



MONITORING POVERTY AND WELL-BEING IN NYC

VULNERABILITIES AND SERVICE NEEDS OF
**SINGLE-PARENT
HOUSEHOLDS**
IN NEW YORK CITY

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Introduction

Launched in 2012, the Robin Hood Poverty Tracker captures a more complete picture of disadvantage in New York City than is provided by official poverty statistics. The Poverty Tracker collects data on multiple forms of disadvantage, including poverty, material hardship, health, and a host of other factors that contribute to the well-being of New York City's households. The Poverty Tracker also follows respondents over time, tracing the persistence of disadvantage and identifying the events or circumstances that preempt a movement out of poverty and material hardship. This report uses Poverty Tracker data to zoom in on a population that is subject to higher levels of poverty and material hardship at the national and local level — single-parent households.¹ There are approximately 250,000 single-parent households in New York City, and approximately 580,000 (or 32 percent of) New York City children live in a single-parent home. This report highlights the elevated rates of disadvantage among single-parent households and analyzes the current and potential role of public policies in improving their well-being.

In Section 1, we look at the demographic characteristics of single-parent households, compared to the population of the city as a whole. In Section 2, we document differences between single-parent households and the average New York City household in poverty and severe material hardship rates, both important measures of households' ability to meet basic needs and well-documented hazards to child development. In Section 3, we report on the elevated rates of disadvantage that single-parent households face compared to the average household in terms of other factors related to well-being, including neighborhood functioning, rent burden, and access to emergency funds. Section 4 compares service needs and utilization among single-parent families and households across the city. Finally, in Section 5, we examine the policies that reduce poverty among single-parent households and estimate the potential impacts that reforms to antipoverty programs would have on the poverty rate of single-parent households.

¹We define single-parent households as those where a parent is living with one or more biological and/or foster children but with no partner or spouse.

KEY FINDINGS

SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS AND DISADVANTAGE

36 percent of single-parent households live in poverty. This means that they are much more likely to live in poverty than the average New York City household (**36 percent versus 20 percent**).

Over half of single-parent households experience one or more **severe material hardships** over the course of a year, such as utility shut-offs and worrying frequently about money for food. Single-parent households are much more likely to experience a severe material hardship in a year than the average New York City household (**53 percent versus 35 percent**). Nearly half of all single-parent households above the poverty line still experience a material hardship.

One-third of single-parent households often **run out of money** between paychecks or pay-cycles.

One in five single-parent households are located in a **high-poverty neighborhood** (where over 40 percent of residents live below the poverty line). Single-parent households are more likely to live in neighborhoods with lower levels of collective efficacy and inadequate city services.

Over half of single-parent households who rent their apartment or home are **rent-burdened** (i.e., spend over 30 percent of their household income on rent).

Single-parent households are nearly **twice as likely** as the average New York City household to have a **need for services** related to paying for food and bills, finding adequate or affordable housing, getting public benefits, or other economic issues.

WHAT CAN POLICIES DO?

The antipoverty effects of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly referred to as food stamps) are significantly greater for single-parent households than the average New York City household. **Increasing take up of SNAP benefits to 100 percent by eligible recipients would add to this impact — lowering the poverty rate of single-parent households by an estimated 2.5 percentage points.**

The Section-8 Housing Choice Voucher program moves 3 percent of single-parent households out of poverty. **Doubling the number of vouchers available in New York City would move another 5 percent of single-parent households out of poverty.**

Section 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Single-Parent Households

Before examining poverty and other forms of disadvantage for single-parent households relative to all households in New York City, we first present descriptive information on the demographic characteristics of single parents in the city, compared with the demographics of the city as a whole. Table 1 shows these demographics.

The key findings are:



Single parents are more likely to be black (36 percent versus 23 percent) or Hispanic (45 percent versus 28 percent) and less likely to be white (13 percent versus 36 percent) than adults in the city as a whole.



Single parents are less likely to have a college degree: 18 percent of single parents have a bachelor's degree compared to 36 percent of New York City adults.



Looking specifically at the working-age population (adults under the age of 65), we see that single parents are slightly less likely to be working than the average working-age New Yorker (57 percent versus 62 percent). However, overall single parents are slightly more likely to be working than the average New York City adult (55 percent versus 54 percent).



Single parents are more likely to be foreign born (43 percent versus 38 percent) than the citywide adult population.



Single parents are more likely to reside in the Bronx (34 percent versus 20 percent) and less likely to reside in Queens (17 percent versus 25 percent) than all New York City adults.



Single parents are more likely to be younger: 39 years old on average as compared to 46 for the city's adult population.



Taken together, the demographics in Table 1 confirm the familiar story that single parents are more likely than the average New York City resident to not have a college degree and to be younger, from historically disadvantaged racial group, and born in other countries. Thus, single-parent households represent a group more vulnerable, on average, to the risk of poverty and disadvantage than the city as a whole, as we will see in the next section.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of New York City Adults and Single Parents

	Adults	Single Parents
Race/Ethnicity		
Asian	10%	3%
Black	23%	36%
Hispanic	28%	45%
Other/Multi-Racial	3%	3%
White	36%	13%
Education Level		
Less than High School	18%	28%
High School Graduate	21%	26%
Some College/Vocational School	25%	28%
College Graduate	36%	18%
Work Status		
Currently Working (all Adults)	54%	56%
Currently Working (Adults under 65 years old)	62%	57%
Immigration Status		
Born in the United States	62%	57%
Foreign Born	38%	43%
Borough		
Bronx	20%	34%
Brooklyn	28%	24%
Manhattan	22%	20%
Queens	25%	17%
Staten Island	5%	5%
Age		
18 to 29	23%	24%
30 to 44	24%	42%
45 to 64	36%	32%
65+	17%	2%
Average Age	46 years old	39 years old

Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

Note: Results are weighted to be representative of adults in New York City.

Section 2.

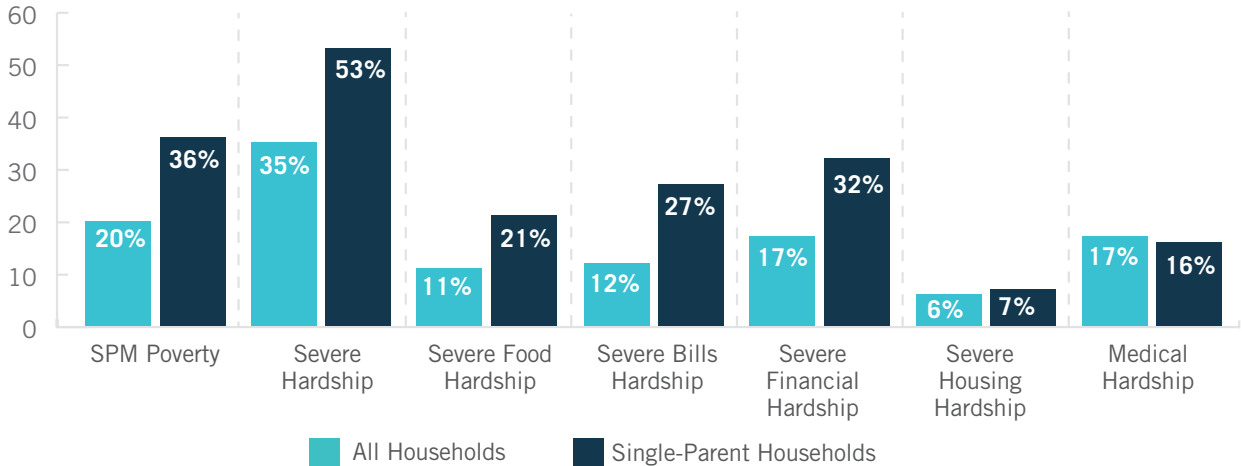
Poverty and Material Hardship in Single-Parent Households

Traditional snapshots of poverty show us that single-parent households face elevated rates of poverty compared to the rest of the population. Studies of single mothers have found that, nationally, approximately 3 in 10 households with children headed by a single parent are in poverty. This is according to the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM), an improved measure of poverty that takes into account post-tax income and in-kind resources such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly referred to as food stamps).²

New York City is not an exception when it comes to the poverty rate of households headed by single parents. Poverty Tracker data confirms that about 36 percent, or over one-third, of single-parent households in New York City are living below the SPM poverty line (see Figure 1). Compared to the average New York City household, single-parent households are much more likely to live in poverty.

Figure 1

Household Poverty and Hardship



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline
Note: See Appendix Table A1 for these results by borough.

The Poverty Tracker also shows that single-parent households face elevated rates of material hardship compared to the rest of the population (see Figure 1). While measures of poverty consider income relative to the poverty line, measures of material hardship show how many households cannot meet their basic expenses regardless of their income. Researchers commonly study hardships related to food, housing, utility bills, medical, and financial needs.

²Authors' calculations, Current Population Survey, 2015; Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, and J. Robert Warren. Integrated Public Use Micro-data Series, Current Population Survey: Version 5.0. [dataset]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V5.0>.

