



A Profile of Boston's Single Mothers

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BPDA Research Division



**boston planning &
development agency**

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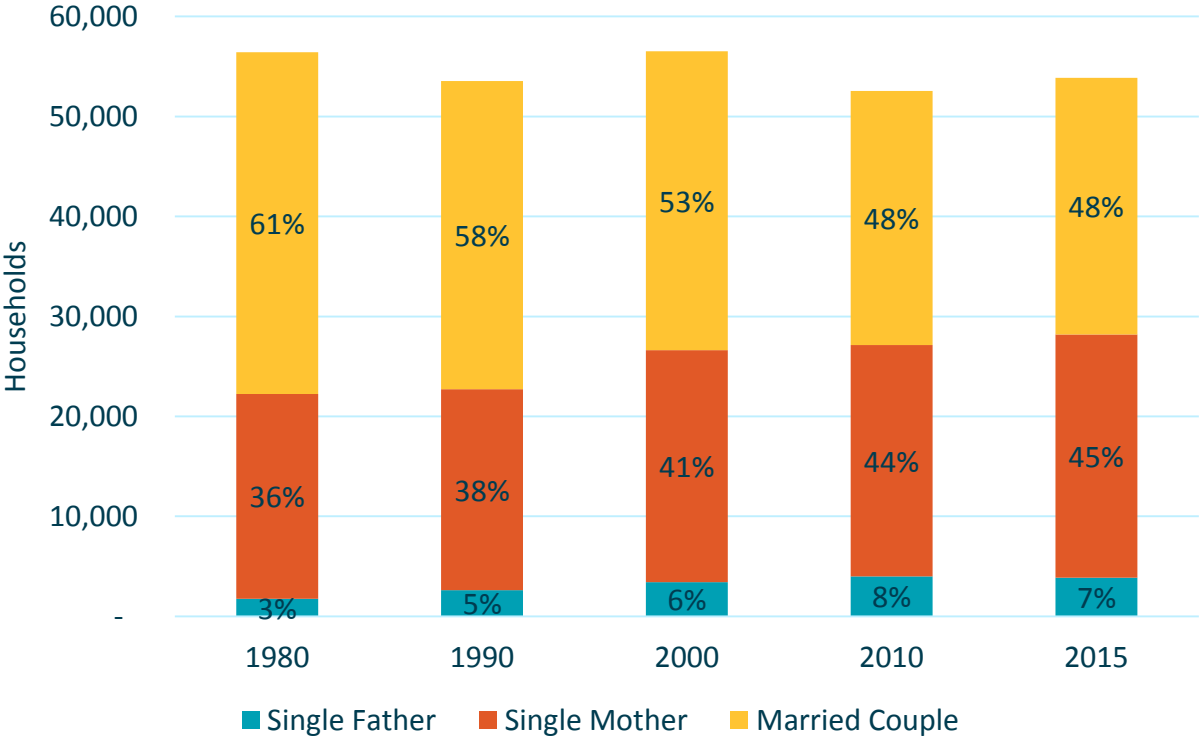
The Definition of Single Mother

- Based on the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, we classified someone as a single mother if they met the following conditions:
 - **Female householder:** she reported herself as female and as the head of the household.
 - **At least one child under 18:** she reported she had at least one child under 18 years old. The child must be related to the householder either by birth, adoption, or as a stepchild.
 - **Not Married:** when classifying her marital status, she selected either "Divorced", "Separated", "Widowed", or "Never Been Married". The only other option was "Married".
- NOTE: Due to data limitations, the definition of single mothers on slides 6 & 7 differs slightly from our operating definition of single mothers in the rest of the presentation. For these slides, single mothers are defined as female householders with no husband present, who have at least one child under 18.

Why focus on single mothers?

Single mother households are becoming increasingly common in Boston.

Households with Children – Boston (1980 – 2015)

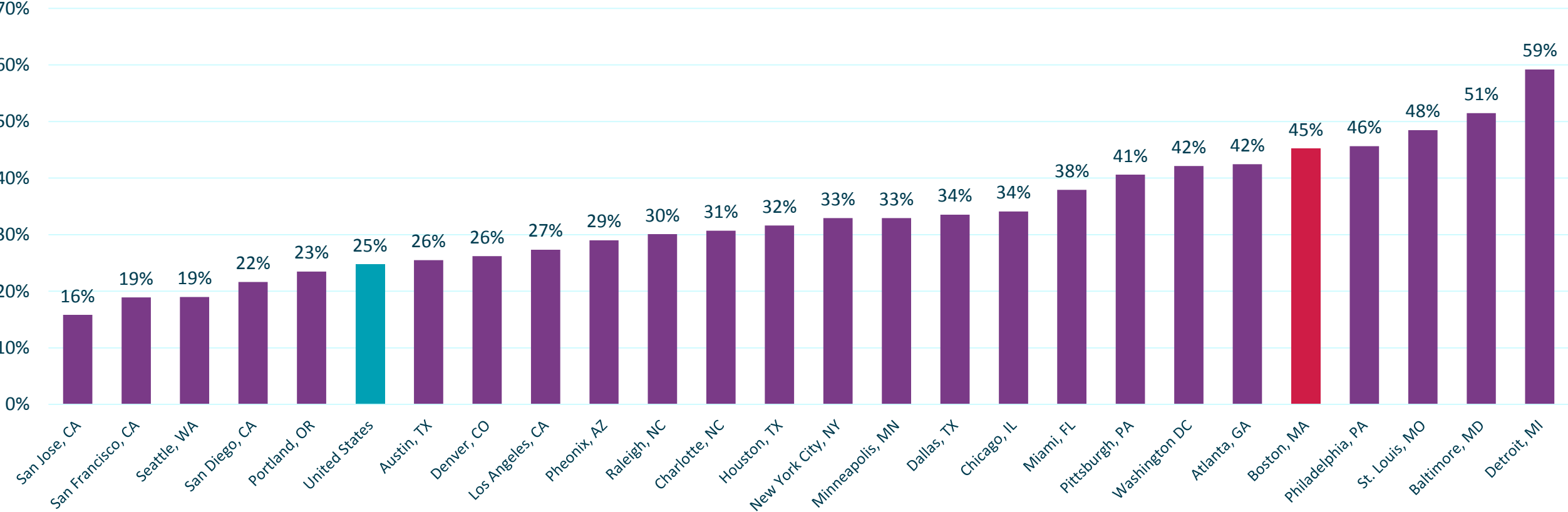


- In 1980, 36% of Boston households with children under the age 18 were headed by single mothers. In 2015, about 45% were headed by single mothers.
- In Boston, there are 23,739 households with children under 18 headed by single mothers.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980-2000 Decennial Censuses, University of Minnesota, IPUMS-USA, www.ipums.org; 2006-2010 American Community Survey and 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

Boston's share of single mother households (45%) surpasses the national level (25%), as well as the levels in most major cities.

