadvantaged workers have also been disproportionately impacted by the recession. Unemployment rates for workers with no high school diploma exceeded 18 percent in 2009, compared to just 5 percent for workers with at least a bachelor's degree (Allegretto and Lynch 2010). Black and Hispanic workers have experienced particularly large increases in unemployment; as of 2009, 15 percent of black workers and 12 percent of Hispanic workers were unemployed, compared to 7-8 percent of White and Asian workers (Allegretto and Lynch 2010; Jacobsen and Mather 2010). Finally, job losses have been concentrated among younger workers: 24 percent of workers ages 16-19 and 15 percent of workers ages 20-24 were unemployed in 2009 (Allegretto and Lynch 2010).

### *Child well-being in the United States*

Even in times of economic prosperity, American families experience considerable poverty and material hardship (Heuveline and Weinshenker 2008). In 2000, 16 percent of children lived in poverty, a 20-year low (Lichter, Qian, and Crowley 2006). Poverty rates, however, vary considerably with children's family structure: from less than 10 percent among children living with two married parents to 44 percent of children living with a single mother (Manning and Brown 2006). Poverty rates for children in cohabiting families fall in-between; about one-fifth of these children resided in poverty in 2000. Food insecurity also varies by family

structure, as married-parent families have the lowest levels of food insecurity (20-30%), while over half of children living with a single mother experience some form of food insecurity. Cohabiting families also report extremely high levels of food insecurity (over 40%) (Manning and Brown 2006).

These estimates of family structure variation in child economic well-being were measured during a period of relative economic prosperity, and recent studies indicate that the child poverty rate remained fairly stable between 2000 and 2007 for children in married, cohabiting, and single-parent families (U.S. Census Bureau 2003, 2009; Kreider 2007; Kennedy and Fitch Forthcoming). The Census Bureau's most recent estimates show only a small increase during the first year of the recession in poverty rates of children under age 18; poverty rates rose from 18 to 19 percent between 2007 and 2008. By 2009, however, child poverty has risen to 21 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). This increase appears to be largely attributable to increased poverty in married parent families compared to single-parent families, with the largest increase, 2.5 percentage points, found among Hispanic families, (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Smith 2010: Table POV03). Note that even as of the second year of the recession, child poverty rates remain well below levels experienced in 1993, a milder recession, when 23 percent of children resided in poverty (Lichter et al. 2006; U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Calculating poverty rates for cohabiting families is more complicated. Consensual unions are typically short-lived (Kennedy and Bumpass 2008) and cohabiting couples pool resources to a lesser extent than married couples (Iceland 2007). Yet, cohabiting couples—particularly those raising children—share financial resources and expenses and they experience economies of scale from sharing housing (Kenney 2004; Iceland 2007). Official poverty statistics treat cohabiting couples as members of different families, and children in these families are treated as if they

lived with only one parent. Studies that pool the incomes of cohabiting couples reduce, by half, the estimated poverty rate for children who live with cohabiting biological or stepparents (Carlson and Danziger 1999; Manning and Brown 2006; Iceland 2007). Consequently, it remains unclear from official statistics how children living with unmarried parents have fared during the current recession.

Food insecurity increased substantially during the first year of the recession (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2009; Nord et al. 2010). In 2008, 23 percent of children lived in a household that had experienced food insecurity in the past year, compared to 17 percent in the years preceding the recession. Food insecurity prevalence remained essentially unchanged in between 2008 and 2009, with some evidence of an improvement at the end of year (Nord et al. 2010). Increases occurred across children's living arrangements. However, the largest increases were observed in households headed by single-fathers and mothers (to 28% and 37% respectively). Hispanic households appear to be most impacted by the recession, with food insecurity rates now matching those of African-American households (Nord et al. 2009). Food insecurity rates for cohabiting families have not been released.

These studies demonstrate that the 2007 recession has had an impact on child well-being and suggest that some groups of children may be particularly vulnerable. Our paper adds to this literature by examining trends in child well-being during the first two years of the recession. We produce estimates for children in cohabiting families—who are poorly measured in official statistics—and may be at risk during the recession due to their low socioeconomic status. Finally, we systematically evaluate whether the impact of the recession disproportionately affected children in particular family types, socioeconomic statuses, or by race and ethnicity.

## *Data and Methods*

In this paper, we will use data from 2007-2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) of the Current Population Survey (CPS). These data are available from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series at <http://cps.ipums.org> (King et al. 2010). The ASEC collects detailed data on income, employment, non-cash benefits, and demographic characteristics and is the source for annual Census reports on Families and Living Arrangements. Each year, the ASEC reports data on approximately 50,000 children under the age of 15. With these data, we are able to provide estimates of parental employment through March 2010, as well as measures of material deprivation through 2009. Our food insecurity analysis uses the 2007-2009 December food security supplements and will include about 20,000 children annually. Our analysis is based on the 2007-2010 ASEC and the 2007-2009 food security supplements and covers the first two years of the recession.

In 2007, the Census Bureau improved their measurement of cohabitation and family relationships in the CPS by adding a direct question on cohabitation to the questionnaire (Kreider 2008). In households containing unrelated adults, the respondent was asked: “Do you have a boyfriend, girlfriend or partner in this household?” If they responded yes, the cohabiting partner's line number was recorded. The same question was posed about all other unmarried adults in the household. Previously, only those cohabiting couples who identified one partner as the “unmarried partner” of the householder could be identified. Adding this direct question on cohabitation increased the estimated number of cohabiting couples by about 20 percent, and, for the first time, made it possible to identify relationships not involving the household head, for instance couples living with parents. Identifying these couples is especially important given the

increase in multi-generational co-residence during the 2007 recession (Taylor, Passel, et al. 2010).

