



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The increasing diversity of the United States population 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 could benefit from 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 engagement.

POPULATION OF CHILDREN

In 2008, there were nearly 74 million children under 18 years of age in the United States, representing nearly 25 percent of the population. Young adults aged 18–24 years made up another 9.8 percent of the population, while adults aged 25–64 years composed 53.1 percent of the population, and adults aged 65 years and older composed 12.8 percent.

The age distribution of the population has shifted significantly in the past several decades. The percentage of the population that is under 18 fell from 28.2 percent in 1980 to 24.3 percent in 2008. The representation of young

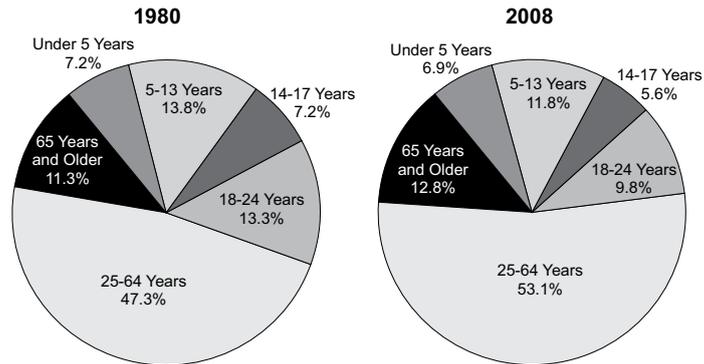
adults (aged 18–24 years) has also fallen, from 13.3 percent to 9.8 percent. During this time period, the percentage of the population that is aged 25–64 years has increased from 47.3 percent to 53.1 percent, and the percentage that is over 65 years has increased from 11.3 percent to 12.8 percent. The median age in the United States has increased from 30.0 years in 1980 to 36.8 years in 2008.

The shifting racial/ethnic makeup of the child population (under 18 years) reflects the increasing diversity of the population as a whole. Hispanic children represented fewer than 9 percent of children in 1980, compared to nearly 22

percent in 2008, and the proportion of children who are Asian/Pacific Islander increased from less than 2 percent to 4.4 percent during the same period. The percentage of children who are Black has remained relatively steady over the same period, around 15 percent. However, the percentage of children who are non-Hispanic White has fallen significantly, from 74.3 percent in 1980 to 56.2 percent in 2008.

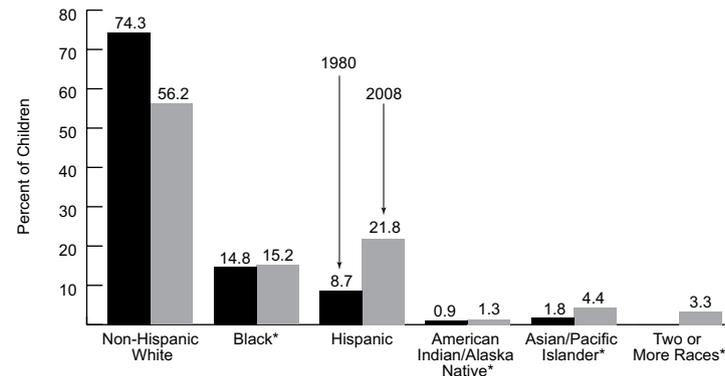
U.S. Population, by Age Group, 1980 and 2008

Source (I.1): U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Population Estimates



Population of Children Under Age 18, by Race/Ethnicity, 1980 and 2008

Source (I.1): U.S. Census Bureau, Annual Population Estimates



*May include Hispanics; 1980 data is not available for two or more races.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY

In 2008, more than 14 million children under 18 years of age lived in households with incomes below 100 percent of the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold (\$22,025 for a family of four in 2008); this represents 19.0 percent of all children in the United States. Poverty affects many aspects of a child's life, including living conditions, nutrition, and access to health care. A number of factors affect poverty status, and a significant racial/ethnic disparity exists. In 2008, 34.7 percent of Black children and 30.6 percent of Hispanic children lived in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold, compared to 10.6 percent of non-Hispanic White children.

Single-parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty. In 2008, 43.4 percent of children living in a female-headed household experienced poverty, as did 20.5 percent of children living in a male-headed household. Only 9.9 percent of children living in married-couple families lived in poverty (data not shown). Also, younger children are more likely than older children to experience poverty. In 2008, 21.8 percent of children under 5 years of age lived in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold, while the same was true of 17.2 percent of children aged 5–17 years.