Single Mother Households as a Percentage of All Households with Children under 18 (2015)

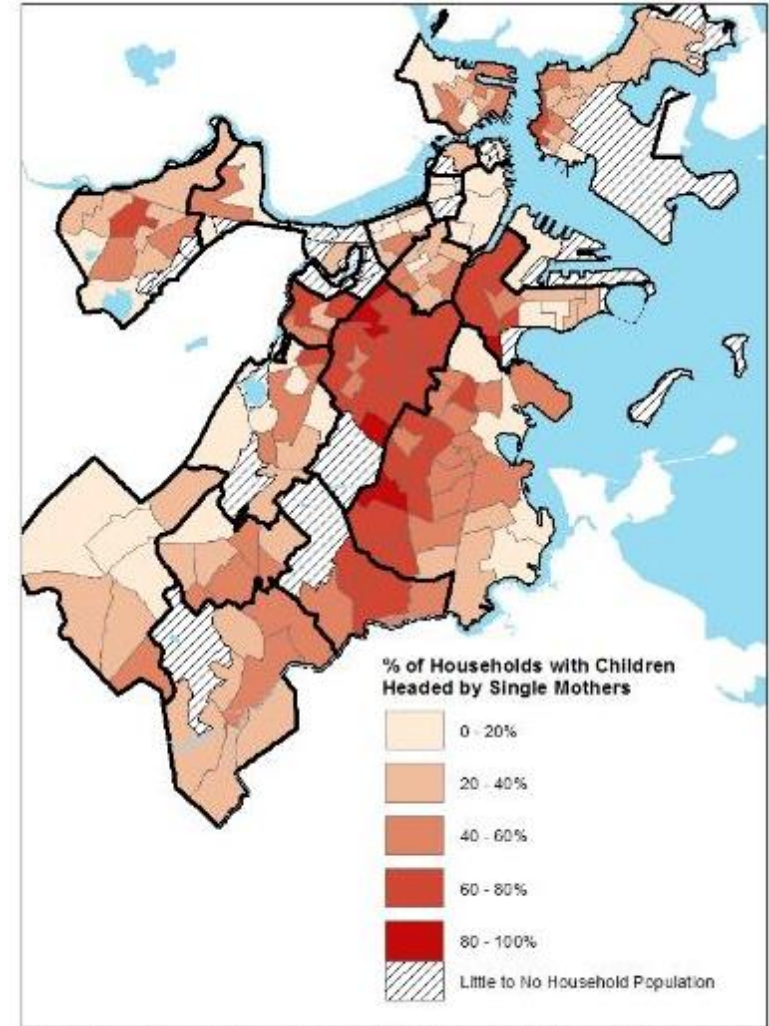
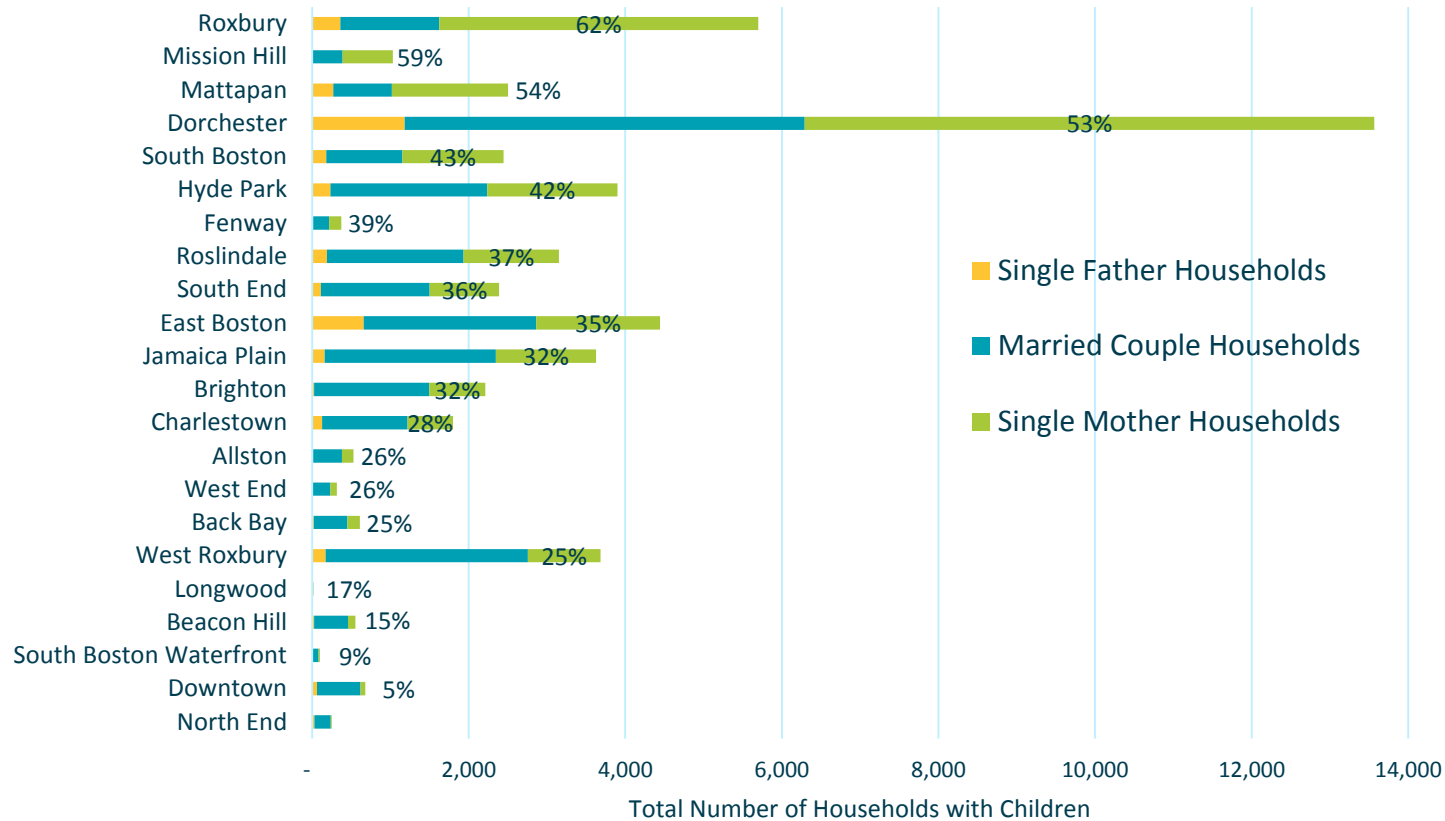


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, BPDA Research Division Analysis

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In Roxbury, Mission Hill, Mattapan, Dorchester, and South Boston, single mother households make up the majority of households with children under 18.

