

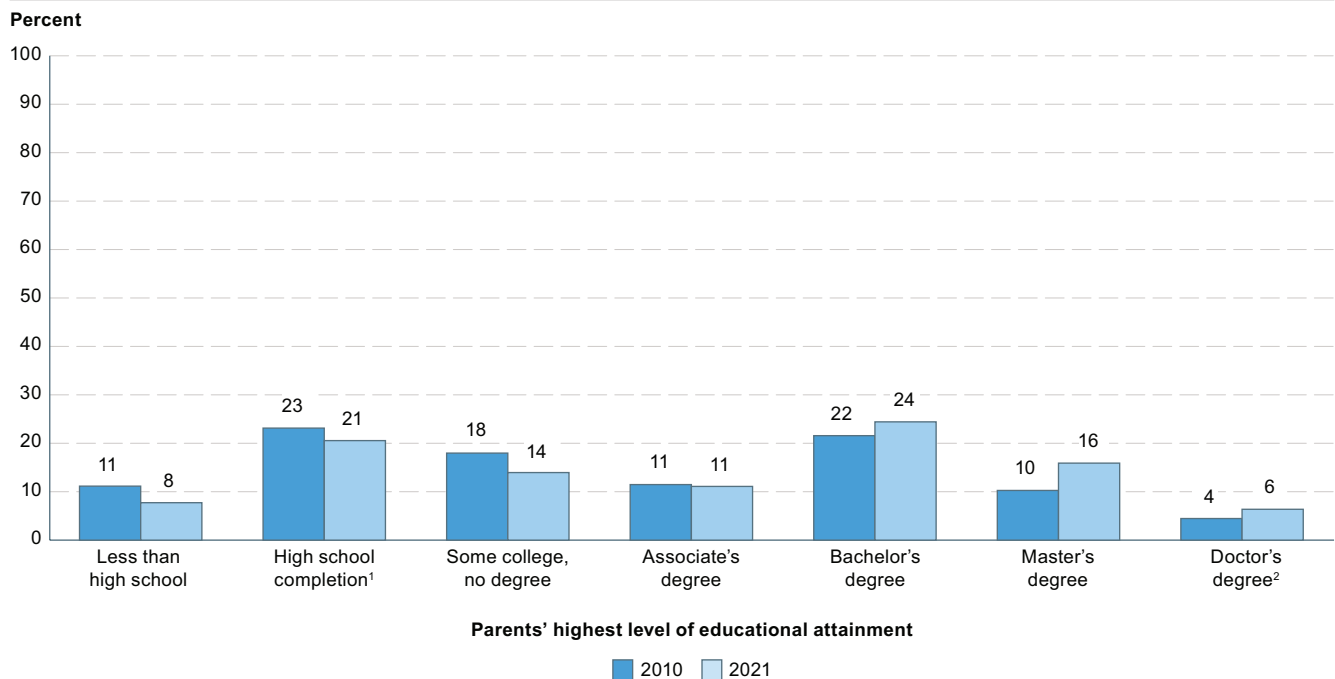
# Characteristics of Children's Families

In 2021, some 8 percent of children under the age of 18 lived in households in which no parent had completed high school, 23 percent lived in mother-only households, and 5 percent lived in father-only households. In 2020, some 16 percent were in families living in poverty.

Characteristics of children's families are associated with children's educational experiences and their academic achievement. Prior research has found that the risk factors of living in a household without a parent who has completed high school, living in a single-parent household, and living in poverty are associated with poor educational outcomes—including receiving low achievement scores, having to repeat a

grade, and dropping out of high school.<sup>1,2</sup> This indicator examines the prevalence of these risk factors among racial/ethnic groups. For more information on the relationship between family socioeconomic status and later postsecondary and employment outcomes, see *The Condition of Education 2019* Spotlight indicator [Young Adult Educational and Employment Outcomes by Family Socioeconomic Status](#).

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of children under age 18, by parents' highest level of educational attainment: 2010 and 2021**



<sup>1</sup> Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

<sup>2</sup> Includes parents with professional degrees.