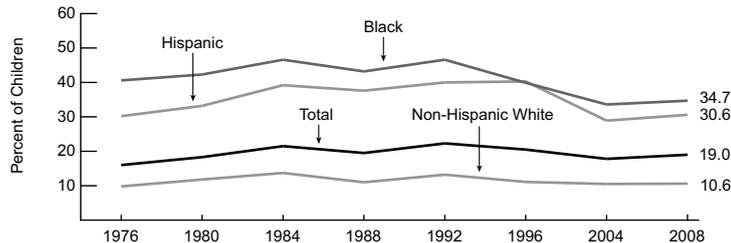
A number of Federal programs work to protect the health and well-being of children living in low-income families. One of these is the

National School Lunch Program, administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. The program provides nutritionally-balanced low-cost or free lunches to children based on household poverty level. In 2008, the program served free lunch to 15.4 million children and reduced-price lunch to another 3.1 million children. This represents 60.1 percent of all lunches served in participating schools.¹

1. United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Child nutrition tables: National-level annual summary tables. Available online: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/cnpmain>. Accessed November, 2009.

Children Under Age 18 Living in Households with Incomes Below 100 Percent of the Poverty Threshold,* by Race/Ethnicity,** 1976–2008

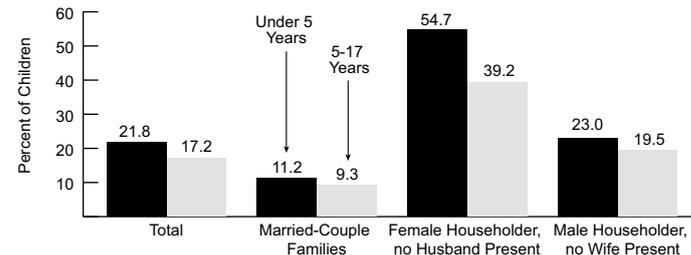
Source (I.2): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



*The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds to determine who is in poverty; the poverty threshold for a family of four was \$22,025 in 2008. **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 Families* with Incomes Below 100 Percent of the Poverty Threshold,** by Age and Family Type, 2008

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



*Includes only children who are related to the head of household by birth, marriage, or adoption. **The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds to determine who is in poverty; the poverty threshold for a family of four was \$22,025 in 2008.

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 2008, 22.0 percent of children in the United States had at least one foreign-born parent. Of all children, 18.6 percent were U.S.-born with a foreign-born parent or parents, and 3.4 percent were themselves foreign-born. Most children (73.9 percent) were native-born with native-born parents.

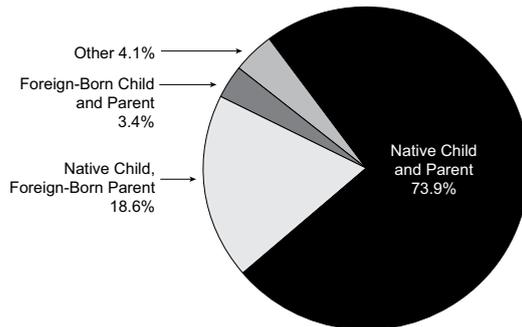
Children's poverty status varies with their nativity. In 2008, foreign-born children with

foreign-born parents were most likely to live in poverty, with 30.1 percent living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold (\$22, 025 for a family of four in 2008). Another 27.8 percent of these children lived in households with family incomes of 100–199 percent of the poverty threshold. Native-born children with native parents were the least likely to experience poverty, with 15.9 percent living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold, and another 18.7 percent living in households with incomes of 100–199 percent of the poverty threshold.

A number of other sociodemographic factors vary by the nativity of children and their parents. For instance, native-born children with native parents were most likely to have health insurance in 2008 (92.2 percent), while foreign-born children with foreign-born parents were least likely (68.7 percent). Almost 85 percent of native-born children with foreign-born parents had health insurance in 2008 (data not shown).

