

Poverty is a county-wide issue

The Johnson County community has many reasons to devote attention to the significant number of very low-income individuals and families living here. The effects of poverty ripple out beyond those directly impacted to nearly everyone who lives or works in the county. Increasing poverty means lower tax revenues in city and county coffers, an increased burden on public services, and ultimately, a higher burden on homeowners and taxpayers.

The problem is sizable.

Nearly 33,000 of our county's residents live below the federal poverty level. Thousands more earn just enough to avoid the technical definition of poverty, which is \$11,670 for an individual and \$19,790 for a family of three. Since 2000, the number of persons who are poor and near poor has more than doubled; during the same period the total county population increased only 26 percent.

	Changed Conditions from 2000 to 2013			
	2000		2013	
	Number	%	Number	%
People below 100% of poverty	15,330	3.4	32,890	5.9
People below 200% of poverty	48,300	10.8	98,660	17.6
Children and youth (ages 0-17) below 100% poverty	4,310	4.0	9,220	6.4
Elderly adults (ages 75+) below 100% poverty	850	4.5	1,960	7.0
Families below 100% poverty	2,620	2.1	5,270	3.5
Unrelated individuals below 100% poverty	6,930	10.1	16,260	17.4

Poverty has many faces.

There is no single description that fits those Johnson County residents who live with income below poverty. Many of today's poor were formerly members of the middle-class who saw the "American Dream" disappear during the recession. A smaller number are new to the county – moving to Johnson County for better jobs, good schools and safe neighborhoods.

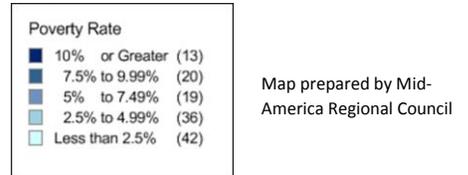
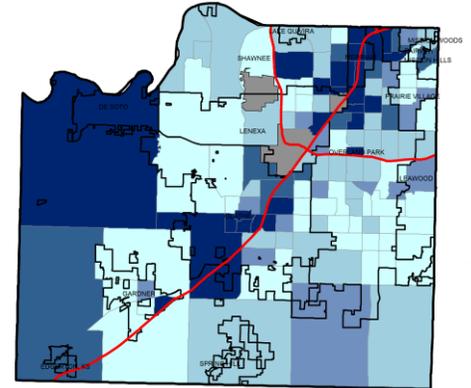
Data from the U.S. Census Bureau tells us the following about Johnson County residents who are poor:

- the majority are white;
- the majority are U.S. citizens;
- the majority of poor families do not receive cash public assistance benefits;
- the majority of poor families include at least one worker; and
- the majority of poor adults have at least some college education.

Most people who become poor do not spend a long time in poverty. But for those who do, the longer a person is poor, the less likely he or she is to escape poverty.

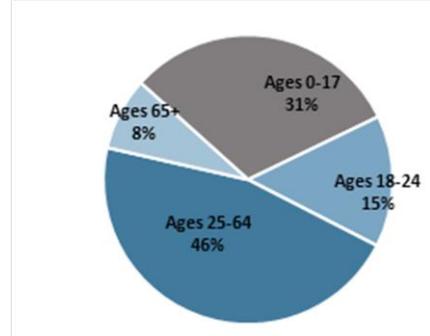
Some groups do experience poverty at higher rates – people of color, people with disabilities, people without a high school diploma, and children living with one parent -- but these groups do not account for a majority of the poor.

Johnson County Poverty Profile Poverty Rate by Census Tract



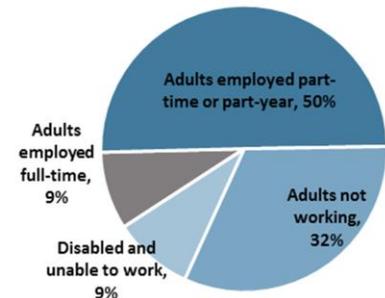
Poverty Distribution by Age

Nearly 1 in 3 of the poor are under age 18, the most critical period of development.