Single Mother Households as a Percentage of All Households with Children
- Boston Neighborhoods (2015)

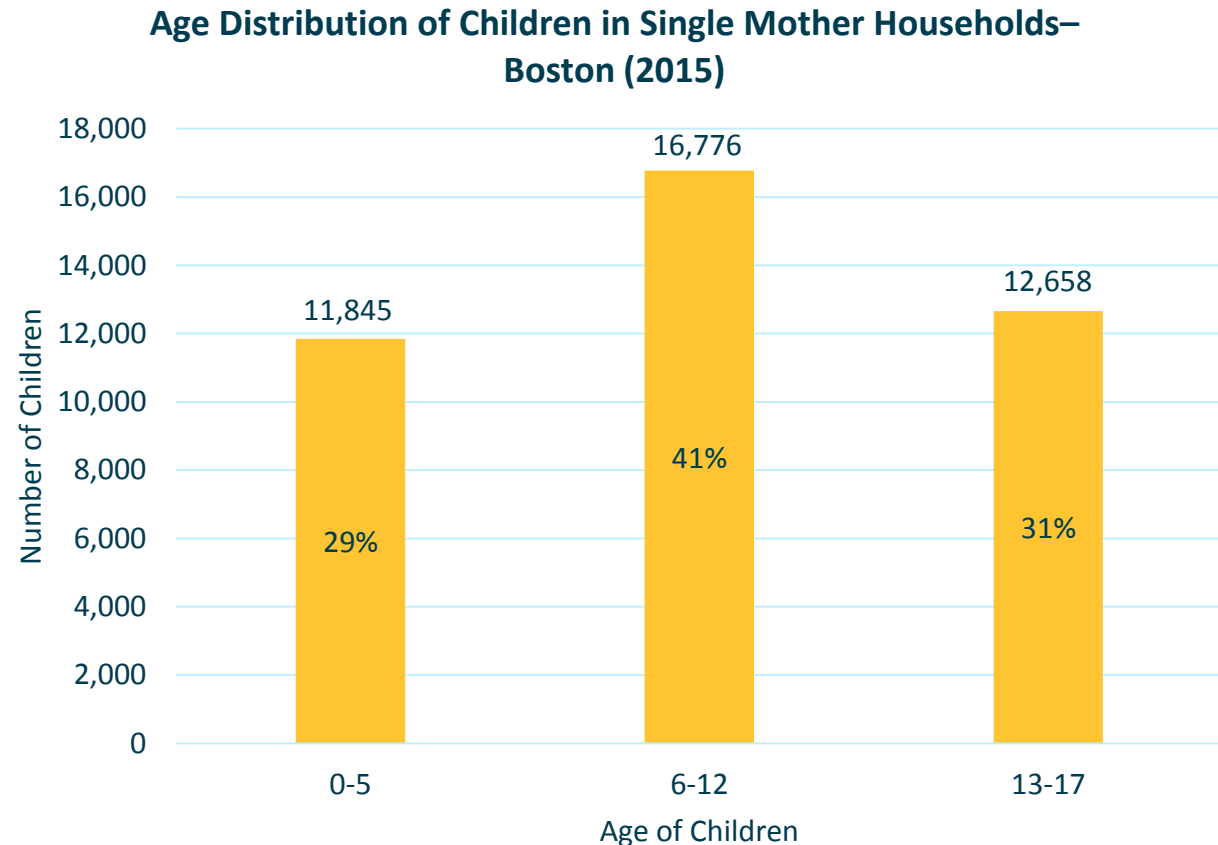


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, BPDA Research Division Analysis

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About 41,279 children under 18 live with single mothers, making up 43% of all children under 18 in Boston households.

- About 29% of children under 18 living with single mothers are 5 years old or younger.
- Most of the children of single mothers are between the ages 6 and 12.
- On average, single mothers have 1 to 2 children.



Demographic Characteristics of Boston's Single Mothers



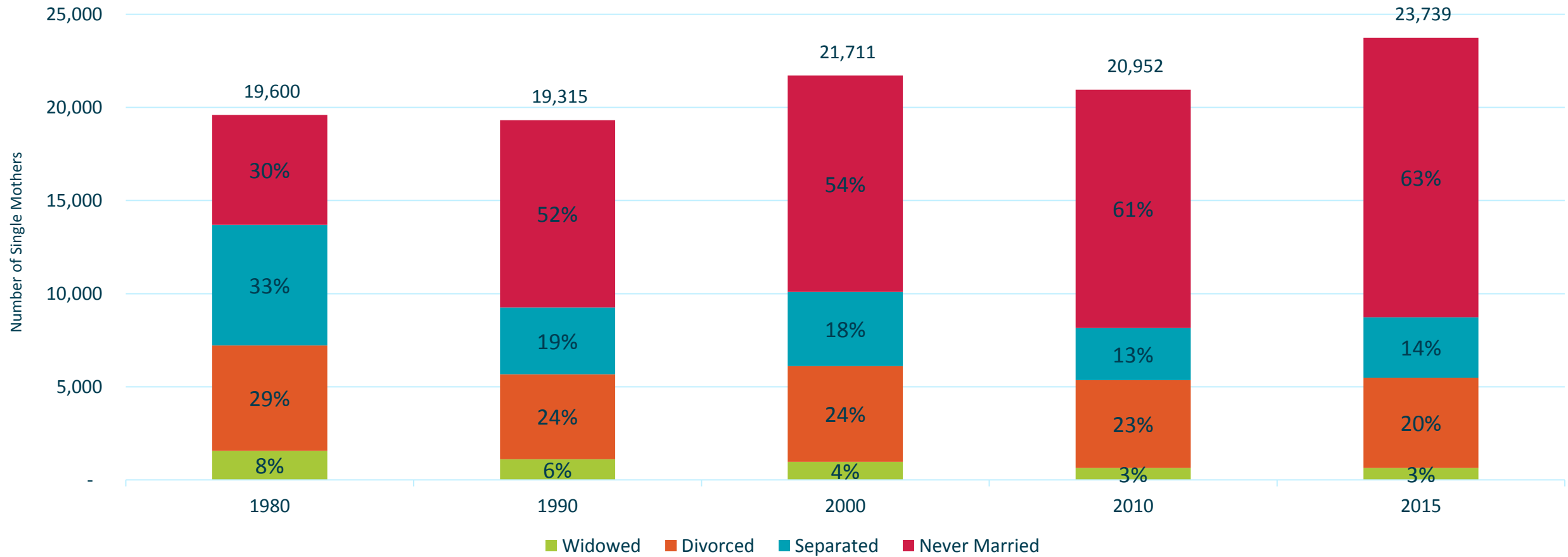
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Summary

