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 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 education.

This section also presents the latest estimate of the proportion of U.S. children with special health care needs. Children are considered to have a special health care need if, in addition to a chronic medical, behavioral, or developmental condition that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or longer, they experience either service-related or functional consequences, including prescription medications and/or specialized therapies.

POPULATION OF CHILDREN

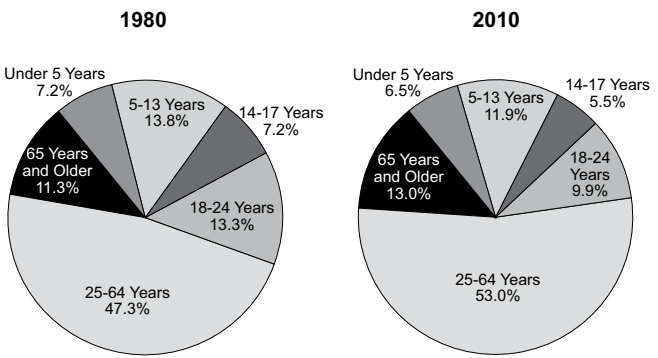
In 2010, there were more than 74 million children under 18 years of age in the United States, representing nearly one-quarter of the population. Young adults aged 18–24 years made up another 9.9 percent of the population, while adults aged 25–64 years composed 53.0 percent of the population, and adults aged 65 years and older composed 13.0 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 24.0 percent in 2010. The representation of young adults (aged 18–24 years) has also fallen, from 13.3 percent to 9.9 percent. During this time period, the percentage of the population that is aged 25–64 years has increased from 47.3 percent to 53.0 percent, and the percentage that is over 65 years has increased from 11.3 percent to 13.0 percent. The median age in the United States has increased from 30.0 years in 1980 to 37.2 years in 2010 (data not shown).

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 more than 23 percent in 2010, while the percentage of children who are non-Hispanic 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 58.3 percent in 2010. After 2000, changes in the ways that racial and ethnic data were collected limit comparison over time for some groups, including Asians and individuals of more than one race.

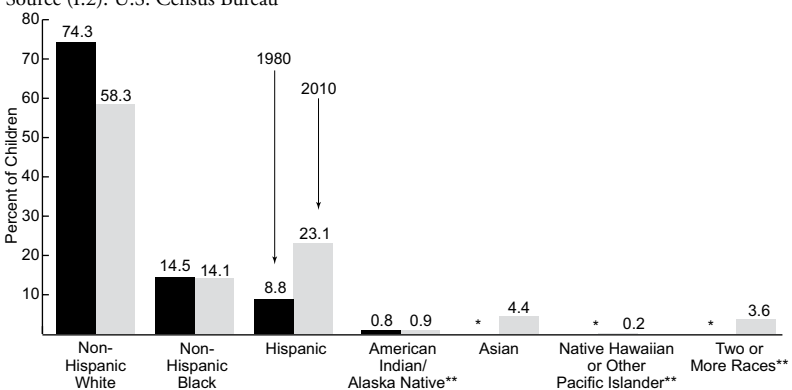
U.S. Population, by Age Group, 1980 and 2010

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



U.S. Population of Children Under Age 18, by Race/Ethnicity, 1980 and 2010

Source (I.2): U.S. Census Bureau



*1980 data not available for this population. **May include Hispanics.