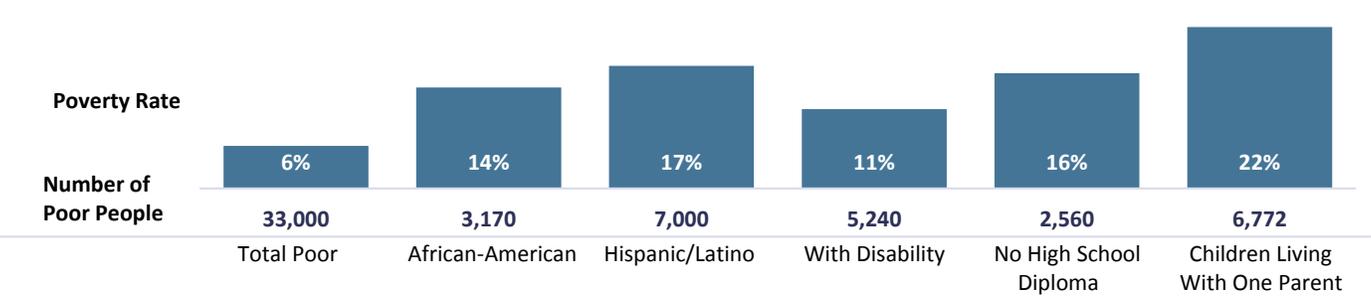


Poverty Distribution by Work Status

About 20,000 of the poor are between ages 18 and 64. The majority worked in 2013, and nearly 1 in 10 worked full time, yet do not earn enough to lift their income above the poverty level.



Poverty by Race, Ethnicity, Disability and Social Factors



Insufficient income requires difficult choices.

An individual or family with income at or below the federal poverty level has limited funds to spend on life’s essentials such as a safe place to live, health care, reliable transportation, nutritious food, and child care (if necessary). Consequently, difficult choices must be made about where to live, who cares for children while a parent works, whether to see a doctor when ill, and hundreds of other choices that are income-driven.

Consider the cost of housing. In Johnson County, median monthly rent was \$923 in 2013, an amount similar to poverty level earnings for one person. Child care can cost \$1,000 a month, an essential expense for a working parent with young children.

	Federal Poverty Level		
	Annual	Monthly	Hourly
One person	\$11,670	\$972	\$5.61
Two person	\$15,730	\$1,311	\$7.56
Three person	\$19,790	\$1,649	\$9.51
Four person	\$23,850	\$1,988	\$11.47

The majority of poor adults are working, yet the jobs they hold pay low wages, offer part-time or temporary work, may have unpredictable schedules, and likely do not offer paid benefits, such as sick leave. As a result, the poor are working hard but not getting ahead.

When income from employment falls short or an adult is unable to work, there are few options that provide consistent, sustainable income. While some may be eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP (formerly food stamps), Supplemental Security Income, or other safety net programs, few poor families receive public cash assistance.

There is no “silver bullet,” but evidenced-based approaches can make a difference.

No one policy, program, new idea or technology alone can address poverty. But there are strategies that can make a difference. While some actions can only be accomplished at a national and state level, others can be implemented by local communities working together to reduce poverty and increase opportunity.

What will it take to reduce poverty and increase opportunity?

Household sustaining jobs

- Jobs that offer competitive wages, predictable work schedules, paid leave and opportunities for advancement.
- Skill building via workforce and vocational training, apprenticeships and enhanced higher education curricula.

Opportunities for healthy development and learning

- Early learning programs to give infants and toddlers a good start in life.
- School success for K-12 students.
- Post high school development of skills that are in demand.

Strong safety net to meet basic needs of individuals and families in crisis or on the edge of poverty

- Public and community resources to meet basic needs, and to promote health, wellness and safety.
- Supports to stabilize individuals and families when they work, and to sustain them when they cannot work.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Census; American Community Survey 2013 1-year estimates. Some calculations by UCS.