

RESEARCH BRIEF



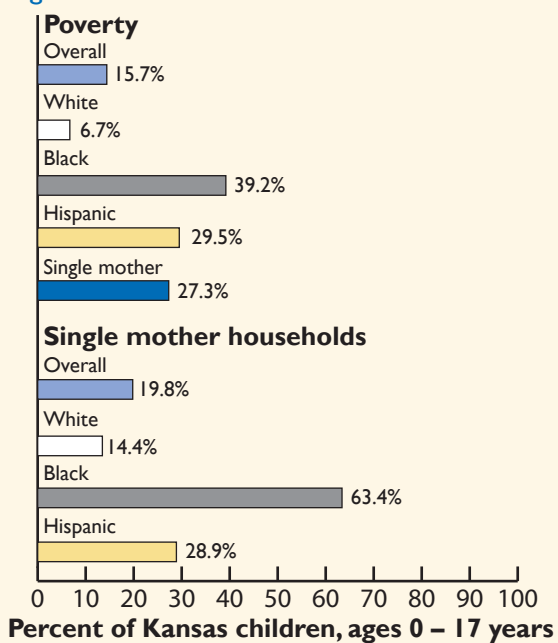
KANSAS
HEALTH
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THE CHILD'S HOME ENVIRONMENT

National Survey of Children's Health finds most Kansas parents have good relationships with their children.

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Figure 1. Kansas children's households



Source: 2003 National Survey of Children's Health

In 2003, more than 60% of black Kansas children lived in single-mother households.

The home environment provides the context and foundation for positive child development and health.

Fewer children living in poverty in Kansas, but disparities exist in single-mother households

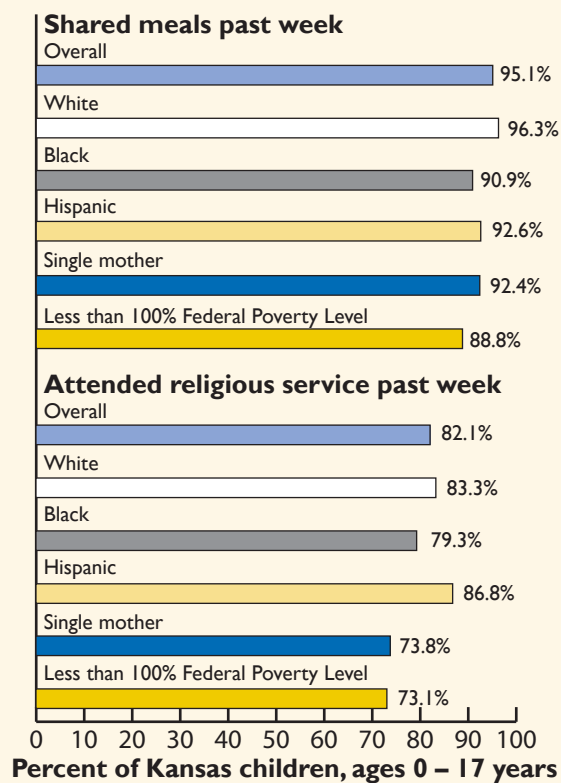
The 2003 National Survey of Children's Health found, in Kansas, about 16 percent of children live in households where parents earn less than 100 percent of the Federal Poverty Level, compared to 18 percent of all children in the nation. Not all households fare as well: Families of black and Hispanic children in Kansas were more than four times as likely to be poor than families of white children (Figure 1).

Families led by single mothers frequently struggle with the challenges of limited wage-earning capacity and finding affordable and stable child care. In 2003, one in five Kansas children lived in single-mother households. Black children were more than four times as likely and Hispanic children twice as likely as white children to live in single-

mother households. Poverty rates were much higher among single-mother households, despite the fact that the majority of these households included at least one full-time wage earner.

For many working parents, successful and sustained employment depends on access to high-quality, stable child care. Last-minute problems with child care result in increased stress levels for parents and may cause missed workdays or excessive tardiness that leads to job loss. About 27 percent of Kansas families with children ages 5 years and younger reported making last-minute changes in child care arrangements at least once during the previous month. Nearly 11 percent of Kansas families with young children found it necessary to quit, decline, or change jobs in the previous year because of problems with child care. Single mothers and low-income parents were more likely to have quit or changed jobs because of problems with child care.

Figure 2. Child's home environment



Ninety-five percent of Kansas families shared a meal at least once during the past week.

The Kansas Health Institute is an independent, nonprofit health policy and research organization based in Topeka, Kansas. Established in 1995 with a multiyear grant from the Kansas Health Foundation, the Kansas Health Institute conducts research and policy analysis on issues that affect the health of Kansans.

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Families are coping with life's demands and spending quality time together

While parenting can be a very demanding and sometimes stressful job, 98 percent of Kansas parents reported that they were coping with the day-to-day demands of parenting either somewhat well or very well. While more than half of Kansas parents said that their child sometimes did things that bothered them a lot, only about 5 percent said that they

were usually or often bothered by the child's behavior.

Shared family meals have been linked to improved nutritional intake, better social skills and family relationships and more positive psychological well-being among adolescents. Ninety-five percent of Kansas families shared a meal at least once during the past week and, on average, shared meals five days a week (Figure 2).

Almost 84 percent of Kansas parents reported that they enjoyed a very close relationship with their child and were spending time involved in their children's activities. Parents of four out of five young children reported that they had accompanied their child on community outings three or more times in the past week. Eighty-five percent of parents said they usually or

always attended the after-school activities of their school-age children.

Religious activities can also be an important aspect of family time. Eighty-two percent of Kansas children attended religious services at least once a week, compared to 78 percent of children throughout the nation.

Policy implications

Overall, most Kansas families are doing a good job in creating a positive and supportive home environment for their children and are coping well with the demands of child rearing. While the overall family environment picture looks positive in Kansas, some segments of the population are not faring as well and could benefit from targeted assistance and supports.

Low-income households, minority households and families led by single mothers reported less-favorable results in their homes. Public programs and policies directed toward job skills development, establishing living wages, child care support and affordable housing could help these families move toward self-sufficiency and more positive home environments.