

## **Our Nation's Children: Trends**

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Committee on Post Office and Civil Service  
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A picture of the nation's children must begin with a chart showing how many children there are, which was 64.1 million in 1990. On page 1, you can see that the total child population fell between 1970 and 1980, but rose between 1980 and 1990. This increase is entirely due to increased numbers of minority children, with the Hispanic population increasing particularly rapidly. However, as a proportion of the entire United States population, the number of children has declined. As of 1990, children under 18 accounted for 26 percent of the population, compared with more than a third in the 1960s.

Although the birth rate and the fertility rate are much lower than they were several decades ago (shown on page 2), the number of births has increased to over 4 million births annually during the past several years. A substantial change has occurred in the composition of these births, such that more than a quarter of all births -- more than one million annually -- now occur to unmarried mothers.

Non-marital births account for a higher proportion of all births to African American mothers than white mothers; however, the proportion of births occurring outside of marriage has increased for all population groups (page 2). In addition, the frequency of non-marital childbearing has increased among older women as well as among teens.

Because of increases in non-marital childbearing, but also because of substantial increases in divorce and separation, more children today live with just one parent (page 4). One in five white children and about two-thirds of black children live with a single parent. Because (re)marriage rates are lower for black mothers, their children tend to spend more years in single parent family situations.

One consequence of the increase in single-parent families has been an increase in the proportion of children who live in poverty (page 5). In 1990, 23 percent of all children under age 6 were in poverty, as were 19 percent of all children ages 6-17, compared with 11 percent of adults aged 18-64 and 12 percent of the elderly. In fact, the incidence of poverty has fallen substantially among the elderly over time (page 6), while among children the poverty rate during the 1980s was higher than it was during most of the 1970s. Hence, poverty today is considerably more common among those just starting life than it is among the elderly, an historically vulnerable group.

Poverty is particularly common among female-headed families (page 7). More than 37 percent of persons in female-headed families lived under the poverty line in 1990, compared with 12 percent among all persons in families.

Poverty is also more common among children of color than among white children, in part because minority and particularly

African American children are more likely to live in female-headed families. However, within single-parent families and also among married couple families, black and Hispanic children are more likely to experience poverty (page 8).

Poverty is strongly associated with parental work effort. Few families without employed members escape poverty, while few families with at least one person employed full-time full-year are in poverty (page 9). Interestingly, despite the greater economic need of single-parent families, increases in labor force participation have been particularly great among married women. Higher proportions of married mothers work part-time or part-year than do single mothers; and married mothers are about as likely to work full-time full-year as single mothers (page 10).

Another reason that poverty is a particular risk among children in single-parent families is that only a minority of single mothers receive child support payments. In fact, only 14 percent of never-married mothers received child support from the child's father in 1989, as did 31 percent of separated mothers, 54 percent of divorced mothers, and 48 percent of (re)married mothers (page 11). Even among mothers who do receive payments, amounts averaged just about \$3,000 annually.

Although there is considerable and justifiable concern about changes in family structure and increases in poverty among American children, it is worth noting that from the point of view of children, some positive changes have also occurred. For one, there are fewer very large families (page 12). This trend tends to counterbalance the trend toward more single-parent families and more working parents, in the sense that family time and economic resources are less often stretched across very large numbers of children.

In addition, today's parents are better-educated (page 13). Parent education is generally linked with more optimal childrearing and child outcomes, so increased education among contemporary parents can be viewed as another piece of good news.

It is also important to acknowledge the diversity among families. Although poverty among families with children has risen, most families are not poor. Even among single-parent families, poverty is not universal. Thus, the cup can be viewed either as half full or half empty. Sometimes it is necessary to note that many families are doing well, that not all families need help, because it means that there is hope and a greater probability that resources exist to assist those who really do need help.

Unfortunately, there is some bad news and the bad news is meaningful. Poor children and children in single-parent families are disadvantaged in a variety of ways. Surveys of a nationally representative sample of children conducted for the National

Commission on Children in 1990 indicate that poor children worry more about a variety of topics. These worries are discussed at some length in "*Speaking of Kids*" released by the National Commission on Children. Several results are highlighted here on page 14. Clearly, poorer children more often worry that they are not safe, even in their own homes. In addition, poor children in two-parent families more often worry that their parents will divorce than children in more financially stable two-parent families.

Moreover, children in single-parent families and step-families seem to have less satisfying lives. For example, children who live with both of their natural or biological parents are far less likely to report that their fathers miss events that the child considers important (page 15). In addition, children who live with both parents almost all feel that both of their parents really care about them, while only 71 percent of the children in step-families feel that their biological father really cares about them, as do just 55 percent of the children in single-parent families (page 16).

Finally, parents in intact families tend to be more involved in their children's lives (page 17). While a majority of parents manage to attend a school meeting regardless of family type, parents in two-parent families are more likely to find time for more intensive activities, such as coaching a team or working with a youth group.

The difficulties experienced by children who live in families other than those headed by both of their biological parents are reflected in their psychological well-being as well (page 18). While children in intact, two-parent families have problems, the incidence of emotional or behavioral problems is considerably higher among children living in other family types.

We speak often of how the experience of childhood varies for children in different economic groups and family types. It is important to acknowledge how much children's experiences vary by age as well. And it appears that parents withdraw considerably as children grow older. Perhaps it is not surprising that parents become less likely to play a game or sport with their adolescent or teenager as the child grows up; but the decline in parental involvement with school and school work seems more troubling (page 19). The academic, social, and psychological challenges faced by adolescents are substantial and require the continued involvement of parents. We are reminded of the long-term obligations of parenthood by the data on page 20.

