

THE POVERTY TRACKER

Launched in 2012, the Poverty Tracker is a groundbreaking study of disadvantage in New York City. Unlike typical surveys of poverty that take an annual snapshot, the Poverty Tracker checks in multiple times per year with the same several thousand households over several years, providing a dynamic view of poverty over time. After nearly a decade, it has emerged as one of the nation's most comprehensive longitudinal studies of poverty and associated hardships. The frequency and flexibility of survey administration also allow for timely analysis of contemporary issues facing New Yorkers such as housing instability, racial justice, and the pandemic recovery.

ANALYSES AND KEY INSIGHTS

When we only use the poverty rate to assess economic insecurity, we don't get the full story. The poverty rate tells us that nearly a quarter of New Yorkers live in poverty – but it does not show that millions more struggle to make ends meet. With an extensive set of variables and near-decade long coverage, the Poverty Tracker datasets can provide insights into how to tackle the high rates of poverty and hardship in New York City.

The Poverty Tracker documents the persistence of poverty in the city, moving beyond an annual snapshot.



The data show that while roughly one in five adult New Yorkers (or 1.2 million people) live in poverty in an average year, when looking across a four-year period, the share of adults below the poverty line in at least one year rises to half. The comprehensive income data collected by the Poverty Tracker also allows us to evaluate the effects of public policy on the city's poverty rate, showing how the robust policy response to the pandemic, for example, offset a sharp rise in poverty.

It doesn't just measure poverty, but provides extensive longitudinal data about hardship and disadvantage in their many forms.



The Poverty Tracker data show that citywide about 40% of New Yorkers experience food hardship, though rates vary dramatically across the city and its neighborhoods. Over a three-year period, half of New York City children (about 900,000 children) ran out of food because there wasn't enough money to buy more.

Findings can be used to inform legislation, and the implementation of policies can be studied through ongoing data collection.



New York City's 2014 Paid Safe and Sick Leave Law and New York State's Paid Family Leave Act entitled many workers in New York city to paid sick leave. Studying this policy since enacted, the Poverty Tracker found that among workers who utilized sick leave, 30% said they were not paid for the days they took off; this rises to 60% among those in poverty. While these policies provided coverage to many workers, these findings show that there's still more work to do.

The study allows researchers to immediately gather data on time-sensitive issues across multiple domains.

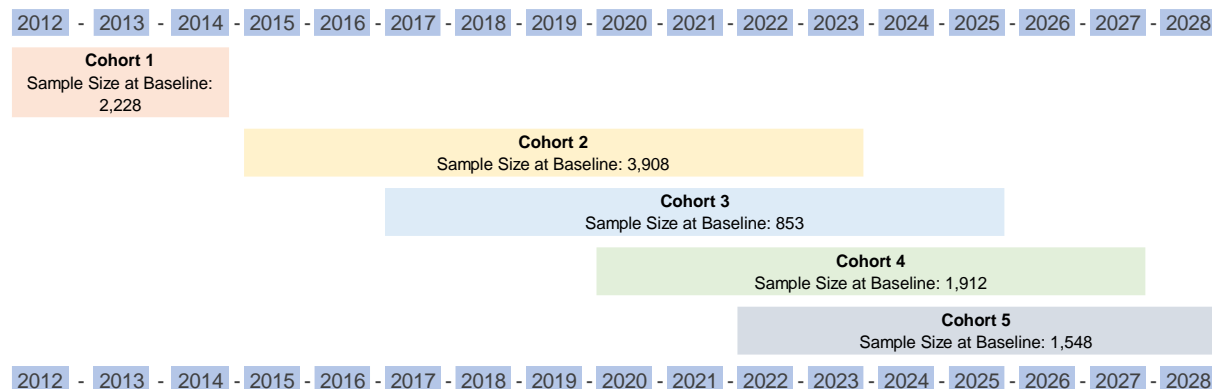


In the early months of the pandemic, Poverty Tracker data found that nearly half of all New York City workers lost employment income; those who lost employment income because of COVID-19 were twice as likely to be in poverty prior to the pandemic.



STUDY DESIGN

Since 2012, the study has recruited five representative cohorts of adult New Yorkers and surveyed respondents multiple times a year for up to six years, covering experiences over a seven-year period. See timeline of cohort recruitment and study participation below.



The Poverty Tracker was originally designed to be a two-year longitudinal study, which would then be repeated every two years. The first cohort ran from 2012 to 2014 and was made up of 2,002 respondents recruited from a Random Digit Dial (RDD) as well as an oversample of 226 New Yorkers in or near poverty. The second cohort, made up of 3,908 respondents, entered the study in 2015. With this cohort, the study expanded to follow respondents for six years. In 2017, researchers decided to move to a rotating cohort design and to recruit a new group of respondents every two years. The third cohort launched in 2017, the fourth in 2020, and the fifth in 2022.

A key feature of the Poverty Tracker is its longitudinal design. By reaching out to families year after year, and month after month, we can see if families are moving out of poverty and hardship or falling into it. Every year, we field a survey that collects detailed information on income poverty, material hardships, and health among New Yorkers. Our measures of material hardships complement our poverty estimates and cover food, bill, financial, housing, and medical hardships. In addition, interim surveys fielded between annual surveys focus on additional topics like assets and debts, as well as changes in circumstances around household composition, employment, and other major events. At times, modules on additional topics such as student loans or policing are added to interim surveys to assess specific policy issues.

GETTING INVOLVED AND WORKING WITH POVERTY TRACKER DATA

All of the Poverty Tracker reports are available at: www.robinhood.org/programs/special-initiatives/poverty-tracker/. You can also access the Poverty Tracker data and documentation at: www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/poverty-tracker-data

We want to hear from you! Our Poverty Tracker team is collecting rich data and we need your help to produce results for the real world. For more information and to speak with researchers from the Center on Poverty and Social Policy contact povertytracker@columbia.edu.

ABOUT US

THE CENTER ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL POLICY (CPSP) at Columbia University's School of Social Work produces cutting-edge research to advance our understanding of poverty and the role of social policy in reducing poverty and promoting opportunity, economic security, and individual and family-wellbeing. The center's work focuses on poverty and social policy issues in New York City and the United States. For the latest work, go to <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/>. Follow us @CpspPoverty.

THE COLUMBIA POPULATION RESEARCH CENTER (CPRC) supports population health researchers across Columbia University, galvanizing new interdisciplinary and cross-campus collaborations, promoting the professional development of junior scientists, and enabling members to do work that is more innovative and impactful. Our members' interests encompass four primary research areas: Children, Youth, and Families; Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS; Immigration/Migration; and Urbanism, with cross-cutting attention to inequalities and policies to mitigate those inequalities. Learn more at <https://cprc.columbia.edu/>. Follow us @ColumbiaCPRC.

ROBIN HOOD finds, fuels, and creates the most impactful and scalable solutions lifting families out of poverty in New York City, with models that can work across the country. The largest poverty fighting organization in New York City, Robin Hood partners with top nonprofits in New York City and invests in legal services, housing, meals, workforce development training, education programs, and more. Robin Hood tracks every program with rigorous metrics. Learn more at www.robinhood.org. Follow us @RobinHoodNYC.