In addition, the Census Bureau added new measures of child-parent relationships. With the new variables, the CPS explicitly identifies mothers and fathers, distinguishing between biological, step, and adoptive parents (Kreider 2008). These new variables make possible, for the first time, regular and detailed analysis of children's family structure and economic well-being.

## **Measures**

*Family structure and living arrangements.* Our analysis makes use of the direct question on cohabitation to identify all children living with cohabiting parents and their position in the larger household. Our analyses distinguish between children living with married, cohabiting parents, and single parents. We include children raised by same sex parents with different sex cohabiting partners, as there are too few cases to analyze these families separately. These detailed family relationship variables also allow us to examine the implications of residence with extended families for child poverty rates.

*Poverty status.* Our analysis includes family poverty estimates in the years 2006-2009 (the years for which individuals reported income data in the 2007-2010 surveys). We base our estimates of poverty status on federal poverty thresholds, or the minimum annual income required to provide for the basic needs of all family members (U.S. Census Bureau 2008). The income-to-needs ratio, or poverty ratio, is the ratio of a family's income to the relevant poverty threshold, determined based on total family size and the number of related children under age 18.

Our definition of poverty differs from official measures of poverty, which treat cohabiting partners as members of separate families. Previous research has demonstrated that

including cohabiting partner incomes in family poverty measurements provides a more complete accounting of the economic resources available to cohabiting family members (Carlson and Danziger 1999; Iceland 2007; Manning and Brown 2006). Following Manning and Brown (2006), we calculate a measure of *social poverty*, by including the cohabiting partner and all household members related to either partner in calculations of family income and family size. Consistent with previous studies, incorporating cohabiting partner income in family poverty calculations reduces our estimates of child poverty rates in cohabiting families by over 50 percent.

We consider both poverty status and the ratio of family income to poverty threshold. The first enables us to see which families have fallen below this minimal standard of economic well-being. A limitation of poverty status is any change in the economic well-being of families who are already poor won't be counted; income losses that do not put families into poverty are not flagged. By using the income-to-need ratio, we can assess the impact of the recession on family incomes more broadly.

To address the impact of residence with extended family on child poverty rates, we also calculate a measure of subfamily poverty status. Income and family size calculations are limited to the parent-child unit, thus excluding contributions from co-resident kid. Thus, we can estimate what poverty levels would be in the absence of changes in multi-generational co-residence.

*Food insecurity.* We also include an analysis of family food insecurity between 2007 and 2009. Since 1995, the December supplement to the CPS has included a food insecurity scale. The scale is comprised on 10 questions about household and adult food insecurity and 8 child-specific questions (see Appendix 1). The items range from less severe (e.g. worrying about food) to more severe (e.g. skipping meals because there wasn't enough money for food). A household

is considered food insecure if they report experiencing at least 3 food insecure items, while a child is considered food insecure if they experience 2 or more of the child-specific conditions. In order to be considered food insecure, a household must make changes in the quality or quantity of food consumed. All of the child questions involve some form of limitation in the quality or amount of food available to children. Using these questions, we can determine whether a child lived in a food-insecure household and whether a child was directly affected by food insecurity in the household at any point during the past year. We focus on the former, household food insecurity. In addition, we examine the food insecurity scale, which enables us to see changes in food insecurity both below and above the cut-off.

The food security questions are asked of all households with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line. Higher income households are asked two preliminary screening questions. If they give no indication of food access problems, these households are not asked the food security questions and are assumed to be food secure.

*Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.* We also consider differences in child well-being by parent education and child's race/ethnicity. When a child lives with two-parents, we use the highest level of education attained by either parent. The CPS allows respondents to report multiple race categories, however, the sample size of multiple-race children is too small to analyze separately. In order to include these children in our study, we use race-bridging techniques to predict the single-race category they would have chosen if they could only report on race (Liebler and Halpern-Manners 2008). Our final measure combines ethnicity and race and includes the following 5 categories: Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Asian/Pacific Islander, and non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaskan Native. A handful

of children still could not be classified within these categories, and we exclude these children from our analysis.

Our multivariate analyses include also controls for child age. The distribution of child characteristics is shown in Appendix 2.

### **Analytic strategy**

We estimate ordinary least squares regression models predicting child economic well-being: poverty status, income-to-needs ratio, food insecure household, and food insecurity scale. Our models allow us to examine family structure, socioeconomic and racial and ethnic variation in the impact of the recession on child well-being. We estimate models for all children combined, and separately by family structure, parents' educational attainment, and child race and ethnicity. Because of sample size limitations in some race and ethnic groups, we restrict multivariate analysis to children living with parents (in a married, cohabiting, or single-parent family) and to children who are White, Black, or Hispanic. All of our estimates are from the perspective of children. Models employ survey weights and adjust for clustering of children in households.

We believe that absolute changes in child well-being are more important than relative changes. Because the base levels of child well-being vary greatly by family structure, an absolute change that is identical in magnitude can produce substantially different relative changes. Rather than estimating odds ratios using logistic regression, and thus relative changes, we estimate linear probability models (LPM) for our dichotomous dependent variables. Thus, we are directly estimating the probability of being poor or in a food insecure household. In a future draft, we will instead report the predicted marginal effects produced by the logistic regression model

instead of linear probability models. Our preliminary analyses suggest that results using predicted margins will be similar to the LPM results presented here.

## ***Results***

### *Changes in economic well-being*

We begin by discussing trends for all children, before focusing specifically on differences by family structure, socioeconomic status, and race and ethnicity. Descriptive estimates of child well-being are displayed in Tables 1 and 2 and for the period 2006-2009 for poverty and 2007-2009 for food insecurity. Table 1 presents estimates of the total number of children living in poverty and food insecure households, while Table 2 presents estimates of the proportion of children living in poverty and living in food insecure households. We examine trends

[Table 1 about here]

[Table 2 about here]

By 2009, nearly 12.5 million children ages 0-14 were living in poverty, an increase of over 2 million since 2006 and 2009. The percent of children living in poverty also increased over this period, from 17 percent to 20 percent.