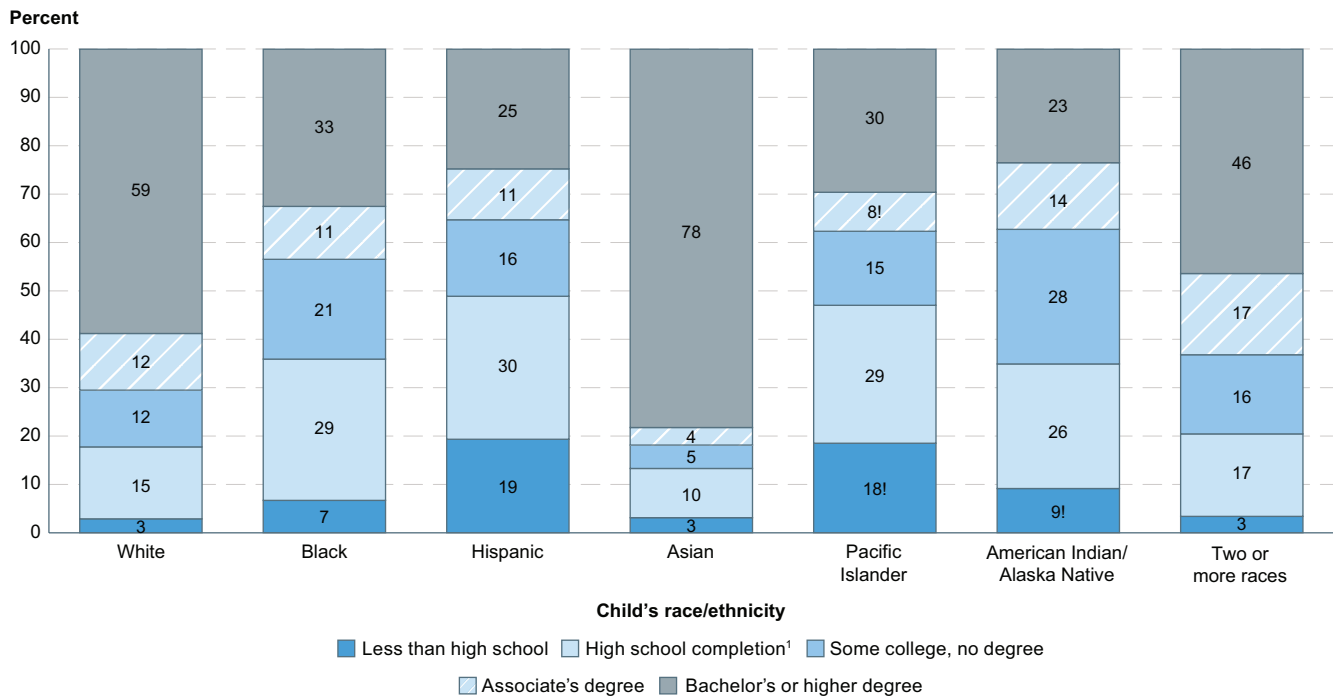
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only children under age 18 who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent, but excluding parents not residing in the same household). Parents' highest level of educational attainment is the highest level of education attained by any parent residing in the same household as the child. Caution should be used when comparing 2021 estimates to those of prior years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2010 and 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 104.70.

In 2021, some 58 percent of children under age 18 lived in households in which at least one parent had completed a college degree (an associate's degree or higher). Conversely, 42 percent lived in households in which no parent had a college degree. Specifically, 8 percent lived in households in which no parent had completed high school, 21 percent lived in households in which the highest level of education was high school completion,<sup>3</sup> and 14 percent lived in households in which the highest level of education was some college attendance but no degree. Eleven percent lived in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was an associate's degree. Forty-seven percent of children lived in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor's or higher degree, including 24 percent with a bachelor's degree, 16 percent with a master's degree, and 6 percent with a doctor's degree.<sup>4</sup>

Compared with 2010, lower percentages of children under age 18 in 2021 lived in households in which no parent had completed a postsecondary degree.<sup>5</sup> This includes children in households in which no parent had completed high school (8 vs. 11 percent), in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was high school completion (21 vs. 23 percent), and in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was some college attendance but no degree (14 vs. 18 percent). The percentage of children living in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was an associate's degree in 2021 was not significantly different from the percentage in 2010 (both 11 percent). This, in turn, means there was a higher percentage of children in 2021 than in 2010 who lived in households in which the highest level of parental education was a postsecondary degree. Specifically, in 2021, some 47 percent lived in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor's or higher degree, compared with 36 percent in 2010.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of children under age 18, by child's race/ethnicity and parents' highest level of educational attainment: 2021**