After declining during the 1970s, the teenage birth rate stabilized during the 1980s. Then, during the late 1980s, the rate of births to U.S. teens began to rise again, ensuring that you and I will be faced with the need to worry about America's children for the foreseeable future.

**THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN UNDER AGE 18  
IN THE UNITED STATES**

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	<u>1990</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1960</u>
<b>TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN</b>	64.1 mil.	63.4 mil.	69.2 mil.	63.7 mil.
<b>WHITE CHILDREN</b>	51.4	52.2	58.8	55.1
<b>AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN</b>	10.0	9.4	9.4	8.7
<b>HISPANIC CHILDREN</b> (ethnicity, can be of any race)	7.2	5.5	4.0	--
<b>TOTAL POPULATION</b>	250 mil.	228 mil.	205 mil.	181 mil.
<b>PERCENT UNDER AGE 18</b>	26%	28%	34%	35%

Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.

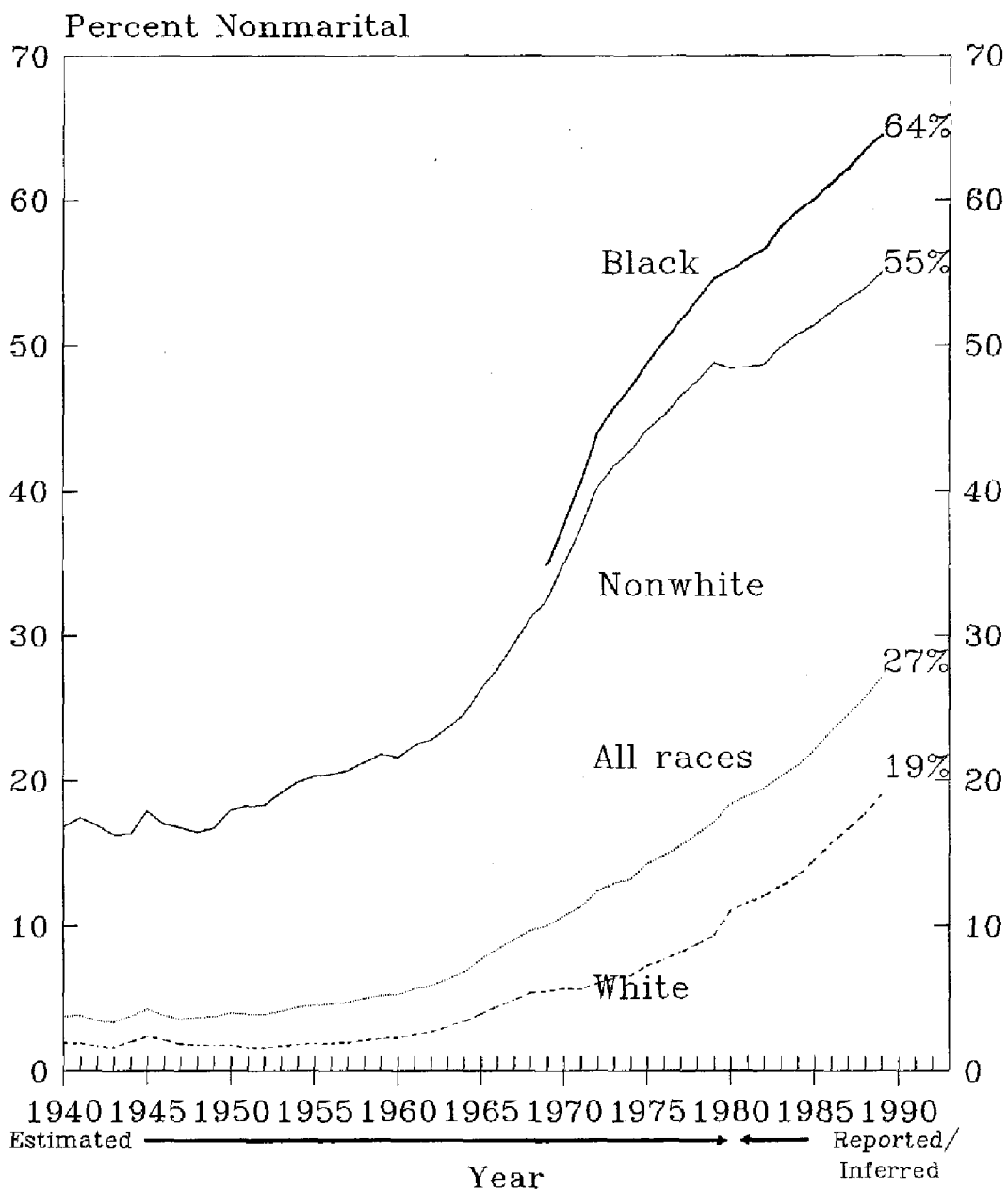
## THE NUMBER AND RATE OF BIRTHS PER YEAR

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	<u>1991</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1950</u>
<b>Total Number of Births</b>	4.1 mil	4.2 mil	4.0 mil	3.6 mil	3.7 mil	4.3 mil	3.6 mil
<b>Birth Rate (births per 1,000 population)</b>	16.2	16.7	16.3	15.9	18.4	23.7	24.1
<b>Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women aged 15-44)</b>	68.3	70.0	69.2	68.4	87.9	118.0	106.2
<b>Percent of All Births to Unmarried Women</b>	na	na	27%	18%	11%	5%	4%