The Poverty Tracker also measures these forms of material hardship and defines them as:

SEVERE FOOD HARDSHIP: Often worrying food would run out without enough money to buy more

SEVERE BILLS HARDSHIP: Having utilities cut off because of a lack of money

SEVERE FINANCIAL HARDSHIP: Often running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles

SEVERE HOUSING HARDSHIP: Having to stay in a shelter or other place not meant for regular housing, or having to move in with others because of costs

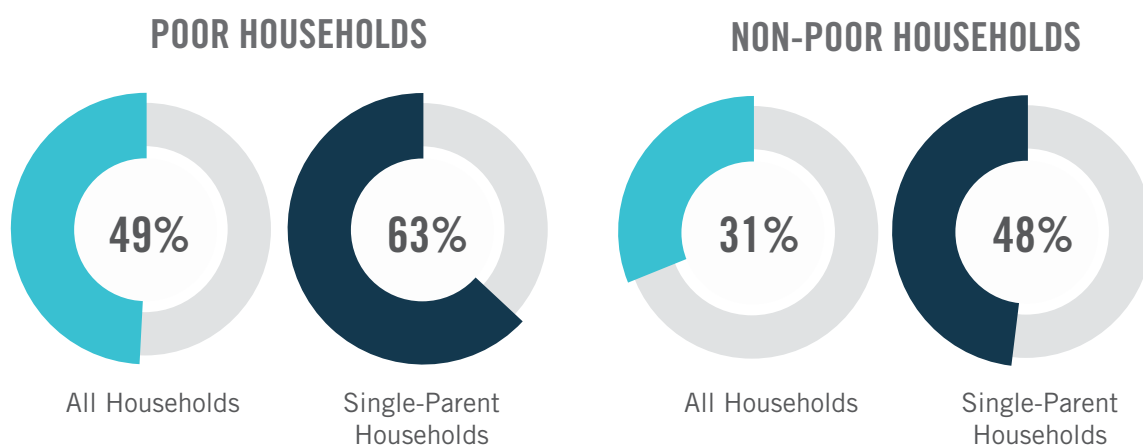
SEVERE MEDICAL HARDSHIP: Not being able to see a medical professional because of cost

Poverty Tracker data show that just over half (53 percent) of single-parent households face some form of severe material hardship, such as having utilities shut off or often running out of money between paychecks (see Figure 1). This is well above the rate for the average New York City household (35 percent). Single-parent households are more likely to face all types of material hardship compared to the average household, with severe financial hardship being the most common among single-parent households.

Elevated severe material hardship is not limited to single-parent households living in poverty. Figure 2 shows the rates of severe material hardship by household poverty status. While 63 percent of single-parent households living in poverty report at least one severe hardship, 48 percent of single-parent households above the poverty line report such hardship. Of course, even single parents above the poverty line still have much lower incomes on average than all New Yorkers above that line.

Figure 2

Severe Hardship Rate by Poverty Status



Source: Poverty Tracker Pooled Baseline

These high rates of severe material hardship among even non-poor single parents demonstrate that getting above the poverty line does not guarantee an escape from hardship and disadvantage.

Section 3.

Other Forms of Disadvantage and Well-Being in Single-Parent Households

Along with rates of poverty and material hardship, the Poverty Tracker examines other factors that contribute to the economic and personal well-being of New York City's households. Here, we look at some of these factors, specifically neighborhood characteristics, rent burden, and access to funds in an emergency, to see how the experiences of single-parent households compare to those of the average household in New York City. From the earlier analyses we know that single-parent households endure higher rates of poverty and material hardship, but in this section we ask whether these disadvantages extend into lower quality of life.

Table 2

Elevated Rates of Disadvantage in Single-Parent Households

	All Households	Single-Parent Households
Neighborhood Poverty		
High-poverty neighborhood*	12%	22%
Neighborhood Services³		
Rated health care services as fair or poor	29%	35%
Rated any emergency services as fair or poor	23%	33%
Rated any sanitation services as fair or poor	79%	81%
Rated any kind of neighborhood recreation as fair or poor	54%	63%
Rated any crime related services as fair or poor	55%	66%
Rated any transportation services as fair or poor	40%	46%
Collective Efficacy		
Collective efficacy rating in lowest quartile	24%	42%
Rent Burden		
Households with high rent burden**	44%	56%
Access to \$400		
Households that could count on a \$400 loan	67%	44%

* Over 40 Percent of Neighborhood Population in Poverty

** Rent Exceeds 30 Percent of Household Income

Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline and Six-Month Surveys

Note: See Appendix Table 2 for these results by borough.

³The services that fall into these categories include:

Health Care Services: Availability of health care services

Emergency Services: Fire protection services, emergency medical services

Sanitation Services: Garbage pickup, snow removal, rat control, street/sidewalk maintenance, recycling services, maintenance of neighborhood cleanliness, street noise control

Neighborhood Recreation: Cultural activities availability, neighborhood parks, neighborhood playgrounds, public libraries

Crime-Related Services: Police-community relations, crime control, graffiti control

Transportation Services: Bus services, subway services

In the 1990s, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development launched the Moving to Opportunity experiment, a randomized social experiment designed to answer the question of whether “moving from a high-poverty neighborhood to a lower-poverty neighborhood improves the social and economic prospects of low-income families.”⁴ Results from its data make it clear that neighborhoods matter to child development, particularly in terms of the opportunities and resources that are available. The latest evidence from the experiment finds that children who move to a lower-poverty neighborhood when they are young are more likely to attend college and have higher earnings as adults.⁵ Single-parent households in New York City, however, are much more likely to be located in high-poverty neighborhoods with lower levels of collective efficacy (a measure of social cohesion – see Appendix B) and inadequate city services, such as emergency services and transportation.

- Over 1 in 5 single-parent households reside in a high-poverty neighborhood (one in which 40 percent of the population lives under the federal poverty line) (see Table 2). Citywide, only about 1 in 10 households are in high-poverty neighborhoods.
- And across all types of city services, specifically those related to health care, emergency services, neighborhood recreation, and crime-related services, single-parent households are more likely to rate their services as fair or poor (see Table 2).
- Nearly 2 in 5 single-parent households are located in low-collective-efficacy neighborhoods, compared to 1 in 5 households in the city as a whole.

Single-parent households are also more likely to spend a large portion of their household income on rent. New York City is expensive, especially in terms of housing. The Department of Housing and Urban Development considers 30 percent of a household’s income as the appropriate cost burden for rent, defining those paying over that amount as “rent-burdened.” Using Poverty Tracker data on monthly rent and annual household income, we are able to measure household rent burden among households that rent. About 44 percent of New York City households and 56 percent of New York City’s single-parent households are rent-burdened (see Table 2).⁶ This suggests that while all New Yorkers struggle with the city’s high rents, single-parent households are particularly vulnerable.

Some households make use of social services to weather turbulent economic changes, and others turn to family or friends, but not all households are able to turn to the latter. On the Poverty Tracker survey, respondents are asked, “If you needed help during the next year, could you count on someone to loan you \$400?” Single-parent households are 23 percentage points less likely to be able to rely on their network for this type of loan compared to the average household (44 percent versus 67 percent; see Table 2). In addition to facing an elevated risk of a host of disadvantages, single-parent households are also less likely to be able to call on a friend or family member for financial help in a time of crisis.

⁴National Bureau of Economic Research. *A Summary Overview of Moving to Opportunity: A Random Assignment Housing Mobility Study in Five U.S. Cities.* <http://www.nber.org/mtopublic/MTO%20Overview%20Summary.pdf>.

⁵Chetty, R., Hendren, N., & Katz, L. F. (2016). *The effects of exposure to better neighborhoods on children: New evidence from the moving to opportunity experiment.* *American Economic Review*, 106(4), 855-902. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.20150572>.

⁶These citywide estimates are in line with other studies of rent burden in New York City. See Jain, R. (2015). *Whose burden is it anyway: Housing affordability in New York City by Household Characteristics.* <https://www.scribd.com/doc/289482478/Report-on-NYC-rent-burden>.

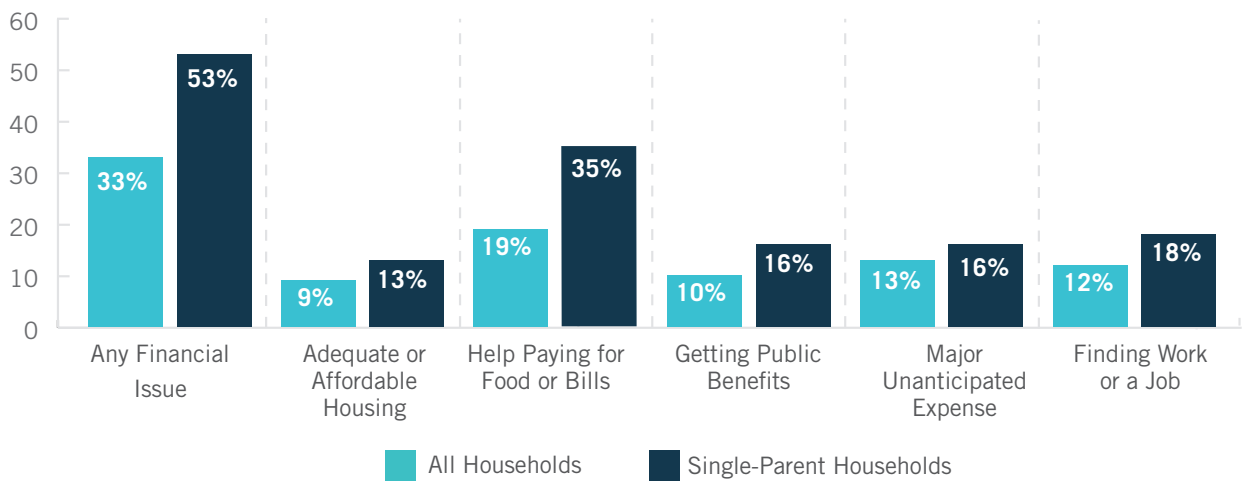
Section 4.

