

The Child's Family

The family environment provides the backdrop and context for children's health and development. Family activities and experiences contribute to children's health and wellness, and parents' problems and stresses reflect the family's well-being. This section examines a range of family activities, including reading, singing, and telling stories to young children, sharing meals, and attending religious services, as well as risk factors for families, including smoking in the household, parental stress, and problems with child care.

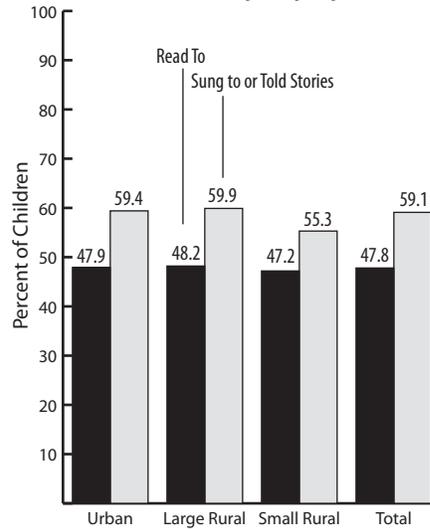


Reading, Singing, and Telling Stories

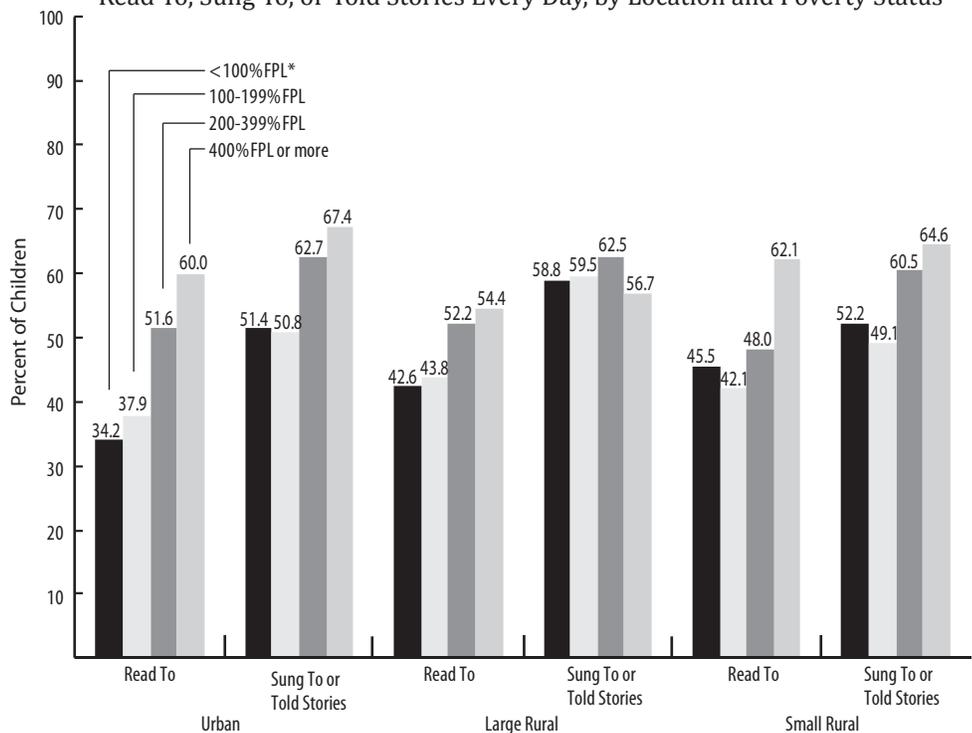
Reading, telling stories, and singing to young children regularly can lay the foundation for future literacy and educational success. Parents of children aged 0-5 were asked how often their children were read to during the past week. A total of 47.8 percent of children in this age group were read to (by a parent or other family member) every day. Parents were also asked how often they or other family members sang or told stories to their children in the past week. Overall, 59.1 percent of children aged 0-5 years were sung to or told stories every day. Neither of these percentages varied greatly across locations.