CHILDREN IN POVERTY

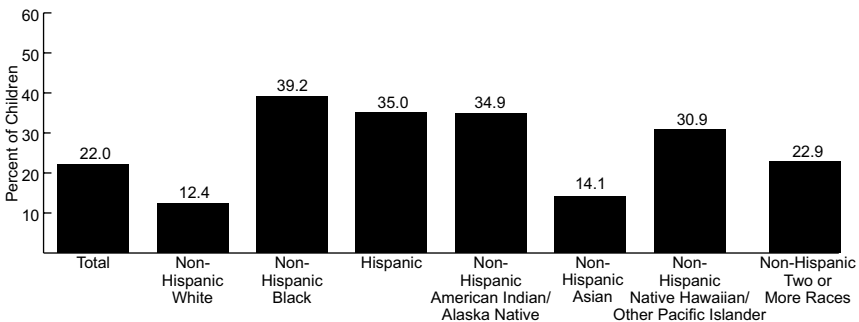
In 2010, more than 16 million children under 18 years of age lived in households with incomes below 100 percent of the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold ($22,314 for a family of four in 2010). This represents 22.0 percent of all children in the United States and reflects an increase since 2009, when 20.7 percent of U.S. children lived in poverty.[1] 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 significant racial/ethnic disparities exist. In 2010, nearly 40 percent of non-Hispanic Black children lived in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold, as did approximately 35 percent of non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native and Hispanic children, compared to 12.4 percent of non-Hispanic White children.

Single-parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty. In 2010, 46.9 percent of children living in a female-headed household experienced poverty, as did 28.1 percent of children living in a male-headed household. Only 11.6 percent of children living in married-couple families lived in poverty (data not shown). The proportion of children living in poverty varies by age and family type. In 2010, nearly 60 percent of children under 5 years of age living in female-headed households lived in poverty (with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold), while the same was true of 41.4 percent of children aged 6–17 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 2010, the program served free lunch to 17.5 million children and reduced-price lunch to another 3.0 million children. This represents 65.3 percent of all lunches served in participating schools.[2]

Children Under Age 18 Living in Households with Incomes Below 100 Percent of the Poverty Threshold,* by Race/Ethnicity, 2010

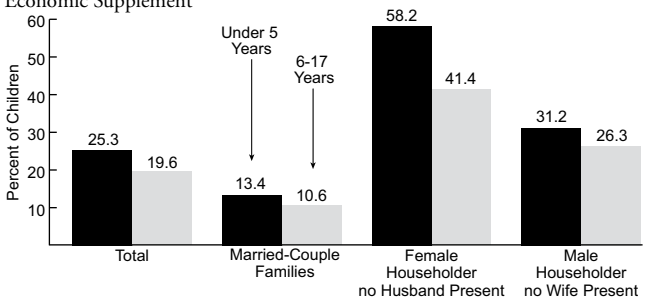
Source (I.3): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



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 $22,314 in 2010.

Children Under Age 18 Living in Families* with Incomes Below 100 Percent of the Poverty Threshold, by Age and Family Type, 2010**

Source (I.3): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



*Includes only children who are related to the head of household by birth, marriage, or adoption.
**The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was $22,314 in 2010.*

CHILDREN OF FOREIGN-BORN PARENTS

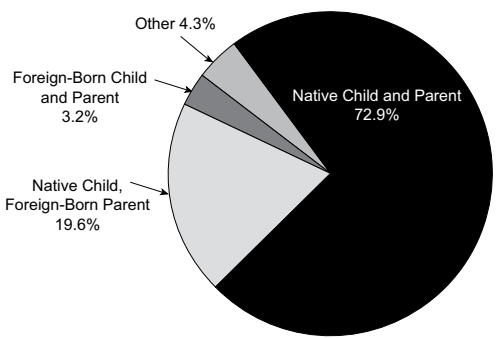
The foreign-born population in the United States has increased substantially since the 1970s, largely due to immigration from Asia and Latin America. In 2010, 22.8 percent of children in the United States had at least one foreign-born parent. Of all children, 19.6 percent were U.S.-born with a foreign-born parent or parents, and 3.2 percent were themselves foreign-born, with or without a foreign-born parent. Most children (72.9 percent) were native-born with native-born parents.

Children's poverty status varies with their nativity. In 2010, foreign-born children with foreign-born parents were most likely to live in poverty, with 32.8 percent living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the U.S. Census Bureau's poverty threshold ($22,314 for a family of four in 2010). Another 30.1 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 18.1 percent living in households with incomes below 100 percent of the poverty threshold, and another 19.4 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 2010 (92.4 percent), while foreign-born children with foreign-born parents were least likely (71.3 percent). Almost 87 percent of native-born children with foreign-born parents had health insurance in 2010 (data not shown).