Service Needs and Service Utilization

We have established that New York City’s single-parent households face elevated rates of disadvantage, so it makes sense that they are more likely to have service needs compared to the average household. In this section, we investigate the service needs (and utilization) of single-parent households, based on the Poverty Tracker’s six-month follow-up surveys. Figure 3 shows the prevalence of needs for various services to address financial issues among single-parent households in comparison to the city as a whole. Over half of New York City’s single-parent households reported a need for help with a financial issue, as compared to a third of all New York City households.⁷ Single-parent households are more likely than the average New York City household to have a need for services related to paying for food and bills, finding adequate or affordable housing, and getting public benefits. The greatest service need among single-parent households is help paying for food and bills (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Service Needs of New York City Households

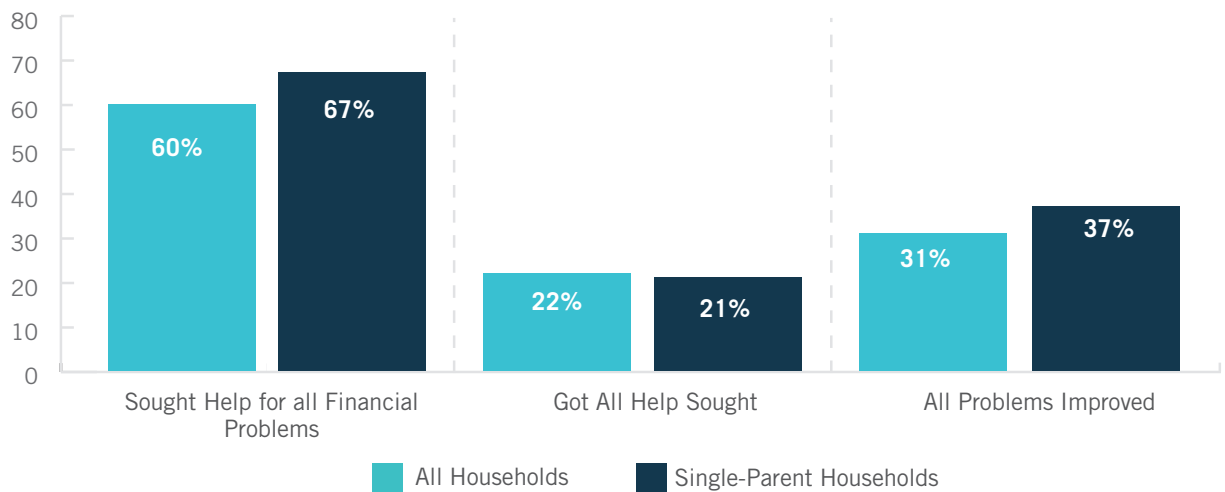


Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline and Six-Month Surveys

⁷Supplemental analysis (see Appendix Figure A1) shows that both poor and non-poor single-parent households exhibit elevated needs for help with financial problems relative to poor and non-poor New Yorkers as a whole, respectively.

Figure 4

Service Use by New York City Households



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline and Six-Month Surveys

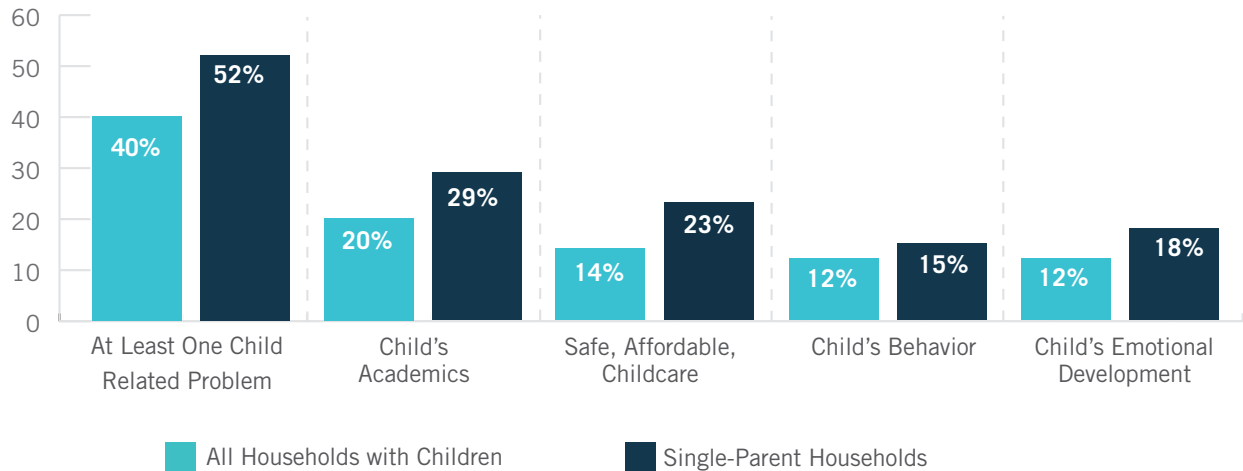
In Figure 4, we examine what happened to single parents who expressed a need for help with financial problems. Because of limited sample size, we concentrate here on any financial problem, rather than differences between various types of financial problems. Single-parent households were somewhat more likely to seek help for all of their financial problems (67 percent) than the population as a whole (60 percent). Upon seeking help, single-parent households were almost equally likely to receive all the help they needed (21 percent) in comparison to the general population (22 percent). These numbers suggest quite high levels of unmet need. Note, however, that this is a fairly restrictive definition of getting all the help one seeks. For example, if a household has three financial problems, but got all the help it needed for two of these problems, it would be counted as not getting all the help it sought. Lastly, and perhaps surprisingly, single-parent households were more likely on average (37 percent versus 31 percent) to see all of their reported problems improve. Though we cannot directly test this, this difference could indicate a higher level of experience working with public and private social services.

The Poverty Tracker also asks respondents about their needs for their children. Child-related service needs are more common in single-parent households than in the average New York City household with children (see Figure 5). In total, over half (52 percent) of single-parent households reported a need for child-related services, compared to over a third (40 percent) of all New York City households with children. Over a quarter of single-parent households reported needing services related to children's academics, and nearly 1 in 5 single-parent households needed safe and affordable childcare. For each individual child-related need, single-parent households reported somewhat elevated levels of need.

Figure 6 looks at what happens following a child-related service need, again concentrating on any of the four potential needs. The results are fairly remarkable, with little difference between single-parent households

Figure 5

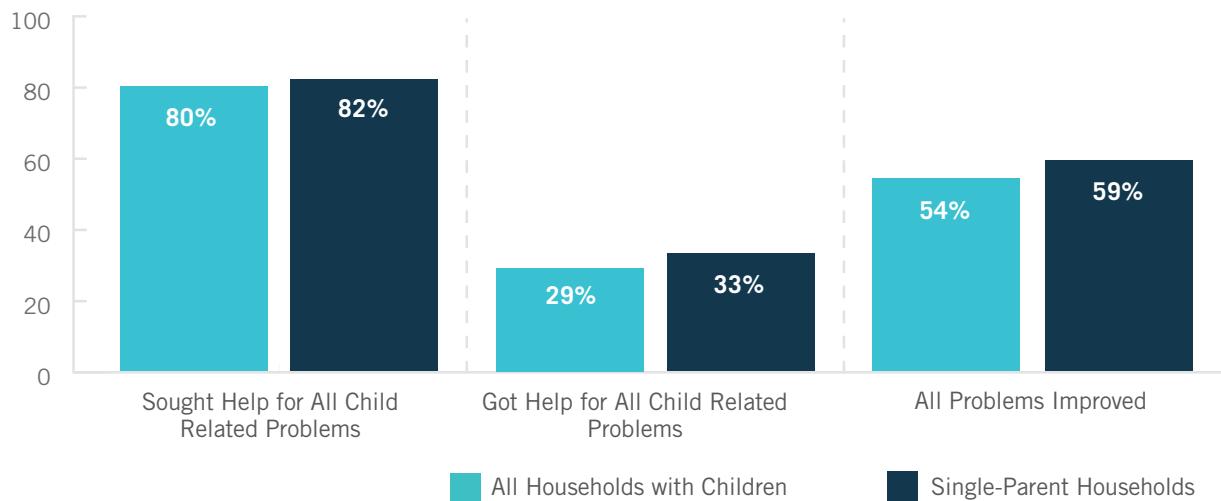
Child-Related Service Needs for New York City Households



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline and Six-Month Surveys

Figure 6

Child-Related Service Use by New York City Households



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline and Six-Month Surveys

and the average New York City household with children in terms of help-seeking. Single-parent households are also slightly more likely to get all of the help needed and see their problems improve. It may seem paradoxical that so many parents saw improvement in their child-related needs even though only a minority got all the help they needed. It is worth remembering that parents might see some improvement even if they don't get all the help that they feel they need.

Section 5.

