




## Setting the Stage

### **Poverty, Child Welfare System, and Those Served by the System.**

*WEEK* \_\_\_\_\_

Note: The brief overview of poverty and the child welfare system can be incorporated into a pre-course orientation that focuses on bringing students from different disciplines into a common understanding of the overall context that the work of marriage/relationship education and counseling will be performed in.



***Promoting Child Welfare: Training Professionals to Support Healthy Marriages, Relationships and Families Project.***

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*Project Mission: To develop curricula and provide training for students and professionals that enhance their ability to facilitate healthy marriages, relationships and families in the child welfare population, with the end goal of promoting and improving the well-being of children.*

Project funded by the US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.  
*Oct. 2003 - Sept. 2008*



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## Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an ability to apply knowledge regarding public policy, private and public child welfare services, and systems that influence family health, well-being and formation.
- Demonstrate an awareness of agency/organizational dynamics that impact on policy and change efforts and understand her/his own role with regard to policy and facilitating change within an organization, community networks and inter-professional endeavors.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the impact of oppression, racism and prejudice (macro & micro issues) on the formation, development and status of families and couples.

# What is Poverty?

## 2008 HHS Poverty Guidelines

SOURCE:  
*Federal Register*,  
Vol. 73, No. 15,  
January 23, 2008,  
pp. 3971–3972

Persons in Family	48 Contiguous & D.C.	Alaska	Hawaii
1	\$10,400	\$13,000	\$11,960
2	14,000	17,500	16,100
3	17,600	22,000	20,240
4	21,200	26,500	24,380
5	24,800	31,000	28,520
6	28,400	35,500	32,660
7	32,000	40,000	36,800
For each additional person add	\$3,600	\$4,500	\$4,140

## Family of Four

- One adult with 3 dependents earning \$10.19 per hour and working 40 hours per week is considered to be at poverty level.

- **New Federal Minimum Wage:**

\$5.85 - July 24th, 2007

\$6.55 - July 24th, 2008

\$7.25 - July 24th, 2009

<http://www.dol.gov/compliance/laws/comp-flsa.htm>

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and child labor standards affecting full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in federal, state, and local governments.



## Who is Most Likely to Live in Poverty

- In 2006, the poverty rate for families was 9.8 percent, comprising 7.7 million families. Of all family groups, poverty is highest among those families headed by single women.
  - In 2006, 28.3 percent of all female-headed families (4.1 million families) were poor, compared to 4.9 percent of married-couple families (2.9 million families).

