

Child Well-Being 50 Years After the Launch of War on Poverty

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty in his State of the Union Address. Fifty years later, how have American children fared?

Fair Start: Rich Get Richer While Working Families Struggle

- In 2012, child poverty was 5 percent lower than in 1964 but 64 percent higher than the lowest recorded level — 14 percent in 1969 — and 21 percent higher than before the recession. The Black-White ratio for child poverty decreased 26 percent from 1964 to 2012. Black children remained three times more likely than White children to be poor in 2012.
- Taking into account government benefits, child poverty and child extreme poverty were cut by over a third from 1967 to 2012.
- Income inequality has increased dramatically. The top 1 percent of earners received 22.5 percent of the nation's income in 2012, more than double their share in 1964 and equal to levels last seen in the 1920s.
- The federal minimum wage is now worth 22 percent less in inflation-adjusted terms than in 1964. In no state can an individual working full-time at the minimum wage afford the fair market rent for a two-bedroom rental unit and have enough for food, utilities and other necessities.

Head Start: Progress and Peril

- The percent of children living in single-parent households more than doubled between 1964 and 2012 and in 2012 children in single-parent families were nearly four times more likely to be poor than children in married-couple families. While the Black-White ratio decreased 35 percent, Black children are more than twice as likely as White children to live with only one parent.
- Teen births have been cut nearly in half since 1970 and the Black-White ratio has decreased by a quarter since 1980. The U.S. teen birth rate is the second highest among industrialized countries.
- The percent of 3- and 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool or kindergarten more than quintupled between 1964 and 2012.
- There are 19 percent more high school graduates and 162 percent more college graduates and Black-White gaps have decreased substantially. However, a majority of fourth and eighth graders remained unable to read or compute at grade level in 2013 and there are large achievement gaps by income and race. School segregation by race and income continues to be the norm.

Healthy Start: Important Gains but More to Do

- Infant mortality decreased three-quarters between 1964 and 2011 but the Black-White ratio grew 14 percent since 1980. In 2011 Black babies were more than twice as likely to die as White babies. The U.S. infant mortality rate remains one of the highest among industrialized nations.

Safe Start: Children Losing a War at Home

- Gun deaths of children and teens increased 31 percent between 1964 and 2010, and the Black-White ratio more than doubled leaving Black children and teens nearly five times more likely than White children and teens to be killed by a gun in 2010.

Changes in Key Child and National Well-Being Indicators From 1964 to 2012

Green indicates improvements, grey indicates changes for the worse.

	Overall			Black-White Gap*			
	1964	2012	Change	1964	2012	Change	
FAIR START	Child poverty	23.0%	21.8%	5 percent decrease	4.2:1	3.1:1	26 percent decrease
	Child poverty taking into account government benefits	29.4**	18.7	36 percent decrease			
	Child extreme poverty taking into account government benefits	8.9**	5.4	39 percent decrease			
	Income share of top 1 percent	10.5	22.5	114 percent increase			
	Unemployment rate (ages 16 and older)	5.2	8.1	56 percent increase			
	Minimum wage (in 2013 dollars)	\$9.31	\$7.25	22 percent decrease			
HEAD START	Percent of children living with one parent	12%	28%	139 percent increase	3.6:1	2.4:1	35 percent decrease
	Teen births (per 1,000 females ages 15-19)	68.3	31.3**	47 percent decrease	2.2:1	1.6:1**	25 percent decrease
	Percent of 3- and 4-year olds enrolled in preschool and kindergarten	9.5	53.5	463 percent increase	1.1:1	0.9:1	Still not equal
	High school graduates among ages 18-24	68.1	81.3	19 percent increase	0.6:1	0.9:1	45 percent decrease
	College graduates among ages 25-29	12.8	33.5	162 percent increase	0.4:1	0.7:1	67 percent decrease
	Percent of Black students attending schools with more than 50 percent children of color	77%**	74%**	4 percent decrease			
HEALTHY START	Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	24.8	6.1**	76 percent decrease	2.0:1**	2.2:1**	14 percent increase
SAFE START	Child and teen gun deaths (per 100,000 children and teens)	2.47	3.24**	31 percent increase	2.3:1	4.8:1	111 percent increase

*The Black-White gap is the ratio of Black rate and the White rate. We are using this to assess progress made towards all children having the same chance to succeed regardless of race. These two groups are the ones compared because they are the ones for whom the most historical data are available.

**Data for 1964 or 2012 were not available so the closest available years were used. For child poverty and extreme poverty after government benefits 1967 was used instead of 1964, for teen births: 2011 was used instead of 2012, for segregation: 1968/69 to 2009/10 were used, for infant mortality 2011 was used instead of 2012 and 1980 was used for the Black: White ratio instead of 1964, for gun deaths 2010 was used instead of 2012.