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## County poverty rate higher than state and nation

According to recent U.S. Census Bureau data, Cochise County's poverty rate over the five-year period from 2012 through 2016 was 18.9 percent. That was higher than the statewide rate of 17.7 percent and the national rate of 15.1 percent during the same period.

Within Cochise County, poverty rates vary widely. Of the seven incorporated cities and towns, Huachuca City had the highest poverty rate over the five-year period at 34.8 percent. That was followed by Douglas (33.9 percent), Bisbee (28.4 percent), Benson (24.8 percent), Tombstone (23.6 percent), and Willcox (20.6 percent). Sierra Vista had the lowest poverty rate in Cochise County from 2012 through 2016 at 14.9 percent—lower than both the state and national levels.

Three factors stand out as primary influences affecting whether one will live below the poverty line: family structure, age, and education. In Cochise County, families led by single moms are more than three times as likely to live in poverty as married-couple families with children. Single-mom families with small children (under 5 years old) are nearly seven times as likely to be in poverty.

From 2012 through 2016, 46 percent of Cochise County households headed by single mothers lived in poverty. The situation is even worst for single-mother families with small children, 52.4 percent of whom lived in poverty. For married-couple families with children, the poverty rate in Cochise County is 13.9 percent; for married couples with small children it's only 7.9 percent.

Countywide, 26.9 percent of all children live in poverty, compared to 25.3 percent statewide and 21.2 percent nationwide. The highest child poverty rate of Cochise County's municipalities is Huachuca City at 44.5 percent. Douglas is second at 39.6 percent, followed by Bisbee (39.2 percent), Benson (38.6 percent), Tombstone (33.1 percent), and Willcox (31.2 percent). Sierra Vista has the lowest childhood poverty rate at 22.2 percent.

Sierra Vista is the only city to have a childhood poverty rate below the countywide rate. The other six municipalities (Benson, Bisbee, Douglas, Huachuca City, Tombstone, and Willcox) are above the countywide rate, which is pulled down considerably by the low rate in Sierra Vista—the county's most populous city. Sierra Vista is also the only city in Cochise County with a childhood poverty rate below the statewide average. Childhood poverty rates throughout the county are higher than nationally.

Due to social insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare, seniors tend to have lower poverty rates than the general population. In Cochise County, 11.6 percent of those ages 65 and up lived below the poverty line from 2012 through 2016. That was the lowest of all age groups. The countywide senior poverty rate, however, was higher than statewide (8.9 percent) and nationwide (9.3 percent).

Of Cochise County's municipalities, Douglas has the highest rate of seniors in poverty at 23.5 percent, followed by Tombstone (18.7 percent), Benson (16.7 percent), Bisbee (14.9 percent), Huachuca City (10.1 percent), and Willcox (8.7 percent). The senior poverty rate is lowest in Sierra Vista, where only 6.9 percent of those ages 65 and over lived in poverty from 2012 through 2016.

Regarding education levels and poverty, the inverse relationship between the two has been well documented over the years. Douglas has the second highest individual poverty rate in Cochise County and the lowest share of the population with a high school diploma or higher (69.6 percent of the population ages 25 and over). Sierra Vista, which has the lowest poverty rate in the county, has the highest rate of high school graduates at 93.2 percent of the adult population 25 years old and up.

Douglas also has the lowest share of the population with a bachelor's degree or higher at 8.4 percent while Sierra Vista has the highest (30.3 percent).

In a positive sign, Douglas has the largest share of its population ages 25 years and up enrolled in college or graduate school at 30 percent. Sierra Vista has the second largest share of college or graduate school enrollees at 28.5 percent, followed by Huachuca City (28.1 percent), Benson (22.2 percent), Tombstone (20.8 percent), and Bisbee (9.6 percent). The lowest rate of college or graduate school enrollment is Willcox (7.5 percent).

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