Population Characteristics

The population of the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, which is reflected in the sociodemographic characteristics of children and their families. The percentage of children who are Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander has more than doubled since 1980, while the percentage who are non-Hispanic White has declined. The percentage of children who are Black has remained relatively stable. This reflects the changes in the racial and ethnic makeup of the population as a whole.

At the national, State, and local levels, policymakers use population information to address health-related issues that affect mothers, children, and families. By carefully analyzing and comparing available data, public health professionals can often identify high-risk populations that require specific interventions.

This section presents data on several population characteristics that influence maternal and child health program development and evaluation. Included are data on the age and racial and ethnic distribution of the U.S. population, as well as data on the poverty status of children and their families, child care arrangements, and school dropout rates.

POPULATION OF CHILDREN

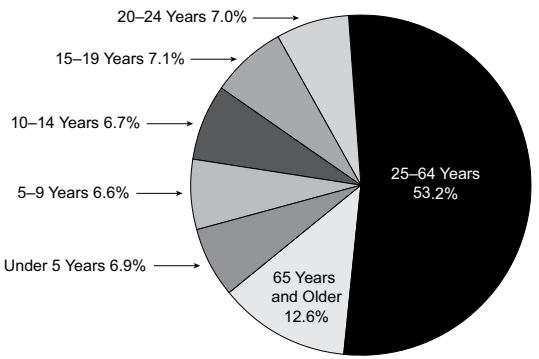
In 2007, there were an estimated 75.2 million children under 18 years of age in the United States, representing nearly 25 percent of the population. Young adults aged 20-24 years composed 7 percent of the population, while adults aged 25-64 years composed over 53 percent of the population, and adults aged 65 years and older composed over 12 percent.

Since the 2000 Census, the number of children under 5 years of age has risen 8 percent, while the numbers of children aged 5-9 and 10-14 years have fallen 3.4 percent and 1.0 percent, respectively. The number of adolescents aged 15-19 years of age has risen just over 6 percent, while the number of young adults aged 20-24 years has risen nearly 11 percent. The number of adults aged 25-64 years has risen over 9 percent since the 2000 Census, and the number of adults aged 65 years and older has risen more than 8 percent in the same period (data not shown).

The racial/ethnic makeup of the child population reflects the increasing diversity of the population over the past several decades. Hispanic children represented 9 percent of all children in 1980, compared to more than 20 percent in 2007; Asian/Pacific Islander children represented 2 percent of all children in 1980, but more than 4 percent in 2007. While the percentage of children who are Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander has more than doubled since 1980, the percentage who are non-Hispanic White has declined, and the percentage who are Black has remained relatively stable.

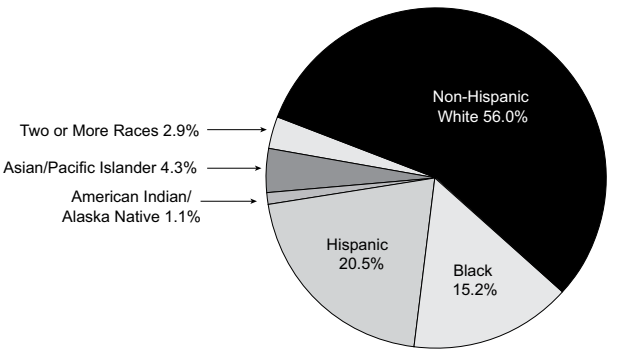
U.S. Population, by Age Group, 2007

Source (I.1): U.S. Census Bureau



Population of Children Under Age 18, by Race/Ethnicity, 2007

Source (I.1): U.S. Census Bureau



CHILDREN OF FOREIGN-BORN PARENTS

The foreign-born population in the United States has increased substantially since the 1970s, largely due to immigration from Asia and Latin America. In 2007, nearly 22 percent of children living in the United States had at least one foreign-born parent. Of all children, 18.3 percent were U.S.-born with a foreign-born parent or parents, and 3.6 percent of children were themselves foreign-born. Most children (74.4 percent) were native-born with native-born parents.

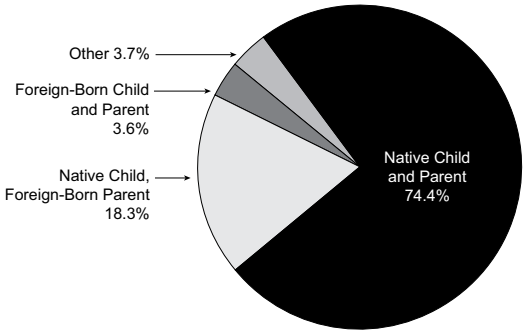
Children's poverty status varies noticeably with nativity. In 2007, foreign-born children of foreign-born parents were most likely to live in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold (25.6 percent) and 100-199 percent of the poverty threshold (31.8 percent). In comparison, only 15.8 percent of native-born children of native-born parents lived below 100 percent of the poverty threshold.