Most of the increase occurred between the years 2008 and 2009: nearly 1.2 million children fell into poverty between 2008 and 2009 alone, compared to 650,000 during the first year of the recession. Poverty status is measured based on annual income and thus appear to be a lagging indicator of family well-being during periods of rapid economic deterioration, like 2008 and 2009. Recall that the unemployment rate did not peak until October 2009 and hovered around 10 percent for much of the following year. Poverty rates may continue to increase as a result of continuing high unemployment and growing levels of long-term unemployment.

Unlike poverty rates, food insecurity increased rapidly during the first year of the recession and then leveled off even as unemployment continued to rise. The percent of children living in a food insecure household increased from 17 to 23 percent during the first two years of the recession. There were nearly four million more children living in food insecure households in 2009 than in 2007. Recall that we use an annual measure of food insecurity: a household is considered food insecure if they meet the food insecurity criteria at any point in the past 12 months, thus food security should be more sensitive to recent changes in family well-being than annual poverty status.

Because the increase in food insecurity is larger than that of poverty, our results suggest that a substantial number of families with above-poverty earnings experienced difficulty making ends meet. Child food insecurity--where the quality or quantity of children's food consumption is curtailed--is lower, but still increased significantly, from 9 percent to 12 percent (not shown). The magnitude of these changes may reflect the fact that most adults in the labor force have experienced some change in their work hours or earnings during the recession (Taylor, Morin, et al. 2010). Changes in food insecurity may also reflect anticipatory actions—parents may make changes to their food budgets because they are concerned about changes in their employment status or income.

Table 3 presents regression results predicting changes in child well-being, controlling for parental education, race/ethnicity, and child age. These models confirm the descriptive trends. There was no significant change in poverty rates between 2006 and 2007, followed by a small and significant increase during 2008, and a much larger increase in 2009. The second column of the table presents estimates of the in the income-to-needs ratio. Here we see that incomes began to fall as early as 2007, prior to the official start of the Great Recession. Food insecurity

(measures as living in an food insecure households, as well as a scale) increased dramatically during the first year of the recession, leveling off between 2008 and 2009.

[Table 3 about here]

### *Family structure differences in child well-being*

Large family structure differentials in poverty are observed in all years, and, our estimates for 2007 are quite similar to estimates for 1999 for married, cohabiting, and single-parent families (Manning and Brown 2006). (See Table 2). Nine percent of children raised by married parents resided in poverty prior to the recession, compared to 20 percent of children with cohabiting-parents, 39 percent of children in a single-parent family, and 46 percent of children in other families (without parents).

By 2009, we see that poverty increased in all families except among children who don't live with parent (other families). The increase is especially large for cohabiting families, 25 percent of whom are now living below the poverty line. Note, that the timing of changes in poverty rates vary by family structure -- first emerging among married parents; only in the second year of the recession do we see an increase in poverty for children with cohabiting or single parent families. Note, the number of children living in other families has increased over the recession, and the decline in poverty rates may be consistent with a movement of children move into households that are more financially able to support the children.

The distribution of family structure across poor families is shown in Figure 2 and Table 4. Here we can see a substantial increase in the proportion of poor children with married parents (4 percentage points), or cohabiting parents (2 percentage points), accompanied by a decline in

the proportion with a single parent. By 2009, there are nearly as many poor children in two-parent families as there are children in single-parent families.

[Table 4 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

Regression models confirm that the increase in poverty was larger in married-parent families than in single-parent families (see Table 5). In fact, the observed increase in poverty in single-parent families doesn't reach statistical significance. When we run models separately by family structure, we find evidence that the increase in poverty rates by 2009 was largest in cohabiting families. However, in pooled models testing whether the impact of the recession varied by family structure, we find some evidence that fact cohabiting families experienced a significantly smaller decline in well-being than married parents controlling for educational differences in the impact of the recession (results not shown). Thus, the greater increase in absolute poverty rates experienced among cohabiting families during the recession appears attributable to the greater economic vulnerability of the families.

We also ran models estimating the income-to-needs ratio for each family type. Unlike our other measures of child well-being, higher values here indicate greater levels of child well-being. Children in married-parent family experienced the greatest loss of income. Because these families are on average financially more secure, this income loss did not translate into a disproportionate increase in poverty.

Family structure differences in food insecurity are notably smaller than differences in poverty status, especially when we compare cohabiting and single parent families. In 2009, 16 percent of children with married parents lived in a food insecure household, compared to 36 percent of cohabiting families and 37 percent of children in single-parent families. While food

insecurity rates are much higher than poverty rates for two-parent families, the opposite is true for single-parent families. Note, that if we examine child food insecurity, rather than household food insecurity the differences between cohabiting and single-parent families are much larger, indicating that food insecure cohabiting families appear to be better able to shelter children from feeling the effects of financial hardship (not shown).

The increase in food insecurity during the recession far exceeds the increase in poverty rates across family structure, with most of the increase occurring in the first year of the recession. By 2009, the percent of children in food insecure households increased by 5 percent in married and single-parent families and by 8 percentage points in cohabiting families. The largest increase in food insecurity was experienced by children living in households without their parents, despite declining poverty rates. When we look at the family structure distribution of children in food insecure households, we again see a decline in the proportion in single-parent family, accompanied by small increases in two-parent and other types of families (see Figure 3).

[Figure 3 about here]

Our multivariate analysis demonstrates that food security increased significantly across family structure and that change in economic well-being occurred during the first year of the recession. In pooled models, we found no evidence that change in food insecurity varied by family structure. Thus, irrespective of changes in income and poverty status, levels of food insecurity occurred quite broadly.

