

# Monthly and Average Monthly Poverty Rates by Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2015

## Household Economic Studies

### Current Population Reports

By Abinash Mohanty

P70BR-165

July 2019

#### INTRODUCTION

Poverty rates are key economic indicators often used by policymakers to evaluate economic well-being and make comparisons across sectors of the population.

This report presents monthly and average monthly poverty rates for the United States in 2015. In addition, it examines how monthly and average monthly poverty rates vary across demographic groups. The statistics presented in this report were produced using data collected in interviews from March to June 2016 as part of the 2014 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked about their income in calendar year 2015.

The SIPP is a longitudinal survey which provides monthly data on family composition and economic

<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau reviewed this data product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and has approved the disclosure avoidance practices applied to this release. CBDRB-FY19-ROSS-B0149.

#### WHAT IS SIPP?

The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is a nationally representative panel survey administered by the U.S. Census Bureau that collects information on the short-term dynamics of employment, income, household composition, and eligibility and participation in government assistance programs. It is a leading source of information on specific topics related to economic well-being, family dynamics, education, wealth and assets, health insurance, child care, and food security. Each SIPP panel follows individuals for several years, providing monthly data that measure changes in household and family composition and economic circumstances over time. For more information, please visit the SIPP Web site at <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html)>.

#### POVERTY MEASURES USED IN THIS REPORT

Monthly Poverty Rate	Percentage in poverty in a given month using monthly income and a monthly threshold.
Average Monthly Poverty Rate	Percentage in poverty using monthly income and a monthly threshold over a given reference period—in this case, the percentage of individuals with monthly income below their monthly poverty thresholds calculated using all months of the calendar year.

well-being. Compared to other surveys, such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) and the American Community Survey (ACS) that provide annual measures of poverty, the SIPP allows for the examination of poverty on a monthly basis. This facilitates the analysis of changes in poverty rates over time, as well as the duration of poverty spells.

Poverty statistics presented in this report adhere to the standards specified by the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14. The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total pretax cash income is less than that family's threshold in a given month, then that family and every individual in it are considered to be in poverty. The poverty thresholds are updated annually to allow for changes in the cost of living using the Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). They do not vary geographically.

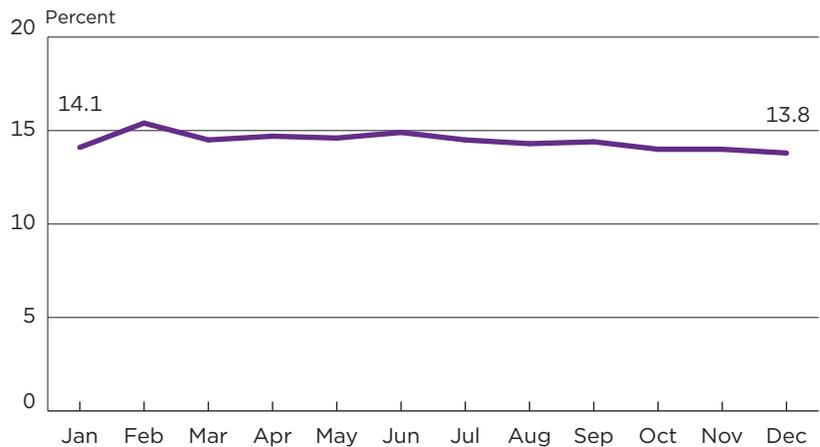
## RESULTS

### Monthly Poverty Rates

Figure 1 presents monthly poverty rates for 2015.<sup>2</sup> Monthly poverty rates serve as a valuable supplement to estimates of annual poverty rates. While annual poverty rates reflect longer-term income deficits, monthly poverty rates reflect more frequent short-term income deficits. The monthly poverty rate of 14.1 percent in January