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

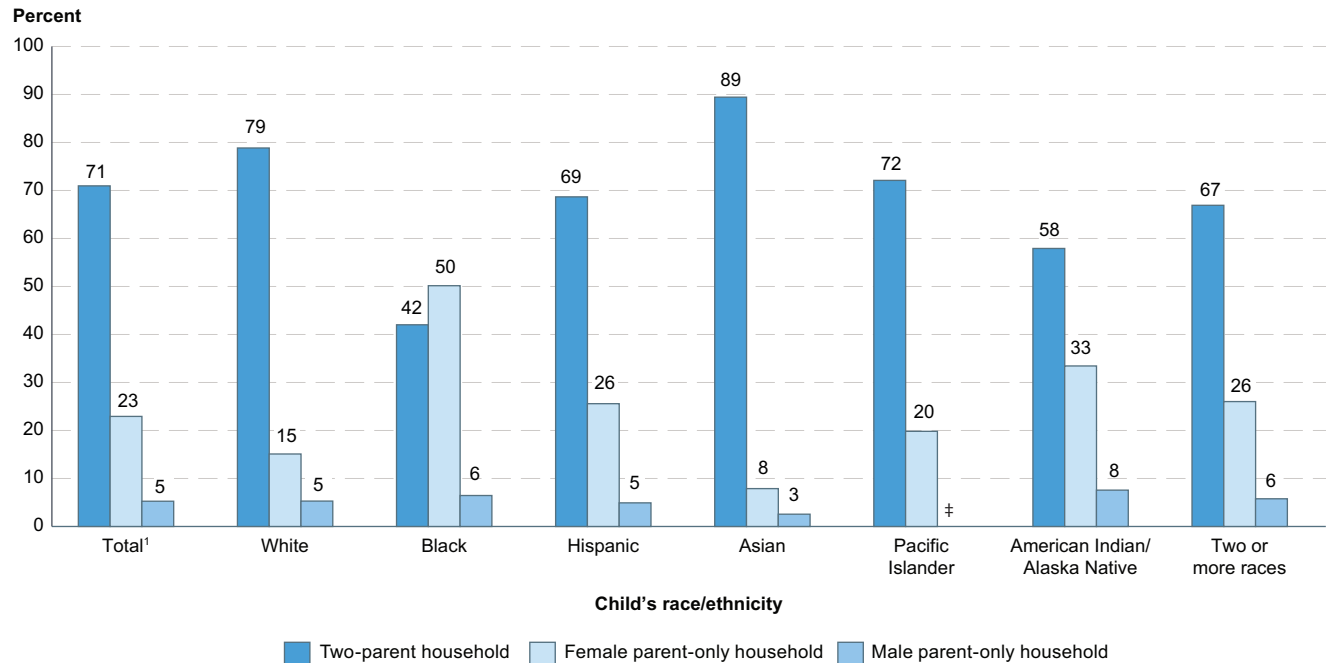
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only children under age 18 who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent, but excluding parents not residing in the same household). Parents' highest level of educational attainment is the highest level of education attained by any parent residing in the same household as the child. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 104.70.

The highest level of education attained by either parent of children under age 18 varied across racial/ethnic groups in 2021. The percentage of children under age 18 who lived in households in which no parent had completed high school was higher for Hispanic children (19 percent) than for children who were American Indian/Alaska Native (9 percent), Black (7 percent), of Two or more races (3 percent), Asian (3 percent), and White

(3 percent). The percentage of children in 2021 who lived in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was at least a bachelor's degree was higher for children who were Asian (78 percent), White (59 percent), and of Two or more races (46 percent) than for Black (33 percent), Pacific Islander (30 percent), Hispanic (25 percent), and American Indian/Alaska Native (23 percent) children.

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of children under age 18, by child's race/ethnicity and living arrangement: 2021**