### *Socioeconomic differences in child well-being*

Socioeconomic differences in child well-being are large (see Table 2). The percent of children in poverty in 2006 ranged from 3 percent of children in families whether parents have at

least a 4-year college degree to 47 percent of children in families where no parent has graduated high school. As with family structure differences, the range is smaller when we examine food insecurity: from 5 percent to 38 percent. This may reflect the important role played by supplemental nutrition and school lunch programs in combating child hunger and food insecurity.

We see large increases in poverty status and food insecurity across educational levels. The largest increases in poverty status occur among families where parents have a high school degree or less. In contrast, the largest increases in food insecurity occur in families where parents have at least a high school degree, but not a four-year college degree. Here, food insecurity increased by 8-10 percentage points, compared to 3-percentage points in other families. Again, this may indicate that food programs are helping alleviate food insecurity among the poorest families. Figure 3 presents the distribution of parental education among food insecure children and shows that the proportion of food insecure children who had a parent without a high school degree declined, while proportion who were more educated increased.

We ran models predicting poverty status, income-to-needs ratio, food insecurity, and the scale measures of food insecurity and the results are shown in Table 6. These models confirm that there were large increases in poverty at all education levels except college-graduates. When we examine income-to-needs, however, we see large declines at all education levels. Thus, although children living with highly educated parents experienced a significant decline in economic well-being, this decline was not sufficient to push many of these families below the poverty line. Likewise, our regression models confirm that the largest increases in food insecurity occurred among families in the middle of the education distribution.

[Table 6 about here]

### *Race and ethnic differences in child well-being*

Poverty increased across most race and ethnic groups, by about 2-3 percentage points. The difference for Hispanic families, however, was largest, as poverty increased from 26 to 32 percent between 2006 and 2009. While Hispanic poverty rates increased in both years of the recession, we find no evidence of increasing poverty for White and Blacks until the second year. Changes in food insecurity were large across all race and ethnic groups, with both Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Black experiencing an 8 percentage point increase during the first two years of the recession. (Note, sample sizes for American Indians are small and trends should be interpreted cautiously.)

Multivariate results are presented in Table 7. Results for increasing poverty are consistent with changes the descriptive results. The largest declines in income-to-needs, however, occurred among Whites, while Hispanics experienced a significant change only in the second year of the recession. This suggests that changes in income were not largest among Hispanics, but that they were most likely to be pushed into poverty as a result of declining incomes. Food insecurity models confirm that White children experienced smaller increases in food insecurity than Hispanics.

[Table 7 about here]

### *Parental employment*

Table 8 presents descriptive statistics on trends in parental employment. The first panel examines unemployment, and shows that two-parent families experienced larger increases in unemployment than single-parent (mostly single-mother) families. The difference between single and married parents is significant, but small, perhaps reflecting the higher socioeconomic status of married parents. In the second panel, we show the percent of children in a family with no

parents working full-time. Between 2007 and 2010, this time increased by 11 percentage points in cohabiting families, to 29%, by 7 points in single-parent families to 53%, and by 6 points in married families to 13%. This suggests that cohabiting and single parents are more likely to shift to part-time work or drop out of the labor force than married couples, and are not counted in traditional employment statistics.

[Table 8 about here]

### *The importance of extended family households during the recession*

During the 2007 recession, the living arrangements of Americans have shifted as individuals and families are increasingly living with others instead of living alone. The number of different-sex cohabiting couples increased by over 10 percent between 2009 and 2010, apparently in response to rising unemployment levels (Kreider 2010). This was accompanied by an increase in families living with related persons, an increase in young adults living with their parents, and a decrease in individuals living alone (Kreider 2010; Taylor, Passel, et al. 2010). Because residing with extended family members appears to be an important strategy families are using to cope with hardship during the recession, we present in Table 9 estimates of the proportion of children living with grandparents as well as estimates of what poverty rates would be if we exclude the incomes of co-resident extended family members (which we call subfamily poverty status).

[Table 9 about here]

The proportion of children living in multigenerational families increased to 10 percent, a 2 percentage point change, between 2007 and 2010. We find significant increases in the proportion of children residing with a grandparent in married, cohabiting, and single parent

families. Children living in a single-parent family experienced the largest change, with more than 20 percent now living with a grandparent.

When we examine subfamily poverty, we find that nearly one-quarter of all children would have lived in poverty in 2009 if a significantly proportion did not reside with extended family. The magnitude of increased poverty between 2007 and 2009 is slightly larger for subfamily poverty than for poverty estimates that include the income and needs of all family members: 3.1 percentage points compared to 2.6. Poverty levels in married parent families change little when we adjust for extended family residence, while we see notable increases in cohabiting and single parent families. Nearly 27 percent of children in cohabiting parent families and over 50 percent of children in single-parent families would live in poverty if they had to rely on parent incomes only.

### *Discussion*

Our results indicate that the impact of the recession on American families was large and widespread. In 2009--two years after the recession began--20 percent of children under age 15 lived in poverty and 23 percent lived in a food insecure household. Economic well-being, measured by poverty status, income, and food insecurity, declined across family structure, socioeconomic status, and race and ethnicity.

Consistent with the heavily male nature of job losses during the years 2008 and 2009, we find evidence that two-parent families were impacted more than single-parent families during the recession. During the first year of the recession, poverty increased only in married parent families; during the second year, we see extremely a large increase in cohabiting family poverty. The differences between cohabiting and married parent families, however, appear to result from

differences in socioeconomic status--cohabiting parents have lower earnings than married parents, and thus were at greater risk of entering poverty as a result of job loss, reduced hours, or reduced wages. Because of the disproportionate impact of the recession on two-parent families, the proportion of two-parent families among children who are poor or food insecure has increased over the course of the recession.