Children Under Age 18, by Nativity of Child and Parent(s),* 2008

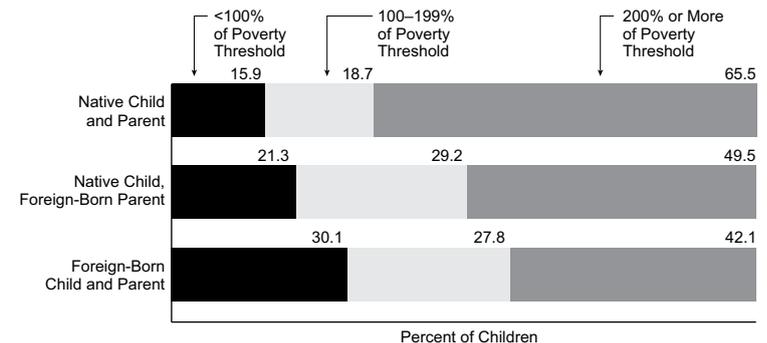
Source (I.3): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



**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),** 2008

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



*The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was \$22,025 in 2008. ***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.

ADOPTED CHILDREN

In 2007, there were approximately 1.8 million adopted children living in the United States. Of all adopted children, 38 percent were placed with families through private domestic adoption, meaning the child was voluntarily placed for adoption by his or her biological parents. Another 37 percent of adopted children were placed with their families through foster care adoption, and the remaining 25 percent of adopted children came to their families through international adoption.

The racial/ethnic distribution of adopted children differs from that of the general child population. While non-Hispanic White children represented 56 percent of the overall child population in 2007, they represented only 37

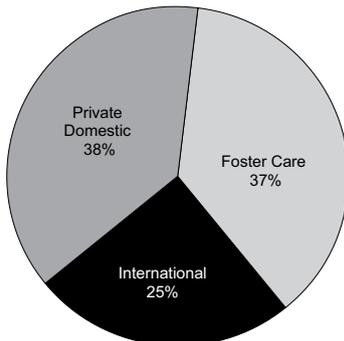
percent of adopted children. Conversely, non-Hispanic Black children composed 14 percent of the overall child population but 23 percent of the adopted child population, and Asian children composed 4 percent of the overall population but 15 percent of the adopted child population. Hispanic children represented 20 percent of the overall child population and 15 percent of the adopted child population (data not shown). The racial/ethnic distribution of adopted children also varies across adoption types, with private adoptions most likely to involve non-Hispanic White children and international adoptions most likely to involve Asian children. The racial/ethnic profile of children placed through foster care adoptions is less disparate: in 2007, 37 percent were non-Hispanic

White, 35 percent were non-Hispanic Black, and 16 percent were Hispanic.

The population of adopted children is older than the general child population. In 2007, 16 percent of the general child population was 0–2 years of age, but only 6 percent of adopted children were in that age group. Conversely, 23 percent of the adopted child population was 15–17 years of age, while only 17 percent of the general child population was in that age group. Adopted children were more likely than children in the general population to have at least one parent with more than a high school diploma, to live in a household with income above 400 percent of the Federal poverty threshold, to live in a safe neighborhood, and to have consistent insurance coverage (data not shown).

Adopted Children, by Adoption Type, 2007*

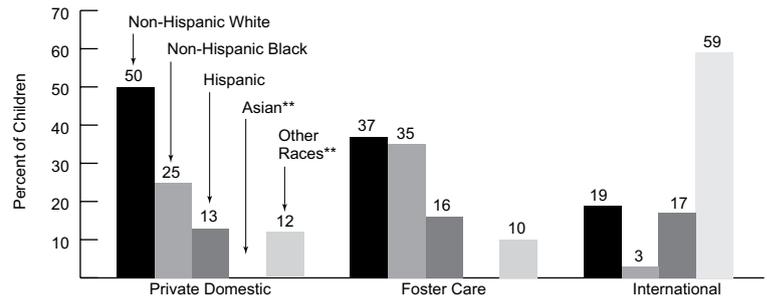
Source (I.4): Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration for Children and Families, National Survey of Adoptive Parents



*Published analyses of this data source round all estimates to the nearest whole number.

Adopted Children, by Race/Ethnicity and Adoption Type, 2007*

Source (I.4): Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration for Children and Families, National Survey of Adoptive Parents



*Published analyses of this data source round all estimates to the nearest whole number. **The number of Asian children adopted through private domestic adoption and foster care, and the number of children of other races adopted through international adoption, is too small to produce reliable estimates.