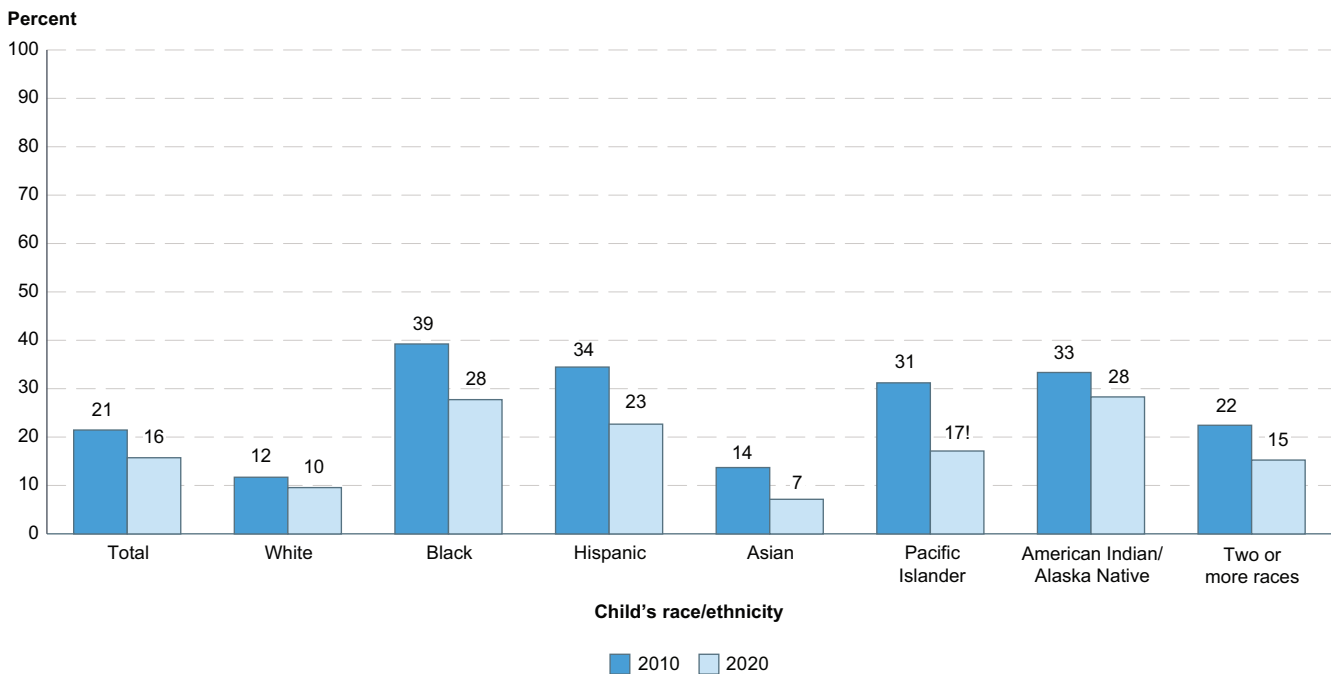


† Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.  
 NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population. Includes all children who live either with their parent(s) or with a householder to whom they are related by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). Children are classified by the number of parents they live with or, if no parents are present in the household, by the marital status of the householder who is related to the children. A "two-parent household" has two parents (married or unmarried) or related married householders. A "female parent-only household" has a female parent only or related female householder with no spouse present (i.e., the householder is unmarried, or the spouse is not in the household). A "male parent-only household" has a male parent only or related male householder with no spouse present. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Data do not include foster children, children in unrelated subfamilies, children living in group quarters, and children who were reported as the householder or spouse of the householder. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Data do not sum to 100 percent because the "All other children" category is not reported.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 102.20.

In 2021, although most children under age 18 lived in two-parent households (71 percent), 23 percent lived in female parent-only households and 5 percent lived in male parent-only households.<sup>6</sup> This pattern—of a higher percentage of children living in two-parent households than in female parent- and male parent-only households—was observed

for children across all racial/ethnic groups, except for Black children. A larger percentage of Black children lived in female parent-only households (50 percent), compared with 42 percent who lived in two-parent households and 6 percent who lived in male parent-only households.

**Figure 4. Percentage of children under age 18 in families living in poverty, by child's race/ethnicity: 2010 and 2020**



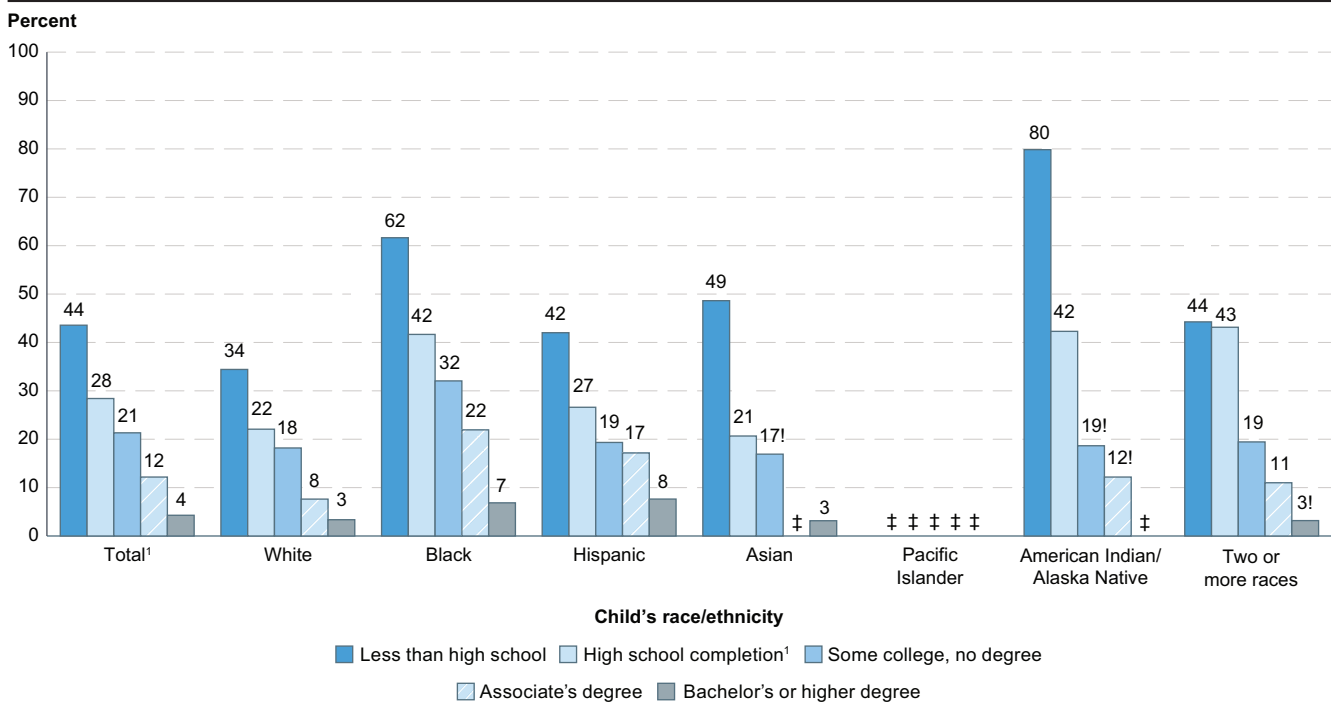
! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.  
 NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only related children under age 18. The measure of child poverty includes all children who live in a household or are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Poverty status is determined by the Census Bureau using a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. For additional information about poverty status, see <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>. Caution should be used when comparing 2020 estimates to those of prior years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2011 and 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 102.60.