Policies that Reduce Poverty in Single-Parent Households

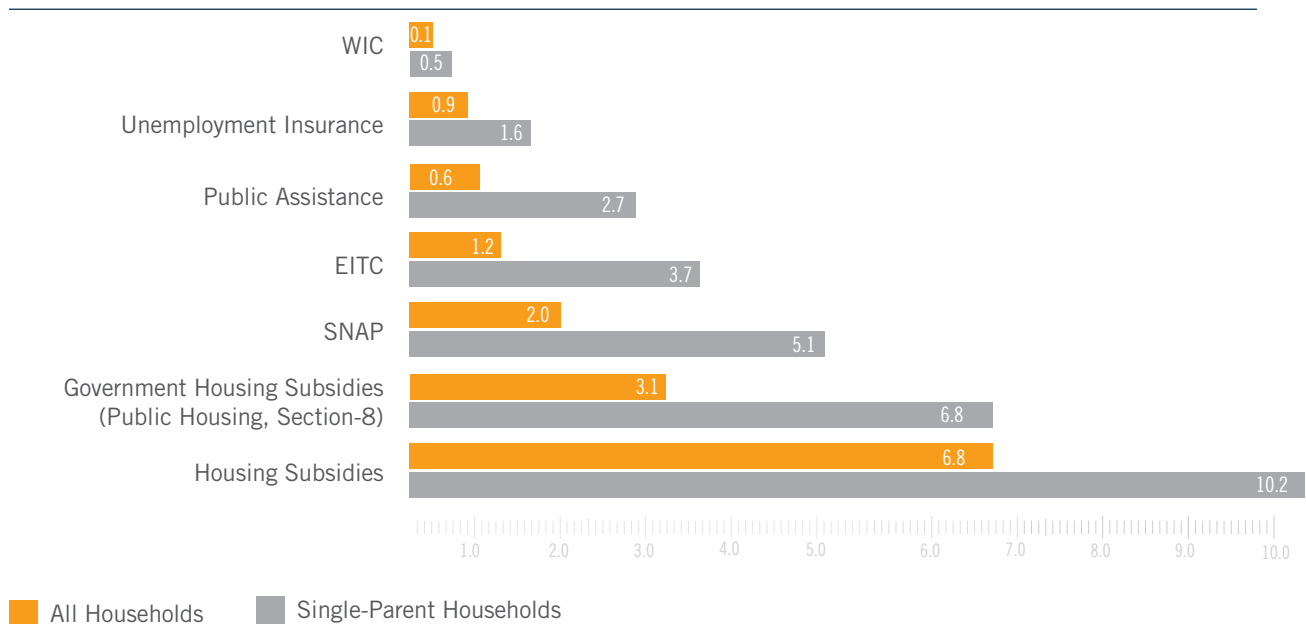
Because the Poverty Tracker contains the SPM, a detailed measure of income poverty, the data can be used to analyze the effects of various policies and programs on the poverty rates of single-parent households. We can also analyze the potential effects of alternative policies and programs. In this final section, we first present estimates of the current effects of policies and programs on the poverty rates of single-parent households in New York City and compare these effects to those for the population at large. We then present estimates of the potential effects of three possible policy scenarios: (1) Expansion of government housing assistance through the Section-8 Housing Choice Voucher program, given New York City's notoriously high housing costs and limited supply of housing assistance for the poor; (2) Potential increases in uptake of SNAP benefits under current policy; and (3) Potential cuts to SNAP benefits, given federal discussions about such cuts in current budget talks.

Estimates of the Current Effects of Policies and Programs on the Poverty Rate

Figure 7 shows the percentage point difference in the poverty rate for single-parent households and the New York City population overall that results from various policies in their current form. These differences are often referred to as the antipoverty effects. In Table 3, we show the number of New York City households and single-parent households that are moved out of poverty by these policies.

Figure 7

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate by Public Policies



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

Note: Government housing subsidies include all subsidies provided through public housing and Section-8 vouchers. The broader housing subsidies category includes government housing subsidies and the benefits households receive through rent control, rent stabilization, and rental arrangements where tenants do not pay rent.

Table 3

Number of Households Moved out of Poverty by Current Public Policies

	All Households	Single-Parent Households
WIC	3,100	1,300
Unemployment Insurance	28,000	4,000
Public Assistance	18,700	6,800
EITC	37,400	9,300
SNAP	62,300	12,800
Government Housing Subsidies (Public Housing, Section-8)	96,500	17,100
All Housing Subsidies	211,700	25,700

Beginning with the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, which provides nutritional assistance to pregnant mothers or their infants and young children, we see that poverty would be about half a percentage point higher among single-parent households in the absence of the program, while barely budging the overall poverty rate. This makes sense because (a) the monetary value of the WIC benefit is relatively small; and (b) it would naturally make more of a difference for single-parent households than for the overall population, as the program is geared to low-income women and children.

Unemployment Insurance reduces overall poverty by nearly a percentage point, while this reduction is almost double among single-parent households. The antipoverty effect of public assistance is about 3 percentage points for single parents. While this program has shrunk dramatically since the 1990s,⁸ we find that it still achieves significant reductions in single-parent households' poverty levels.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a program that has expanded as public assistance has been rolled back,⁹ has a greater antipoverty effect than public assistance and brings the poverty rate for single-parent households down by nearly 4 percentage points. The EITC does not have as substantial an impact on the citywide poverty rate, which makes sense given that the credit is targeted to low-income families with children. The SNAP program makes a larger difference, at 2 percentage points overall but over 5 percentage points for single-parent households. The magnitude of these antipoverty effects reflects the increasing importance of the SNAP program in buffering against poverty in recent years, especially since the Great Recession.¹⁰

The biggest effects are seen for housing subsidies. Government housing subsidies, including Section-8 housing vouchers and public housing, bring the citywide poverty rate down by 3.1 percentage points and by 6.8 percentage points for single-parent households. Looking at all types of housing subsidies including government subsidies, rent-regulated apartments, and rental arrangements where tenants do not have to

⁸Floyd, I., Pavetti, L., & Schott, L. (2017). Policy brief: TANF reaching fewer poor families. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/family-income-support/policy-brief-tanf-reaching-few-poor-families>.

⁹Hungerford, T. L., Thiess, R. (2013). The earned income tax credit and the child tax credit: History, purpose, goals and effectiveness. Economic Policy Institute. <http://www.epi.org/publication/ib370-earned-income-tax-credit-and-the-child-tax-credit-history-purpose-goals-and-effectiveness/>.

¹⁰Zedlewski, S., Waxman, E., Gundersen, C. (2012). SNAP's role in the great recession and beyond. Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25626/412613-SNAP-s-Role-in-the-Great-Recession-and-Beyond.PDF>.

pay rent (e.g., live-in superintendents), we see that the impact is even greater. These latter groups essentially receive a subsidy and are included when calculating the total antipoverty effect of housing subsidies. Housing subsidies reduce poverty by almost 7 percentage points overall and by over 10 percentage points for single-parent households.

While these estimates show that policies make a substantial difference in reducing poverty in New York City, especially among single-parent households, there is certainly more that could be done. In the remainder of this section, we examine how expansions of two key programs — housing subsidies and SNAP — could further reduce the poverty rate of single-parent households. We also examine how potential cuts could exacerbate poverty among these households.

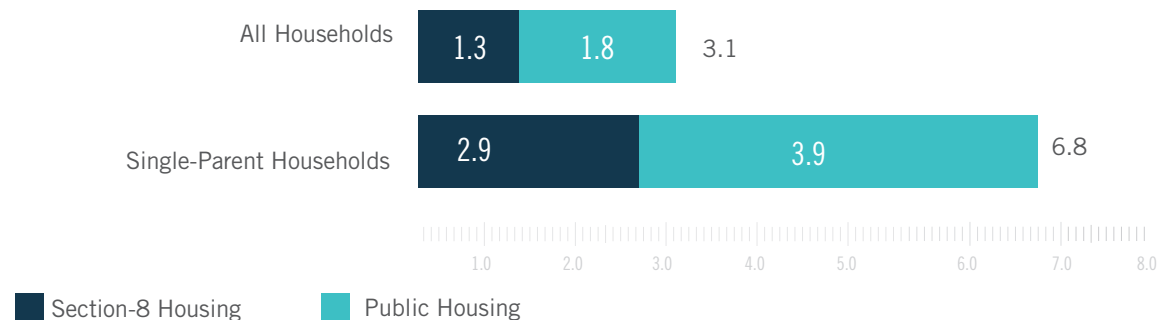
POLICY SIMULATION 1: EXPANSION OF THE SECTION-8 HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

Compared to other public policies, government housing subsidies are very effective at bringing New York City households out of poverty, particularly single-parent households. In Figure 7, we see that combined, public housing and Section-8 housing vouchers — the two largest government housing subsidy programs — move 3.1 percent of New York City households and 6.8 percentage points of single-parent households out of poverty. We estimate that about 43 percent of this effect is attributable to Section-8 housing vouchers and the remainder is attributable to public housing (see Figure 8).¹¹

While Section-8 housing is successful at lowering the poverty rate, it is notoriously difficult to qualify for a voucher. The number of vouchers available is limited and the number of recipient households is far below the number of eligible households. At the national level, it is estimated that about one in five eligible households

Figure 8

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate by Government Housing Subsidies



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

¹¹According to the most recent Poverty Tracker data, approximately 9.4 percent of New York City households receive some form of government housing subsidy through residence in public housing or receipt of a Section 8 housing voucher. See Appendix A for a comparison of this estimates against other credible estimates. We also know that there were 3,113,535 households in New York City in 2015, and approximately 293,000 (9.4 percent of 3,113,535) benefitted from government housing assistance. Administrative documents from New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) report that approximately 126,000 NYC households receive Section-8 housing vouchers, which means that about 43 percent of households that benefit from government housing subsidies reported in Poverty Tracker data are Section-8 recipients, while the remaining 57 percent benefit from public housing. Because we calculate the value of housing subsidies in the same way for public housing residents and Section-8 recipients, we can attribute about 43 percent of the antipoverty impacts of government housing subsidies to the Section-8 program.