RURAL AND URBAN CHILDREN

The health risks facing children often vary by the child's geographic location. Children living in rural areas are more likely to live in poor families,¹ are more vulnerable to death from injuries,² and are more likely to use tobacco than their counterparts in urban areas.³ Rural families also face particular challenges in gaining access to health care, as they often have to travel greater distances to use health services.⁴ These discrepancies in health status and health risks are not necessarily attributable to children's geographic location, but rather are related to the demographic characteristics of the children and families who live in rural areas. Understanding these health risks provides program planners and policymakers important information with which to target services and interventions.

In 2007, more than 81 percent of children lived in urban areas, 9 percent lived in large rural areas, and another 9 percent lived in small or isolated rural areas (data not shown). For the National Survey of Children's Health, these areas were classified based on zip code, the size of the city or town, and the commuting pattern in the area. Urban areas include metropolitan areas and surrounding towns from which commuters flow into an urban area. Large rural areas include large towns with populations of 10,000 to 49,999 persons and their surrounding areas. Small or isolated rural areas include small towns with populations of 2,500 to 9,999 persons and their surrounding areas.

In 2007, approximately 35 percent of children aged 10–17 years living in small rural areas were overweight or obese, compared to 30.9 percent of children living in urban areas. Children were

defined as overweight if their Body Mass Index (BMI), based on parent-reported height and weight, fell between the 85th and 95th percentiles for their age and sex. Those with a BMI at or above the 95th percentile were considered obese. Children living in small rural areas were also more likely to live with a smoker than their urban counterparts (35.0 percent versus 24.4 percent).

1 U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey, Table C17001, accessed through American Factfinder.

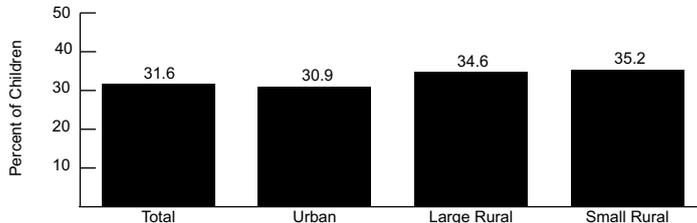
2 Cherry DC, Huggins B, Gilmore K. Children's health in the rural environment. *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 54 (2007):121-133.

3 Johnston LD, O'Malley PM, Bachman JG, Schulenberg JE. (2009) *Monitoring the Future: National Survey Results on Drug Use, 1975-2008*. (NIH Publication No. 09-7402.) Bethesda, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.

4 Probst JC, Laditka SH, Wang J-Y, Johnson AO. Effects of residence and race on burden of travel for care: cross sectional analysis of the 2001 US National Household Travel Survey. *BMC Health Serv Res* 2007 Mar 9;7-40.

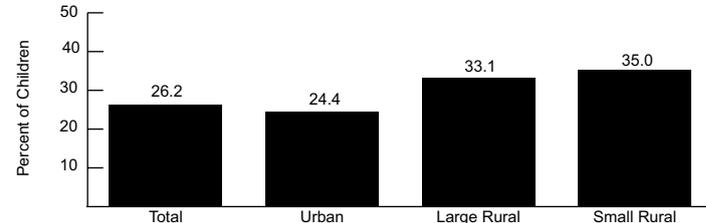
Overweight and Obesity among Children Aged 10-17, by Location, 2007

Source (I.5): 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



Children Under Age 18 Who Live in Households with a Smoker, by Location, 2007

Source (I.5): 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



SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

In 2007, there were nearly 3.6 million high school status dropouts¹ in the United States, representing a status dropout rate of 8.7 percent. This rate has declined steadily over the past several decades, with a decrease of 38 percent since 1980 (when the rate was 14.1 percent).

Historically, Hispanic students have had the highest dropout rates among youth of all racial/ethnic groups. In 2007, 21.4 percent of Hispanics 16–24 years of age were status dropouts, compared to 8.4 percent of non-Hispanic

Blacks and 5.3 percent of non-Hispanic Whites. Nativity is one factor in this disparity: the status dropout rate among Hispanics born in the United States (11.2 percent) was much lower than the overall rate for this ethnic group (data not shown).