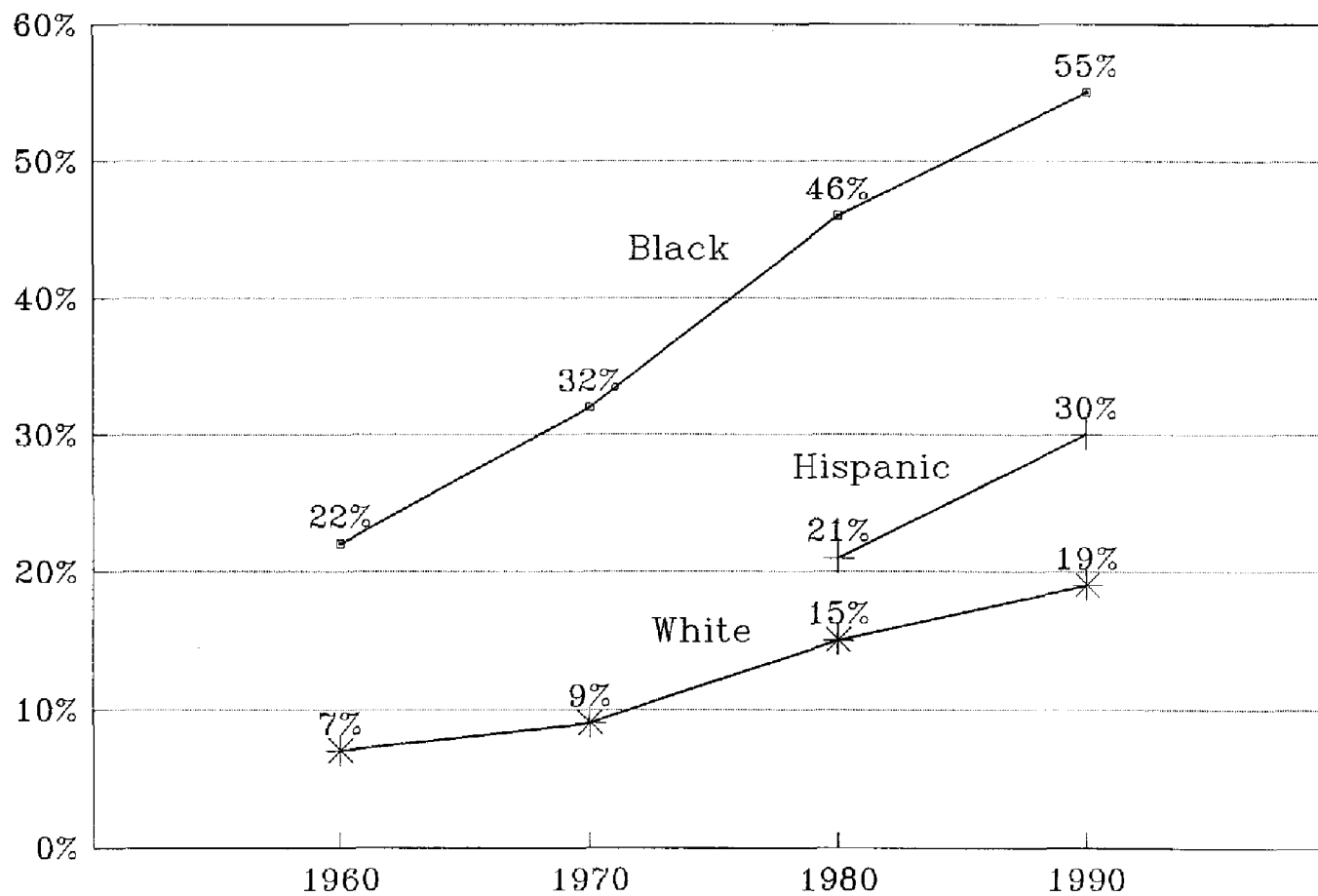
Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Center for Health Statistics.

## Nonmarital Births as a Percent of All Births, 1940-1989



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Center for Health Statistics.