Although poverty rates in single parent families did not increase significantly between 2006 and 2009, family income relative to needs declined during the second year of the recession. This is consistent with the spread of job loss from predominantly male occupations as the recession deepened. In addition, when we examine subfamily poverty (poverty calculated for the parent-child unit and excluding the income of co-resident kin), we find a large and significant increase for single-parent families. This suggests that moving in with grandparent and other relatives was an important strategy employed by single parents to alleviate the impact of changes in employment or wages during the recession. Finally, we see that significant increases in food insecurity in single-parent families even though poverty status did not change significantly. Although job losses were concentrated among males, especially in the beginning of the recession, children raised by mothers only have experienced a notable increase in hardship.

We find changes in child well-being across parental education; although to a lesser extent among children of four-year college-graduates. Poverty increased most among families where parents have no more than a high school degree, while changes in food insecurity were concentrated among families where parents have a high school degree or some college, but not a four-year degree. Nonetheless, children in the most socioeconomically advantaged families still experienced significant changes in income and food insecurity.

Finally, we find important race and ethnic differences in the impact of the recession. Poverty increased more rapidly among Hispanic children than children of other backgrounds. By 2009, Hispanic children made up the largest group of children in poverty (37%) and the second largest group of food insecure children (34%).

The magnitude of changes in household food security were larger than changes in poverty status, and were observed even in family structure, educational, and racial and ethnic groups that did not experience significant increases in poverty. These results suggest that a substantial number of families experienced increased difficulty making ends meet, despite having above-poverty level incomes and despite the responsiveness of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to the recession. Food Stamp enrollments increased by over one-third, and were supplemented by a temporary increase in the maximum benefit level (Pavetti and Rosenbaum 2010). However, the CPS food security measure is multi-faceted and includes items ranging widely in severity, from worrying whether you can afford to buy the types of food you prefer, to being unable to afford a balanced diet, and, at the most extreme, skipping meals and going hungry (Panel to Review U.S.D.A.'s Measurement of Food Insecurity and Hunger, National Research Council 2005). As a result, increases in food insecurity may also reflect growing anxieties about the economy and changes in consumption that result from this anxiety, in addition to increased material hardship.

The recession of 2007-2009 stands out as the longest and deepest recession in the U.S. since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Yet, the increase in child poverty experienced during this recession does not stand out as exceptional. Official estimates of child poverty rates are lower, 20.7 percent, now than they were at the height of the milder recession of the early 1990s when unemployment peaked at 7.8 percent and child poverty at 22.7 percent. In both instances,

child poverty increased about 3 percentage points over the pre-recession period (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). This may be a result of the heavy concentration of job losses among young men who may not be raising children, especially in the beginning of the recession. Two parent families may provide a natural safety net—if the father loses their job, the family may be able to stay afloat, or at least above the poverty line, on the mother’s earnings. The increase in multi-generational families also helped keep poverty rates in check. In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) included many important provisions for families with children, including increased spending on child health and nutrition and expansions of the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit in addition (Aber and Chaudry 2010).

Nonetheless, the full impact of the recession on child well-being is not yet known. The latest estimates of poverty and food insecurity date to the year 2009 when unemployment and long-term unemployment were still rising. Since June 2009 when the recession official ended, the employment situation for men has improved slowly, because of newly created jobs within manufacturing and other heavily male sectors. In contrast, women have seen little to no improvement in unemployment rates because of job cuts at the state and local level (Boushey 2011; Şahin et al. 2010). In 2010, of the 259,000 jobs cut by local governments, nearly 87% were held by females (Boushey 2011). These changes in female employment may have particularly important consequences for children in single-parent families, and have been accompanied by cut-backs in government assistance to families in need at the state and federal level. Even in prosperous times, child poverty rates in the U.S. are extremely high. The 2007 recession has added to these levels of financial stress, and prospects for improvement in the near future seem unlikely.

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## **Appendix 1. Food security questions**

Due to lack of resources, did you or your household...

### **Adult/Household Questions**

1. Worry about food
2. Run out of food
3. Didn't eat balanced meals
4. Skipped meals/ate less
5. Skipped meals in 3+ months
6. Ate less than you should
7. Were hungry, but didn't eat
8. Lost weight
9. Didn't eat for whole day
10. Didn't eat for whole day in 3+ months

### **Child Questions**

11. Ate low-cost foods
12. Didn't eat balanced meals
13. Didn't eat enough food
14. Cut the size of meals
15. Were hungry
16. Skipped meals
17. Skipped meals in 3+ months
18. Did not eat for a whole day

Table 1. Number of children ages 0-14 living in poverty and in food insecure households: 2006-2009

	Children living in poverty					Children living in food insecure households			
	2006	2007	2008	2009	Change: 2006-09	2007	2008	2009	Change: 2007-09
<b>All children</b>	10,259,561	10,620,321	11,269,599	12,467,859	2,208,298	10,301,295	13,668,864	14,195,982	3,894,687
<b>Family structure</b>									
Married parents	3,492,983	3,598,803	4,153,332	4,736,022	1,243,039	4,753,645	6,036,576	6,619,971	1,866,326
Cohabiting parents	732,974	814,122	817,254	1,106,089	373,115	846,972	1,316,144	1,261,172	414,200
Single parents	5,378,185	5,443,293	5,469,432	5,902,705	524,520	3,925,185	4,927,013	4,891,028	965,843
Other families	772,497	920,129	974,131	925,063	152,566	451,942	891,525	906,568	454,626
<b>Parental education</b>									
<HS	3,278,903	3,496,524	3,604,069	3,839,856	560,953	2,494,139	2,728,174	2,561,392	67,253
HS grad	3,755,888	3,926,025	4,021,443	4,531,538	775,650	3,186,602	4,425,630	4,345,484	1,158,881
Some college	2,483,908	2,376,451	2,722,888	3,219,725	735,817	3,075,135	4,249,709	4,643,415	1,568,280
B.A. +	740,863	821,321	921,199	876,740	135,877	1,156,920	1,446,989	1,768,266	611,347
<b>Child race/ethnicity</b>									
American Indian	136,126	108,415	126,263	144,901	8,775	98,073	81,425	159,402	61,329
Asian/Pacific Isl.	285,394	331,394	379,416	388,292	102,898	234,276	433,956	396,614	162,337
Black	3,167,876	3,185,300	3,234,033	3,355,535	187,660	2,426,072	3,320,036	3,260,640	834,569
White	3,351,148	3,356,630	3,380,728	4,018,895	667,747	4,139,492	5,370,067	5,499,904	1,360,412
Hispanic	3,319,017	3,638,582	4,149,158	4,560,236	1,241,219	3,403,382	4,463,380	4,879,422	1,476,040

Source: Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) and Food Insecurity Supplements to the Current Population Survey.