- About 63% of single mothers have never been married. 64% are the only adults in their households.
- Most single mothers (73%) are between 25 and 44 years old.
- 79% of single mothers are either Black or Hispanic; 40% are foreign-born.
- Around 24% have been told by a health professional that they have depression; 23% have been told they have asthma, and 21% have been told they have high blood pressure.
- About 50% of single mothers aged 25 or older have not attained education beyond a high school degree.
- 68% of single mothers are employed. The median wage for a single mother \$17,021.
- Single mother households generally earn less than other household types, with a median household income of \$25,032.
- Around 38% of single mothers do not own a car; about one-fifth take the bus to work.
- Almost 2 out of 3 single mothers are housing burdened. 37% spend more than half of their household income on housing costs.
- 13% of single mothers rely on governmental assistance. 57% rely on public health insurance.
- 44% of single mothers in Boston live in poverty, *making up 70% of the households with children in poverty.*

Compared to previous decades, Boston's single mothers are more likely to have never been married.

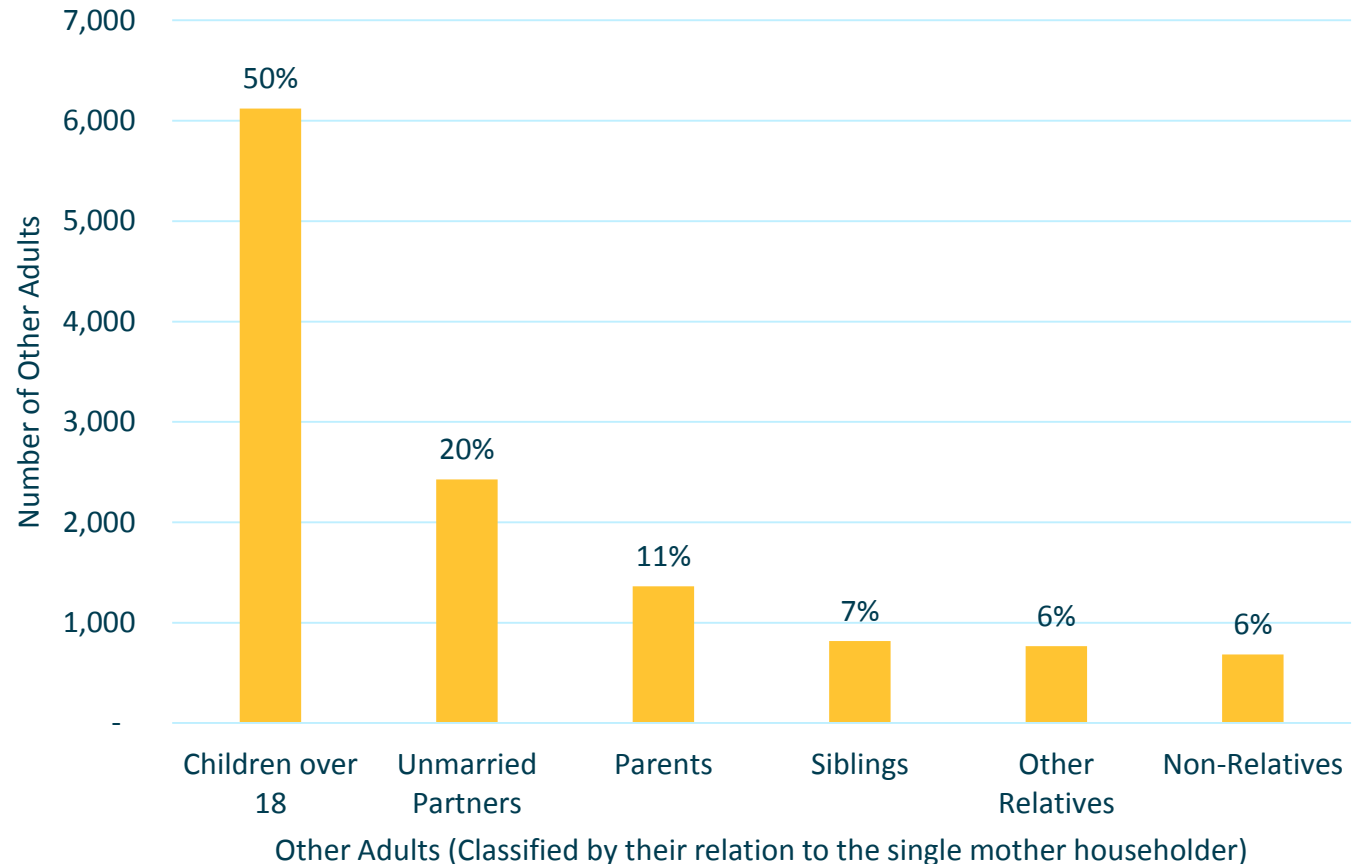
Marital Status of Single Mothers – Boston (1980-2015)



Only 36% of single mothers have another adult living with them in the household.

- Of the other adults living with single mothers, about half are the adult children¹ of the single mothers.
 - 56% of these adult children are employed.
 - 59% are enrolled in school.
- About 20% of the other adults are the unmarried partners of single mothers.

Other Adults in Single Mother Households – Boston (2015)