Children in low-income households were less likely to have a family member read to them every day. This discrepancy is greatest in urban areas, where the parents of 34.2 percent of children with household incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL) read to them every day, compared to 60.0 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent of FPL or more. The percentage of children whose parents sing or tell stories to them every day also varies by income, but not as widely. In urban areas, for example, 51.4 percent of children with household incomes below the FPL were sung to or told

Percent of Children Aged 0-5 who were Read To, Sung To, or Told Stories Every Day, by Location



Percent of Children Aged 0-5 who were Read To, Sung To, or Told Stories Every Day, by Location and Poverty Status



*Federal poverty level was \$20,650 for a family of four in 2007.

stories every day, compared to 67.4 percent of those with incomes of 400 percent of FPL or more.

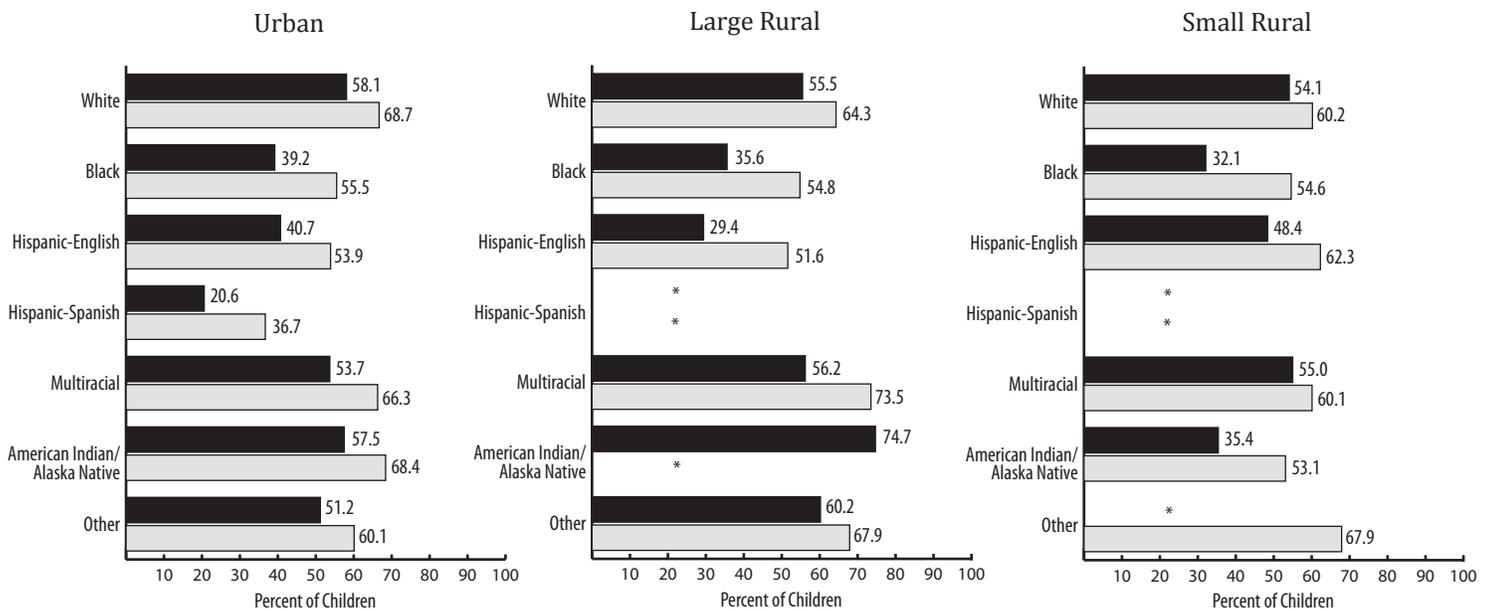
While the percentage of children who were read to, sung to, or told stories by family members every day

varies across racial and ethnic groups, within each group these proportions generally do not vary greatly by location. One exception is American Indian/Alaska Natives, who were considerably less likely to be read to if they lived in small rural areas.