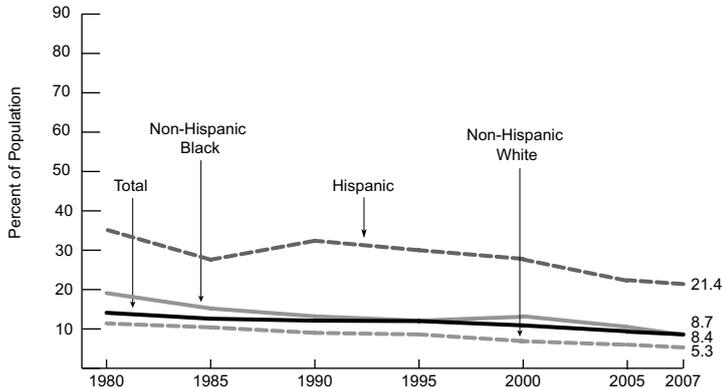
The 2007 National Survey of Children's Health measured youth engagement in school. For this measure, parents were asked how often the child cared about doing well in school and how often the child completed all required homework assignments. Children were consid-

ered engaged in school if the parent answered "usually" or "always" to both of these questions. Overall, 75.4 percent of children were considered engaged in school. This varied by race/ethnicity, with non-Hispanic White children having the highest level of school engagement (82.6 percent), and non-Hispanic Black children having the lowest level of engagement (71.6 percent).

1 Status dropout refers to those 16–24 years of age who are not enrolled in school and have not earned high school credentials (diploma or equivalent).

School Status Dropout* Rates Among Persons Aged 16-24 Years, by Race/Ethnicity, 1980-2007

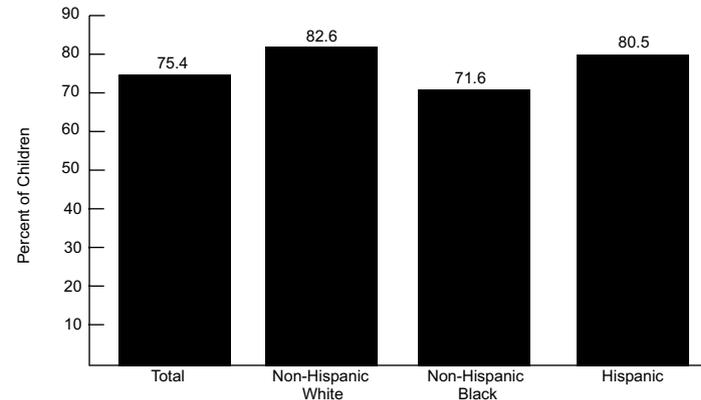
Source (I.6): U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics



***Status dropout* refers to those 16-24 years of age who are not enrolled in school and have not earned high school credentials (diploma or equivalent).*

Children Aged 6-17 Years Engaged in School,* by Race/Ethnicity, 2007

Source (I.7): 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



**Children are considered engaged in school if they "usually" or "always" care about doing well in school and do all required homework, according to parent report.*

PERCEIVED NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY

An unsafe neighborhood can have negative effects on a child's health, from limiting physical activity to risking injury. In 2007, the parents of 2.6 percent of children reported that their child was never safe in their neighborhood or community, while an additional 11.4 percent of children had parents who felt that they were only sometimes safe. The parents of the remaining 86.1 percent of children felt that their child was usually or always safe in their neighborhood.

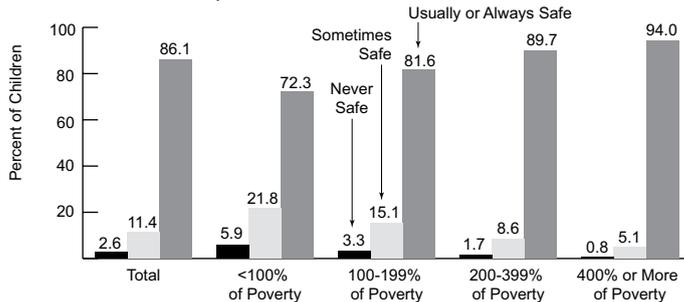
Perceived neighborhood safety varies by a number of factors. Children living in households with incomes of 400 percent or more of the Federal poverty level (\$20,650 for a family of four in 2007) were significantly more likely than children living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level to have parents report that their child was usually or always safe in their neighborhood (94.0 versus 72.3 percent).