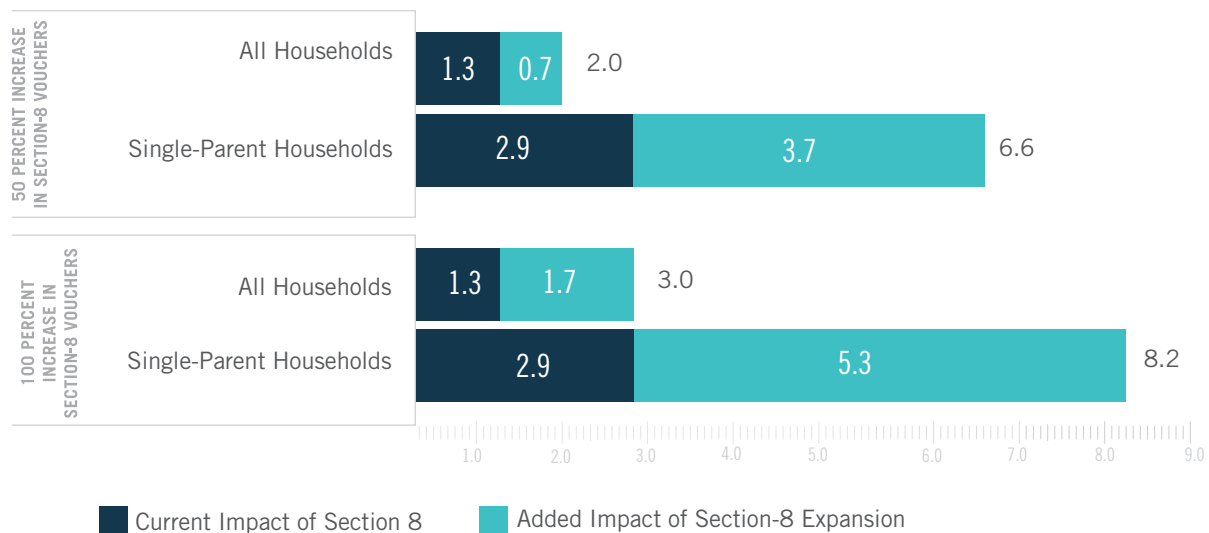
receive a voucher.¹² In response to the affordable housing crisis facing numerous US cities, many policy makers, advocates, and other stakeholders have proposed to expand the Section-8 program by making more vouchers available. Here, we predict the poverty impacts of such a proposal in New York City.

According to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD)¹³, approximately 126,000 New York City households receive housing subsidies through the Section-8 Housing Choice Voucher program.¹⁴ We model a 50 percent increase in the number of vouchers (or 63,000 additional vouchers) and a 100 percent increase (or 126,000 additional vouchers), and then predict the antipoverty impacts of these expansions.

We select new voucher recipients based on their predicted probability of being selected for a voucher. We use statistical models to predict the probability that an eligible non-recipient¹⁵ would enroll for a voucher based on how similar the recipient is to current recipients in terms of certain characteristics.¹⁶ The characteristics we use in the model — a measure of income-to-needs, the number of children in the household, and the number of adults in the household — are all part of the Section-8 voucher application. For each non-recipient

Figure 9

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate after Section-8 Expansion



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

¹²Scally, C., Batko, S., Popkin, S., DuBois, N. (2018). *The case for more, not less: Shortfalls in federal housing assistance and gaps in evidence for proposed policy changes.* Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/95616/case_for_more_not_less.pdf.

¹³These are the two largest administrations of the program in New York City.

¹⁴See <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/index.page> for the estimate of the number of vouchers overseen by HPD and <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/factsheet.pdf> for the estimate of the number of vouchers overseen by NYCHA.

¹⁵Renters who qualify for Section-8 under the income requirements and do not receive any form of government housing assistance or protections under rent controlled or stabilization.

¹⁶We used a logit model to calculate the predicted probability of Section-8 receipt. We control for the log of income-to-needs, number of children in the household, and number of adults in the household. The sample is restricted to households eligible for Section-8 (including recipients and non-recipients).

ient, our model gives us a predicted probability of being selected for the program relative to other eligible non-recipients — the higher the probability, the more likely they are to be selected. In our first expansion of Section-8, we rank eligible non-recipients according to these predicted probabilities. Those with the highest probability of being selected are at the top of the order, and those with the lowest probability are last. We then select the first 63,000 eligible non-recipients from the top of the order as new recipients. In the second expansion, we select the first 126,000 as new recipients.

The value of the housing subsidies for new recipients is then calculated using the same methods used when calculating the housing subsidy values for current recipients: the difference between their annual spending on rent and the fair market rent for their household size.¹⁷

To estimate the antipoverty impacts of the Section-8 expansions, we include the subsidy value for new recipients in their household resources and recalculate the poverty rate.

In Figure 9, we see the additional impact that the expansions of the Section-8 program would have on the poverty rate. The dark blue bars represent the current impact of the Section-8 program and the light blue bars represent the additional impact that would result from the Section-8 expansions.

Overall, the poverty rate drops as Section-8 vouchers are made available to more New Yorkers, and each expansion has a greater impact on single-parent households than the citywide poverty rate. Doubling the number of households that receive government housing support reduces the single-parent-household poverty rate by 5.3 percentage points, which is over triple the impact it would have on the citywide poverty rate.¹⁸

For policymakers interested in closing the gap in the poverty rate between single-parent households and the average household, these expansions seem promising. If selection for the vouchers follows the trend that we modeled, the gap in the poverty rate between the single-parent household and the average household would shrink. With the 50 percent increase in Section-8 vouchers, we find that the citywide poverty rate would fall by 0.7 percentage points, from 20.0 percent to 19.3 percent. For single-parent households, however, the poverty rate would fall by more — from 36 percent to 32.3 percent. The expansion would thus benefit single-parent households at a greater rate, which effectively helps close the gap between single-parent households and the average. This trend is also true with a 100 percent increase in the number of Section-8 housing vouchers available. Of course, policy impacts would be even larger if Section 8 reached all eligible recipients, a scenario that we have not modeled given the currently low rate of receipt.

¹⁷Note that the amount of rent that new recipients might be responsible for could decrease once they qualify for Section-8. We do not account for this change in our simulation and thus may underestimate the value of the subsidy for some new recipients.

¹⁸Similar to the SNAP take-up simulations, if we assign these vouchers randomly to eligible non-recipients the decrease in poverty is not as significant as it is when we assigned vouchers based on our probability model. See Appendix A, Figure A2.

POLICY SIMULATION 2: POTENTIAL INCREASES IN SNAP BENEFIT UPTAKE UNDER CURRENT POLICY

While SNAP has a significant impact on the poverty rate — moving 5.1 percent of single-parent households out of poverty — the impact could be even greater. In 2016, approximately 27 percent of those eligible for SNAP had not received or applied for it.¹⁹ It remains clear that New Yorkers are leaving money on the table when it comes to SNAP benefits.

In January 2017, Robin Hood launched the Start by Asking campaign, an effort to help the many New Yorkers who do not receive the benefits to which they are entitled — specifically SNAP, the EITC, and WIC — access these funds. Here, we predict the poverty impacts that would result from enrolling eligible non-recipients in the SNAP program.

Because of the challenges associated with getting every household that's eligible for SNAP to take up benefits, we look at the change in poverty rate under two scenarios:

- (1) half of eligible non-recipient households take up benefits;
- (2) and all eligible non-recipient households take up benefits.

For these simulations, we first select new recipients from our pool of eligible non-recipients and then calculate a SNAP income value for each new recipient. The additional income is then included in household resources of new recipients that we use to estimate the poverty rate under each scenario.

To select the non-recipients who would take up benefits in Scenario 1, we use a statistical model to calculate the predicted probability that a non-recipient will enroll in the program relative to other eligible non-recipients. These predicted probabilities are based on how similar non-recipients are to current SNAP recipients in terms of characteristics that are key in the application process and have been found to influence enrollment in SNAP.²⁰ The characteristics we include are: the number of adults in the household, the number of children in the household, and a measure of each household's income-to-needs ratio. In Scenario 1, we rank eligible non-recipient households according to their predicted probability of enrolling relative to other non-recipients and select the top 50 percent as new recipients (i.e., the half that are most likely to enroll are selected). In Scenario 2, we select all eligible non-recipient households.

When assigning SNAP values to new-recipient households, we give them the median SNAP income value of families similar to their own in terms of size and yearly resources. For example, a family of four with one to two times the poverty line in yearly resources will be assigned the median SNAP benefit amount of families meeting the same criteria.