Table 2. Proportion of children ages 0-14 living in poverty and in food insecure households: 2006-2009

	Children living in poverty					Children living in food insecure households			
	2006	2007	2008	2009	Change: 2006-09	2007	2008	2009	Change: 2007-09
<b>All children</b>	0.17	0.18	0.19	0.20	0.03	0.17	0.22	0.23	0.06
<b>Family structure</b>									
Married parents	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.12	0.03	0.12	0.16	0.17	0.05
Cohabiting parents	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.25	0.05	0.26	0.36	0.34	0.08
Single parents	0.40	0.39	0.39	0.41	0.02	0.30	0.37	0.36	0.05
Other families	0.42	0.46	0.44	0.41	-0.02	0.20	0.34	0.34	0.14
<b>Parental education</b>									
<HS	0.47	0.51	0.54	0.55	0.07	0.38	0.43	0.41	0.03
HS grad	0.26	0.27	0.28	0.32	0.06	0.23	0.33	0.34	0.10
Some college	0.14	0.14	0.15	0.18	0.03	0.19	0.25	0.27	0.08
B.A. +	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.01	0.05	0.07	0.08	0.03
<b>Child race/ethnicity</b>									
American Indian	0.34	0.26	0.29	0.33	0.00	0.22	0.19	0.38	0.15
Asian/Pacific Isl.	0.11	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.03	0.09	0.16	0.15	0.06
Black	0.34	0.34	0.35	0.35	0.02	0.26	0.35	0.34	0.08
White	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.02	0.12	0.15	0.16	0.04
Hispanic	0.26	0.28	0.30	0.32	0.06	0.26	0.33	0.35	0.08

Source: Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) and Food Insecurity Supplements to the Current Population Survey.

Table 3. Results from OLS models predicting changes in child poverty, family income-to-needs, and food insecurity during the recession

	In poverty	Poverty ratio	Food insecure	Food insecurity scale
Year				
2006 (omitted)	--	--		
2007 (omitted food insecurity)	0.003	-0.087**	--	--
2008	0.013**	-0.161***	0.048***	29.870***
2010	0.031***	-0.226***	0.055***	33.834***
Family structure				
Married parents (omitted)	--	--	--	--
Cohabiting parents	0.047***	-0.552***	0.097***	63.829***
Single parent	0.205***	-1.046***	0.109***	77.175***
Parent education				
<HS (omitted)	--	--	--	--
HS degree	-0.211***	0.556***	-0.073***	-37.764***
Some college	-0.314***	1.094***	-0.114***	-66.320***
4-year college degree	-0.374***	3.513***	-0.245***	-152.690***
Race/ethnicity				
Non-Hispanic White	--	--	--	--
Non-Hispanic Black	0.106***	-0.741***	0.076***	49.459***
Hispanic	0.055***	-0.736***	0.078***	50.377***
Child age				
< 1 year	--	--	--	--
1-4 years	-0.005	-0.066	0.001	-1.905
5-9 year	-0.024***	0.049	0.006	4.445
10-14 years	-0.050***	0.251***	0.001	0.991
_cons	0.385***	2.325***	0.248***	153.950***

Table 4. Characteristics of children ages 0-14 living in poverty and in food insecure households

	In poverty			Food insecure		
	2006	2009	Change: 06-09	2007	2009	Change: 07-09
<b>Family structure</b>						
Married parents	0.34	0.38	0.04	0.48	0.49	0.01
Cohabiting parents	0.07	0.08	0.02	0.08	0.09	0.01
Single parents	0.52	0.47	-0.05	0.39	0.35	-0.04
Other families	0.08	0.07	0.00	0.04	0.06	0.02
<b>Parental education</b>						
<HS	0.32	0.31	-0.01	0.25	0.19	-0.06
HS grad	0.37	0.36	0.00	0.32	0.33	0.00
Some college	0.24	0.26	0.02	0.31	0.35	0.04
B.A. +	0.07	0.07	0.00	0.12	0.13	0.02
<b>Child race/ethnicity</b>						
American Indian	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.00
Asian/Pacific Isl.	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.02	0.03	0.01
Black	0.31	0.27	-0.04	0.24	0.23	-0.01
White	0.33	0.32	0.00	0.40	0.39	-0.01
Hispanic	0.32	0.37	0.04	0.33	0.34	0.01

Source: Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) and Food Insecurity Supplements to the Current Population Survey.