Children Under Age 18, by Nativity of Child and Parent(s),* 2010

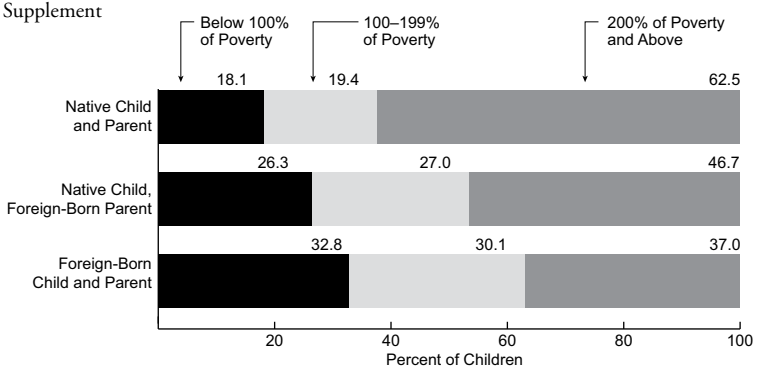
Source (I.4): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



"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; children could be living with one or both parents. "Other" includes children with parents whose native status is unknown and foreign-born children with native parents.

Children Under Age 18, by Nativity of Child and Parent(s)* and Poverty, 2010**

Source (I.4): U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement



*"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. **The U.S. Census Bureau poverty threshold for a family of four was $22,314 in 2010.*

RURAL AND URBAN CHILDREN

Urban and rural children differ in their demographic characteristics, which, in combination with geographic factors, can affect their health and access to health care. For instance, children living in rural areas are more vulnerable to death from injuries,[3] are more likely to use tobacco and other substances,[4,5] and are more likely to be obese than their urban counterparts.[6] Rural families may also not have the same access to health care because health services are not always located nearby.[7] Understanding these potential risks can provide program planners and policymakers information that can be used to design and target services.

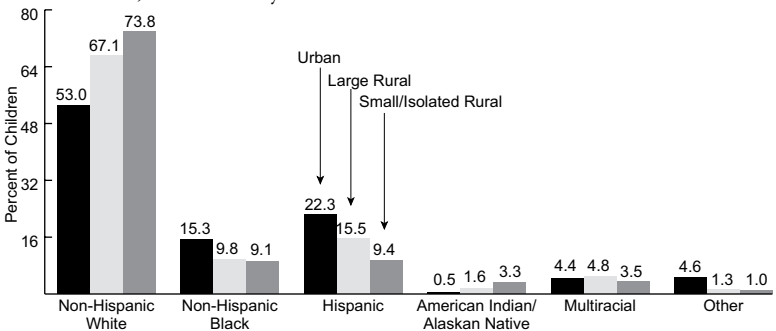
In 2007, 81.7 percent of children lived in urban areas, while about 9 percent lived in either large or small/isolated rural areas, respectively (data not shown). These areas were classified based on ZIP code, the size of the city or town, and the commuting pattern in the area. Urban areas include metropolitan areas and surrounding towns, large rural areas include towns with populations of 10,000 to 49,999 persons and their surrounding areas, and small/isolated rural areas include towns with populations of 2,500 to 9,999 persons and their surrounding areas.

The demographic distribution of the population of children in small and large rural areas differs from that of urban children in terms of both race/ethnicity and family income. Among urban children, 53.0 percent were White, compared to 67.1 percent of children in large rural areas and 73.8 percent of those in small rural areas. Children living in urban areas were more likely to be Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic than those living in both small and large rural areas. American Indian/Alaska Native children were most likely to reside in small rural areas, where they represent 3.3 percent of the population.

Children in rural areas were more likely than urban children to be living in low-income families. Nearly one-quarter of children in both small and large rural areas had household incomes below the Federal poverty level (FPL), compared to 17.4 percent of urban children. In contrast, nearly one-third of urban children had household incomes of 400 percent of the FPL or more, compared to 17.3 percent of children in large rural areas and 14.1 percent of those in small rural areas.