A number of other sociodemographic indicators vary by children's nativity. For instance, native-born children with native-born parents were the most likely to have health insurance in 2007 (91.7 percent), while foreign-born children of foreign-born parents were the least likely to be insured (59.1 percent). Just over 83 percent of native-born children with foreign-born parents had health insurance coverage (data not shown).[1]

1 The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold was $21,203 for a family of four in 2007. Following the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty.

Children Under Age 18, by Nativity of Child and Parent(s),* 2007

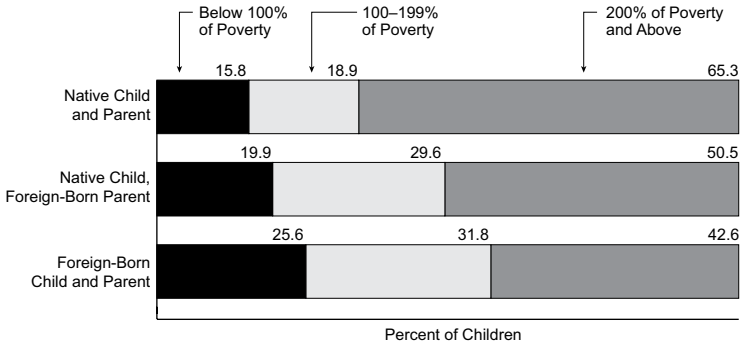
Source (I.2): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



*"Native parent" indicates that both of the child's parents were U.S. citizens at birth, "foreign-born parent" indicates that one or both parents were born outside of the United States, and "other" includes children with parents whose native status is unknown and foreign-born children with native parents.

Children Under Age 18, by Poverty Status* and Nativity of Child and Parent(s), 2007**

Source (I.2): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



*The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was $21,203 in 2007. ***"Native parent" indicates that both of the child's parents were U.S. citizens at birth, "foreign-born parent" indicates that one or both parents were born outside of the U.S.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY

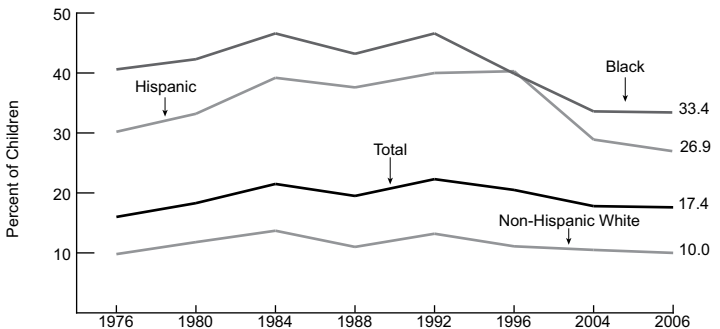
In 2006, nearly 13 million children under 18 years of age lived in households with incomes below the poverty threshold ($20,614 for a family of 4 in 2006); this represents 17.4 percent of all children in the United States.

Poverty affects many aspects of a child's life, including living conditions, access to health care, and adequate nutrition, all of which contribute to health status. Black and Hispanic children are particularly vulnerable to poverty. In 2006, 33.4 percent of Black children and 26.9 percent of Hispanic children lived in households with incomes below the poverty threshold, compared to 10.0 percent of non-Hispanic White children. Over the past two decades, the percentage of children in poverty has dropped noticeably among the Black population, while it has remained relatively constant among Whites.

Single-parent families are also particularly vulnerable to poverty: of children living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold in 2006, 59.6 percent lived in a female-headed household. However, children living in a female-headed household made up only 24.1 percent of the overall child population. Overall, 42.0 percent of children living with a female householder and 20.3 percent of children living with a male householder were living in poverty in 2006 (data not shown).