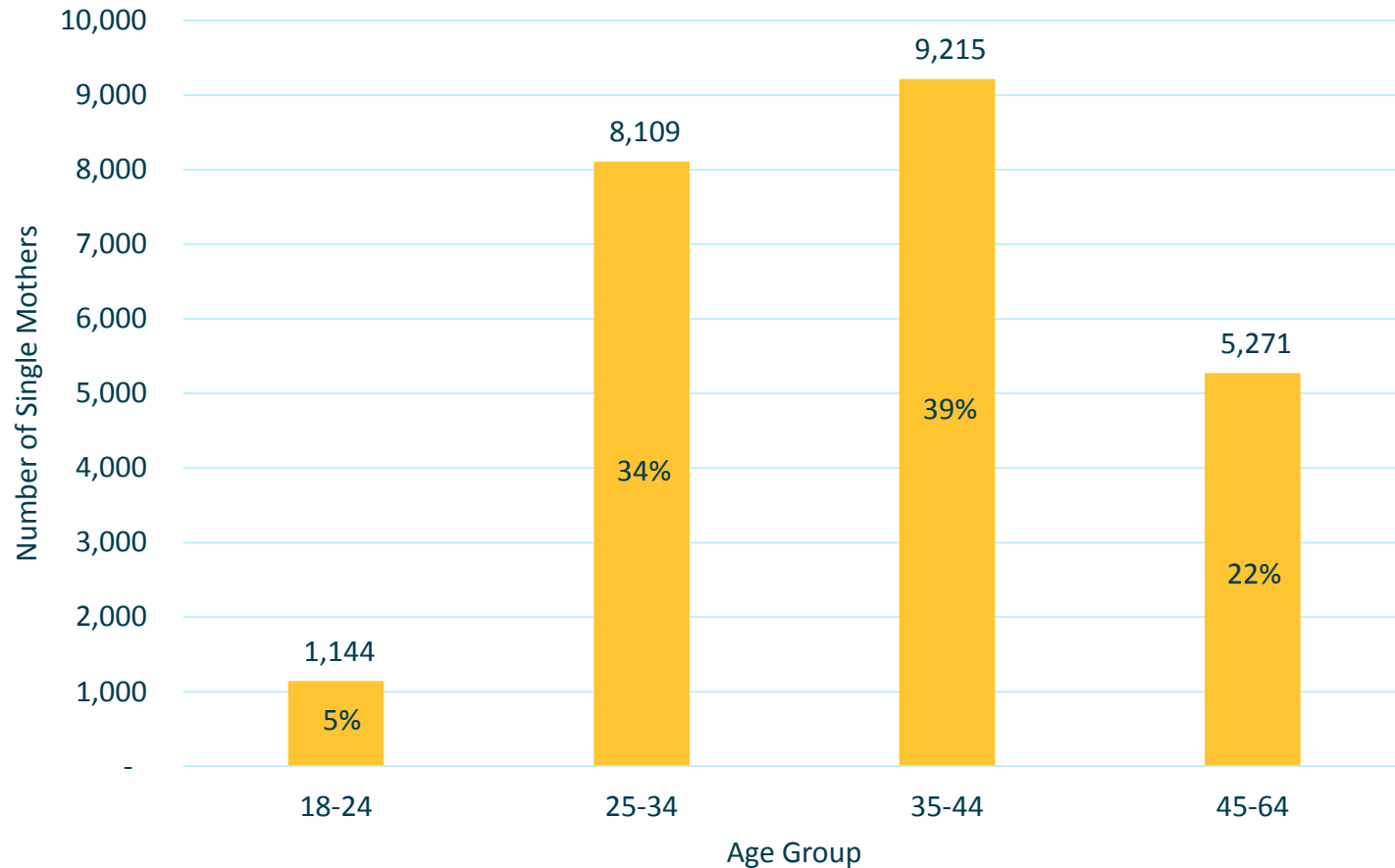


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

1. "Adult children" in this graph includes biological sons or daughters, adopted sons or daughters, stepsons and stepdaughters, grandchildren, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, and foster children.

73% of single mothers with children under age 18 are between the ages of 25 and 44.

Age of Single Mothers – Boston (2015)

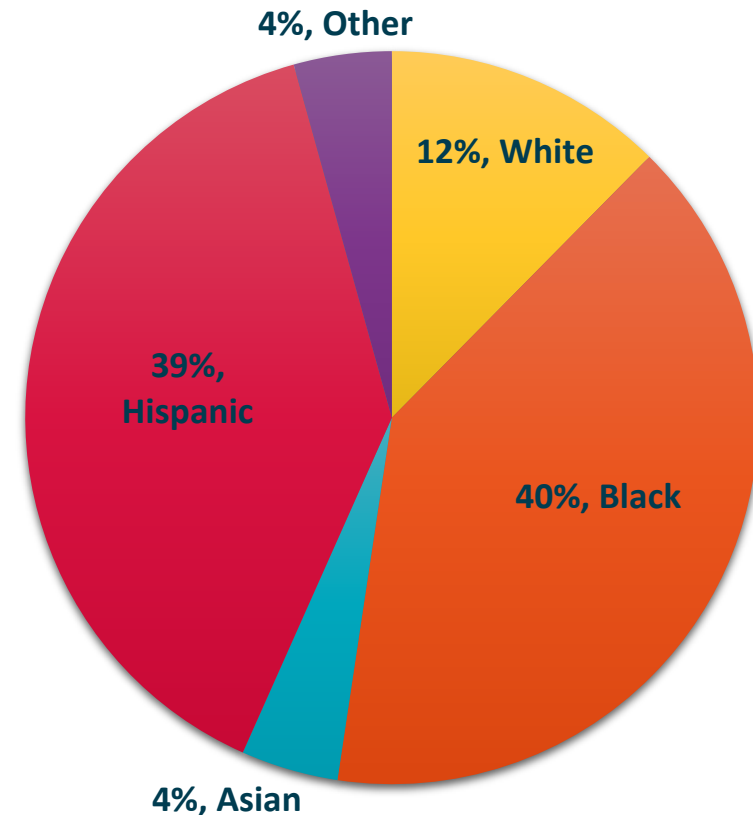


- Only 5% of single mothers are between 18 and 24 years old. One-fifth are between 45 and 64 years old.
- About 63% of single mothers between the ages 18 and 24 live in poverty, compared to 32% of single mothers between ages 45 and 64.

Most of Boston's single mothers (79%) are either Black or Hispanic.

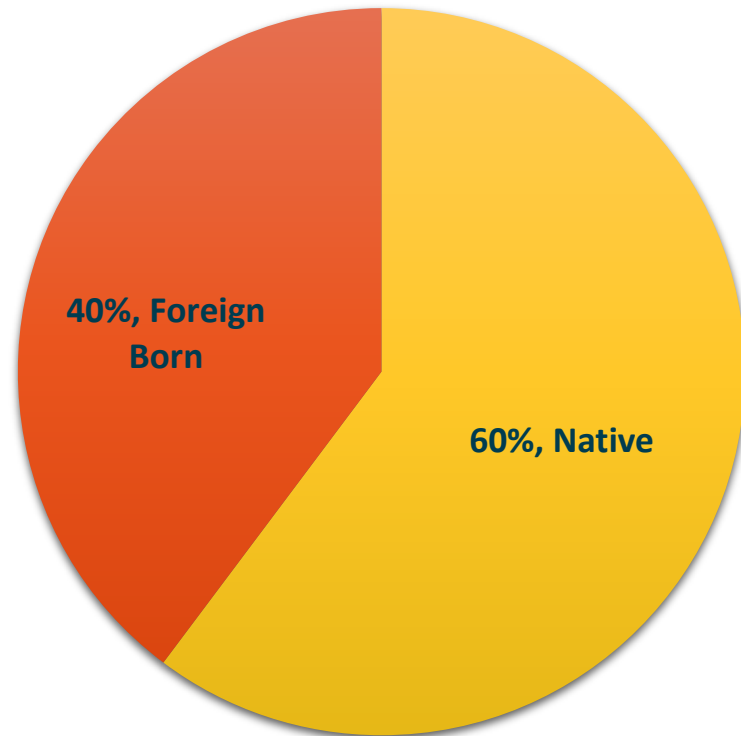
- Nationally, only 53% of single mothers are Black or Hispanic.¹
- 55% of Boston's Hispanic single mothers live in poverty, more than any other race.
 - 31% of Non-Hispanic White single mothers are in poverty. For Non-Hispanic black single mothers, this percentage is 38%.