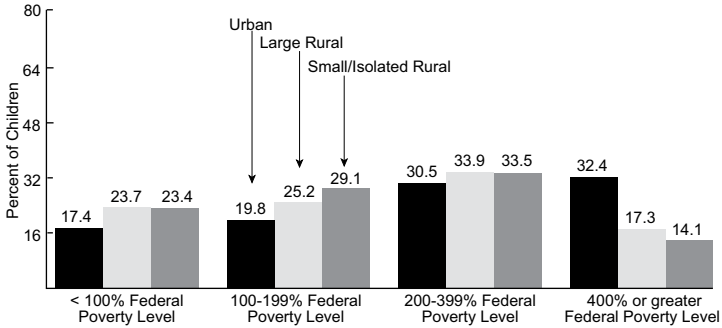
Race/Ethnicity Among Children, by Location, 2007

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



Poverty Among Children, 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



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

EDUCATION

In 2009, nearly 90 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in high school had received a high school diploma or alternative credential in the United States. Status completion rates[8] were highest among non-Hispanic Asians and Other Pacific Islanders (95.9 percent) and non-Hispanic Whites (93.8 percent). These rates were lower in other racial/ethnic groups, including non-Hispanic persons of two or more races (89.2 percent), non-Hispanic Blacks (87.1 percent), non-Hispanic American Indians/Alaska Natives (82.4 percent), and Hispanics (76.8 percent).

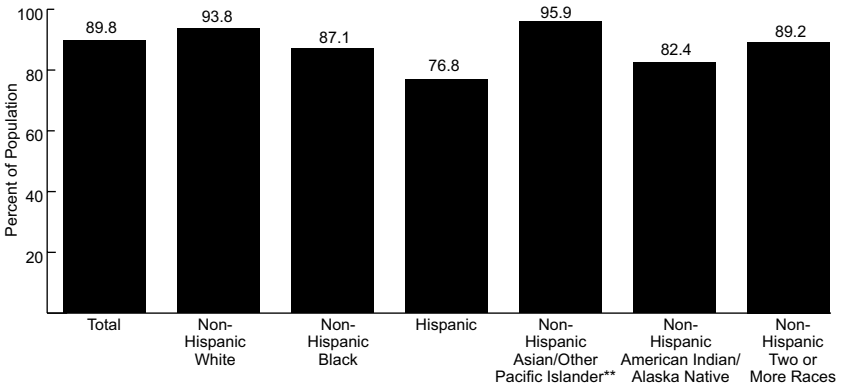
Differences are also observed between males and females within racial/ethnic groups. Overall, females had a higher status completion rate in 2009 (91.2 percent) than their male counterparts (88.3 percent). Among non-Hispanic Whites and Blacks, females aged 18-24 who were not enrolled in high school had higher status completion rates than males (data not shown).

The National Assessment Governing Board sets three achievement levels – Basic, Proficient, and Advanced – for children based on what students should know and be able to do at each grade assessed.[9] In 2011, 82.5 percent of 4th graders and 73.4 percent of 8th graders, respectively, were at or above basic proficiency in mathematics, while 67.5 percent of 4th graders and 76.0 percent of either grade students had achieved at or above basic proficiency in reading.

Among eighth-graders, there was no significant difference in the proportion of students achieving at least basic proficiency in mathematics by sex; however, a slightly larger proportion of males than females were ranked as proficient or advanced in this subject. Larger differences were evident in reading: a significantly higher proportion of females were ranked as proficient and advanced than males (data not shown).