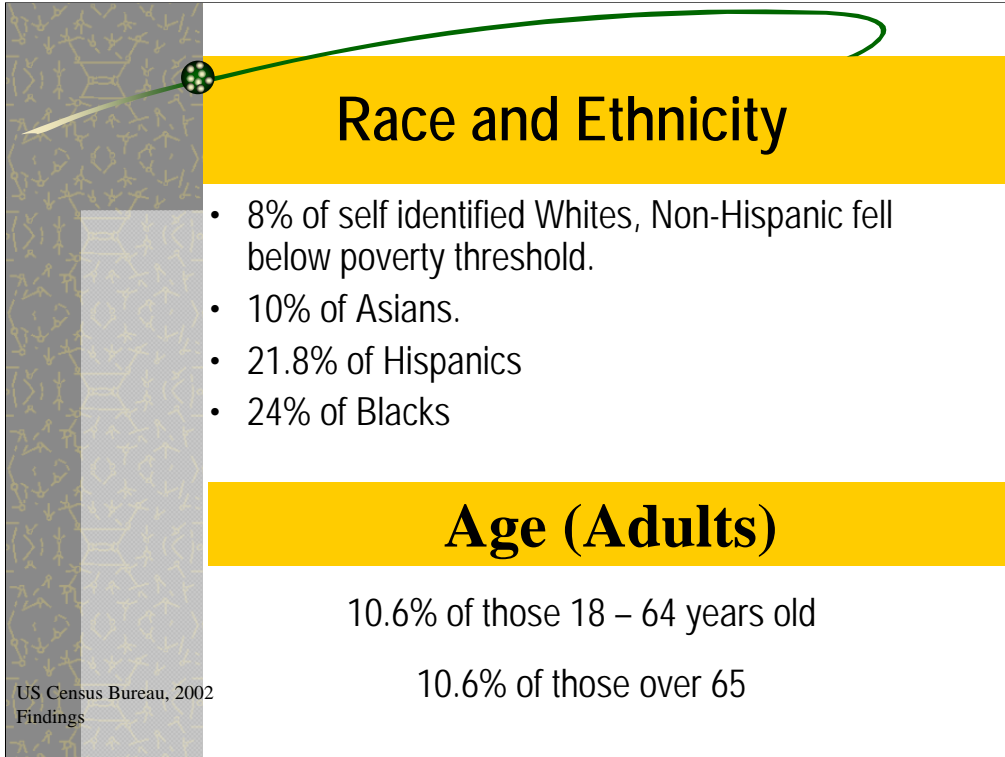
Institute for Research on Poverty

## A Snap Shot of "Low-Income" Families?

- **Family Structure**

- 5.3% of married heterosexual family incomes fell below the poverty threshold.
- 12.1% of male households with no wife present fell below the poverty threshold.
- 26.5% of female-headed households with no husband present fell below.
- *Most children in low-income families have employed parents*; only 16% are without at least one employed parent.

US Census Bureau, 2002  
Findings



It should be introduced within discussion a recognition of the disproportionality and disparate outcomes for people of color in the child welfare system.



## Citizenship

- 11% of native born citizens live below poverty level.
- 10% of foreign-born, naturalized citizens.
- 20% of foreign-born, non-documented US residents.

## Language

- 51% of foreign-born citizens are from Spanish speaking countries.
- 8.1% of foreign-born citizens report speaking English "less than very well".

US Census Bureau, 2002 Findings



## Regions in the US

- 10.9% of families in the northwest fell below the poverty threshold.
  - 10.3% in the Midwest.
  - 12.4% in the West.
  - 13.8% in the South.
- 
- 16.7% of families living in central urban areas fell below the poverty threshold.
  - 8.9% of families living outside of urban areas fell below.

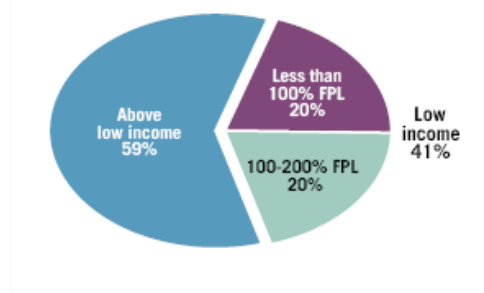
US Census Bureau, 2002  
Findings

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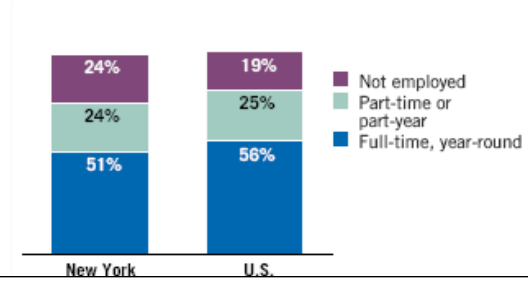
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National Center for Children in  
Poverty

Children in New York by income level, 2006<sup>1</sup>



Employment status of parents of low-income children, 2006<sup>1</sup>





## Caveat

Looking at trends and statistics is helpful in understanding the broader picture. However, as professionals with the ethical mandate to respect the dignity and worth of those we serve, it is critical that we remember that each individual and family has their own circumstances, strengths, challenges and dreams that we must place at the forefront of our thoughts.

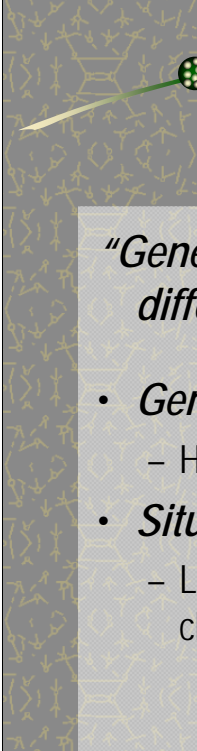


## Understanding Poverty

When government undertook to wage war on poverty in the prosperous United States of the 1960s, poverty was defined largely in terms of income. The apparent solution was to correct the income shortfall in a simple, efficient, and standardized manner.

Decades of research and experience with antipoverty programs have made it clear that poverty involves very complex and interrelated macro socioeconomic issues and micro level concerns within families, and individuals.