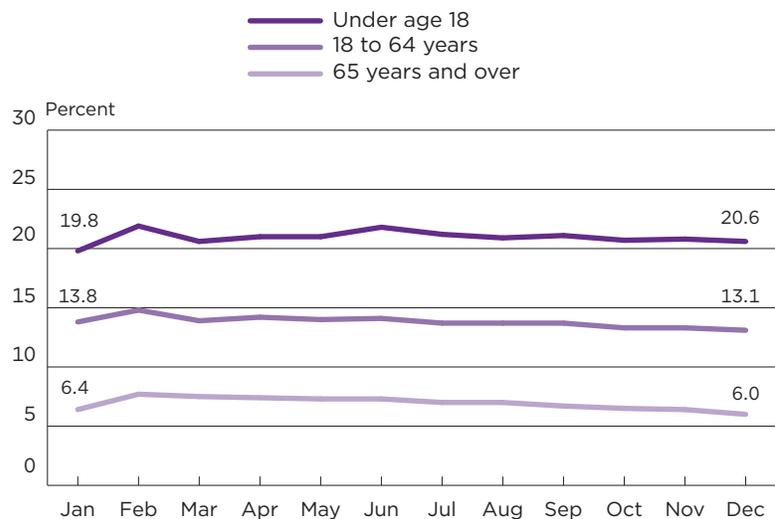
<sup>2</sup> Some of the monthly fluctuations in poverty rates for February reflect that fewer weeks of earnings are recorded in the month of February. In the case of children, fluctuations in weekly pay reflect the employment of any employed adult family members.

Figure 1.  
**Monthly Poverty Rates: 2015**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection and sampling and nonsampling error, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel.

Figure 2.  
**Monthly Poverty Rates by Age: 2015**



Note: For information on confidentiality protection and sampling and nonsampling error, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html)>. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel.

of 2015 was not statistically different from the rate in December 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2 presents monthly poverty rates for 2015 across age groups. Children under the age of 18 had higher monthly poverty rates than adults aged 18 to 64 for every month in 2015, while adults aged 65 or older had lower monthly poverty rates than the working-age population aged 18 to 64.

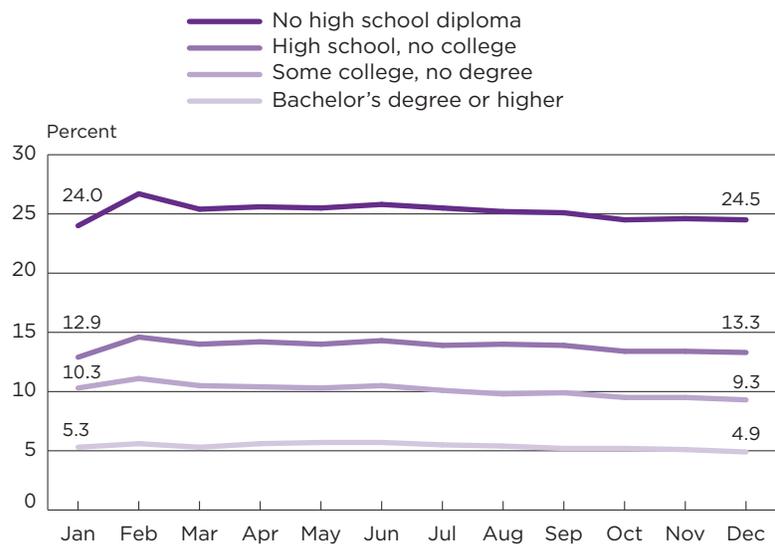
Over the course of 2015, monthly poverty rates for adults aged 18 to 64 declined from 13.8 percent in January to 13.1 percent in December. Monthly poverty rates for individuals under the age of 18 and adults aged 65 or older were not statistically different across January and December 2015.

Figure 3 presents 2015 monthly poverty rates by educational attainment for people aged 25 and older. In 2015, individuals without a high school diploma had higher monthly poverty rates than people with advanced levels of education. People with a bachelor's degree or higher had the lowest monthly poverty rates among educational attainment groups.