Neighborhood safety, as reported by parents, varies by the geographic setting of the neighborhood or community. In 2007, the parents of 84.1 percent of children who lived in urban

areas reported that their child was usually or always safe, compared to 93.0 of children who lived in suburban areas. Perceived safety also varies by race/ethnicity and family structure: the parents of non-Hispanic White children were most likely to report that they are usually or always safe, while non-Hispanic Black children were least likely, and children living in households with two biological or adoptive parents were most likely to be usually or always safe while children living in single-mother households were least likely to be usually or always safe (data not shown).

Neighborhood Safety* Among Children Under 18 Years, by Poverty Level,** 2007

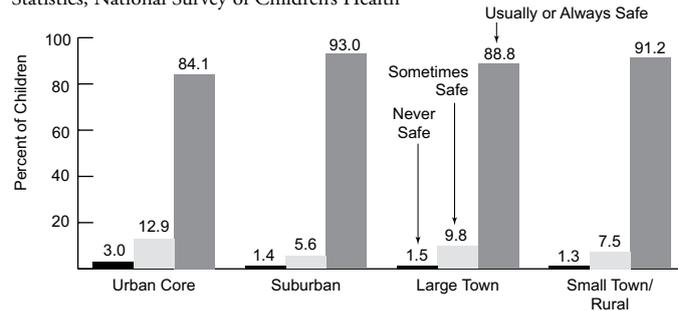
Source (1.7): Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Survey of Children's Health



*As determined by asking parents, "How often do you feel [child] is safe in your community or neighborhood?" **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services establishes poverty guidelines for determining financial eligibility for Federal programs; the poverty level for a family of four was \$20,650 in 2007.

Neighborhood Safety* Among Children Under 18 Years, by Rural-Urban Area,** 2007

Source (1.7): 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



*As determined by asking parents, "How often do you feel [child] is safe in your community or neighborhood?" **Rural-Urban areas are determined using the Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) system, which uses a combination of Census Bureau place definitions and work commuting information to determine the rural-urban status of an area.

CHILD-FAMILY CONNECTEDNESS

There are a number of family activities that can promote family bonding and help children lay the groundwork for future health and well-being. Sharing meals is a bonding activity that can also encourage good nutritional habits. In 2007, 45.8 percent of children under 18 years of age ate a meal every day with all other members of their household. The rate of sharing meals decreased with age, from 57.7 percent of children from birth through age 5 to 32.9 percent of children 12–17 years of age. Sharing a meal every day was more common among

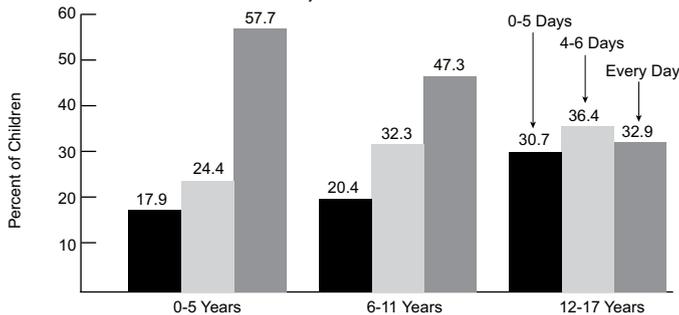
Hispanic children (53.8 percent) than non-Hispanic White and non-Hispanic Black children (42.0 and 42.6 percent, respectively). Sharing of meals also varied by family income, with 58.3 percent of children living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level (\$20,650 for a family of four in 2007) sharing meals daily, while the same was true for only 38.8 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent or more of the Federal poverty level (data not shown).