Institute for Research on Poverty



## Two Types of Poverty

### GENERATIONAL vs. SITUATIONAL POVERTY

*“Generational poverty and situational poverty are different”*

- ***Generational Poverty:***
  - Having been in poverty for at least two generations.
- ***Situational Poverty:***
  - Lack of resources due to a particular event (divorce, chronic illness, death, etc.)

(Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2006)

## Impact of Poverty

- One example: Poverty is associated with *health risks* for young children including:
  - Low birth weight
  - Exposure to lead
  - Lower scores on measures of cognitive ability
  - Increased internalizing and externalizing behavior problems.

What about relationships? Can you think of the ways it impacts on relationships?

***The effects of poverty on adults and children seem to be most marked when it is long-term.***

National Center for Children in Poverty



## Family Patterns in Poverty

- Definition of family differs from middle class and can be very complicated and continually changing.
- Mother is usually at the center.
- To understand the story, pay attention to the omissions as much as the identified members of the family (A genogram is a great tool for this.)
- Allegiances and feuds are important to know.

The roles, multiple relationships, multi-partner fertility, co-parenting alliances, nature of the male and female identity, the ever-changing allegiances, and the matriarchal structure result in different patterns of family than middle class families.

(Payne, DeVol, & Smith, 2006)



## Low Resource vs. Low Income

- Not all families involved in the child welfare system are considered low income. There are other reasons for being in the child welfare system such as having failed to safe guard children.
- The families in the system that have economic resources have other stressors for which they lack sufficient resources to cope. Poverty does not cause child abuse.
- The term "low resource" is a more inclusive term including those personally, socially and/or economically disadvantaged and may find themselves involved in the child welfare system.



## Discussion

- Economic inequality and the widening gap between those who can attain the American dream and those who cannot.

***What will this mean to long-term couple commitment?***

***What will it mean to families?***

## Child Welfare: Two Key Goals



- To ensure the safety, well-being and permanency of children.
- To provide services to assess, ensure safety and/or provide an alternative secure setting.



## Child Welfare Services

Child welfare services include a broad range of programs and activities administered by states and in some states local governments and private institutions. Financing of child welfare programs comes from a intricate combination of federal, state and local funds.



## Public Child Welfare System is Responsible for:

- Responding to reports of abuse and neglect.
- Helping families solve the problems that cause abuse and neglect.
- Helping children to be safe and secure.
- Preventing separation of children from their families.

» Child Welfare League of America

Handout: flow chart the Stages of CPS decision making



## Responsibilities continued:

- Working with families so that their children can return home (when children have been separated from their families to be safe )
- Ensuring that children receive adequate care while they are away from their families.
- Finding another suitable permanent home for children who cannot return home.

» Child Welfare League of America



## Who Performs the Work?

- Public and private child welfare agencies, courts and other service systems (mental health, health, education, etc.) are all partners in serving children and families who come to the attention of the child welfare system.



## Types of Programs

- Child Abuse and Neglect Investigation and Intervention Prevention.
- Child Abuse Prevention
- Foster Care
- Family Preservation
- Family Counseling and other Services
- Economic support programs

The disproportionality and disparate outcomes for people of color in the child welfare system should be noted in discussion.



## Why should child welfare workers care about marital relationships?

- **Legislation:** 1996 Welfare Reform (Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, PL104-193)
- **Executive Action:** Healthy Marriage Initiative
- **Research findings:**
  - Links between parental marital status and child poverty rates;
  - Links between couple relationship quality, parenting ability and the well-being of children.

There will be in other lessons more policy information as well as more information about the research findings. This is just an introduction of the ideas.



## 1996 Personal Responsibility & Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

Family-formation purposes of key legislation abbreviated as TANF:

**“To end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.”**

**“To encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.”**



## Healthy Marriage Initiative - Mission

"To help couples, who have chosen marriage for themselves, gain greater access to marriage education services, on a voluntary basis, where they can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage."

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).



## Impact of Policies on Union Formation

- Fragile Families research brief drew the conclusions that child welfare and child support policies do affect union formation and dissolution among couples who have a child outside of marriage. Therefore, practitioners must have a basic understanding of these policies.
- A fragile family refers to unmarried couples with a new baby who are usually poor and living together or, if not living together, romantically involved.