Children Under Age 18 Living in Households with Incomes Below 100 Percent of Poverty Threshold,* by Race/Ethnicity, 1976–2006**

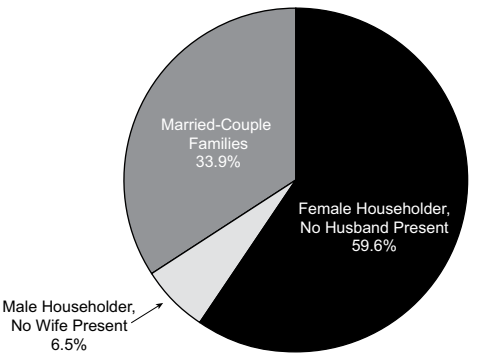
Source (I.3): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



**The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was $20,614 in 2006.*
***The Current Population Survey currently allows respondents to choose more than one race; however, prior to 2002, only one race was reported. For consistency, figures reported here are only for respondents who chose one race.*

Children Under Age 18 Living in Households with Incomes Below 100 Percent of Poverty Threshold,* by Family Type, 2006

Source (I.3): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



**The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was $20,614 in 2006.*

SCHOOL DROPOUTS

As of October 2006, there were nearly 3.5 million high school status dropouts[1] in the United States, representing 9.3 percent of the population aged 16-24 years. The dropout rate has generally declined over the past several decades, and after a slight increase in 2004, reached a new low in 2006. This represents a decline in status dropouts of over 35 percent since 1972.

Historically, Hispanic students have had higher dropout rates than youth of other races and ethnicities: in 2006, 22.1 percent of Hispanics aged 16-24 years were status dropouts compared to 5.8 percent of non-Hispanic Whites and 10.7 percent of non-Hispanic Blacks. The high rate among Hispanics, overall, is partly due to the high dropout rate among Hispanics born outside of the United States (36.2 percent). First generation Hispanics—those born in the United States but having at least one parent born outside of the country—have a much lower dropout rate (12.3 percent) than do Hispanics who were born in the United States to American-born parents (12.1 percent; data not shown).

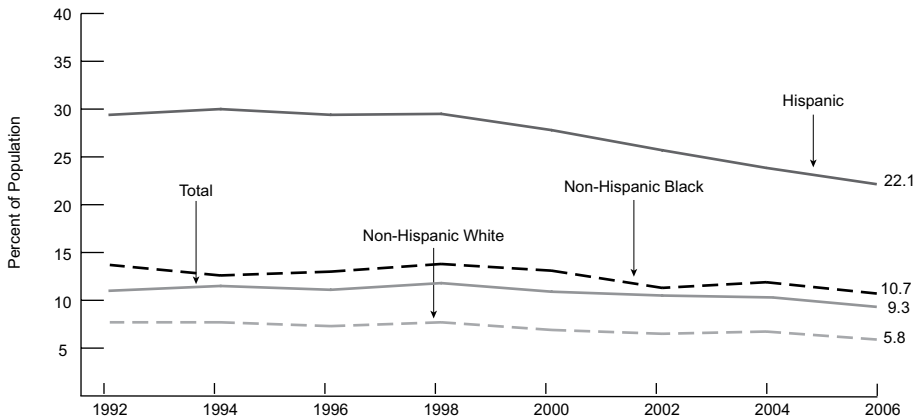
According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed and, when they are employed, earn less than those who completed high school. In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that those who did not complete high school reported worse health outcomes than their peers who did complete high school, as well as reduced access to medical care and higher rates of uninsurance.[2]

1 "Status dropouts" refer to 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned high school credentials (diploma or equivalent).

2 National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2006 with Chartbook on Trends in the Health of Americans. Hyattsville, MD: 2006.

School Status Dropout* Rates Among Persons Aged 16–24, by Race/Ethnicity, 1992–2006

Source (I.4): U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics



** "Status dropout" refers to 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned high school credentials (diploma or equivalent).*