Percent of Urban Children Aged 0-5 who were Read To, Sung To, or Told Stories Every Day, by Location and Race/Ethnicity/Language

Read To Sung To or Told Stories



*Estimate suppressed as it does not meet the standard for reliability or precision.



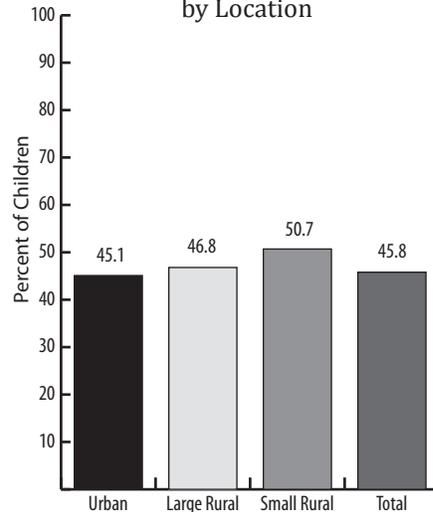
Sharing Meals

Eating together as a family can promote family bonding and good nutrition and eating habits. Overall, the parents of 45.8 percent of children reported that their families had eaten at least one meal together every day during the previous week. More than 31 percent of children were reported to eat meals with their families on 4-6 days per week, while 19.1 percent ate meals together on only 1-3 days per week and 4.1 percent of children did not eat at least one meal with their families during the previous week. On average, children and their families ate meals together on 5.4 days during the previous week. The percentage of children who shared a meal with their families every day in the past week was highest in small rural areas, where 50.7 percent of children did so.

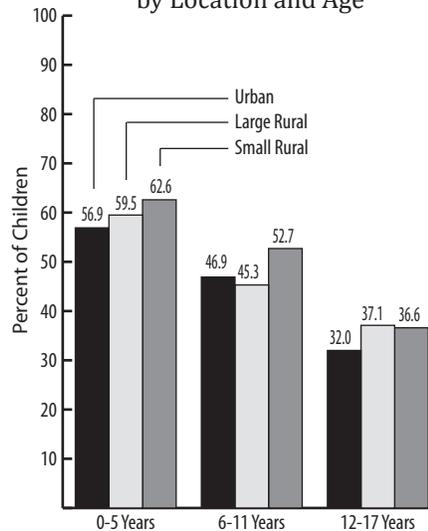
In all locations, younger children were more likely than older children and adolescents to share meals with their families. In small rural areas, for example, 62.6 percent of children aged 0-5 shared meals with their families every day, compared to 36.6 percent of adolescents aged 12-17.

Children with lower household incomes were also more likely to share meals with their families, regardless

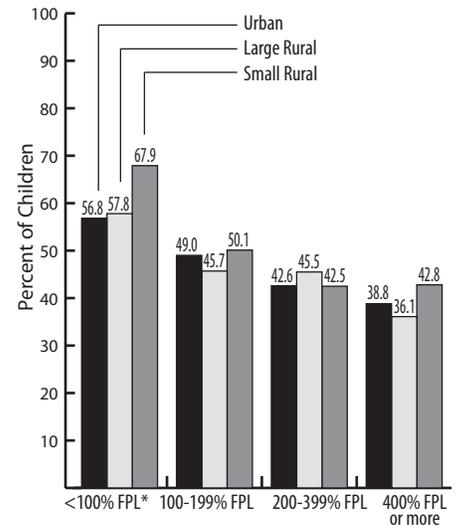
Percent of Children who Shared a Meal with their Families Every Day in the Past Week, by Location



Percent of Children who Shared a Meal with their Families Every Day in the Past Week, by Location and Age



Percent of Children who Shared a Meal with their Families Every Day in the Past Week, by Location and Poverty Status



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of location. In urban areas, for example, 56.8 percent of children with household incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL) shared a meal

with their families every day, compared to 38.8 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent of FPL or more.