The Current Population Survey's (CPS) March Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) collects income data for the prior calendar year. As a result, the March 2021 CPS ASEC data used for this indicator report poverty status based on 2020 income. Based on these data, approximately 11.3 million children under age 18 were in families living in poverty in 2020.<sup>7</sup> The poverty rate for children in 2020 (16 percent) was lower than in 2010 (21 percent). This pattern was observed for children across all racial/ethnic groups, except for Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native children. For example, 23 percent of Hispanic children lived in poverty in 2020, compared with 34 percent in 2010, and 28 percent of Black children lived in poverty in 2020, compared with 39 percent in 2010. For Pacific Islander and American

Indian/Alaska Native children, the 2020 poverty rate was not measurably different from the rate in 2010.

The poverty rate for children under age 18 varied across racial/ethnic groups in 2020. American Indian/Alaska Native (28 percent), Black (28 percent), and Hispanic (23 percent) children had poverty rates higher than the national average (16 percent), while White (10 percent) and Asian (7 percent) children had rates lower than the national average. The poverty rates for Pacific Islander children and children of Two or more races were not measurably different from the national average. For additional information about poverty rates and racial/ethnic subgroups, please refer to the *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018* report.

**Figure 5. Percentage of children under age 18 in families living in poverty, by child's race/ethnicity and parents' highest level of educational attainment: 2020**

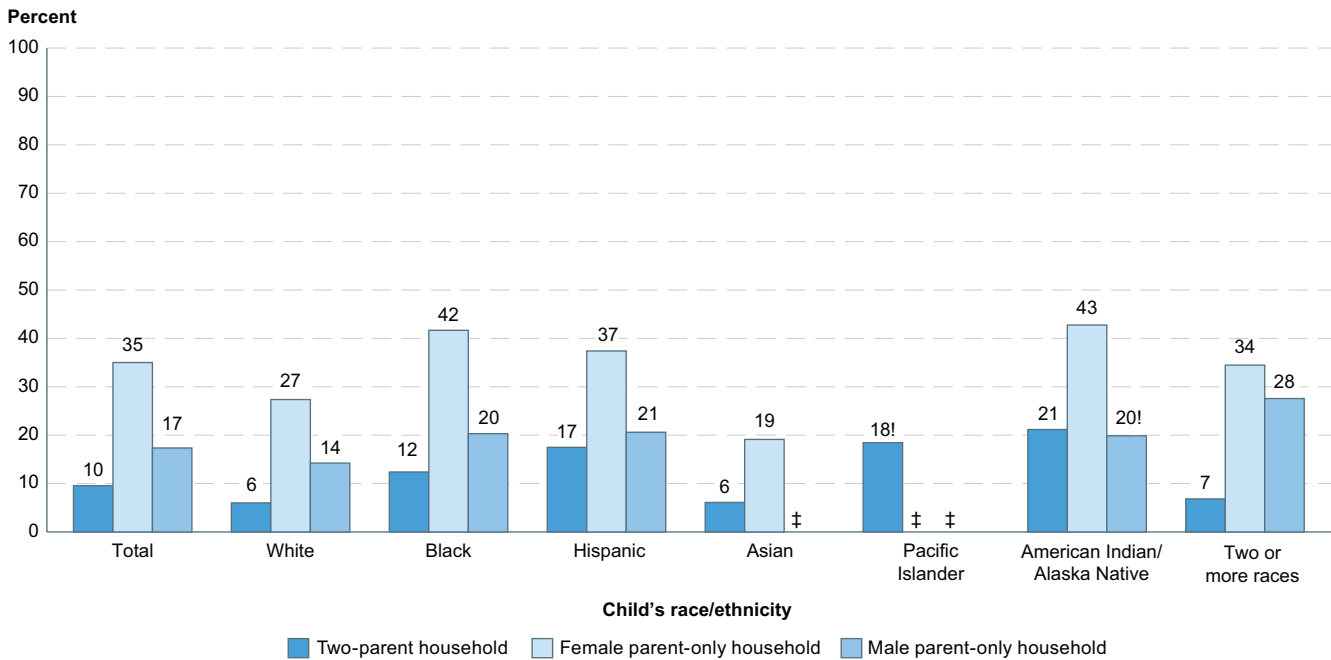


! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.  
 ‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.  
<sup>1</sup> Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.  
 NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only related children under age 18 who resided with at least one of their parents (including an adoptive or stepparent, but excluding parents not residing in the same household). Parents' highest level of educational attainment is the highest level of education attained by any parent residing in the same household as the child. The measure of child poverty includes children who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Poverty status is determined by the Census Bureau using a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. For additional information about poverty status, see <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 102.62.