MATERNAL AGE

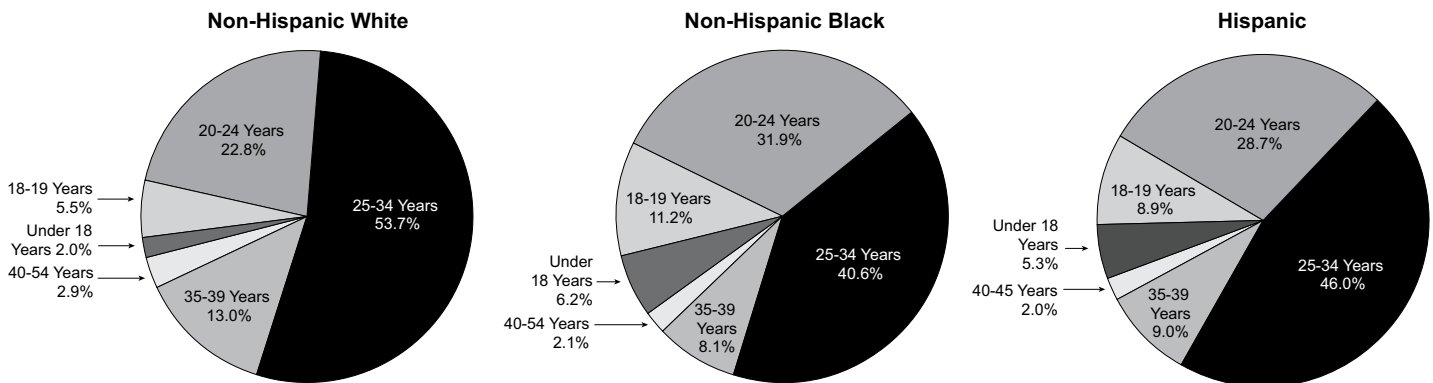
According to preliminary data, the general fertility rate rose to 69.5 live births per 1,000 women aged 15-44 years in 2007. The birth rate among teenagers aged 15-19 years rose for the second year in a row, to 42.5 births per 1,000 females in this age group. This rate is still 31 percent lower than the most recent peak, reported in 1991 (61.8 births per 1,000). In 2007, the highest birth rate was among women aged 25-29 years (117.5 births per 1,000), followed by women aged 20-24 years (106.4 births per 1,000). Birth rates for women aged 30-34 years (99.9 births per 1,000) and 35-39 years (47.5 per 1,000) were the highest reported in over four decades. The birth rate for women aged 40-44 years was 9.5 births per 1,000, an increase of more than 70 percent since 1990 (data not shown).

In 2007, 3.4 percent of births were to minors under 18 years of age, and another 7.1 percent were to teenagers aged 18-19 years. Just over one-quarter of births occurred among young adults aged 20-24 years, and exactly one-half were to women aged 25-34 years. Another 11.6 percent of births were to women aged 35-39 years, and 2.6 percent of births were to women aged 40-54 years. Average age at first birth fell to 25.0 years in 2006 (the latest year for which data are available), the first such decline since the measure became available in 1968 (data not shown).

Age distribution of births varies by race/ethnicity. Among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women, 17.4 percent and 14.2 percent of births, respectively, were to teenagers, compared to 7.5 percent among non-Hispanic Whites. The percentage of births to young adults aged 20-24 years was also higher among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women (31.9 percent and 28.7 percent, respectively) than among non-Hispanic White women (22.8 percent). However, non-Hispanic White women had higher birth rates than non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women in each of the older age categories.

Distribution of Births, by Race/Ethnicity and Maternal Age, 2007*

Source (I.5): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System



*Preliminary data

WORKING MOTHERS AND CHILD CARE

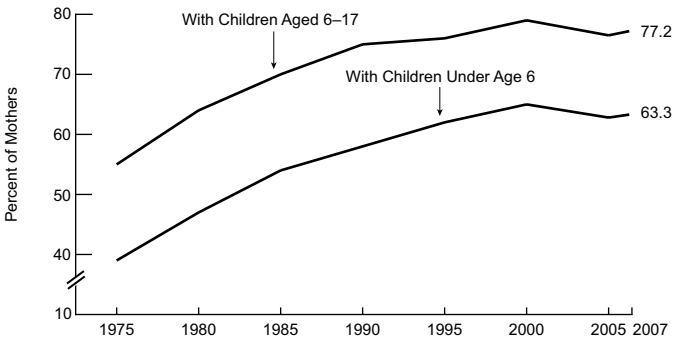
In 2007, 71.0 percent of women with children under 18 years of age were in the labor force (either employed or looking for work) and 67.8 percent were employed. Of mothers with children under 6 years of age, 63.3 percent were in the labor force and 59.6 percent were employed. Of women with children aged 6-17 years, 77.2 percent were in the labor force and 74.3 percent were employed.

Employed mothers with children aged 6-17 years were more likely to be employed full-time than women with younger children (77.8 percent versus 72.5 percent). Married mothers with a spouse present were less likely to be in the labor force than women of other marital statuses (68.8 percent versus 76.5 percent). Married mothers who were in the labor force, however, were more likely than mothers of other marital statuses to be employed: the unemployment rate among married mothers was only 3.0 percent, compared to a rate of 8.0 percent among mothers of other marital statuses (data not shown).

In 2005, 40 percent of children under 6 years of age did not require nonparental child care, while 60 percent required at least one child care arrangement. Overall, 60 percent of children with at least one child care arrangement received center-based care, 22 percent received care from a nonrelative, and 35 percent received care from a relative other than a parent (data not shown). Among children who received child care, 56.9 percent of children aged 3-5 years received center-based care compared to 22.8 percent of children aged 1-2 years and 11.8 percent of children under 1 year of age.