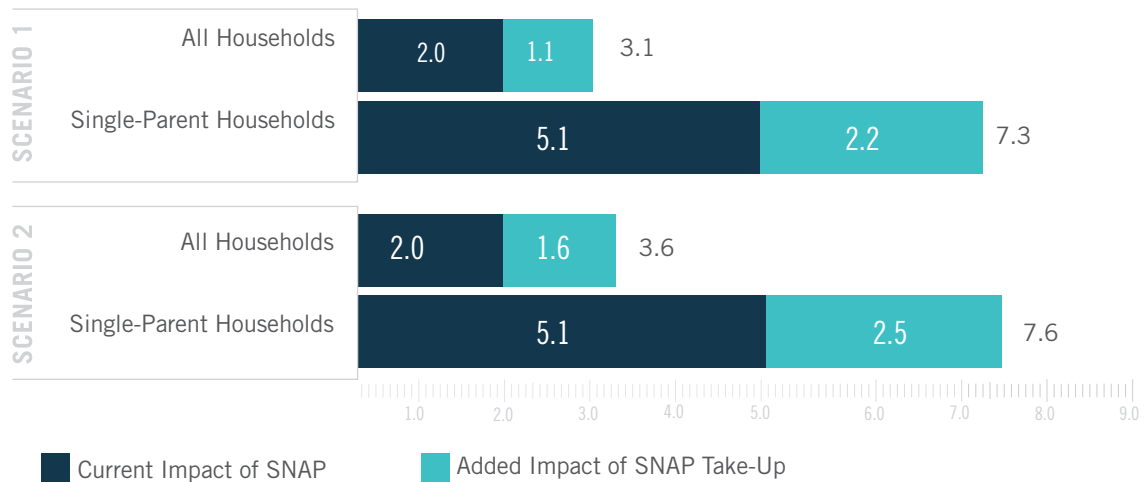
Figure 10 highlights the impact these expansions would have on the poverty rate for single-parent households and New York City as a whole. The dark blue bars represent the current impact of the SNAP program and the light blue bars represent the added impact that would result from the increase in SNAP uptake under each scenario.

¹⁹Rahman, R., Collyer, S., Wimer, C. (2017). *Going hungry: Which new Yorkers are leaving food on the table*. Robin Hood. https://robinhoodorg-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/12/PovertyTracker_FULLREPORT.pdf.

²⁰These predicted probabilities come from a logistic regression model. In the model, we predict SNAP enrollment and control for the number children in the household, the number of adults in the household, and the log of the income-to-needs ratio. The sample is restricted to SNAP-eligible recipients and non-recipients.

Figure 10

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate with Increased SNAP Enrollment



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

For each simulation, the expansion of SNAP produces a larger impact on the poverty rate for single-parent households compared to all New York City households. Under Scenario 1, the poverty rate for single-parent households would fall by 2.2 percentage points, from 36 percent to 33.8 percent, and under Scenario 2, it would fall by 2.5 percentage points, to 33.5 percent.

We find that there is not a major difference in the antipoverty impacts between the two scenarios. This stems from the fact that in the first scenario we assign SNAP income to those most similar to current SNAP recipients; in other words, those most in need.²¹ In Scenario 2, those households that are less similar to current recipients are also taking up benefits, but their take up does not impact the poverty rate as dramatically (because their incomes are higher to start with, and because the benefits they qualify for are relatively low). Interestingly, the most modest increase in SNAP uptake makes a bigger impact in the poverty rate of single-parent households than it does for the most dramatic increase in uptake among all households. From this simulation, we see that efforts to enroll SNAP eligible households in SNAP, particularly those households that are most in need, could greatly extend the antipoverty impacts of the already important SNAP program.

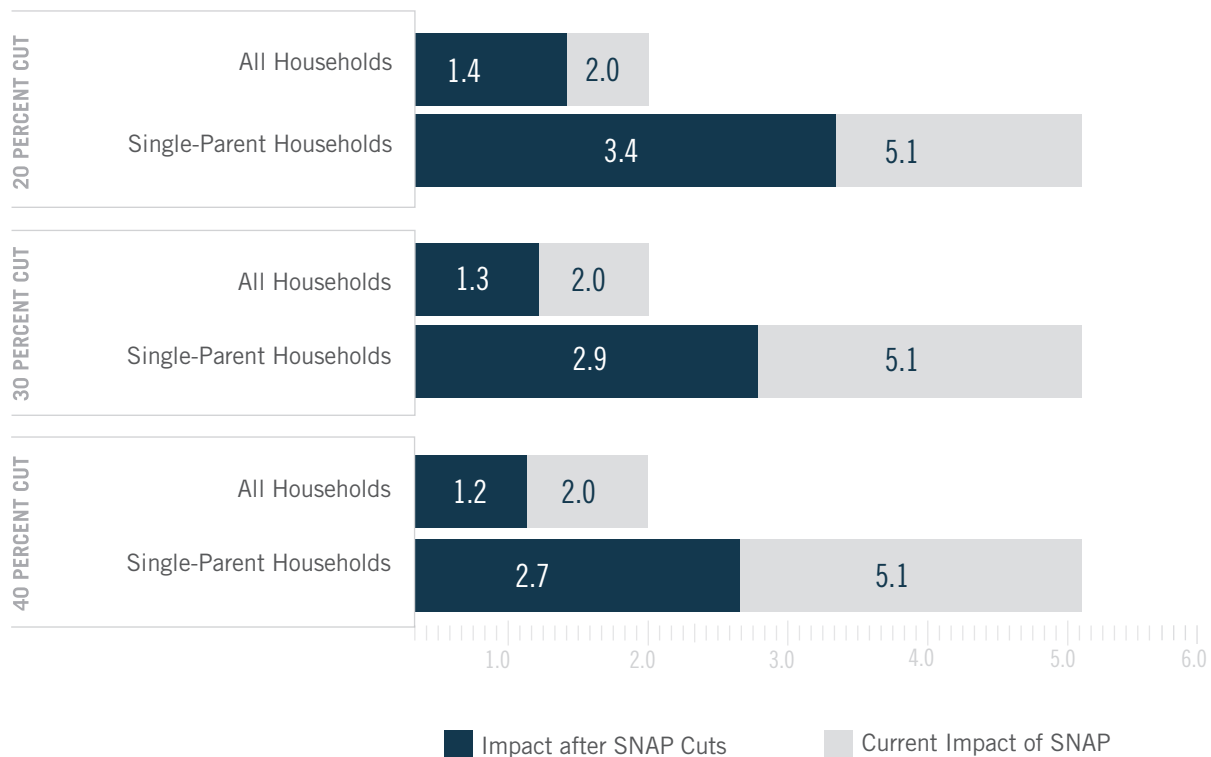
²¹If we randomize SNAP receipt for non-participants (rather than use the prediction equation) the poverty rate declines at a much lower rate in Scenario 1 than in Scenario 2. See Appendix A, Figure A3. This indicates that single-parent households are similar to SNAP recipients and thus most likely to be assigned the benefit first when we use a prediction equation.

POLICY SIMULATION 3: POTENTIAL CUTS TO SNAP BENEFITS

Policymakers at the federal level have proposed various potential cuts to the SNAP program, which as we saw above is one of the most important programs reducing the poverty rates of single-parent households. If these cuts occur, their impact on low-income individuals and families will depend on many factors, such as the details of how cuts are implemented legislatively, how states respond, and how individuals and families respond to those cuts.²² But as a thought exercise, we here simulate the effects of cuts of various sizes, in this case 20 percent, 30 percent, or 40 percent cuts to benefit levels across the board. Forty percent cuts are the largest cuts that we have seen recently proposed.²³ Figure 11 shows the potential impact of such a SNAP cut both overall and for single-parent households.

Figure 11

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate after SNAP Cuts



Source: Pooled Poverty Tracker Baseline

²²Laird, J., Hartley, R. P., Pac, J., Wimer, C. & Waldfogel, J. (2018). Taking food off the table: Understanding who would be affected by potential SNAP cuts and how. Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/news-internal/2018/1/24/the-house-budget-proposal-to-cut-snap-by-40-would-impact-24-million-people>.

²³Laird, J. et al. (2018).

Overall, such cuts would decrease the antipoverty impacts associated with SNAP from 2.0 percentage points to 1.4 percentage points for a 20 percent cut and to 1.2 percentage points for a 40 percent cut. This would result in the total household poverty rate in New York City rising by 0.6 to 0.8 percentage points as cuts grow in magnitude. For single-parent households, the magnitude of such effects would be much larger. The anti-poverty impacts of SNAP for this group would fall from 5.1 percentage points to 3.4 percentage points with a 20 percent cut and to 2.7 with a 40 percent cut, pushing between 1.7 and 2.4 percent of single-parent households into poverty. Such cuts would significantly reduce the antipoverty impact of a program that many households have turned to since the Great Recession.

As it stands, approximately 90,000 single-parent households in New York City are in poverty. The simulations that we have modeled show that public policies and programs could work to lift more single-parent households out of poverty, or, in the case of benefit cuts, move many of these households into poverty. We find that it is also useful to compare the impacts of these policies in real terms — that is, how many households would move out of, or into, poverty with each policy change. We find that:

Providing 63,000 additional Section-8 vouchers in New York City would move approximately 9,300 single-parent households out of poverty; 126,000 additional vouchers would move approximately 13,300 single-parent households out of poverty.