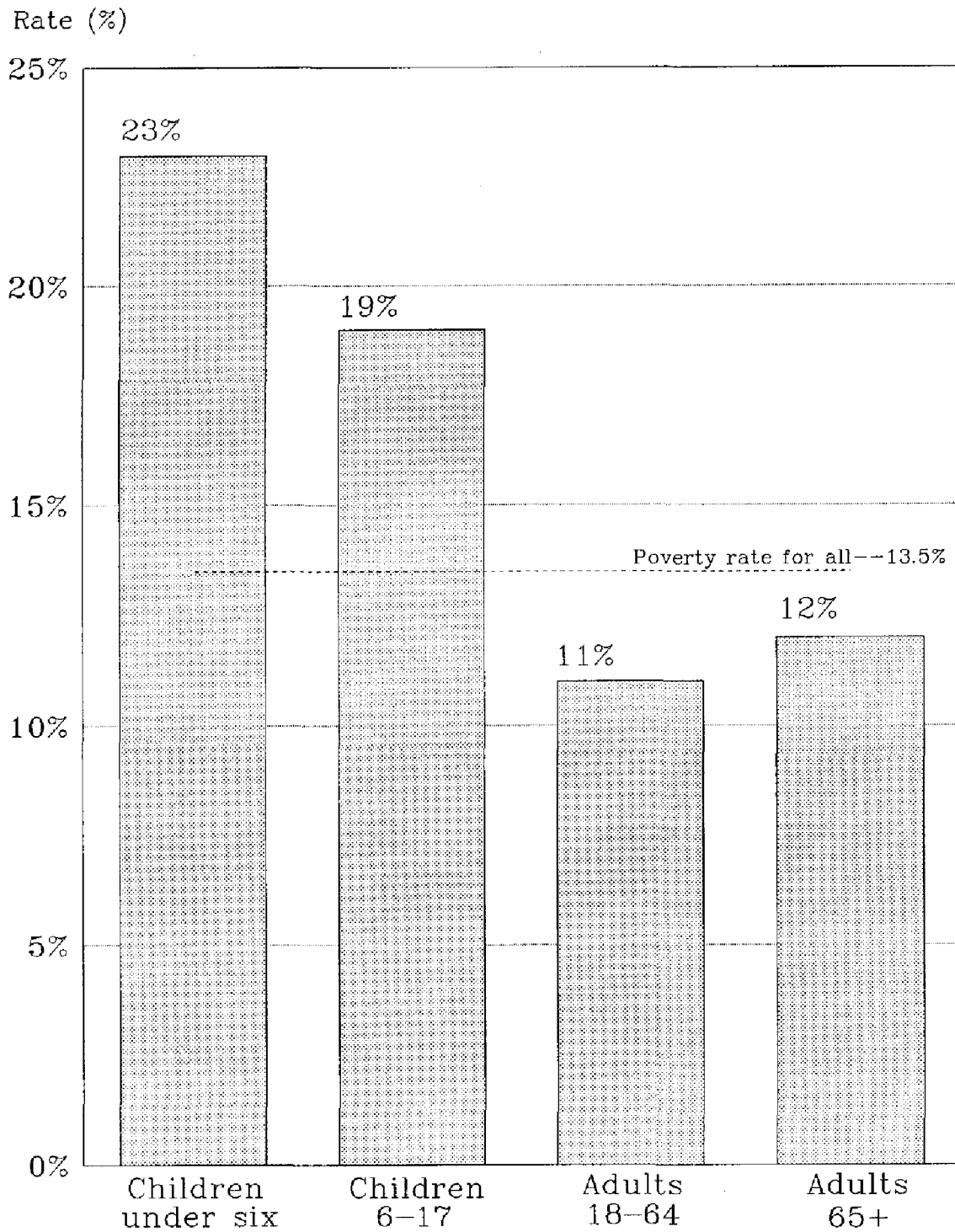
## Percent of Children Living with Just One Parent, 1960-1990



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.

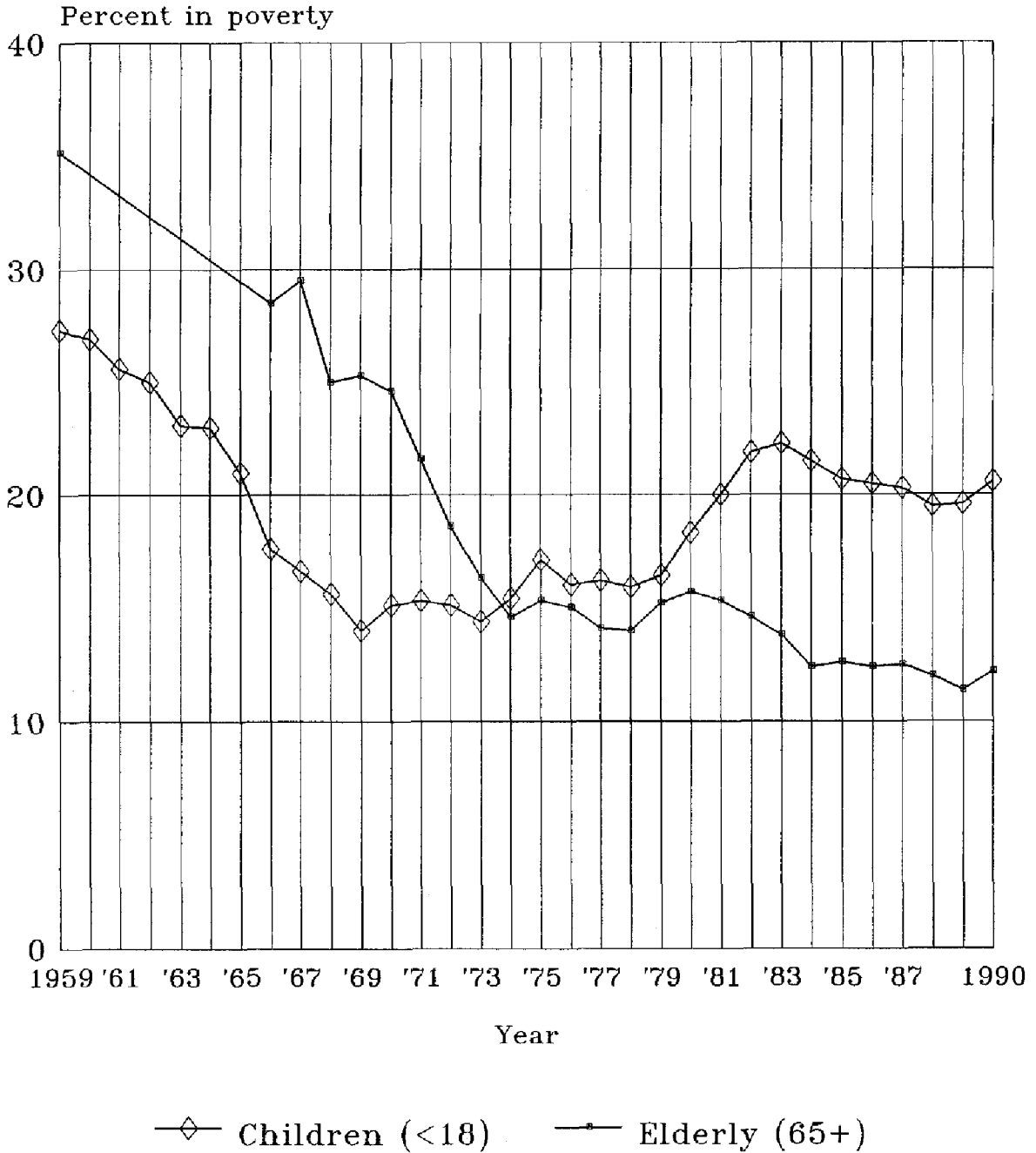


## Poverty Rates by Age Group, 1987



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.