Over the course of 2015, monthly poverty rates for people with some college education but no degree declined 1.0 percentage point to a rate of 9.3 percent in December 2015. For the other three educational attainment

<sup>3</sup> The estimates in this report (which may be presented in the text, figures, and table) are based on responses from a sample of the population and may differ from the actual values because of sampling variability and other factors. As a result, apparent differences between the estimates for two or more groups may not be statistically significant. All comparative statements have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level, unless otherwise indicated.

Figure 3.  
**Monthly Poverty Rates by Educational Attainment: 2015<sup>1</sup>**



<sup>1</sup> Includes only people 25 years and older.  
Note: For information on confidentiality protection and sampling and nonsampling error, see <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html)>.  
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel.

groups—people with at least a bachelor's degree, people with a high school diploma but no college, and people without a high school diploma—monthly poverty rates were not statistically different across January and December 2015.

### Average Monthly Poverty Rates

While monthly poverty rates are calculated individually in each month of the calendar year, average monthly poverty rates provide an annual summary measure of the number and percentage of people who experienced poverty during a given month over the course of a year.

As shown in Table 1, the average monthly poverty rate in 2015 was

14.4 percent. Non-Hispanic Whites had a lower average monthly poverty rate (11.0 percent) than Blacks and Hispanics, while the average monthly poverty rates for Hispanics (21.7 percent) and Blacks (21.9 percent) were not significantly different from each other.<sup>4</sup> The average monthly poverty

<sup>4</sup> Federal surveys, including the SIPP 2014 Panel, give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. These data can be shown in two ways: (1) as mutually exclusive from other race groups, which may be denoted by "alone" or (2) not mutually exclusive with other race groups, denoted by "alone or in combination with other race groups." The figures, table, and text in this report show race using the first method. Since Hispanics may be of any race, data for Hispanics are not mutually exclusive with race. Data users should exercise caution when interpreting aggregate results for these groups because they consist of many distinct subgroups that differ in socioeconomic characteristics, culture, and recency of immigration.

Table 1.

**Average Monthly Poverty by Selected Characteristics: 2015**

(Numbers in thousands. For information on confidentiality protection and sampling and nonsampling error, see [www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html))

Characteristic	Total	In poverty			
		Number	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)	Percent	Margin of error <sup>1</sup> (±)
<b>All people</b> .....	<b>314,842</b>	<b>45,439</b>	<b>1,544</b>	<b>14.4</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Race and Hispanic Origin<sup>2</sup></b>					
White .....	243,437	32,245	1,223	13.2	0.5
White, non-Hispanic.....	192,579	21,101	961	11.0	0.5
Black .....	41,007	8,978	664	21.9	1.6
Hispanic.....	55,632	12,099	795	21.7	1.4
Non-Hispanic.....	259,210	33,340	1,232	12.9	0.5
<b>Age</b>					
Under 18 years.....	72,545	15,202	830	21.0	1.1
18 to 64 years.....	195,797	27,021	820	13.8	0.4
65 years and over.....	46,501	3,216	240	6.9	0.5
<b>Sex</b>					
Male .....	153,859	20,177	747	13.1	0.5
Female.....	160,983	25,262	934	15.7	0.6
<b>Family Status</b>					
In married-couple families .....	190,728	12,729	1,087	6.7	0.6
In families with a male reference person, no spouse present .....	9,639	1,564	256	16.2	2.6
In families with a female reference person, no spouse present .....	53,462	16,611	992	31.1	1.7
Unrelated individuals.....	61,013	14,535	537	23.8	0.7
<b>Educational Attainment</b>					
Total, 25 years and over .....	212,211	23,824	753	11.2	0.4
No high school diploma .....	23,737	5,984	332	25.2	1.3
High school, no college .....	58,880	8,137	454	13.8	0.7
Some college.....	57,847	5,847	339	10.1	0.6
Bachelor's degree or higher.....	71,746	3,856	316	5.4	0.4

<sup>1</sup> A 90 percent confidence interval is a measure of an estimate's variability. The larger the confidence interval in relation to the size of the estimate, the less reliable the estimate.