Increasing SNAP take up by enrolling 50 percent of eligible non-recipients would move approximately 5,500 single-parent households out of poverty. Increasing take up by enrolling 100 percent of eligible non-recipients would move approximately 6,300 single-parent households out of poverty.

Cutting SNAP benefits by 20 percent would move approximately 4,300 single-parent households into poverty. Cutting SNAP benefits by 30 percent would move approximately 5,500 single-parent households into poverty. Cutting SNAP benefits by 40 percent would move approximately 6,000 single-parent households into poverty.

Conclusion

This report uses data from the Poverty Tracker to shed new light on single-parent households in New York City. Demographically and in terms of poverty, hardship, and other dimensions of well-being, single-parent households represent a particularly vulnerable group. They exhibit higher than average rates of poverty and material hardship, live in under-served neighborhoods, face higher rent burdens, and have access to less emergency funds. Single-parent households also report elevated levels of needs, both for their households and for their children.

Policies, programs, and single parents themselves are doing much to try to reduce this group's disadvantages. We have focused here on two key government safety net programs, SNAP and housing assistance, though of course many other types of efforts may stand to benefit single-parent households and their children. For example, we know that many single parents work, and struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. Although their effects are harder to quantify, city and state policies like paid family leave, sick leave, and child care subsidies are potentially important for the many single parents who are employed. Many government policies and community programs reach single parents, and there remains much work to be done to understand how the programs affect single parents, their children, and other households across the city.

Appendix A. Supplemental Analysis

Table A1

Household Poverty and Hardship By Borough

		SPM Poverty	Severe Hardship	Severe Food Hardship	Severe Bills Hardship	Severe Financial Hardship	Severe Housing Hardship	Medical Hardship
Bronx	All Households	26%	46%	18%	19%	24%	8%	18%
	Single-Parent Households	38%	56%	24%	30%	34%	6%	14%
Brooklyn	All Households	19%	37%	10%	13%	17%	6%	16%
	Single-Parent Households	35%	53%	17%	23%	35%	8%	13%
Manhattan	All Households	16%	29%	9%	8%	14%	6%	15%
	Single-Parent Households	29%	44%	15%	21%	21%	6%	16%
Queens	All Households	21%	30%	10%	10%	14%	5%	18%
	Single-Parent Households	42%	60%	26%	35%	31%	11%	32%
Staten Island	All Households	19%	31%	6%	8%	18%	5%	17%
	Single-Parent Households	33%	57%	23%	22%	48%	5%	6%

Table A2A

Neighborhood Services by Borough

		Neighborhood Services					
		Rated health care as fair or poor	Rate any emergency service as fair or poor	Rated any sanitation service as fair or poor	Rated any kind of neighborhood recreation as fair or poor	Rated any crime related services as fair or poor	Rated any transportation services as poor
Bronx	All Households	35%	30%	79%	66%	66%	40%
	Single-Parent Households	34%	32%	79%	72%	73%	46%
Brooklyn	All Households	30%	24%	80%	55%	60%	42%
	Single-Parent Households	44%	40%	85%	66%	72%	47%
Manhattan	All Households	26%	19%	81%	39%	46%	36%
	Single-Parent Households	38%	34%	90%	53%	62%	44%
Queens	All Households	28%	21%	72%	58%	50%	42%
	Single-Parent Households	31%	32%	65%	56%	46%	49%
Staten Island	All Households	21%	17%	79%	52%	41%	48%
	Single-Parent Households	18%	13%	97%	45%	64%	76%

Table A2B

Elevated Rates of Disadvantage in Single-Parent Households By Borough

		Rent Burden	Neighborhood Poverty	Collective Efficacy	Access to \$400
		Households with High Rent Burden (>30% of Household Income)	High Poverty Neighborhoods (>40% of Neighborhood Population in Poverty)	Collective Efficacy Rating in Lowest Quartile	Households that Could Count on a \$400 Loan
Bronx	All Households	40%	26%	68%	58%
	Single-Parent Households	59%	30%	80%	44%
Brooklyn	All Households	32%	13%	20%	68%
	Single-Parent Households	49%	26%	25%	45%
Manhattan	All Households	28%	7%	19%	75%
	Single-Parent Households	39%	17%	35%	40%
Queens	All Households	30%	3%	0%	69%
	Single-Parent Households	54%	3%	0%	61%
Staten Island	All Households	14%	2%	0%	68%
	Single-Parent Households	25%	6%	0%	57%

Figure A1

Percentage of Households with At Least One Financial Service Need by Poverty Status

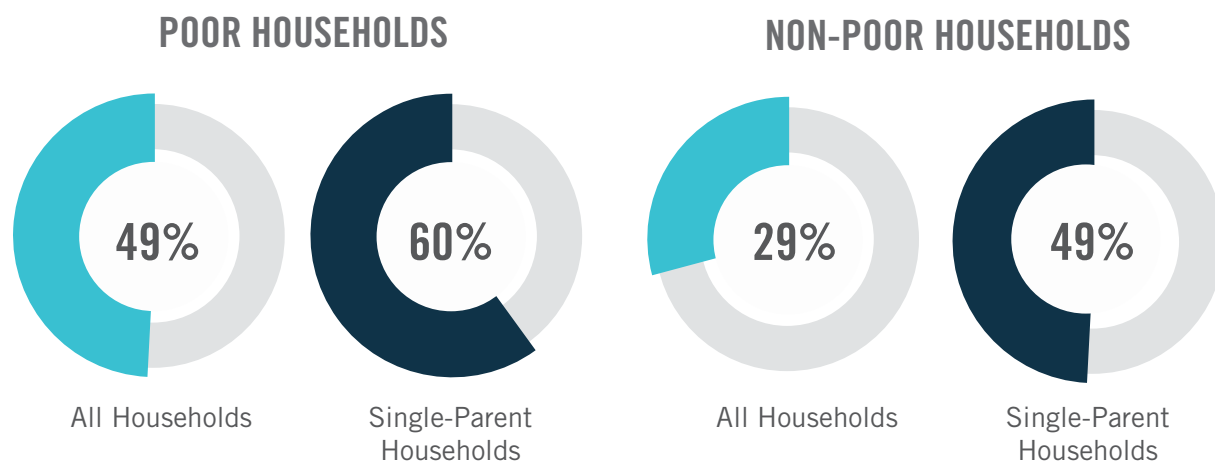


Figure A2

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate after Section-8 Expansion using Random Selection

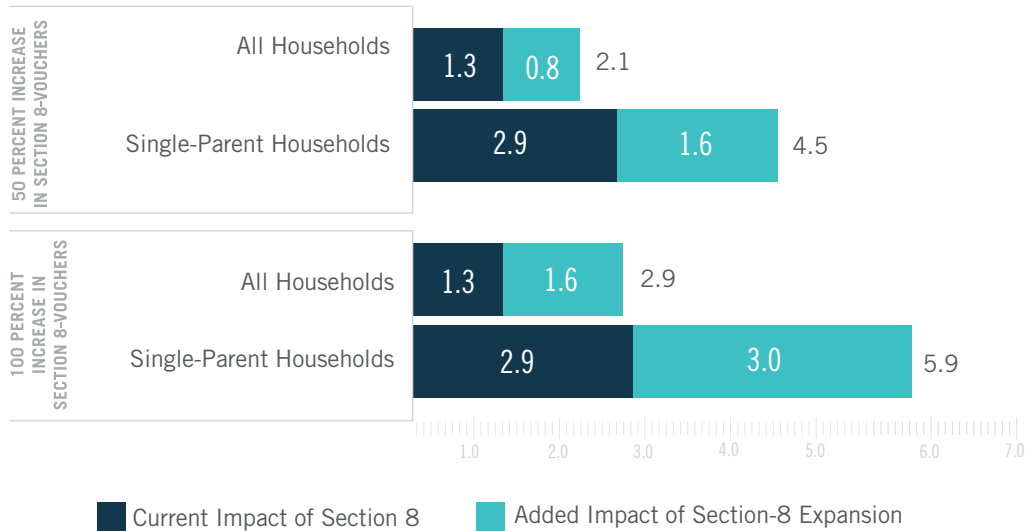
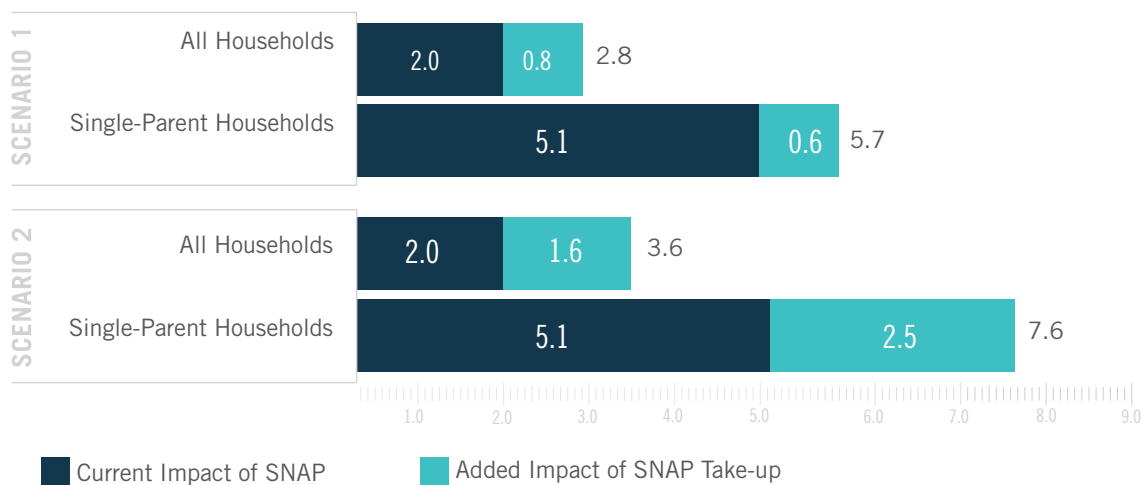