In 2020, the poverty rate for children under age 18 was highest for those in households in which no parent had completed high school (44 percent) and lowest for those in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor's or higher degree (4 percent). This pattern held for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian<sup>8</sup> children. For American Indian/Alaska Native children, the poverty rate was highest for those living in households in which no parent completed high school (80 percent) and lowest for those in households in which the highest level of education was an associate's degree

(12 percent), the highest level of education for which data were reported.<sup>9</sup> For children of Two or more races, the poverty rates for those in households in which no parent had completed high school or in which either parent had attained high school completion were not measurably different from each other (44 and 43 percent) but these were still higher than the poverty rate of those living in households in which the highest level of education was a bachelor's or higher degree (3 percent). Poverty rate data for Pacific Islander children by parents' educational attainment were not reported.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 6. Percentage of children under age 18 in families living in poverty, by child's race/ethnicity and family structure: 2020**



‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

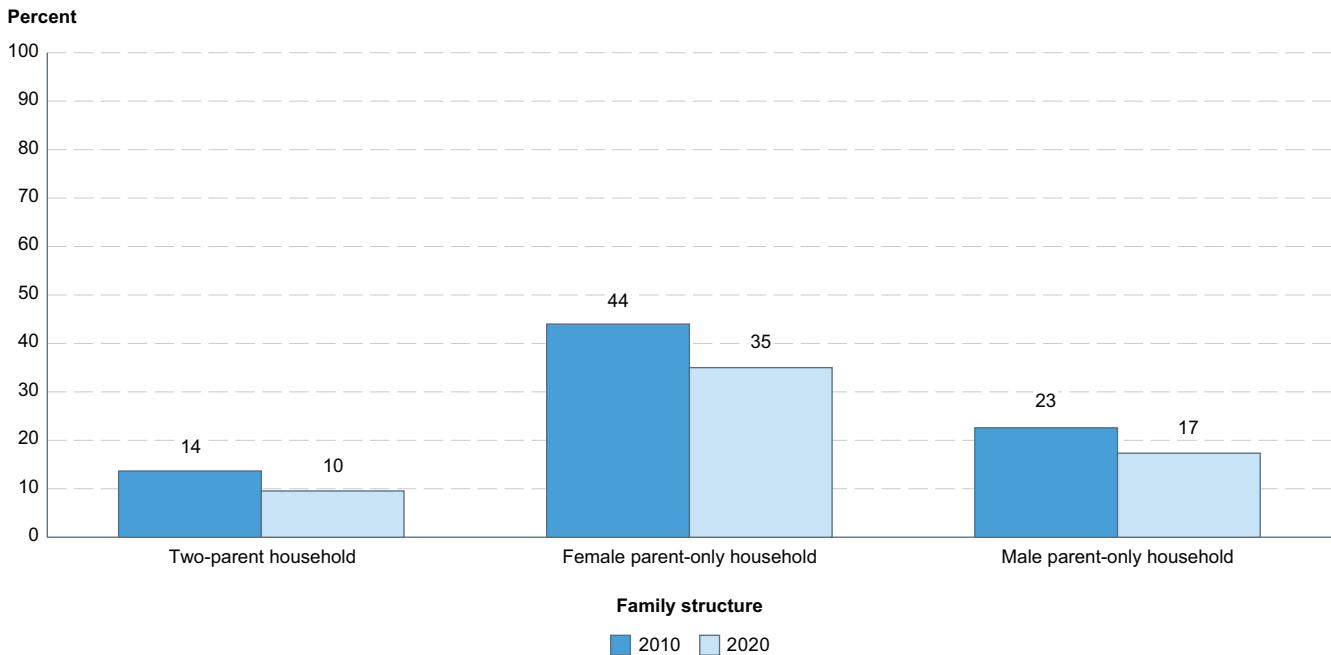
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only related children under age 18. Children are classified by the number of parents they live with or, if no parents are present in the household, by the marital status of the householder who is related to the children. A “two-parent household” has two parents (married or unmarried) or related married householders. A “female parent-only household” has a female parent only or related female householder with no spouse present (i.e., the householder is unmarried, or the spouse is not in the household). A “male parent-only household” has a male parent only or related male householder with no spouse present. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Poverty status is determined by the Census Bureau using a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. For additional information about poverty status, see <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 102.60.

In 2020, the poverty rate for children under age 18 was highest for those living in female parent-only households (35 percent), followed by those living in male parent-only households (17 percent). Children living in two-parent households had the lowest poverty rate (10 percent). This pattern of children living in two-parent households having the lowest poverty rate was also observed for White and

Black children and children of Two or more races.<sup>11</sup> For Hispanic children, there was no measurable difference between poverty rates in two-parent households and male parent-only households. For White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native children and children of Two or more races, poverty rates were higher in female parent-only households than in two-parent households.