Table 5. Results from OLS models predicting child well-being by family structure

	Family income below poverty threshold			Ratio of family income to poverty threshold			Food insecure household			Household food insecurity scale		
	Married	Cohab	Single	Married	Cohab	Single	Married	Cohab	Single	Married	Cohab	Single
Year												
2006	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2007	0.004	0.003	0.002	-0.135**	-0.014	0.036	--	--	--	--	--	--
2008	0.017***	0.018	0.003	-0.219***	0.003	-0.04	0.038***	0.100**	0.066***	25.956***	51.299**	36.354***
2009	0.032***	0.062**	0.02	-0.290***	-0.138	-0.088*	0.055***	0.080*	0.050**	34.849***	46.331*	27.993**
Parent education												
<HS	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
HS degree	-0.194***	-0.230***	-0.217***	0.642***	0.656***	0.538***	-0.081***	-0.05	-0.077***	-38.581***	-22.324	-44.873**
Some coll	-0.285***	-0.344***	-0.322***	1.291***	1.215***	0.905***	-0.132***	-0.093	-0.098***	-71.062***	-61.780*	-61.698***
4-year coll	-0.332***	-0.412***	-0.488***	3.822***	3.220***	2.400***	-0.257***	-0.269***	-0.219***	153.278***	169.359***	153.378***
Race/ethnicity												
White	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Black	0.057***	0.079***	0.166***	-0.830***	-0.507***	-0.661***	0.079***	0.062	0.067***	56.487***	33.163	39.061***
Hispanic	0.057***	0.014	0.096***	-0.802***	-0.321***	-0.470***	0.091***	0.018	0.053**	60.219***	11.463	31.972**
Child age												
< 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-4 years	0.001	--	-0.02	-0.088	0.036	0.006	-0.001	-0.013	0.012	-4.448	10.3	-1.734
5-9 year	-0.010*	-0.028	-0.051***	0.07	0.17	0.069	0	-0.005	0.027	-1.5	25.143	11.892
10-14	-0.027***	-0.069***	-0.090***	0.326***	0.490***	0.155**	-0.013	0	0.042	-10.027	21.897	22.176
_cons	0.343***	0.465***	0.612***	2.154***	1.352***	1.319***	0.268***	0.335***	0.331***	160.155***	200.669***	230.595***

Table 6. Results from OLS models predicting child well-being by parental education

	Family income below poverty threshold				Ratio of family income to poverty threshold			
	< HS	HS degree	Some college	College degree	< HS	HS degree	Some college	College degree
Year								
2006	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2007	0.025	0.01	-0.01	0.002	-0.026	-0.022	-0.016	-0.215**
2008	0.060***	0.016	0.005	0.004	-0.105**	-0.128**	-0.111*	-0.248**
2009	0.081***	0.054***	0.029***	0.001	-0.141***	-0.199***	-0.195***	-0.302***
Family structure								
Married								
parents	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cohabiting								
parents	0.075**	0.060***	0.044***	0.029*	-0.206***	-0.384***	-0.510***	-0.814***
Single parent	0.235***	0.221***	0.219***	0.097***	-0.443***	-0.749***	-1.057***	-1.998***
Race/ethnicity								
Non-Hispanic								
White	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Non-Hispanic								
Black	0.152***	0.167***	0.099***	0.027***	-0.414***	-0.536***	-0.566***	-1.242***
Hispanic	0.027	0.098***	0.067***	0.041***	-0.225***	-0.566***	-0.501***	-1.245***
Child age								
< 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-4 years	-0.004	-0.02	-0.005	0.008*	0.039	0.098*	0.034	-0.258**
5-9 year	-0.03	-0.060***	-0.017*	0.004	0.078*	0.253***	0.069	-0.035
10-14 years	-0.064***	-0.103***	-0.042***	-0.002	0.166***	0.411***	0.310***	0.238*
_cons	0.357***	0.167***	0.068***	0.012**	1.597***	2.473***	3.250***	6.190***

Table 6. Results from OLS models predicting child well-being by parental education (continued)

	Food insecure household				Household food insecurity scale			
	< HS	HS degree	Some college	College degree	< HS	HS degree	Some college	College degree
Year								
2006								
2007	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2008	0.045	0.091***	0.057***	0.016*	29.444	46.379***	41.476***	9.975**
2009	0.021	0.099***	0.070***	0.024***	5.876	51.779***	47.884***	19.379***
Family structure								
Married parents	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cohabiting parents	0.042	0.099***	0.120***	0.062*	36.43	72.456***	71.149***	41.431*
Single parent	0.070**	0.089***	0.129***	0.133***	63.685***	68.305***	89.148***	80.229***
Race/ethnicity								
Non-Hispanic White	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Non-Hispanic Black	0.067	0.082***	0.060***	0.089***	41.744	48.891***	39.969***	60.926***
Hispanic	0.05	0.074***	0.074***	0.093***	31.763	46.896***	50.548***	61.670***
Child age								
< 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-4 years	-0.023	0.008	0.02	-0.009	-16.361	-0.546	7.449	-4.382
5-9 year	-0.011	0.009	0.027	-0.007	-5.22	8.805	15.379	-3.702
10-14 years	-0.002	-0.004	0.025	-0.015	-7.614	3.93	12.889	-7.715
__cons	0.315***	0.152***	0.102***	0.033***	194.753***	105.425***	66.689***	16.918**

Table 7. Results from OLS models predicting child well-being by race and ethnicity