Race of Single Mothers – Boston (2015)



Almost 40% of single mothers in Boston are foreign-born.

Nativity of Single Mothers – Boston (2015)



- Dominican single mothers make up the largest group of foreign-born single mothers (about 30%).
- About 36% of foreign born single mothers do not speak English well.
- 46% of foreign-born single mothers are not U.S. citizens.

Single mothers are more likely than married mothers to have depression, diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure.

	Married women with children*	Unmarried** women with children*
My health status is...		
Excellent	30.7% (26.5-34.9)	17.3% (13.9-20.8)
Very Good	34.3% (30.0-38.7)	29.6% (25.3-33.9)
Good	26.6% (20.4-30.8)	33.3% (29-37.5)
Fair	6.2% (4.0-8.3)	16.6% (13.3-19.9)
Poor	2.2% (0.8-3.6)	3.3% (1.8-4.7)
During the past year, have you received professional counseling or any kind of treatment, for sadness or depression?		
Yes	16.1% (12.8-19.4)	23.8% (20.0-27.6)
No	83.9% (80.6-87.2)	76.2% (72.4-80.0)
Have you ever been told by a doctor that you have diabetes?		
Yes	2.8% (1.6-4.0)	7.0% (4.9-9.1)
No	97.2% (96.0-98.4)	93.0% (90.9-95.1)
Have you ever been told by a doctor, nurse, or other health professional that you had asthma?		
Yes	8.5% (6.1-10.9)	22.7% (18.5-27.0)
No	91.5% (89.1-93.9)	77.3% (73.0-81.5)
Have you ever been told by a doctor, nurse, or other health professional that you have high blood pressure?		
Yes	12.8% (9.7-15.8)	20.6% (17.2-23.9)
No	87.2% (84.2-90.2)	79.4% (76.1-82.8)

DATA SOURCE: Boston Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BBRFSS), 2010, 2013 and 2015, Boston Public Health Commission. DATA ANALYSIS: Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office

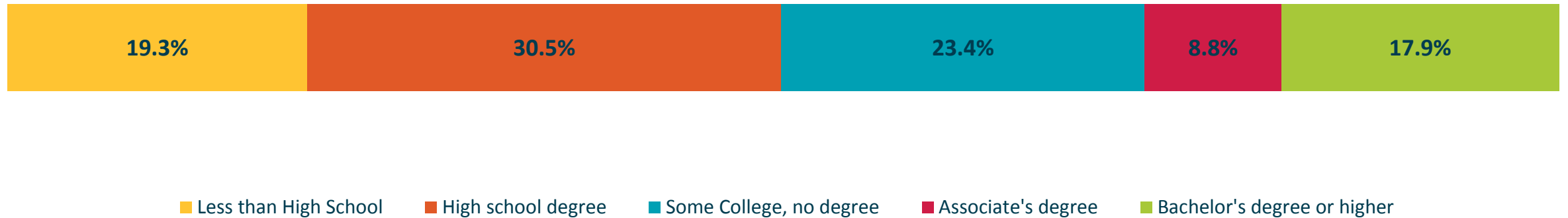
Fields highlighted in yellow represent statistically significant differences between married women and unmarried women. The 95% confidence intervals are in parentheses.

*"with children" = having at least one child under 18 living in her or his household

**Unmarried = Divorced, Separated, Widowed, Never Married, or Member of Unmarried Couple

Single mothers have significantly lower educational attainment with only 18% holding a Bachelor's degree, compared to 48% of all Boston householders.

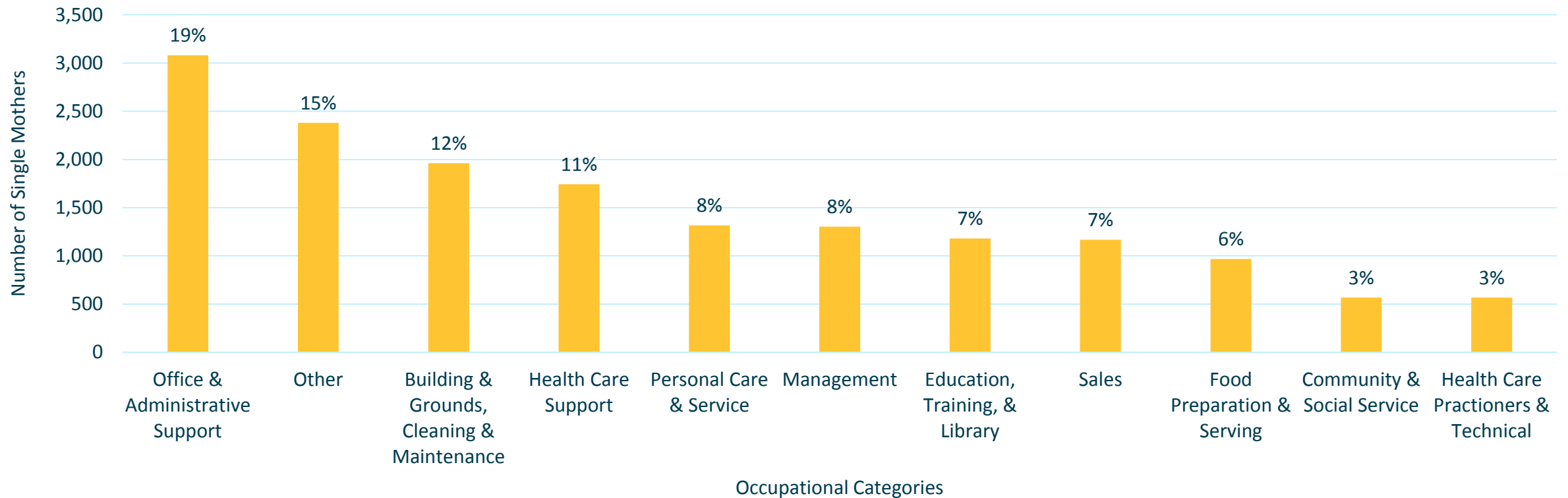
Educational Attainment of Single Mothers, aged 25 and older - Boston (2015)



- About 50% of single mothers aged 25 and older have a high school degree or less.
- 9% of single mothers aged 25 and older are currently enrolled in school, working towards either a high school degree, college degree, or graduate degree.

Approximately 68% of single mothers are employed, mostly working in either office & administrative support, building & grounds, or cleaning & maintenance.