**Figure 7. Percentage of children under age 18 in families living in poverty, by family structure: 2010 and 2020**



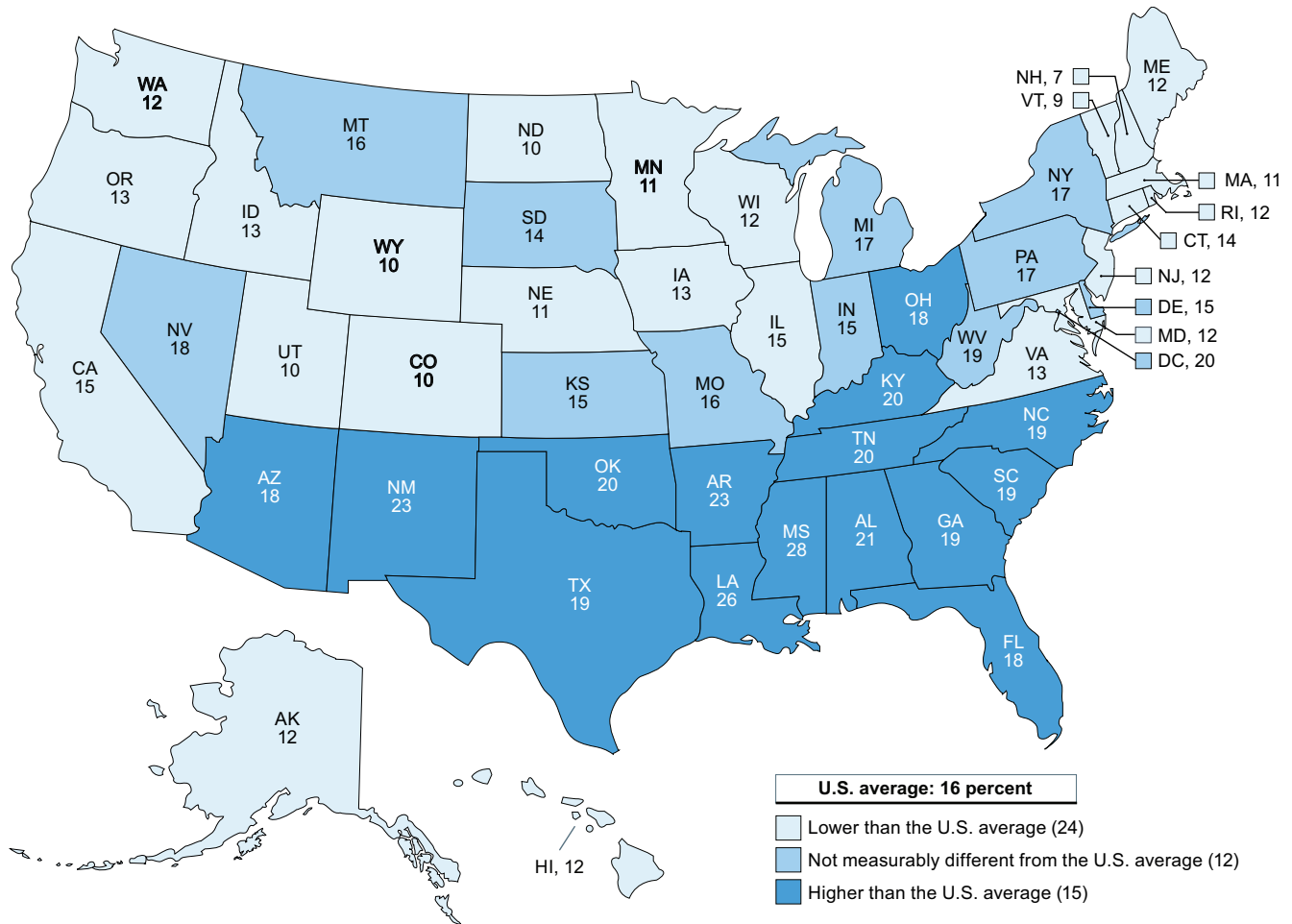
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, but this figure includes only related children under age 18. Children are classified by the number of parents they live with or, if no parents are present in the household, by the marital status of the householder who is related to the children. A “two-parent household” has two parents (married or unmarried) or related married householders. A “female parent-only household” has a female parent only or related female householder with no spouse present (i.e., the householder is unmarried, or the spouse is not in the household). A “male parent-only household” has a male parent only or related male householder with no spouse present. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Poverty status is determined by the Census Bureau using a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. For additional information about poverty status, see <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2011 and 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 102.60.

In 2020, the poverty rate was lower than in 2010 for children under age 18 living in female parent-only households (35 vs. 44 percent), male parent-only households (17 vs. 23 percent), and two-parent households (10 vs. 14 percent). This pattern of lower child poverty rates in 2020 than 2010 by family structure was observed for Black children across all household types; White,

Hispanic, and Asian children living in two-parent and female parent-only households; and children of Two or more races in two-parent households. For American Indian/Alaska Native children across all household types, there were no measurable differences between the two years.



