



## Center for Urban Child Policy

Advancing Public Policy to Improve the Well-Being of Children

### HOW WELL DO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF FAMILIES IN MEMPHIS SUPPORT EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT?

High quality relationships and enriching environments stimulate healthy brain development in young children. Conversely, when young children experience high levels of toxic stress, uncertainty, or neglect, a critical opportunity for development is lost.

Child well-being, in turn, critically depends on the health and safety of families and communities (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2006). What do we know about the conditions of families with young children in Memphis?

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## 1 in 4 Memphians are under 18; 1 in 10 are under 5.

In 2007, Memphis had a population of 619,769, including 166,707 children under the age of 18. 50,967 children are under age 5.

- » 3 in 4 children (73%) are African American and 1 in 6 (16%) are White. 7 percent of children are Hispanic and 2 percent are Asian (ACS 2007, B01001).
- » Between 1990 and 2000, the Hispanic population in Memphis increased by almost 40,000 people, a growth rate of 6.5 percent, twice the national Hispanic growth rate. These figures may undercount a large undocumented population
- » .

## 2 in 5 children in Memphis (42%) live in poverty. Over half (55%) are low-income (< 150% of Federal Poverty Line).

The number of children in poor and low-income families is highest in southern states.

- » Child poverty in Memphis is over twice the national poverty rate (18%), and substantially higher than the poverty rate for children in Tennessee (23%).
- » One of every two children in Memphis lives in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (where 1 in 5 families are poor).

## 3 in 5 children in Memphis (63%) live with a single parent.

- » Younger children are more likely to live with a single mother than are older children.
- » In 2007, 3 out of 5 children new births in the city were to single mothers (ACS, 2007).
- » 11% of children in Memphis live with grandparents (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2006).



## In Memphis, married couples earn three times as much as single mothers.

The median income for married couples in Memphis is \$66,923. The median income for a single mother is \$22,931 (ACS, 2007).

Children raised by single mothers are five times more likely to live in poverty than children raised by married parents.

Parents' levels of education explains much of the difference in family income.

- » 1 in 3 children in Memphis (34%) are born to mothers with less than 12 years of education (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2005).
- » 1 in 5 single mothers in Memphis (21%) have less than a high school diploma, and the majority of single mothers (59 percent) have a high school degree or less. By comparison, only 12 percent of married couples have less than a high school degree, and the majority (65 percent) have at least some college (ACS, 2007).
- » In Memphis, married couples are 3 times more likely to have completed college than are single mothers.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC POLICY:

More than half of all children in Memphis start life in families made vulnerable by poverty, far removed from many of the fundamental resources and opportunities that contribute to optimal brain development. These children are more likely to be uprooted from their homes each year, have fewer books at home, and are less likely to become early readers.

- By the time they reach kindergarten, children from affluent families have cognitive scores that are 60 percent higher than children from poor families (Lee & Burkham 2002).
- Growing up in poverty can account for a 12 to 20 IQ point deficit (vs. a middle-class upbringing) (Kirp 2006).

In light of these concerns, policymakers and researchers agree on the need to focus on key proven best practices to improve child well-being and support healthy cognitive, social and emotional development in our youngest citizens:



## **Investments that promote healthy brain development during early childhood provide dramatic economic and social returns.**

High-quality early childhood investments that focus on at-risk families are cost-effective economic development policies. Careful long-term evaluations show that these programs return between \$3 and \$17 for every dollar invested (Council on Economic Development 2006; Rolnick & Grunewald 2007).

Children who participate in high-quality early care and education programs are more likely to complete school, delay parenting until they are out of their teens, and earn higher wages. Conversely, without the benefit of high quality early childhood education and development, children are more likely to drop out of school, depend on welfare benefits and become involved in crime - thereby imposing significant costs on our community.

## **Science shows us that high quality early childhood initiatives can make a profound difference both for individuals and for society. Our job is to expand the access of our youngest children to the strongest start in life.**

The demonstrated returns on high quality early childhood interventions lead economists to argue that the smartest development dollar that a community can spend is on the healthy development of young children. Conversely, there are real and profound costs to both individuals and to society when more than half of our children are born into poverty and lack access to critical developmental resources and experiences.

For more information on the well-being on children in Memphis and Shelby County, visit The Urban Child Institute at: <http://www.theurbanchildinstitute.org/Home>; and The State of Children in Memphis & Shelby County, available at: <http://www.theurbanchildinstitute.org/Databook.php>

Demographic Data included in this policy brief are independent estimates created by Katie Devlin and Frances Breland at the Center for Urban Child Policy utilizing 2006 State Health Department birth certificate data, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Kids Count and Right Start Census Data Online, 2007 American Community Survey data, or information from the Tennessee Department of Education unless otherwise specified. The Annie E Casey Foundation's Kids Count Data Book can be found at <http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter> or <http://www.kidscount.org/cgi-bin/cliks.cgi>. American Community Survey data can be found at [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov) and the Tennessee Department of Education Report Card can be accessed at [www.k-12.state.tn.us](http://www.k-12.state.tn.us).



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