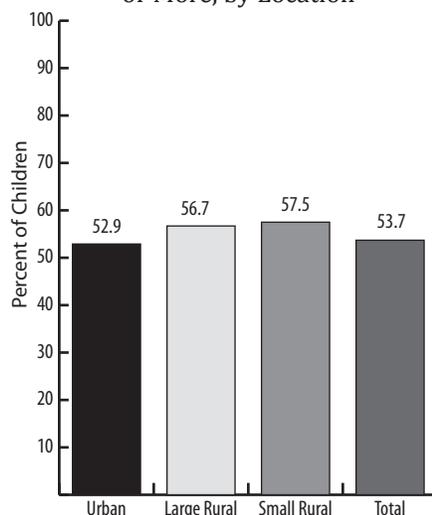
Religious Services

Attendance at religious services is a family activity that can involve children in the broader community. Overall, the parents of 53.7 percent of children reported that their children attended religious services at least once a week, while 20.7 percent did not attend any religious services. The percentage of children who attend services once a week or more was higher in rural areas (56.7 percent in large rural areas and 57.5 percent in small) than in urban areas (52.9 percent).

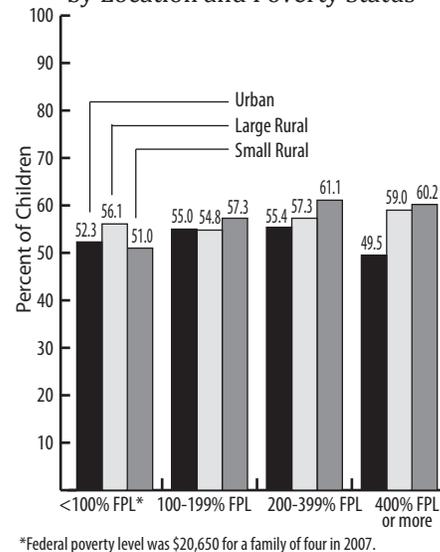
In urban areas, children in lower-income households were more likely to attend religious services at least weekly than were those with higher family incomes. In small rural areas, the reverse was true: the highest percentage of children attending religious services at least weekly (61.1 percent) was found among children with family incomes between 200 and 399 percent of the Federal poverty level (FPL), and the lowest was found among children with household incomes below the FPL.

Within each racial and ethnic group, the percentage of children attending religious services weekly was highest in either small or large rural areas. The highest percentages were found among Black children in large rural areas (69.0 percent),

Percent of Children who Attend Religious Services Once a Week or More, by Location

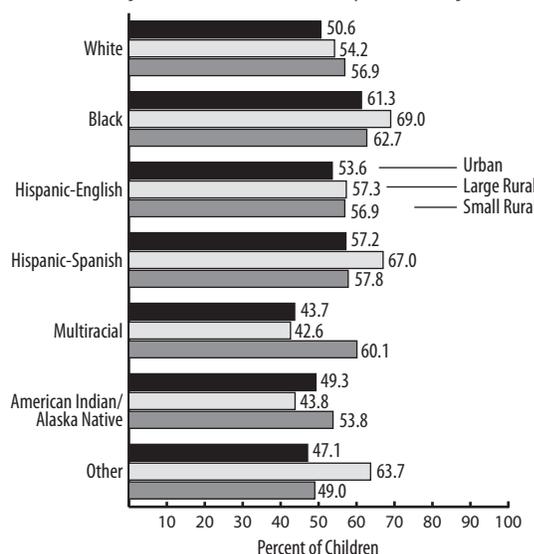


Percent of Children who Attend Religious Services Once a Week or More, by Location and Poverty Status



*Federal poverty level was \$20,650 for a family of four in 2007.

Percent of Children who Attend Religious Services Once a Week or More, by Location and Race/Ethnicity



Spanish-speaking Hispanic children in large rural areas (67.0 percent) and children whose race was identified

as "other" in large rural areas (63.7 percent).

