

Single Parent Families in Northwest Arkansas



Over the last four decades, the composition of the American family has changed dramatically. Since 1970, the number of single-parent families has tripled in the United States. Arkansas estimates show more than 100,000 families headed by a single parent, of which nearly 80 percent are female-headed. Additionally, single-headed families are more likely to live in poverty and face limited educational and occupational opportunities.

The data presented below are meant to serve as a preliminary summary of the population that Single Parent Scholarship programs would most likely reach/serve. Some description of the specific characteristics of this population: how many, what is their need, and how prepared are they for higher educational opportunities, are also discussed.

Figure 1
Families with Children: Single Head of Household: 1990-2006

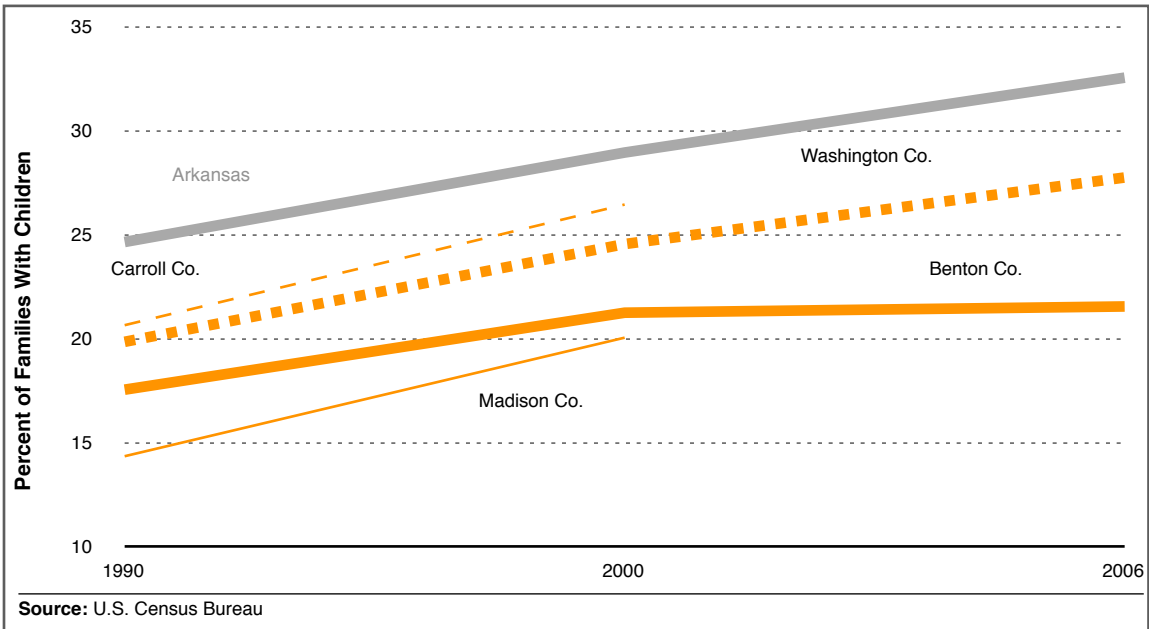


Table 1
Single Parent Families with Children Under 18, 2000

Location	# Families	% Families
Benton	4262	21.3
Carroll	893	28.1
Madison	404	19.7
Washington	5197	25.1
Arkansas	110889	30.1
United States	11101755	29.2

Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000, Accessed from www.census.gov

Table 2
Single Parent Families with Related Children Under 18, 2007

Location	# Families	% Families
Benton	6692	26.6
Carroll	na	na
Madison	na	na
Washington	7781	32.4
Arkansas	110636	33.1
United States	10913281	32

Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000, Accessed from www.census.gov

Table 3
Single Parent Families with Related Children Living at or Below Poverty Level, 2000

Location	# Families	% Families
Benton	1192	37.2
Carroll	316	40
Madison	167	28.1
Washington	1604	43
Arkansas	43565	49.2
United States	3388498	51.2

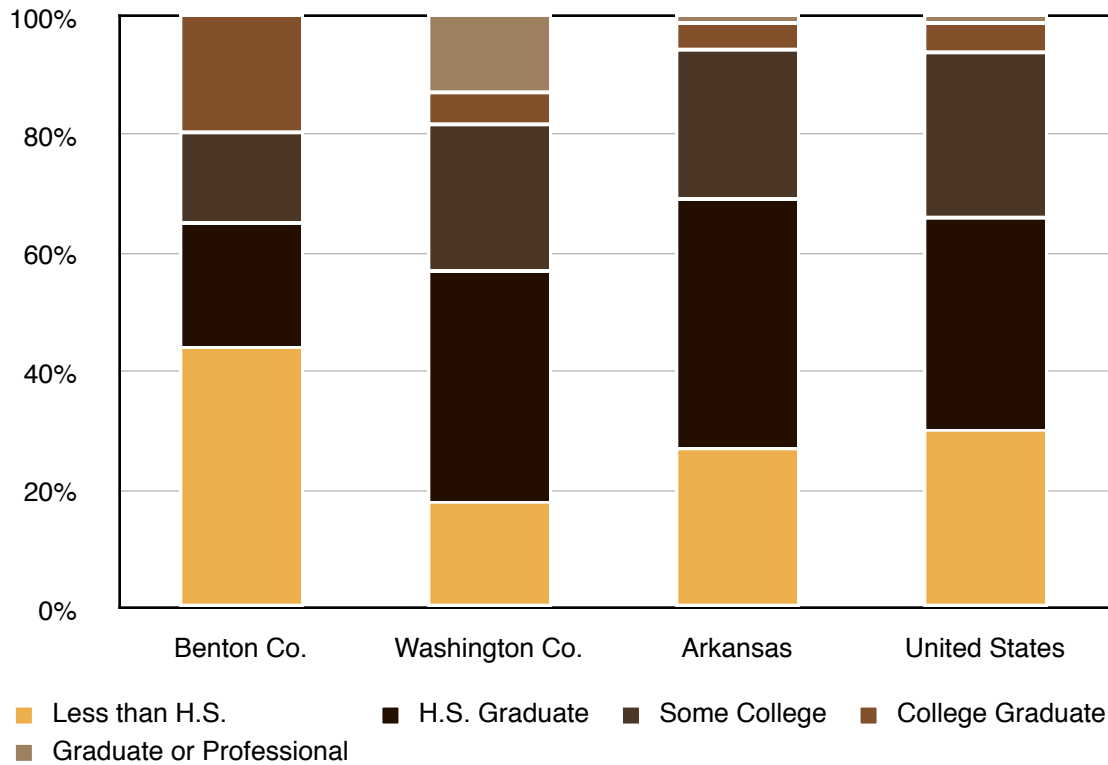
Source: United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000, Accessed from www.census.gov

Table 4
Single Parent Families with Related Children Living at or Below
Poverty Level, 2007

Location	# Families	% Families
Benton	2600	45.8
Carroll	na	na
Madison	na	na
Washington	5249	54
Arkansas	114121	65.5
United States	8663232	68

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2007, Accessed from www.census.gov

Figure 2
Educational Attainment among Single-Parent Women ages 15-50, 2007



General Observations

Clearly, there has been considerable change in the single-parent population throughout Northwest Arkansas. Except for Benton County, all counties in Northwest Arkansas gradually increase in the percentage of single-headed families with children under the age of 18 since 1990. Since 2000, Benton County percentages have leveled off while the trajectory for the remainder of the region seems to follow the state. With nearly 30 percent of the households with children in Washington County headed by a single-parent, the population to benefit from the Single Parent Scholarship program is growing in the region. In the last seven years, the percentage of single parent families in Benton (20%) and Washington (30%) have increased; this same data is not available for Carroll and Madison counties but suspect the same type of change would be evident.

In the last seven years, the number of families living in poverty has quadrupled in Washington County. The percent of families living in poverty headed by a single parent increased by more than 15 percent. A similar pattern is evident in Benton County and again no recent data (post-2000) is available for Carroll and Madison Counties.

Educational attainment data suggests that the pool of potential scholarship candidates in Washington County is sizable—nearly 60 percent of unmarried women that gave birth in the last twelve months have either a high school degree or some college experience (coursework or an Associate's degree). While there are other populations scholarship eligible (i.e. unmarried women with older children, 25 years of age and over, that have not given birth in the last year), we focused on the most recent data specific to unmarried women.

In conclusion, in order to better understand the potential pool of candidates for Single Parent Scholarship in Washington County (and other non-Washington County scholarship recipients), more time needs to be spent exhaustively examining available secondary data for these counties. In addition, besides a more detailed primary examination of persons who have received scholarship assistance in the past, it might be instructive to talk with a group of single-parent scholarship eligibles who have not received support. This comparison might help to inform some understanding of who and why some persons are overlooked, and what, if any, changes might be proposed for planning outreach in the future.

Authors:

Kevin M. Fitzpatrick, Ph.D.
Professor & Jones Chair in Community
Director, Community and Family Institute
Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice
University of Arkansas

With Assistance From:

Hanna Maija Jokinen-Gordon B.A.
Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice
University of Arkansas

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Community and Family Institute
Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, University of Arkansas
Old Main 211
Fayetteville, AR 72701