School Status Completion* Rates Among Persons Aged 18–24 Years Not Currently Enrolled in High School, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009

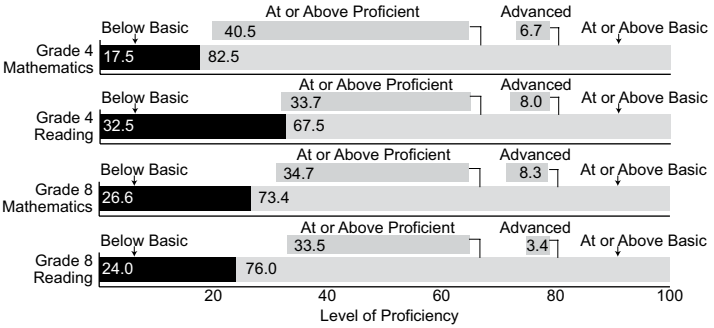
Source (I.6): US Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey



*Status completion rates include individuals who are not enrolled in high school and who have earned a high school diploma or an alternative credential, including a GED certificate.
**Separate estimates were not available for non-Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders.

Proficiency* in Mathematics and Reading among Students, by Grade Level, 2011

Source (I.7): U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress



*Performance standards are set by the National Assessment Governing Board. Basic, Proficient, and Advanced Levels each measure what students should know and be able to do at each grade assessed. Basic denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills, Proficient reflects solid academic performance, and Advanced denotes superior performance. Examples of knowledge and skills demonstrated by students at each achievement level are available in The Nation's Report Cards in Mathematics and Reading are available at: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/subjectareas.asp.

MATERNAL AGE

In 2010, the birth rate among women aged 15–44 years was 64.1 births per 1,000—a decrease of 3 percent from 2009 and the lowest rate reported in over a decade.[10] Although births and birth rates declined for women of all race and ethnic groups, Hispanic women continued to have the highest birth rate, followed by non-Hispanic Black women (80.2 and 66.6 births per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years, respectively). American Indian/Alaska Native women had the lowest birth rate (48.6 per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years). Between 2009 and 2010, the birth rate also declined in every age group except for 40–44 years, which increased 2 percent to the highest level since 1967 (10.2 births per 1,000 women).[10] The birth rates among teenagers aged 15-19 years and young women aged 20–24 years reached historic lows in 2010 (34.2 and 90.0 births per 1,000 women, respectively).

Overall, birth rates were highest among women aged 25–29 years (108.3 births per 1,000 women), followed by those aged 30–34 years (96.5 births per 1,000 women). However, age patterns vary by race/ethnicity. For Hispanic, non-Hispanic Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native women, birth rates were highest among 20- to 24-year-olds (126.1, 119.4, 91.0 births per 1,000 women, respectively), whereas birth rates were highest among 25- to 29-year-olds for non-Hispanic Whites (105.8 per 1,000) and among 30- to 34-year-olds for Asian/Pacific Islanders (113.6 per 1,000).

Demonstrating the trend toward delayed childbearing, average age at first birth rose 3.8 years between 1970 and 2010 to 25.4 years (data not shown).[10,11] The proportion of first births to women aged 35 and older increased from just 1 percent in 1970 to 8.2 percent in 2010. Meanwhile, the proportion of first births to teenagers (under 20 years) dropped in half between 1970 and 2010, from 35.6 to 18.9 percent.

Live Births per 1,000 Women by Age and Race/Ethnicity,* 2010

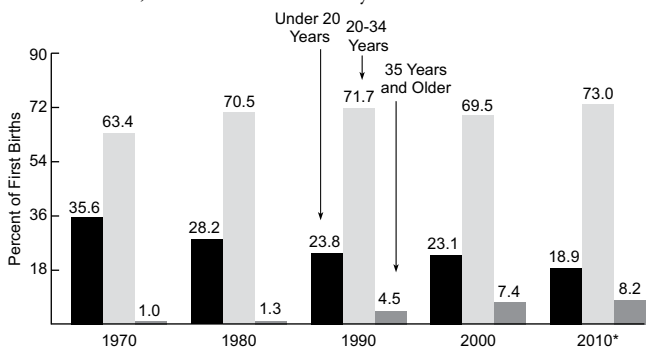
Source (I.8): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System

Age Group	Total	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Hispanic	American Indian/ Alaska Native*	Asian/Pacific Islander*
Total	64.1	58.7	66.6	80.2	48.6	59.2
15-19 Years	34.2	23.5	51.5	55.7	38.7	10.9
20-24 Years	90.0	74.9	119.4	126.1	91.0	42.6
25-29 Years	108.3	105.8	102.5	125.3	74.4	91.5
30-34 Years	96.5	99.9	73.6	96.6	48.4	113.6
35-39 Years	45.9	44.1	36.4	51.7	22.3	62.8
40-44 Years	10.2	9.2	9.2	13.0	5.2	15.1

*Includes Hispanics.