# Percent of Children and Elderly in Poverty, 1959-1990



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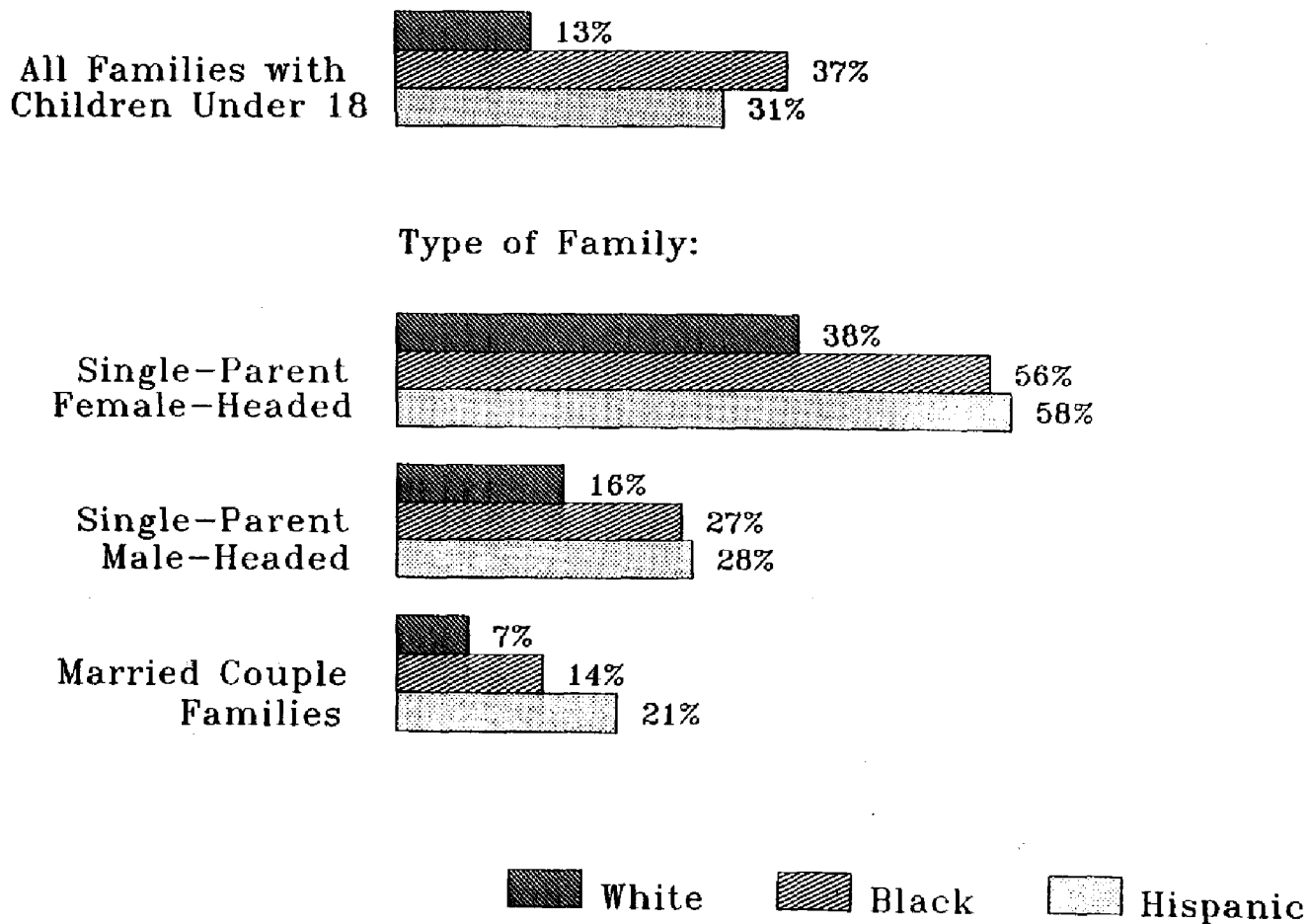
## **POVERTY RATES FOR FAMILIES AND PERSONS, U.S., 1990**

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	<u>Number</u>	<u>Rate</u>
<b>All Families in United States</b>	<b>7.1 million</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
<b>All Families with Children Under 18 Years</b>	<b>5.7 million</b>	<b>16.4%</b>
<b>All Persons in United States</b>	<b>33.6 million</b>	<b>13.5%</b>
<b>Persons in Families</b>	<b>25.2 million</b>	<b>12.0%</b>
<b>Persons in Female-Headed Families, No Husband</b>	<b>12.6 million</b>	<b>37.2%</b>
<b>Unrelated Individuals</b>	<b>7.4 million</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
<b>All Children Under 18 Years</b>	<b>13.4 million</b>	<b>20.6%</b>
<b>All Persons 18 to 64 Years</b>	<b>16.5 million</b>	<b>10.7%</b>
<b>All Persons 65 Years and Over</b>	<b>3.7 million</b>	<b>12.2%</b>

Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.