In 2007, 47.8 percent of children from birth to age five were read to every day by family members. This varied by household income,

with 36.1 percent of children living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level (\$20,650 for a family of four in 2007) being read to every day, compared to 60.0 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent or more of the Federal poverty level. Fewer than 10 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent or more of the Federal poverty level were read to on two or fewer days in the past week, compared to nearly one-third of children with household incomes below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Frequency of Family Meals* Among Children, by Age, 2007

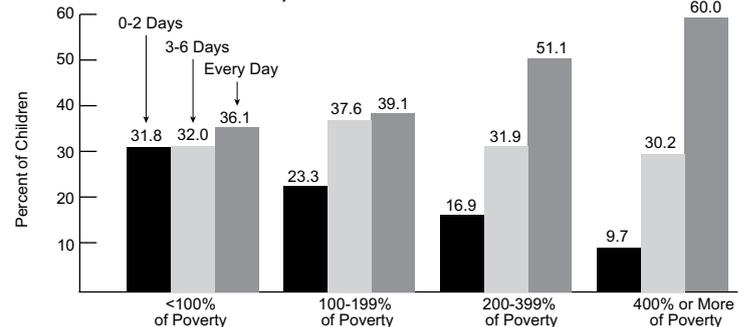
Source (1.7): Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Survey of Children's Health



*Number of days that the child ate a meal with all other family members living in the household.

Frequency of Being Read to by a Family Member* Among Children Aged 0–5 Years, by Poverty Level,** 2007

Source (1.7): 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



*Number of days that the child was read aloud to during the past week. **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services establishes poverty guidelines for determining financial eligibility for Federal programs; the poverty level for a family of four was \$20,650 in 2007.

MATERNAL AGE

According to preliminary data, the general fertility rate fell slightly to 68.7 live births per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years in 2008 (from a rate of 69.5 in 2007). Birth rates for nearly every age and racial/ethnic group also declined. The rate for teenagers aged 15–19 years decreased to 41.5 per 1,000 females in this age group, which continues the general decline in teenage birthrates since 1991, when the rate was 61.8 births per 1,000. Although the birth rate for women aged 25–29 years fell in 2008, this group still experienced the highest birth rate of all age groups (115.1 births per 1,000). This was followed by women aged 20–24 years (103.1 births per 1,000). Birth rates for women aged 30–34 (99.3 births per 1,000) and 35–39 years

(46.9 births per 1,000) also declined slightly; the previous year saw the highest reported rates in over four decades for these age groups. Birth rates for women aged 40–44 years (9.9 births per 1,000) and 45–49 years (0.7 births per 1,000) increased slightly over the previous year.

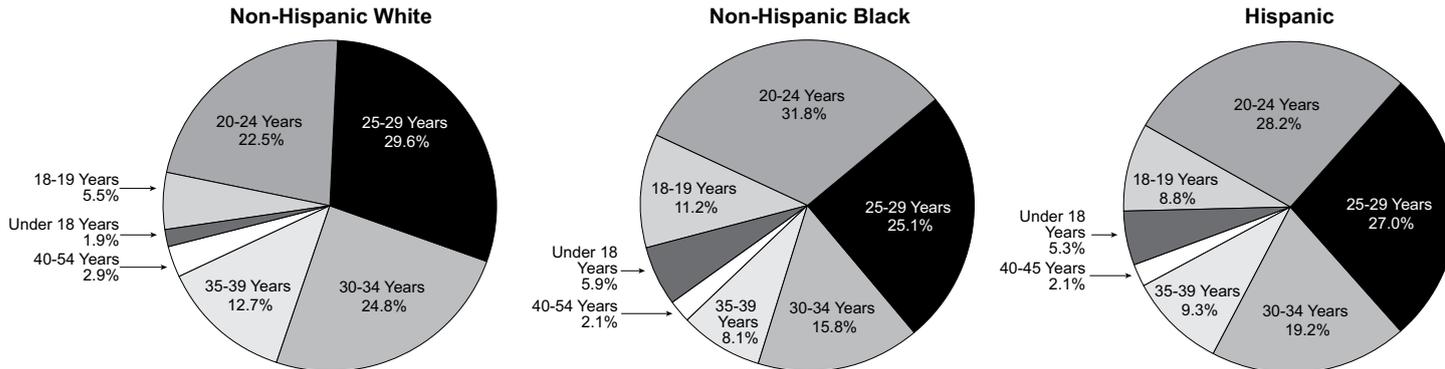
In 2008, 3.3 percent of births were to females under 18 years of age, and another 7.0 percent were to teens aged 18–19 years. Just under one-quarter (24.8 percent) of births occurred among young adults aged 20–24 years, while 28.2 percent were to women aged 25–29 years and 22.5 percent were to women aged 30–34 years. Another 11.5 percent of births were to women aged 35–39 years, and the remaining 2.7 percent of births were to women aged 40 and over. 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).