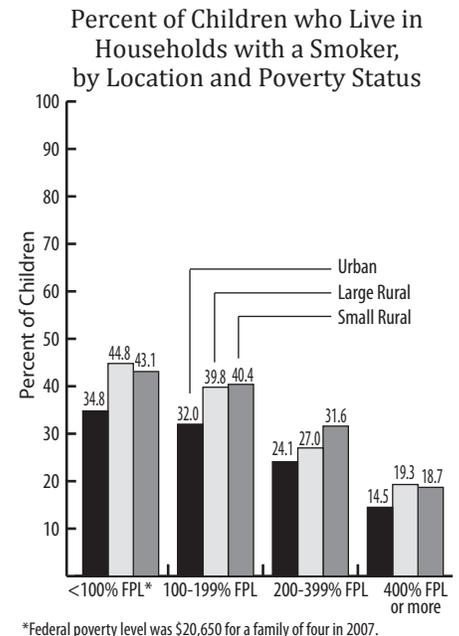
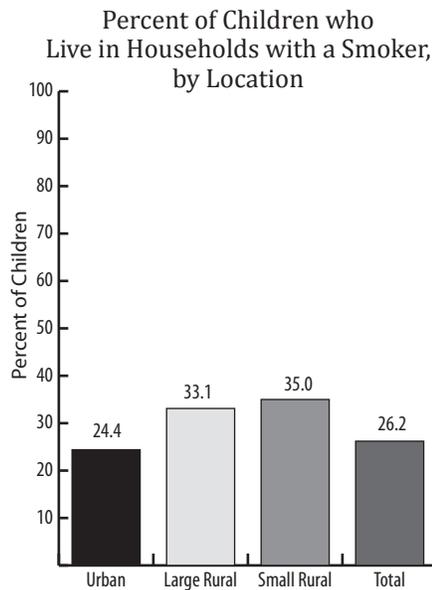


Smoking in the Household

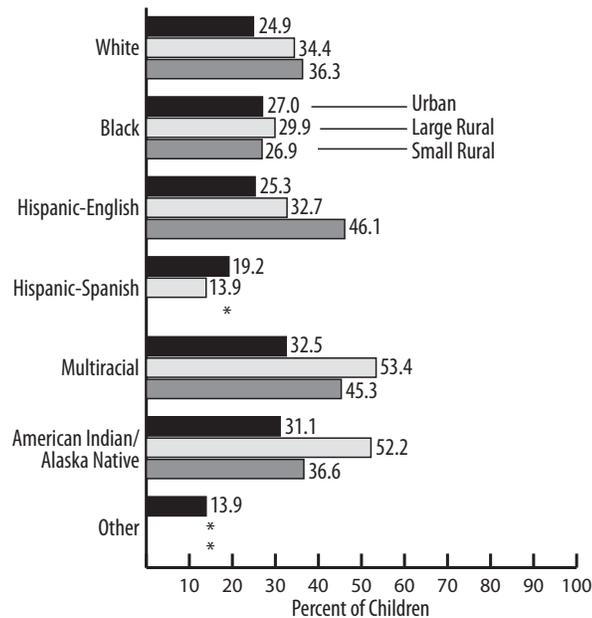
Exposure to environmental smoke— from cigarettes, cigars, or pipes— can be a serious health hazard for children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, exposure to secondhand smoke is associated with higher rates of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), more frequent and severe asthma, and acute respiratory infections in young children.¹⁴ Parents were asked whether anyone in the household used cigarettes, cigars, or pipe tobacco. Overall, 26.2 percent of children were reported to live in households where someone smokes, 7.8 percent of whom were exposed to secondhand smoke inside their homes (data not shown).

The percentage of children who live in a household with a smoker is considerably higher in rural areas. One-third (33.1 percent) of children in large rural areas and 35.0 percent of those in small rural areas lived with a smoker, compared to 24.4 percent of urban children.

In all locations, children with higher household incomes were less likely to live with a smoker. For example, among children in large rural areas, 44.8 percent of those with household incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL) lived with a smoker, compared to 19.3 percent of



Percent of Children who Live in Households with a Smoker, by Location and Race/Ethnicity/Language



those with household incomes of 400 percent of the FPL or more.