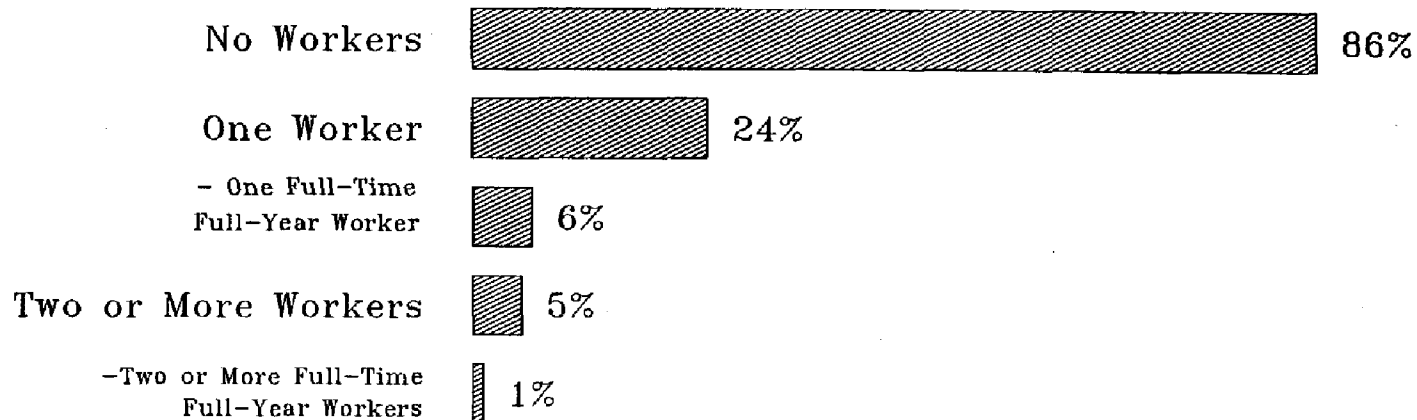
## Poverty Rates for Families with Children By Race, United States, 1990



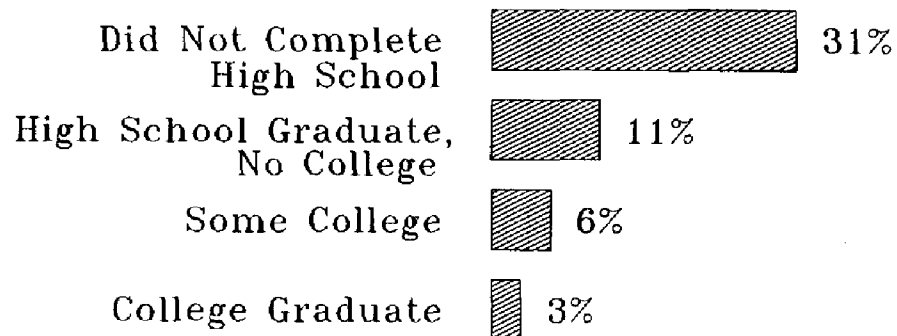
Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.

# Poverty Rates for Families with Children United States, 1990

## Number of Workers:



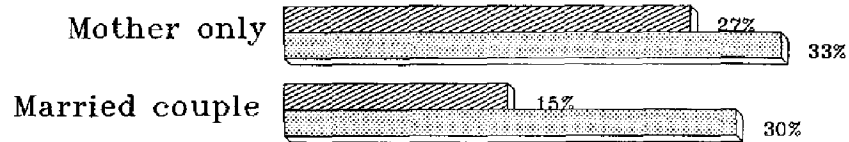
## Education of Householder:



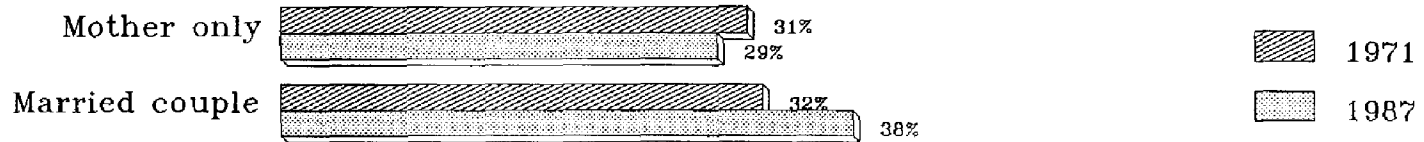
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## Labor Force Participation of Mothers by Family Type, 1971 and 1987

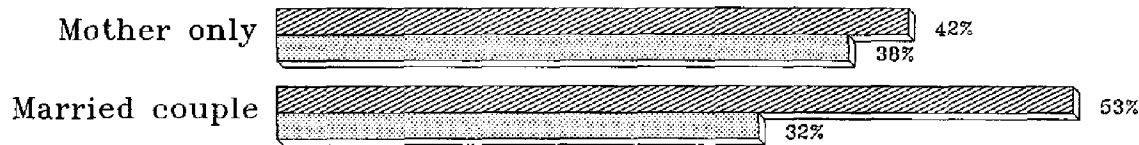
Percent worked full-time, full-year:



Percent worked part-time or part-year:

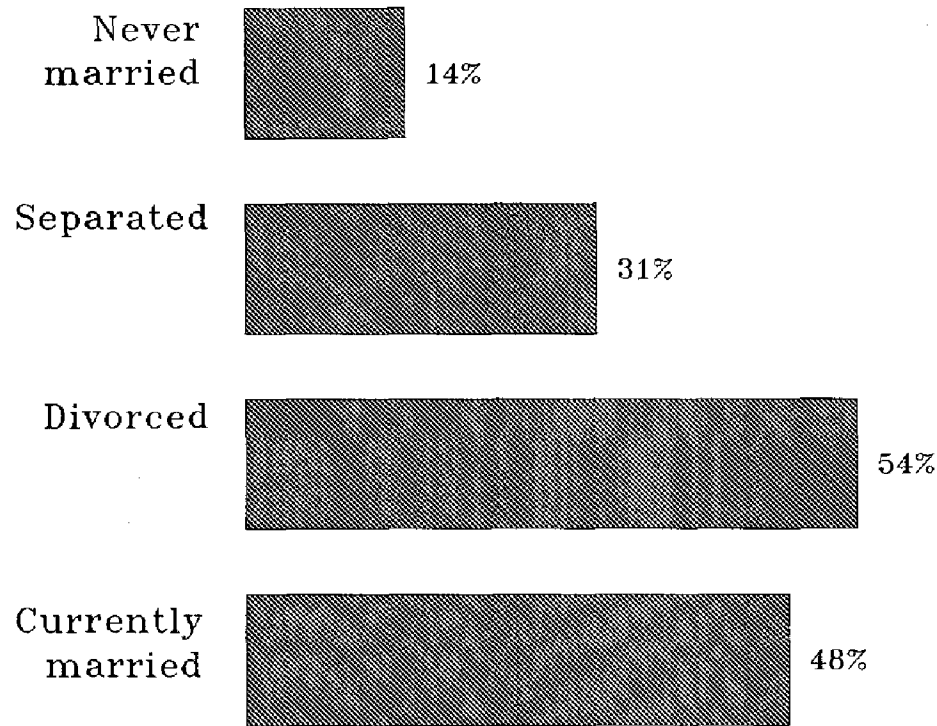


Percent who did not work during year:

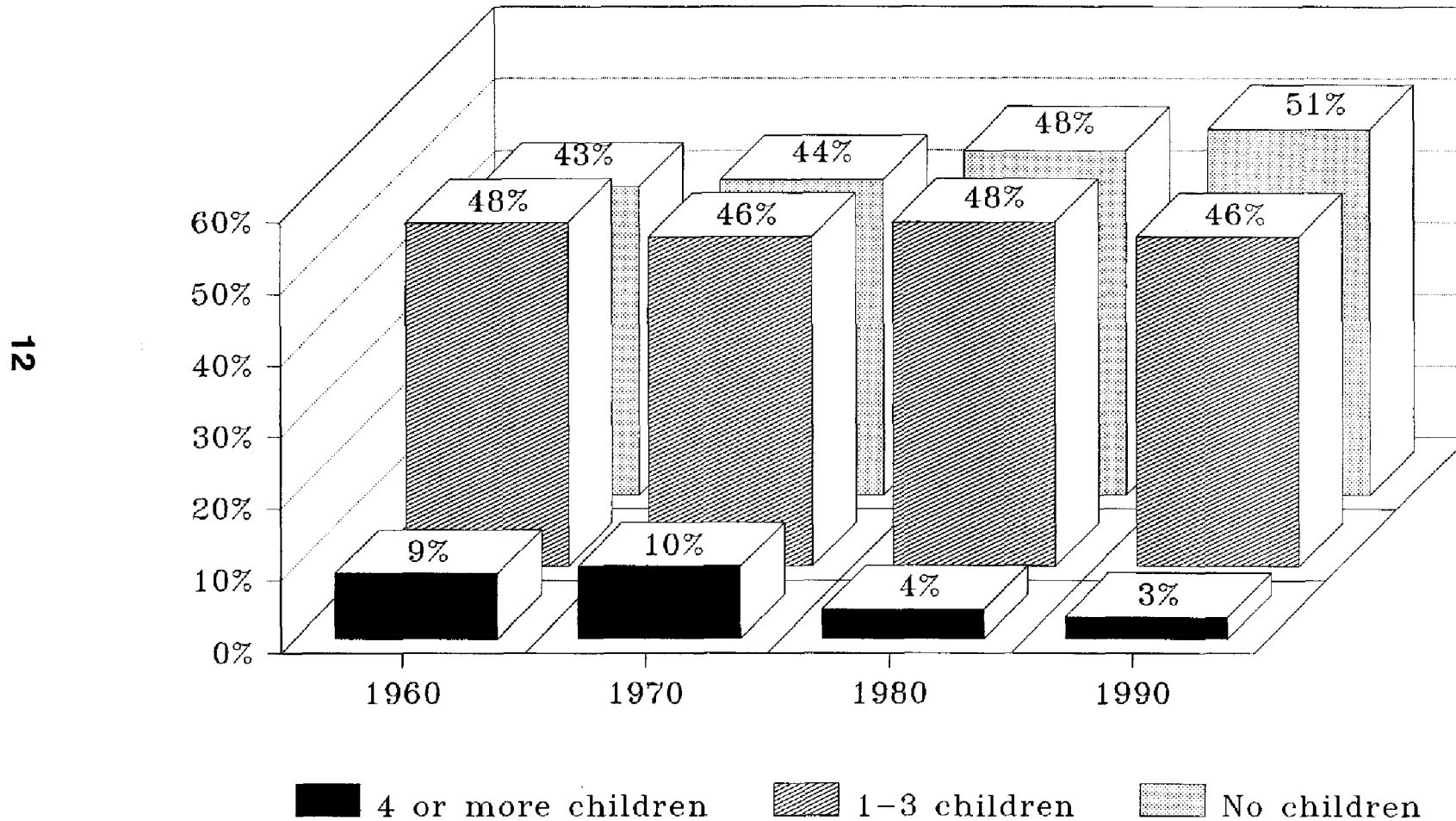


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Percent of Custodial Mothers Receiving  
Child Support Payments from Absent Fathers,  
by Current Marital Status, 1989