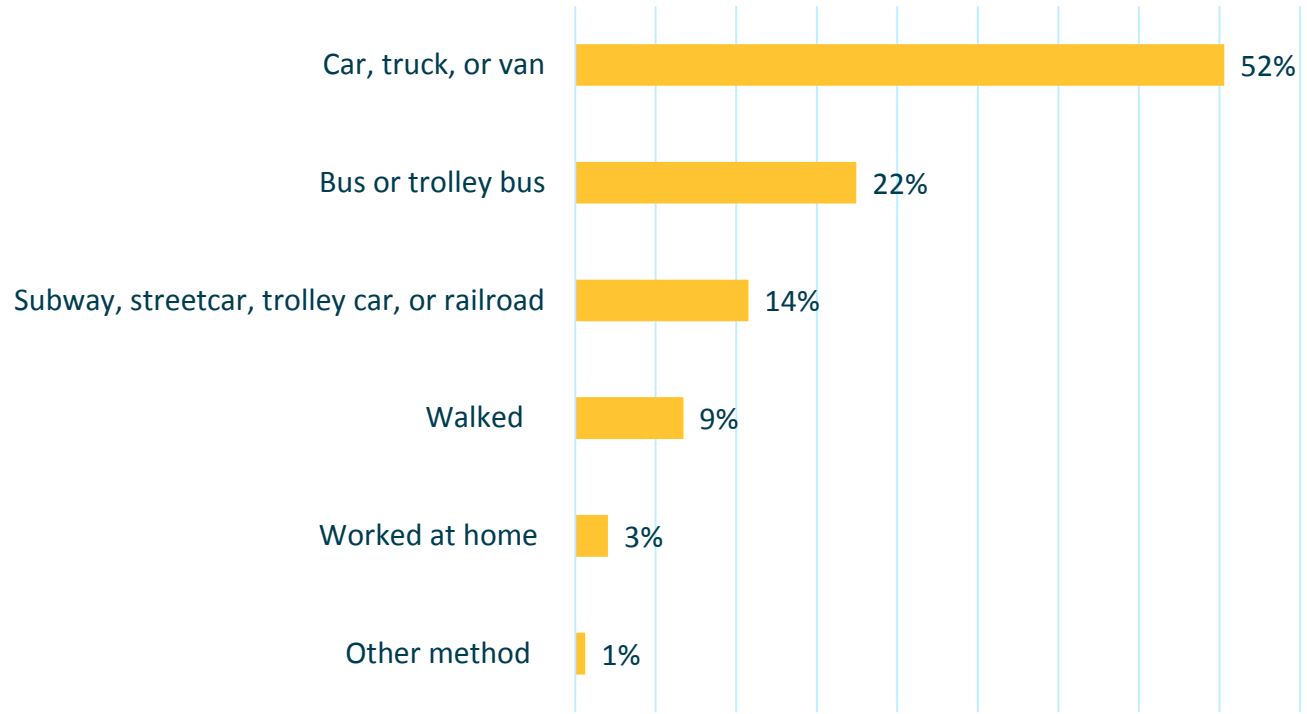
Top Occupations of Single Mothers – Boston (2015)



38% of Boston single mothers do not own a car.

- About 48% of single mothers use a transportation method other than driving in order to get to work.
- 22% of single mothers take the bus to work, compared to 13.5% of all Boston householders.
- 18% of single mothers have a commute of over 45 minutes, compared to 13% of all Boston householders.

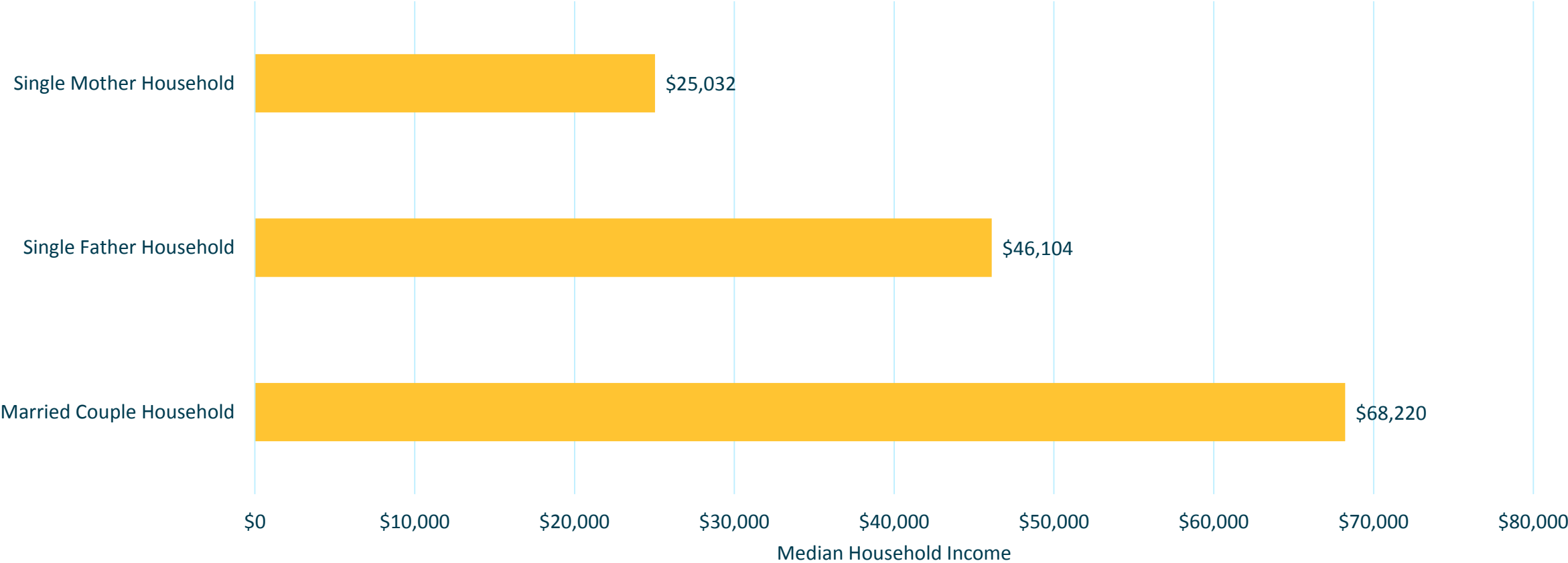
Transportation Mode to Work for Employed Single Mother Household (2015)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

Single mother households generally earn less income than single father households or married households.