Among Black children, the percentage who lived with a smoker did not vary greatly by location. Variation was evident among White children, of whom 24.9 percent in urban areas lived with a smoker, compared to 36.3

percent in small rural areas. There was also great variation in the percent of American Indian/Alaska Native children who lived with a smoker, ranging from 31.1 percent in urban areas to 52.2 percent in large rural communities.



Parenting Stress

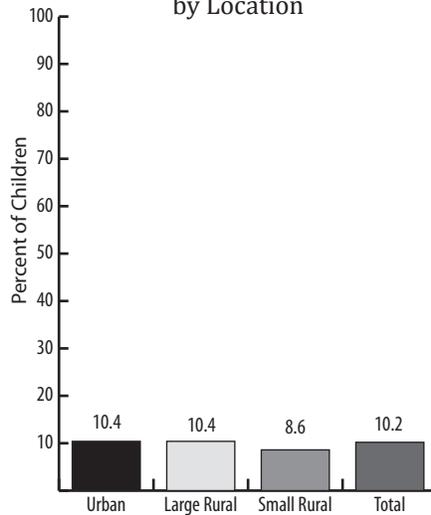
The demands of parenting can cause considerable stress for families. Parents were asked how often during the past month they had felt that their child was much harder to care for than others of his or her age; how often the child did things that really bothered them a lot; and how often they had felt angry with the child. Parents were considered to often feel stressed if they answered “usually” or “always” to at least one of these measures: Overall, parents of 10.2 percent of children reported often feeling stressed.†

Parents in small rural areas were less likely to report often feeling stress than those in urban areas. The parents of 8.6 percent of children in small rural areas reported often feeling stress, compared to 10.4 percent of those in urban or large rural areas.

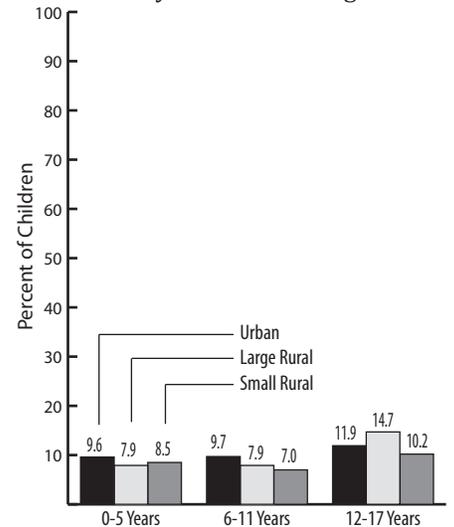
In all locations, parents of adolescents (aged 12-17) were more likely to report often feeling stressed than parents of younger children. The parents of 10.2 percent (in small rural areas) to 14.7 percent (in large rural areas) of adolescents reported often feeling stressed, compared to the parents of less than 10 percent of children in the younger age groups.

Parents of children in low-income families reported higher levels of stress as well. In all locations, the greatest percentage of children

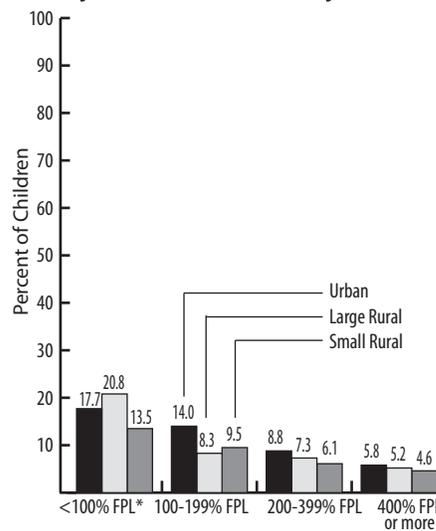
Percent of Children whose Parents Usually or Always Felt Parenting Stress, by Location



Percent of Children whose Parents Usually or Always Felt Parenting Stress, by Location and Age



Percent of Children whose Parents Usually or Always Felt Parenting Stress, by Location and Poverty Status



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whose parents reported often feeling stress was found among children with household incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL). These proportions ranged from 13.5 percent of poor children in small rural areas to 20.8 percent of those in large rural

areas. The parents of a relatively small percentage of children with household incomes of 400 percent of the FPL or more report often feeling stress, and this percentage did not vary significantly by location.