<sup>2</sup> Federal surveys, including the 2014 Survey of Income and Program Participation, give respondents the option of reporting more than one race. These data can be shown in two ways: (1) as mutually exclusive from other race groups, which may be denoted by "alone," or (2) not mutually exclusive with other race groups, denoted by "alone or in combination with other race groups." These tables show race using the first method. Since Hispanics may be any race, data in this table for Hispanics overlap data for racial groups. Data users should exercise caution when interpreting aggregate results for these groups because they consist of many distinct subgroups that differ in socioeconomic characteristics, culture, and recency of immigration.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2014 Panel.

---

rate for females (15.7 percent) was 2.6 percentage points higher than the average monthly poverty rate for males in 2015 (13.1 percent).<sup>5</sup>

In 2015, the average monthly poverty rate for individuals in married-couple families<sup>6</sup> (6.7 percent) was 9.6 percentage points lower than for those living in families with a male family reference person, no spouse present (16.2 percent) and 24.4 percentage points lower than for those in families with a female family reference person, no spouse present (31.1 percent). Unrelated individuals (those not living with any relative), had an average monthly poverty rate of 23.8 percent in 2015.

Among age groups, children under the age of 18 had the highest average monthly poverty rate in 2015 (21.0 percent). The average monthly poverty rate for children under the age of 18 was 7.2 percentage points higher than the rate for adults aged 18 to 64 (13.8 percent) and 14.0 percentage points higher than the rate for those aged 65 and above (6.9 percent).

---

<sup>5</sup> All percentages shown in this report are rounded to one decimal place but differences between estimates are calculated using unrounded numbers. Therefore, published estimates of the differences may not equal the result of subtracting the rounded numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Married-couple families include spouses of opposite-sex and same-sex.

Table 1 also provides 2015 average monthly poverty rates by educational attainment for people aged 25 and older. The average monthly poverty rate for people without a high school diploma (25.2 percent) was 11.4 percentage points higher than the average monthly poverty rate for individuals with a high school diploma, but who did not attend college (13.8 percent). The average monthly poverty rate for people with a high school diploma and no college education was 8.4 percentage points higher than the poverty rate of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (5.4 percent).

### THE ACCURACY OF ESTIMATES

For further information on the source of the data and accuracy of the estimates, including standard errors and confidence intervals, go to <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/tech-documentation/source-accuracy-statements.html)> or contact Mahdi S. Sundukchi of the Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division at <[mahdi.s.sundukchi@census.gov](mailto:mahdi.s.sundukchi@census.gov)> or Faith Nwaoha-Brown of the Census Bureau's Demographic Statistical Methods Division at <[faith.n.nwaoha.brown@census.gov](mailto:faith.n.nwaoha.brown@census.gov)>. Additional information on

the SIPP can be found at the following Web sites: <[www.census.gov/sipp/](http://www.census.gov/sipp/)> (main SIPP Web site) and <[www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/guidance/users-guide.html](http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sipp/guidance/users-guide.html)> (SIPP User's Guide).

### USER COMMENTS

Additional information on poverty statistics can be found by contacting the SIPP survey team at <[census.sipp@census.gov](mailto:census.sipp@census.gov)> or 888-245-3076. For further information on the content of this report, contact Ashley Edwards of the Census Bureau's Social, Economic, and Housing Statistics Division at <[ashley.edwards@census.gov](mailto:ashley.edwards@census.gov)> or 301-763-2458.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

Mohanty, Abinash, "Monthly and Average Monthly Poverty Rates by Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2015," *Current Population Reports*, P70BR-165, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2019.