Median Household Income by Type of Household with Children

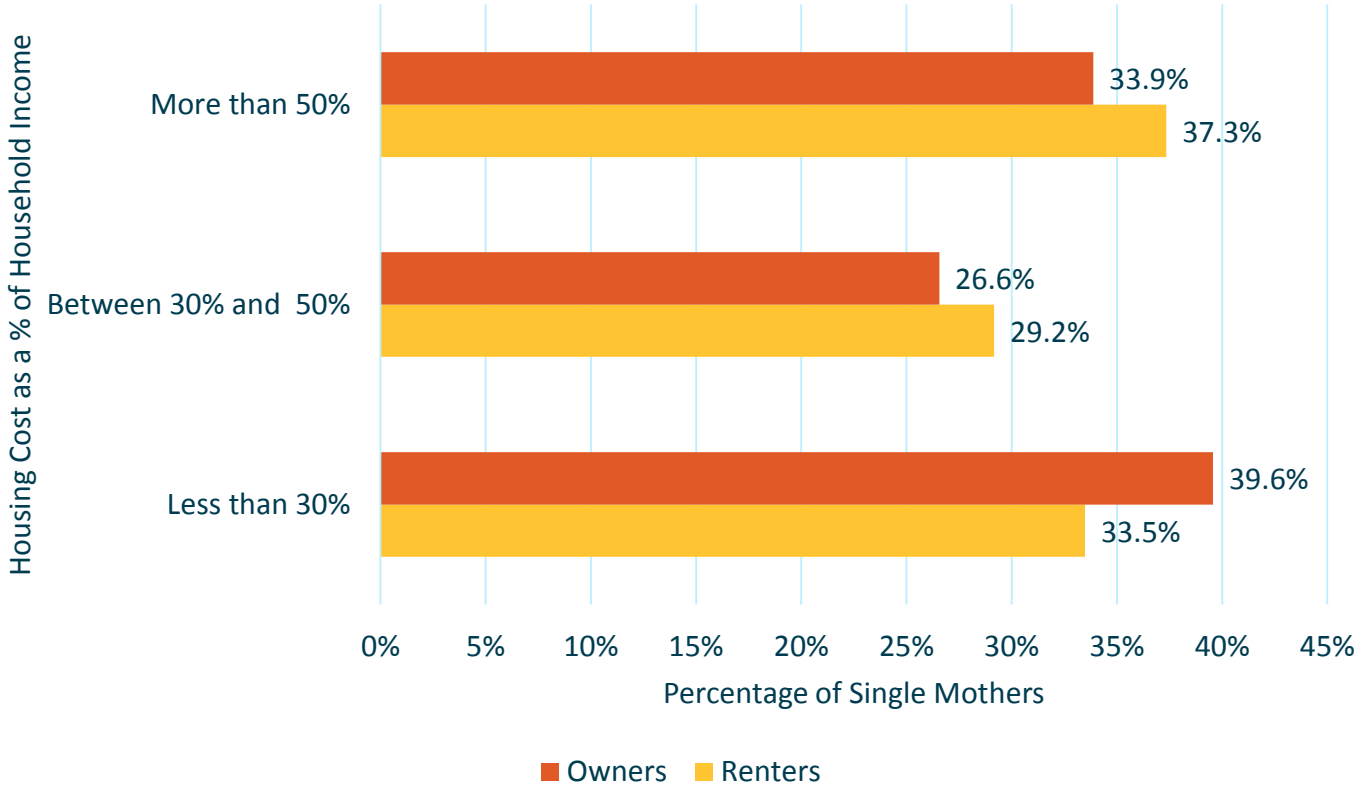


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

Almost two-thirds of single mothers are considered housing cost burdened.

- About 37% of single mothers spend more than 50% of their monthly household income on housing costs.
- Home ownership is low among single mothers, with only 12.5% of them owning a home.
- About 7,000 single mothers receive subsidized housing from Boston Housing Authority.¹

Housing Cost as a Percentage of Monthly Household Income for Single Mothers – Boston (2015)

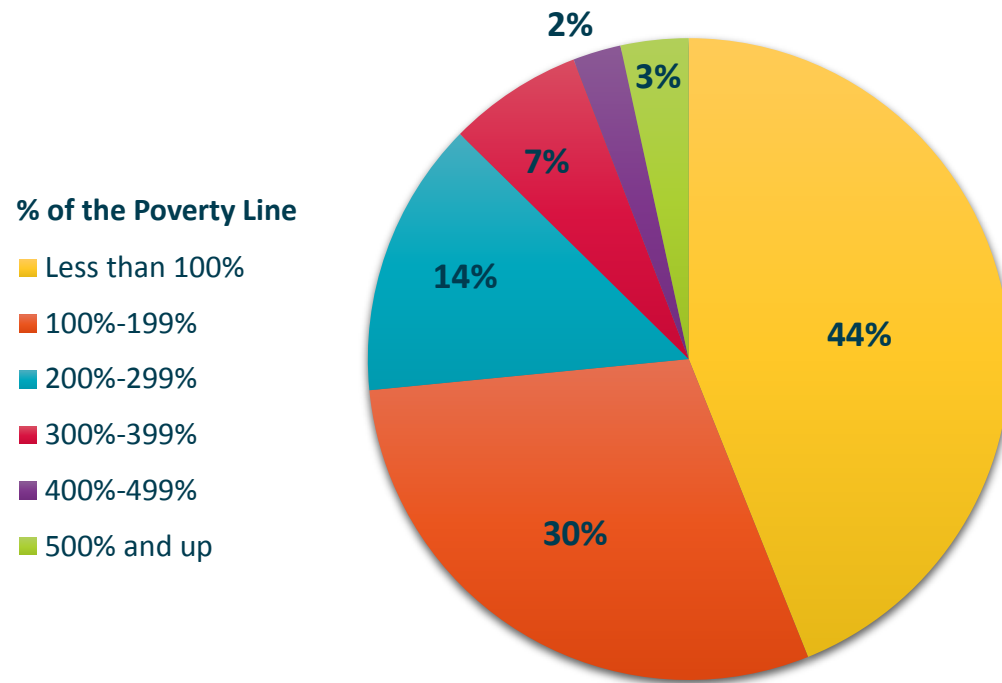


Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), BPDA Research Division Analysis

NOTE: A householder is considered “housing cost burdened” if 30% or more of their income is contributed to rent or house ownership costs
1. Boston Housing Authority, March 2018

A significant share (44%) of single mothers live in poverty.

Poverty Levels of Single Mothers – Boston (2015)



- **Public Assistance**
 - 13% of Boston's single mothers qualify for public assistance (including TANF, excluding Food Stamps and Supplemental Security Income), compared to only 3% of all Boston householders.
- **Food Stamps/SNAP**
 - 54% of Boston's single mothers are enrolled in the Food Stamps/SNAP program.
- **Health Insurance**
 - 57% of single mothers depend on public health insurance.
- **SSI**
 - About 7% of single mothers receive Supplemental Security Income.

Thank you to the following organizations for their contribution to this presentation:

