

More children living in high-poverty communities than 10 years ago

Written by Maria Morales - Special to the NNPA from the Afro-American Newspaper
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BALTIMORE — Nearly 8 million of America’s children live in high-poverty areas, about 1.6 million more since 2000, according to a new report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The Baltimore-based organization does research and funding to programs nationally that focus on disadvantaged children and families.

About 7.9 million, or 11 percent, of the nation’s children are growing up in areas where at least 30 percent of residents live below the federal poverty level of \$22,000 per year for a family of four, according to the latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), which covers 2006 through 2010.

African American, American Indian and Latino children are six to nine times more likely to live in high-poverty communities than their white counterparts.

Washington, D.C. ranks 10th out of the top 10 U.S. cities, with 32 percent of its children living in impoverished neighborhoods, a decrease since 2000. Baltimore falls toward the middle of the top 50 cities, listed at 22nd place, with 25 percent of its children living in poor neighborhoods.

The state of Maryland has one of the lowest numbers of poor children in the country, with just three percent of its children reportedly living in high-poverty areas.

According to the ACS, almost all states saw the number of children in high-poverty neighborhoods climb.

In 2000, 6.3 million kids, or 9 percent, were living in areas of concentrated poverty.

Such communities often lack access to resources that are critical to healthy growth and development, including quality education, medical care and safe outdoor spaces, said Laura Speer, associate director for policy reform and data at the Casey Foundation.

“Kids in these high-poverty areas are at risk for health and developmental challenges in almost every aspect of their lives, to their chances for economic success as adults,” Speer said.

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“Transforming disadvantaged communities into better places to raise children is vital to ensuring the next generation and their families realize their potential.”

Not all children living in these high-poverty neighborhoods are poor themselves, Speer clarified. “Nearly half of the kids living in these neighborhoods are in families above the poverty line, although they may be just above the line.”

But the outcomes for children in those communities are relatively the same, despite income, Speer said. The study found children of all income levels that lived in poor communities had higher stress levels, more social and emotional problems, struggle in school or drop out, especially children of color. “Kids living in a poor neighborhood are more affected,” she said. “It really is double jeopardy.”

Speer said that children in low-income families that live in higher income neighborhoods have a greater chance of success. “When a low-income child goes to school in a higher income area, they do better for the most part,” she said.

The survey also showed that three out of four children in these neighborhoods have at least one parent in the home who works. “Most people think incorrectly that these are families where no one is working,” Speer said. “But what we found is that the adults in the home may be working and need a better job, or are actively looking.

These communities need to create economic opportunities that parents and children can take advantage of, from schools to jobs.”