Mothers in the Labor Force,* by Age of Child, 1975–2007

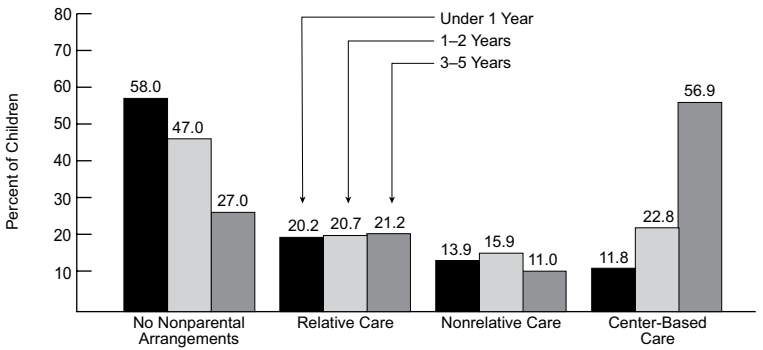
Source (1.6): U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics



**The labor force comprises people who are employed and people who are actively seeking employment.*

Weekly Child Care Arrangements* for Children Under Age 6, by Age, 2005**

Source (1.7): U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics



**Percents may equal more than 100 because children may have more than one type of nonparental care arrangement. **Includes only children not yet enrolled in kindergarten.*

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTERISTICS

The environment in which a child grows up can affect his or her physical health, social and emotional functioning, and cognitive development. The availability of neighborhood amenities, such as playgrounds, community centers, and libraries provides children with opportunities to be active and engaged in the broader community. Poor conditions, however, such as dilapidated housing, vandalism, and litter or garbage on the street may have an adverse impact, either directly or indirectly, on a child's overall well-being.

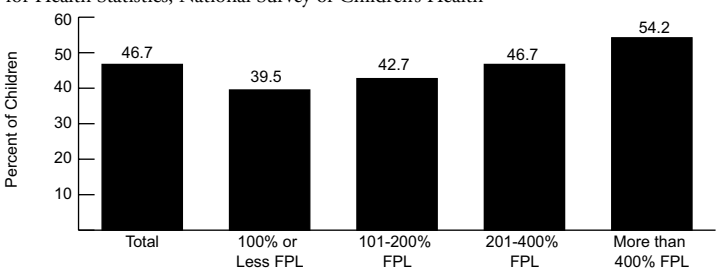
In 2007, 46.7 percent of children lived in neighborhoods that had four neighborhood amenities, including sidewalks, parks or playgrounds, recreation or community centers, and a library, while 28.6 percent of children lived in neighborhoods with at least one indicator of poor conditions, such as vandalism, litter on the street, or dilapidated housing.

The percentage of children living in neighborhoods with amenities and poor conditions varied significantly by poverty status. Among children with household incomes of 100 percent or less of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), 39.5 percent lived in neighborhoods with four neighborhood amenities, compared to 46.7 percent of children with household incomes of 201-400 percent FPL and 54.2 percent of children with incomes of more than 400 percent FPL.

Non-Hispanic Black children were most likely to live in neighborhoods with one or more poor conditions (37.0 percent), and Hispanic children were second most likely (33.5 percent). Non-Hispanic White children were least likely to live in neighborhoods with one or more poor conditions (24.4 percent).

Children Under Age 18 with Four Neighborhood Amenities,* by Poverty Status, 2007**

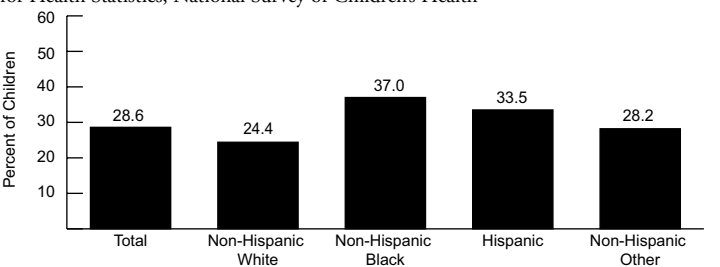
Source (I.8): Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Survey of Children's Health



**Amenities include sidewalks or walking paths; park or playground area; recreation center, community center or boys' or girls' club; and library or bookmobile. **Federal Poverty Level (FPL) was equal to $20,650 for a family of four in 2007; FPL is set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for determining income eligibility in public assistance programs.*

Children Under Age 18 with One or More Poor Neighborhood Conditions,* by Race/Ethnicity, 2007

Source (I.8): Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Survey of Children's Health



**Conditions include litter or garbage on the street or sidewalk; poorly kept or dilapidated housing; and vandalism.*