	Family income below poverty threshold			Ratio of family income to poverty threshold			Food insecure household			Household food insecurity scale		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
Year												
2006	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2007	0.001	-0.008	0.018	-0.128**	0.038	-0.071	--	--	--	--	--	--
2008	0.005	0.006	0.041***	-0.201***	-0.185**	-0.056	0.036***	0.075**	0.066***	23.086***	44.922**	38.868***
2009	0.021***	0.028*	0.059***	-0.257***	-0.215**	-0.162***	0.039***	0.071**	0.086***	25.085***	42.420**	50.785***
Family structure												
Married	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Cohab	0.062***	0.051*	0.029*	-0.682***	-0.567***	-0.243***	0.123***	0.115**	0.042	81.470***	65.346**	31.136
Single	0.160***	0.247***	0.227***	-1.210***	-1.195***	-0.704***	0.126***	0.114***	0.076***	89.111***	72.886***	59.294***
Education												
<HS	--	--	--	--	--	--	0	0	0	0	0	0
HS degree	-0.262***	-0.228***	-0.171***	0.746***	0.522***	0.556***	-0.087**	-0.071*	-0.071***	-46.548**	-43.331	-35.897**
Some col	-0.340***	-0.370***	-0.281***	1.308***	0.944***	1.207***	-0.125***	-0.119***	-0.113***	-74.763***	-75.357***	-61.763***
4-year col	-0.392***	-0.503***	-0.361***	3.903***	2.658***	3.077***	-0.257***	-0.225***	-0.237***	-161.584***	148.018***	145.290***
Child age												
< 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-4 years	0.006	-0.025	-0.011	-0.145*	0.111	0.021	-0.001	0.004	0.002	1.342	-5.046	-7.209
5-9 year	-0.009*	-0.056***	-0.027*	0.033	0.077	0.101*	0.002	0.014	0.01	2.235	9.728	6.021
10-14	-0.029***	-0.096***	-0.054***	0.296***	0.224**	0.183***	-0.004	0.01	0.006	-0.172	10.736	-3.073
_cons	0.407***	0.557***	0.400***	2.112***	1.833***	1.448***	0.269***	0.297***	0.318***	165.036***	197.659***	202.393***

**Table 8. Trends in parental employment, by family structure**

	Proportion of children		
	2007	2010	
<b>No parent works full-time</b>			
Married parent family	0.070	0.129	***
Cohabiting parent family	0.176	0.288	***,a
Single parent family	0.460	0.534	***
Other family	0.495	0.437	*,abc
<b>Parent unemployed</b>			
Married parent family	0.043	0.103	***
Cohabiting parent family	0.103	0.191	***
Single parent family	0.070	0.120	***,b
Other family	0.030	0.082	***

Notes: Significance of change between 2007 and 2010 (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ); Change between 2007 and 2010 differs significantly from change among married parent families (a), cohabiting families (b), and single-parent families (c),  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 9: Trends in Multi-generational Family Residency by Family Structure and Subfamily Poverty Status**

	Proportion of children living with grandparents		Subfamily poverty status (Excluding the income of extended family)	
	2007	2010	2007	2009
	All children	8.7	10.4	20.1
Married parent family	0.039	0.047	9.4	12.3
Cohabiting parent family	0.039	0.061	20.8	26.9
Single parent family	0.179	0.205	47.8	50.5
Other family	0.568	0.578	n/a	n/a

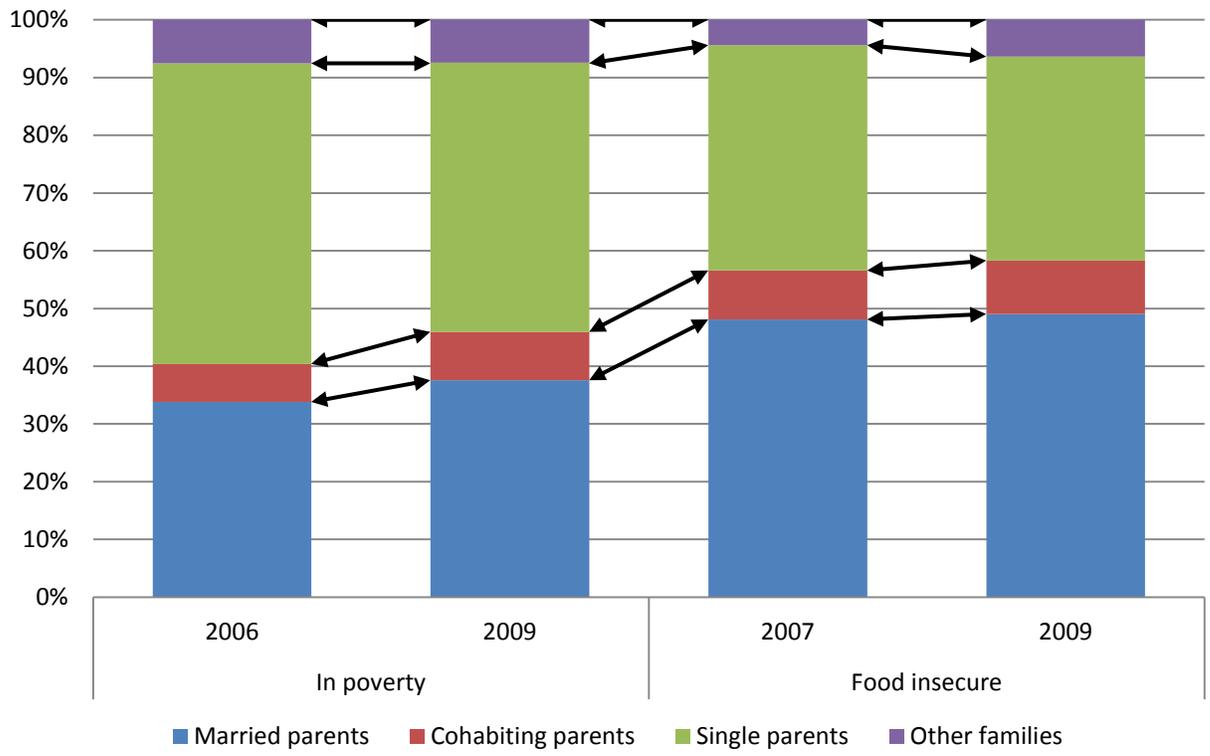
Notes: Significance of change between 2007 and 2010 (\*\*\*)  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ ); Change between 2007 and 2010 differs significantly from change among married parent families (a),  $p < 0.05$ .

**Figure 1. Unemployment Rate, 2007-present**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rate.

**Figure 2. Family structure of children in poor and food insecure families: 2006-2009**



**Figure 3. Distribution of parental education among children in poor and food insecure families: 2006-2009**