Fragile Families Research Brief # 20

## The Retreat From Marriage Among Low Income Families

- Findings based on in-depth, qualitative interviews.
- Suggest that to be successful, marriage promotion programs will need to address at least 2 issues:
  - Strengthening relationships and trust, including emphasizing the importance of sexual fidelity.
  - Ways to increase the financial stability and asset accumulation of these couples. *High need/expectation for financial security in a marriage.*

Fragile Families Research Brief # 17

*The legacy of child maltreatment is often at the root of many barriers to healthy relationships and marriages.*

(Clasp Brief # 12, May 2008)



## Beliefs Behind Their Actions

- Marital standards have risen for all including the poor.
- The poor experience high marital aspirations and low marriage rates.
- Some might say that the marriage standards of the poor are too high, but ironically, those ideals correspond to conditions necessary for long-term marital relationships.

(Edin, Kefala and Reed, 2004)

## Attitudes of Low Income Families Toward Child- Bearing, Cohabitation and Marriage:

### *Why Do Low-Income Unmarried Parents Aspire to Marriage?*

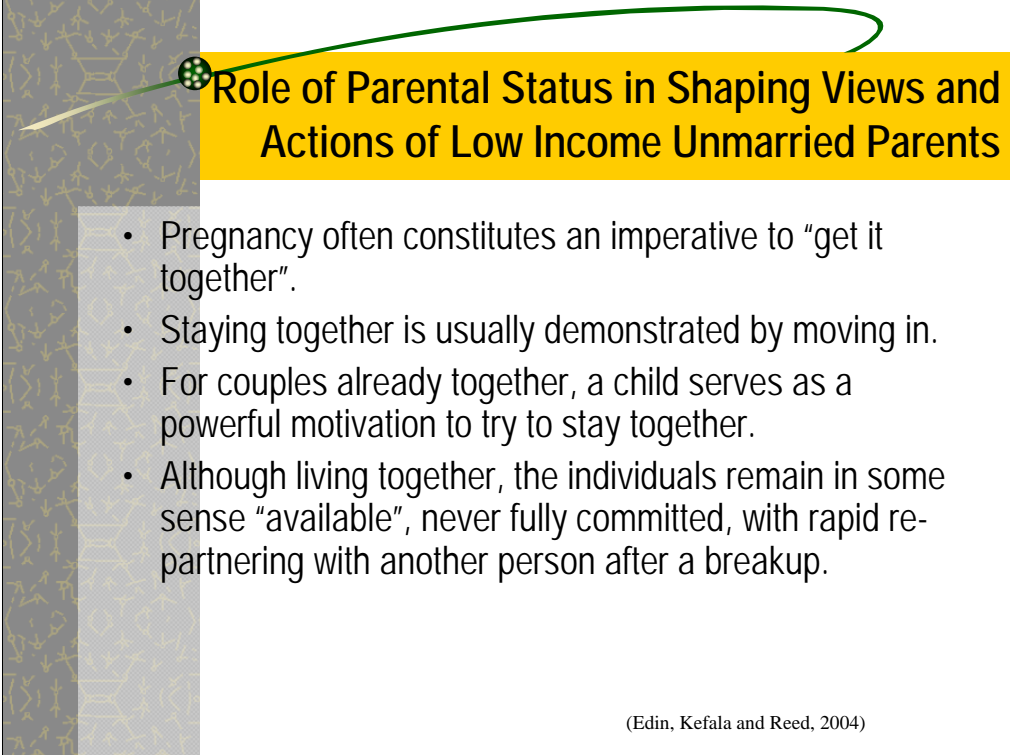
- Sharing a child is important and has meaning for both parents.
- A child should prompt a couple to at least begin to contemplate marriage.
- Majority feel that it is better for children if the parents are married.
- Marrying just to get divorced is worse than no marriage.
- Cohabitation is understood as the first in a series of steps leading to marriage.

(Edin, Kefala and Reed, 2004)

Show sections of PPS video from Frontline called “Let’s Get Married”. Especially interview of urban and rural women who discuss their relationships with men/fathers of their children.

For information call 1-800-424-7963. Video # FROL2106 copyright 1999.