Figure A3

Percentage Point Reduction in Poverty Rate with Increased SNAP Enrollment using Random Selection



Comparison of the Percentage of Households Receiving Government Housing Subsidies in the Poverty Tracker and Other Estimates

To test the estimate of the percentage of New York City households that benefit from government housing subsidies against other credible estimates, we looked at the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity's (CEO) Poverty Report. According to CEO's report, 12.9 percent of New York City households live in public housing or receive a tenant-based subsidy, which includes Section 8 and other, smaller housing subsidy programs such as the Public Assistance Shelter Allowance the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption, "Jiggets" rent supplement program, Employee Incentive Housing Program, Work Advantage Housing program for the homeless, or some other federal, state, or city subsidy program.²⁴

The Poverty Tracker cannot calculate an exactly comparable estimate to CEO's with Poverty Tracker data given that it does not ask about some of these smaller government housing programs, but we attempted to get a somewhat comparable estimate by including those Poverty Tracker respondents who spent time in a shelter as government housing beneficiaries and find that 11.2 percent of households benefited from public housing, Section-8 vouchers, or the shelter system. Given that this estimate is closer to the 12.9 percent estimate reported by CEO and the number of small government programs it does not include, we believe that our estimate of 9.4 percent of households receiving Section-8 or public housing assistance (the two largest government housing benefit programs), is close to the true population estimate.

Appendix B. Technical Notes

This appendix provides detailed information on technical aspects of the analysis in this report, including a brief overview of the structure of the Poverty Tracker, details on the sample, and key measurements employed to arrive at the findings presented in this report.

THE POVERTY TRACKER TOOL

The first Poverty Tracker survey that respondents complete collects in depth information on their income, hardship, and health status. Respondents complete this survey again 12 months and 24 months after they join the panel, and the Poverty Tracker's yearly estimates of poverty, severe material hardship, and poor health in New York City come from data collected on these annual surveys. By calculating these measures annually, the Poverty Tracker is also equipped to chart respondents' transitions in and out of these states of disadvantage.

Between the annual surveys, respondents completed shorter surveys every three months that are focused on specific topics, including assets and debts, health, housing, employment, and service utilization.

²⁴Krampner, J., Shin, J., Virgin, V., Tran, Q., Studer, E. & Li, C. (2017). *New York City government poverty measure, 2005-2015*. New York City Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity. <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/NYCgovPovMeas2017-WEB.pdf>.

SAMPLE

The Poverty Tracker surveyed a panel of 2,228 respondents from 2012 through 2015. In 2015, the Poverty Tracker drew a new sample of 3,909 respondents and continues to follow this expanded panel. The second panel was drawn in partnership with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene from its Community Health Survey sample. This report uses data from the first and second Poverty Tracker panels. When weighted, the sample from each annual survey is representative of the adult population in New York City. To create sample weights, we post-stratify our data using the New York City sample of the American Community Survey. For additional details about our weighting procedure, please see Appendix B in the Spring 2014 Poverty Tracker report.

MEASUREMENTS

Single-Parent Households

For this report we focus on differences between single-parent households compared to New York City households all together. Single-parent households are defined as those where the respondent is not living with a spouse or partner and has a biological or foster child present in the home.

Severe Hardship

We created a binary indicator for whether the respondent was in severe material hardship. A household is in severe material hardship if they reported experiencing any for the following severe hardships:

- Severe Food Hardship: often worrying food would run out without enough money to buy more
- Severe Bills Hardship: having utilities cut off because of lack of money
- Severe Financial Hardship: often running out of money between paychecks or pay cycles
- Severe Housing Hardship: having to stay in a shelter or other place not meant for regular housing, or having to move in with others because of costs
- Severe Medical Hardship: not being able to see a medical professional because of cost

Race/Ethnicity

We constructed the categorical race/ethnicity variable using responses to two questions on the baseline survey. The first question is, “What is your race?” with the following possible answers: white/Caucasian, black/African-American, Asian, American-Indian or Native Alaskan, Native-Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Something Else (which respondents can specify). The second question is, “Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?” Responses to these questions were organized into the following groups: white (non-Hispanic), black/African-American (Non-Hispanic), Asian (non-Hispanic), multiracial/other (non-Hispanic), and Hispanic.

Educational Attainment

The categorical education attainment variable was constructed using the response to the baseline survey question, “What was the highest degree or grade or regular school that you have completed?” The possible response categories were eighth grade or less, some high school, high school diploma, GED credential, some college or associates degree, vocational/trade school, bachelor’s degree, or graduate degree. These responses were collapsed into the following categories: less than high school, high school graduate, some college, and college graduate or more.

Gender

We created a binary indicator variable for whether respondents were female based on the gender that they reported on the baseline survey.

Age

Respondents were organized into the following categories based on the age they reported on the baseline survey: 18 to 29, 30 to 44, 45 to 64, and 65 plus.

Immigration Status

Respondents from the first panel of the Poverty Tracker reported their country of birth on the baseline survey, which was used to identify US-born and foreign-born respondents. Respondents from the second panel reported their country of birth in the 21-month survey. Those born in a US territory such as Puerto Rico or Guam were coded as being US born.

Service Needs

We define two areas of service needs based on questions contained in the Poverty Tracker: financial issues and child related issues. Respondents can identify a number of issues they need help with such as finding adequate or affordable housing, paying for food or bills, getting public benefits, a major unanticipated expense, and finding work or a job. If a respondents indicate that they faced any one of these issues, they are coded as having faced a financial issue.

Respondents with children can also identify a number of child related problems they needed help with such as academic performance or school readiness, finding safe/affordable child care or after-school care, behavior issues/acting out, emotional/developmental issues, and anything else. If respondents indicate that they faced any one of these issues, they are coded as having faced a child related issue.

In addition to looking at these specific problems, we look at how the respondents deal with such problems. To do this we created three variables covering whether they sought help for their problems, got help for their problems, and whether their problems improved. Respondents are coded as having sought help for all of their problems if they said they sought help for every problem they had. They are coded as having got help for all their problems if they said they got all the help needed for every problem they had. If they got some or no help for even one problem, they are coded as having not gotten all the help needed. Respondents are coded as having all problems improved if they said every problem they had got better; they are coded as not having all problems improve if even one problem stayed the same or got worse.

Collective Efficacy

Neighborhood collective efficacy is a combined measure of social control and social cohesion. The methods we use to measure collective efficacy and the definitions of collective efficacy, social control, and social cohesion follow those developed by Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush and Felton Earls.²⁵ Both social control and social cohesion were measured on the six-month Poverty Tracker survey using the two multi-item scales described below.

The social control scale measured each respondents' belief about their community's ability to maintain collectively desired goals by jointly regulating the behavior of community, and the social cohesion scale measured respondents' beliefs about the level of trust between neighbors in their community. Social cohesion has been found to be highly correlated with social control, and it is believed that neighbors are more likely to perform actions related to social control when there is a higher level of trust between community members.

The social control survey items ask respondents to rank the likelihood (very likely, likely, neither likely or unlikely, very unlikely), that neighbors would intervene if: (i) children were skipping school and hanging out on the street corner, (ii) children were spray painting graffiti, (iii) a child was showing disrespect to an adult, (iv) there was a fight in front of their house and someone was being beaten or threatened, (v) the fire station closest to their home was going to be closed due to budget cuts.

Similarly, the social cohesion scale asks respondents to rank how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: (i) this is a close-knit neighborhood, (ii) people around here are willing to help their neighbors, (iii) people in this neighborhood generally don't get along with each other, (iv) people in this neighborhood do not share the same values, (v) people in this neighborhood can be trusted.

Responses to the items on the social control scale were coded from one to five, with one representing very likely and five representing very unlikely. Response to items one, two, and five on the social cohesion scale were also coded from one to five with one representing strongly agree and five representing strongly disagree. Items three and four on the social cohesion scale were reverse coded so one represented strongly disagree and five represented strongly agree.

To measure collective efficacy at the neighborhood level, we average the responses to the social control and social cohesion scales at the respondent level to obtain an average collective efficacy score for each respondent and then average collective efficacy scores across respondents within each neighborhood. In the analysis presented in this report, we define neighborhoods as New York City community districts.

²⁵Sampson, R. J., Raudenbush, S. W., & Earls, F. (1997). *Neighborhoods and violent crime: A multilevel study of collective efficacy*. *Science*, 277(5328), 918-924.