The age distribution of births varies by race/ethnicity. Among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women, 17.1 percent and 14.1 percent of births, respectively, were to teenagers, compared to 7.4 percent of births to non-Hispanic White females. The percentage of births to young adults aged 20–24 years was higher among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women (31.8 percent and 28.2 percent, respectively) than among non-Hispanic White women (22.5 percent). However, births to women aged 35 and older represented a higher proportion of births among non-Hispanic White women than among non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women.

Distribution of Births, by Race/Ethnicity and Maternal Age, 2008*

Source (1.8): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System



*Preliminary data

WORKING MOTHERS AND CHILD CARE

In 2008, 71.4 percent of women with children under 18 years of age were in the labor force (either employed or looking for work), and 67.5 percent were employed. Employment varied by a number of factors, including the age of the youngest child. Of mothers with children from birth through age 5, 64.0 percent were in the labor force and 59.5 percent were employed. Of women whose youngest child was aged 6–17 years, 77.3 percent were in the labor force and 73.8 percent were employed. Employed mothers with children birth to age five were more likely to be employed part time than mothers with older children (27.9 versus 22.2 percent, data not

shown). Employment also varied by marital status: 69.5 percent of married mothers were in the labor force, compared to 76.0 percent of mothers of other marital statuses (data not shown).

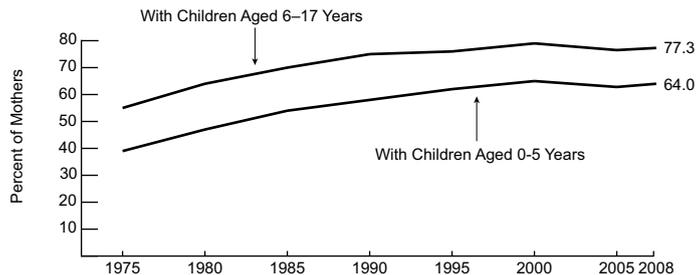
In 2007, 54.2 percent of children from birth through age 5 were in childcare for 10 or more hours per week. Overall, 29.1 percent of children were in the care of a non-relative, while 14.7 percent were cared for by a relative and 10.4 percent received both relative and non-relative care. Childcare arrangements varied by household income: 32.4 percent of children living in households with incomes of 400 percent or more of the Federal poverty level (\$20,650 for a family of four in 2007) did not receive 10 or more hours of childcare per week while the same was true of

57.8 percent of children with household incomes under 100 percent of the Federal poverty level.

Difficulty with childcare can affect the ability of parents to maintain steady employment. In 2007, approximately 37 percent of parents who needed child care in the past month reported that they had to change their arrangements because of circumstances beyond their control (such as a sick child or change in their provider's schedule). Among all parents with children from birth through age five, 12.4 percent reported that childcare issues caused them to quit their job, pass a job offer, or greatly change their job because of problems with childcare (data not shown).

Mothers in the Labor Force,* by Age of Child,** 1975-2008

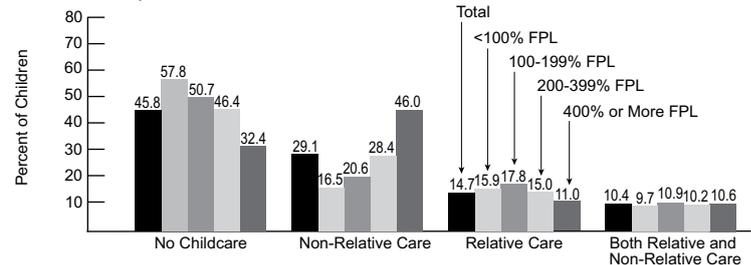
Source (1.9): U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics



*The labor force comprises people who are employed and people who are actively seeking employment. **Women with two or more children are categorized by the age of their youngest child.

Childcare Arrangements* for Children Aged 0-5 Years, by Poverty Level,** 2007

Source (1.7): 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



*10 or more hours of childcare per week. **The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services establishes poverty guidelines for determining financial eligibility for Federal programs; the poverty level for a family of four was \$20,650 in 2007.