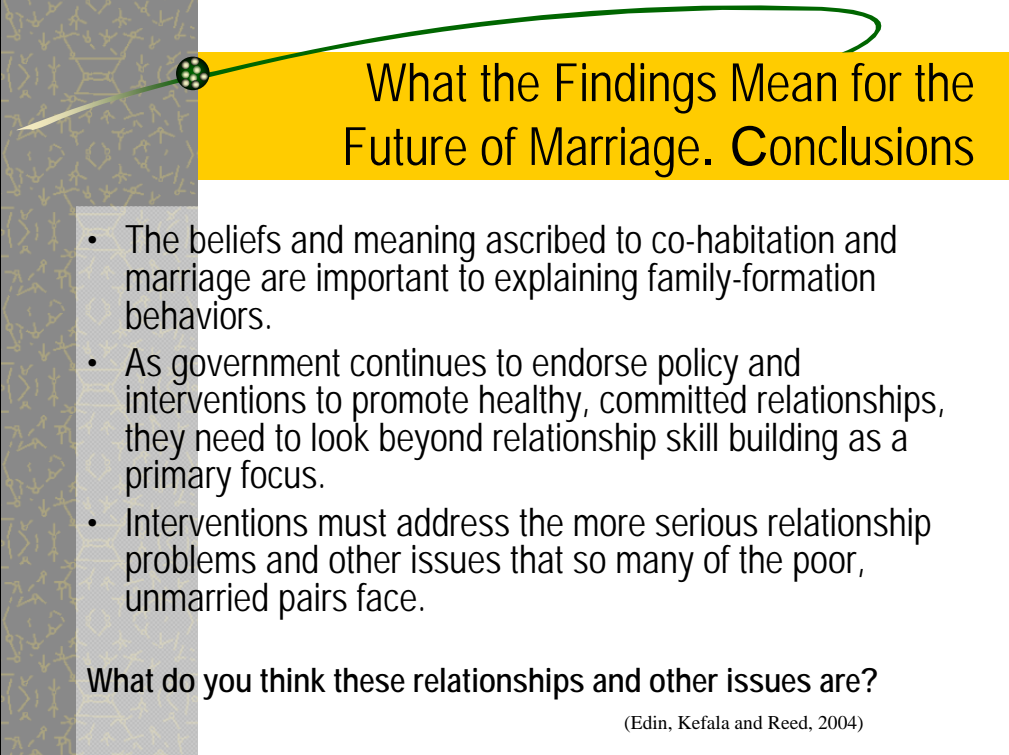
Summary: The traditional American family structure is crumbling, and no one’s sure why. Now everyone from the government to church leaders to intellectuals are pushing marriage. But can such efforts make marriage once again the norm? Frontline correspondent Alex Kotlowitz examines the modern marriage movement. (60 minutes)



## • Role of Parental Status in Shaping Views and Actions of Low Income Unmarried Parents

- Pregnancy often constitutes an imperative to “get it together”.
- Staying together is usually demonstrated by moving in.
- For couples already together, a child serves as a powerful motivation to try to stay together.
- Although living together, the individuals remain in some sense “available”, never fully committed, with rapid re-partnering with another person after a breakup.

(Edin, Kefala and Reed, 2004)



## What the Findings Mean for the Future of Marriage. Conclusions

- The beliefs and meaning ascribed to co-habitation and marriage are important to explaining family-formation behaviors.
- As government continues to endorse policy and interventions to promote healthy, committed relationships, they need to look beyond relationship skill building as a primary focus.
- Interventions must address the more serious relationship problems and other issues that so many of the poor, unmarried pairs face.

**What do you think these relationships and other issues are?**

(Edin, Kefala and Reed, 2004)



## Some Barriers to Marriage Among Fragile Families

- Lack of stable employment
- Mental Health Issues including depression, anxiety, etc.
- Substance Abuse
- Domestic Violence
- Father who is a Violent Offender

Fragile Families Research Brief # 16

### **About Fragile Families:**

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is following a cohort of nearly 5,000 children born in the US between 1998 and 2000. The data is representative of non-marital births in large US cities at the turn of the century.

The Study was designed to address four questions of great interest to researchers and policy makers:

1. What are the conditions and capabilities of unmarried parents, especially fathers?
2. What is the nature of the relationships between unmarried parents?
3. How do children born into these families fare?
4. How do policies and environmental conditions affect families and children?

## Addressing the Full Scope of the Problem

Edin, et al. concur, until there is more access to jobs that lead to financial security and a productive life outside of bearing and raising children....

...people in poverty will continue to have children far sooner than many Americans think they should.



(Edin, Kefala and Reed, 2004)



## Recommended Reading

- Edin, K. & Reed, J.M. (2005). Why don't they just get married? Barriers to marriage among the disadvantaged. *Future of Children, 15*, 117-137.

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