†Due to changes in response options to the survey questions, 2007 estimates cannot be directly compared with those from 2003.



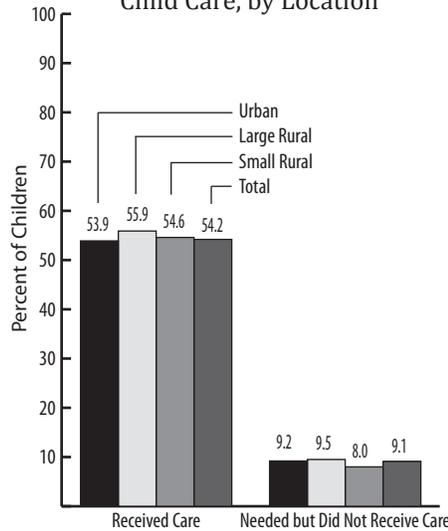
Child Care

The availability of child care, and the ability to make backup child care arrangements in emergencies, can also put stress on parents and the family. Overall, parents of 54.2 percent of children aged 0-5 reported that their child received some form of non-parental care; however, parents of an additional 9.1 percent of children reported needing but not receiving child care during the past month. These percentages did not vary greatly by location.

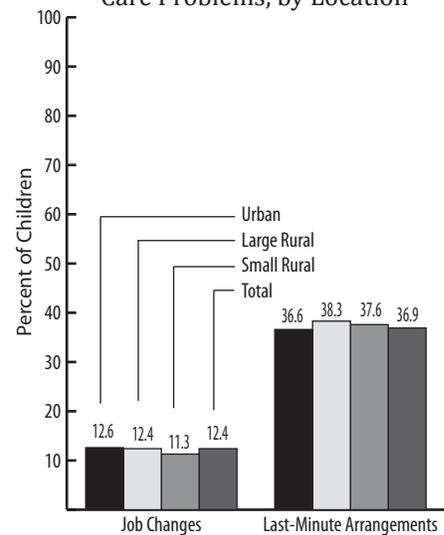
Parents of children aged 0-5 were asked whether they had had to make different child care arrangements in the past month due to circumstances beyond their control and whether anyone in the family had had to quit a job, not take a job, or greatly change their job because of child care problems within the past year. Among parents with children receiving care, 30.7 percent reported one or both of these issues. The prevalence of these problems did not vary greatly by location; the parents of between 11.3 and 12.6 percent of children reported problems that affected their job, while the parents of 36.6 to 38.3 percent reported having to make last-minute arrangements at least once in the past year.

In urban and small rural areas, the percent of children whose parents reported at least one child care

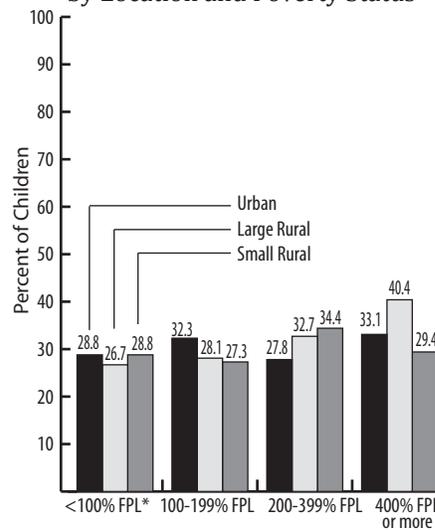
Percent of Children Aged 0-5 who Needed Non-Parental Child Care, by Location



Percent of Children Aged 0-5 whose Families Experienced Child Care Problems, by Location



Percent of Children Aged 0-5 whose Families Experienced One or More Child Care Problems, by Location and Poverty Status



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problem in the past year did not vary greatly by income. In large rural areas, however, the parents of 40.4 percent of children with household incomes of 400 percent of the Federal

poverty level (FPL) reported child care problems, compared to the parents of 26.7 percent of children with household incomes below the FPL.