Percent of First Births* by Mother's Age, 1970-2010

Source (I.8, I.9): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System



*Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

WORKING MOTHERS AND CHILD CARE

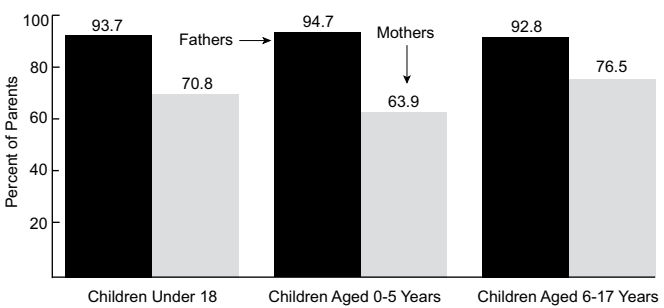
In 2010, 70.8 percent of women with children under 18 years of age were in the labor force (either employed or looking for work), and 64.4 percent were employed. Among men with children, 93.7 percent were in the labor force and 86.6 percent were employed. Employment among women varied by a number of factors. Of mothers with children from birth through age 5, 63.9 percent were in the labor force and 57.0 percent were employed. Of women whose youngest child was aged 6–17 years, 76.5 percent were in the labor force and 70.5 percent were employed. Employed mothers with children birth to age five were more likely to be employed part-time than mothers with older children (28.9 versus 24.6 percent, data not shown).

Although the proportion of mothers with children under the age of 18 who were employed was similar regardless of marital status (64.6 percent of married women versus 64.0 percent of those who were never married, separated, widowed, or divorced), the unemployment rate among those who were married with a spouse present was lower (6.3 percent) than that among mothers of other marital statuses (14.6 percent). Unemployment rates, which count individuals who are not employed but are available for and actively looking for work, increased between 2009 and 2010 for mothers of all marital statuses (data not shown).

In 2010, 48.2 percent of pre-school aged children were cared for by their mother, father, grandparent or some other relative while their mother worked. About one-quarter (23.7 percent) were cared for in a center-based setting, e.g., day care, and 13.5 percent were care for by a non-relative in a home-based setting, such as a family day care provider or nanny. Primary child care arrangements varied by poverty status. Among children with household incomes below the Federal poverty level, 15.4 percent were cared for in a center, compared to 25.6 percent of children with household incomes above poverty (data not shown).

Parents' Labor Force* Participation Rate, by Age of Youngest Child, 2010**

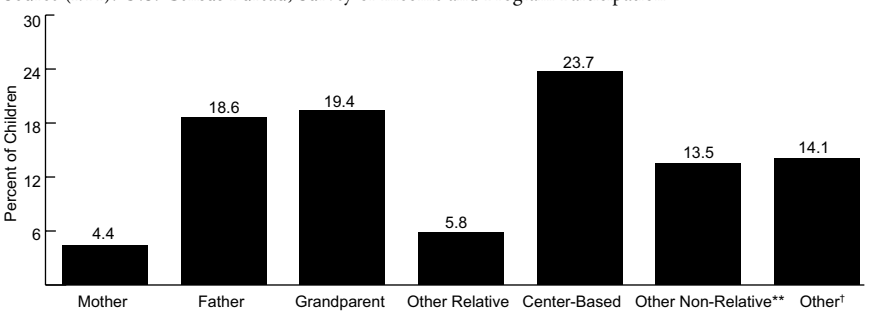
Source (I.10): US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics



*Includes people who are employed and those who are actively seeking work.
**Children include sons, daughters, step-children, and adopted children.