**Figure 8. Percentage of children under age 18 in families living in poverty, by state and comparison with the national average: 2019**



NOTE: The measure of child poverty includes all children who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption (except a child who is the spouse of the householder). The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. For additional information about poverty status, see <https://www.census.gov/topics/income-poverty/poverty/guidance/poverty-measures.html>.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2019. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 102.40.

The following state-level analysis is based on 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) data because they are the most recent reliable data available on child poverty rates by state.<sup>12</sup> While the national average poverty rate for children under age 18 was 16 percent in 2019, the rates among states ranged from 7 percent in New Hampshire to 28 percent in Mississippi. Twenty-four states had poverty rates for children that were lower than the national average, 15 states had rates that were higher than the

national average, and 11 states and the District of Columbia had rates that were not measurably different from the national average. Of the 15 states that had poverty rates higher than the national average, the majority (12) were located in the South. In 39 states and the District of Columbia, the poverty rates were lower in 2019 than in 2010. In the remaining 11 states, there was no measurable difference between the poverty rates in 2010 and 2019.

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Pungello, E.P., Kainz, K., Burchinal, M., Wasik, B.H., Sparling, J.J., Ramey, C.T., and Campbell, F.A. (2010, February). Early Educational Intervention, Early Cumulative Risk, and the Early Home Environment as Predictors of Young Adult Outcomes Within a High-Risk Sample. *Child Development*, 81(1): 410-426. Retrieved January 8, 2021, from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01403.x/full>.

<sup>2</sup> Ross, T., Kena, G., Rathbun, A., KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Kristapovich, P., and Manning, E. (2012). *Higher Education: Gaps in Access and Persistence Study* (NCES 2012-046). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved January 8, 2021, from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubinfo.asp?pubid=2012046>.

<sup>3</sup> Includes parents who completed high school through equivalency programs, such as a GED program.

<sup>4</sup> Includes parents who had completed professional degrees.

<sup>5</sup> Caution should be used when comparing 2020 and 2021 estimates to those of prior years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> A “two-parent household” has two parents (married or unmarried) or related married householders. A “female parent-only household” has a female parent only or related female householder with no spouse present (i.e., the householder is unmarried, or the spouse is not in the household). A “male parent-only household” has a male parent only or related male householder with no spouse present. Children are classified by the number of parents they live with or, if no parents are present in the household, by the marital status of the householder who is related to the children. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. Foster children, children in unrelated subfamilies, children living in group quarters, and children who were reported as the householder or spouse of the householder are not included in this analysis.

<sup>7</sup> In this indicator, data on household income and the number of people living in the household are combined with the poverty threshold, published by the Census Bureau, to determine the poverty status of children. A household includes all families in which children are related to the householder by birth or adoption, or through marriage. The householder is the person (or one of the people) who owns or rents (maintains) the housing unit. In 2020, the poverty threshold for a family of four with two related children under 18 years old was \$26,246. For a more detailed breakdown of the 2020 poverty rate, refer to [this table](#).

<sup>8</sup> Data on the poverty rate for Asian children living in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was an associate’s degree did not meet reporting standards in 2020. However, the pattern held that the poverty rate was highest for Asian children living in households in which no parent had completed high school (49 percent) and lowest for those in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor’s or higher degree (3 percent).

<sup>9</sup> Reporting standards were not met for American Indian/Alaska Native children living in households in which the highest level of education attained by either parent was a bachelor’s or higher degree.

<sup>10</sup> Reporting standards were not met for Pacific Islander children living in households by education attainment of either parent.

<sup>11</sup> Data for Pacific Islander children living in mother-only and father-only households and data for Asian children living in father-only households by poverty rate did not meet reporting standards in 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on response rates and survey administration, the Census Bureau changed the 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) release status to an experimental data product, meaning that it does not meet the Census Bureau’s typical quality standards. Due to limitations of comparability over time for the experimental data product, NCES is presenting 2019 data that are comparable with prior years. For more information see [https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2021/acs/2021\\_CensusBureau\\_01.pdf](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2021/acs/2021_CensusBureau_01.pdf).

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, tables 102.20, 102.60, 102.62, and 104.70; *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 102.40

**Related indicators and resources:** [Children Living in Poverty \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Children’s Living Arrangements \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Concentration of Public School Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch](#); [Disparities in Educational Outcomes Among Male Youth \[The Condition of Education 2015 Spotlight\]](#); [Risk Factors and Academic Outcomes in Kindergarten Through Third Grade \[The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight\]](#); [Snapshot: Children Living in Poverty for Racial/Ethnic Subgroups \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Young Adult Educational and Employment Outcomes by Family Socioeconomic Status \[The Condition of Education 2019 Spotlight\]](#)

**Glossary:** Associate’s degree; Bachelor’s degree; College; Doctor’s degree; Educational attainment; Geographic region; High school completer; Household; Master’s degree; Poverty (official measure); Racial/ethnic group