Primary Childcare Arrangements* for Children Aged 0-4 Years with Employed Mothers, 2010

Source (I.11): U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation



*The arrangement used for the greatest number of hours per week while the mother worked. **Includes family day care providers, in-home babysitters, and other nonrelatives providing care in either the child's or provider's home.
†Includes children in kindergarten or grade school, self-care, and with no regular arrangement; does not include school-based activities.

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

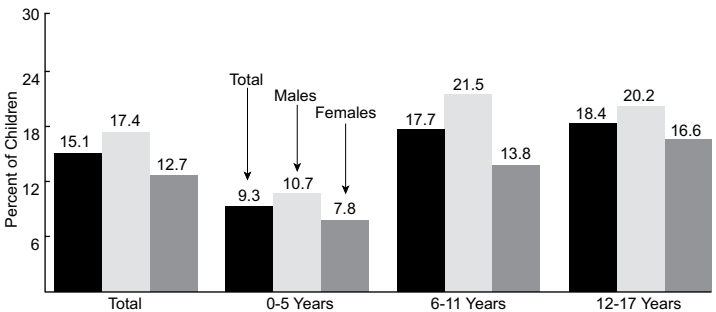
Children are considered to have a special health care need if, in addition to a chronic medical, behavioral, or developmental condition that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or longer, they experience either service-related or functional consequences, including the need for prescription medications and/or specialized therapies.[13] In 2009-10, 15.1 percent of U.S. children under the age of 18 had a special health care need, representing 11.2 million children. Among households with children under the age of 18 years, 18.3 percent have one child with special health care needs and 4.7 percent have two or more children with such needs, representing 8.7 million households with at least one child who has special health care needs (data not shown).

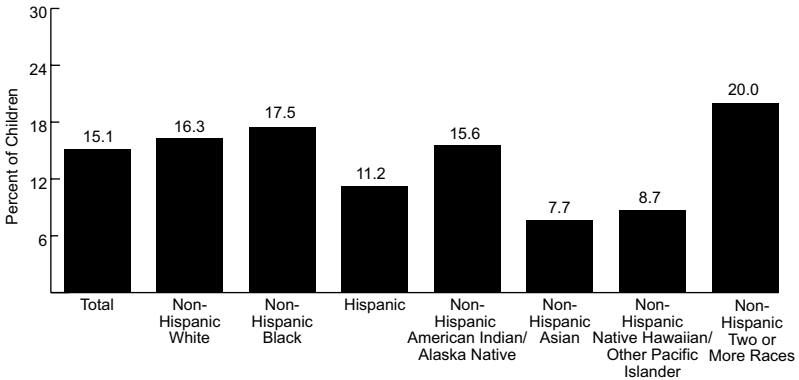
The prevalence of special health care needs in 2009-10 varied by sociodemographic characteristics. Significantly more males than females were reported to have such conditions, 17.4 percent compared to 12.7 percent, as were school-aged children compared to children aged 0-5 years. Approximately 18 percent of children ages 6-11 and 12-17 years were reported to have a special health care need, compared to 9.3 percent of those aged 0-5 years.

The proportion of children with reported special health care needs also varied by race and ethnicity; non-Hispanic children of multiple races had the highest rate (20.0 percent) while non-Hispanic Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander children had the lowest (7.7 and 8.7 percent, respectively). Non-Hispanic Black children had a slightly higher rate (17.5 percent) than non-Hispanic Whites (16.3) while Hispanics had a slightly lower rate (11.2 percent). No significant difference was observed between non-Hispanic Whites and American Indian/Alaska Native children.

Children Under Age 18 with Special Health Care Needs, by Sex and Age, 2009-10

Source (I.12): 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 with Special Health Care Needs



Children Under Age 18 with Special Health Care Needs, by Race/Ethnicity, 2009-10

Source (I.12): 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 with Special Health Care Needs