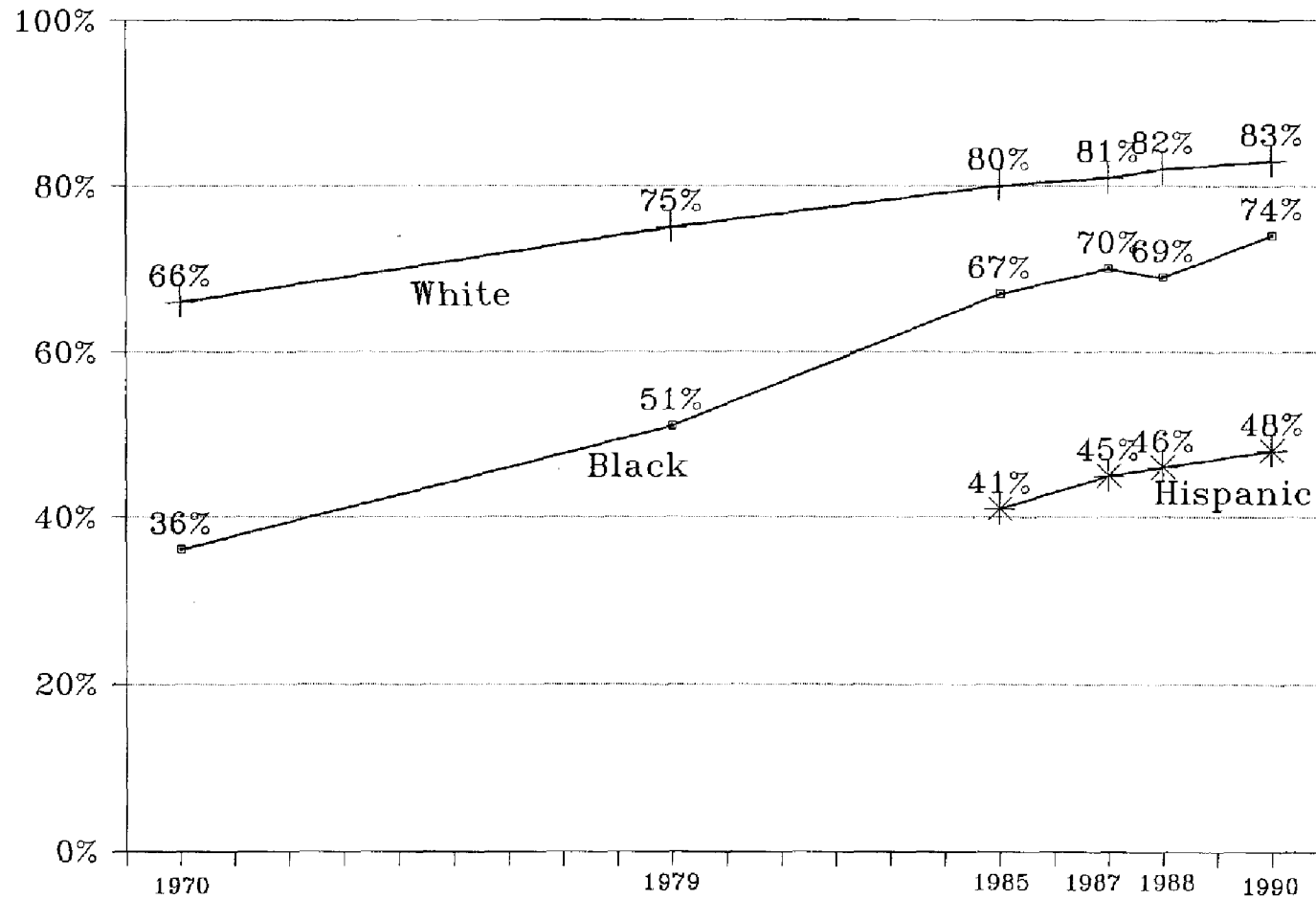
## Distribution of Families by Number of Own Children Under Age 18, 1960–1990



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the US Bureau of the Census.



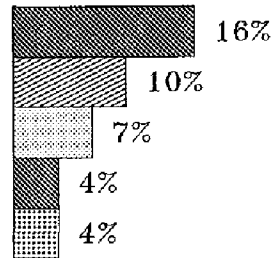
Percent of Elementary School Aged Children  
Whose Parent Had 12 or More Years of Education, 1970-1990



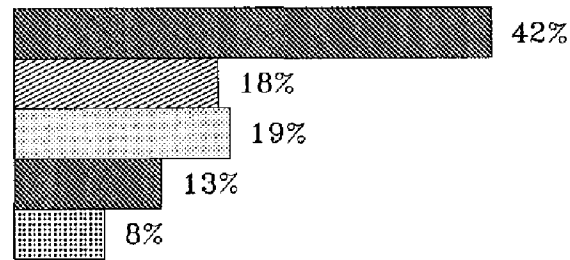
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Percentage of Children (Age 10-17), by Family Income, 1990, Who Worry "A Lot" That:

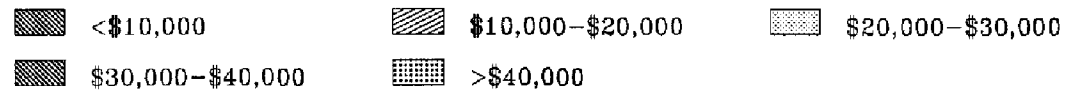
They are not safe in their homes



Their parents will divorce

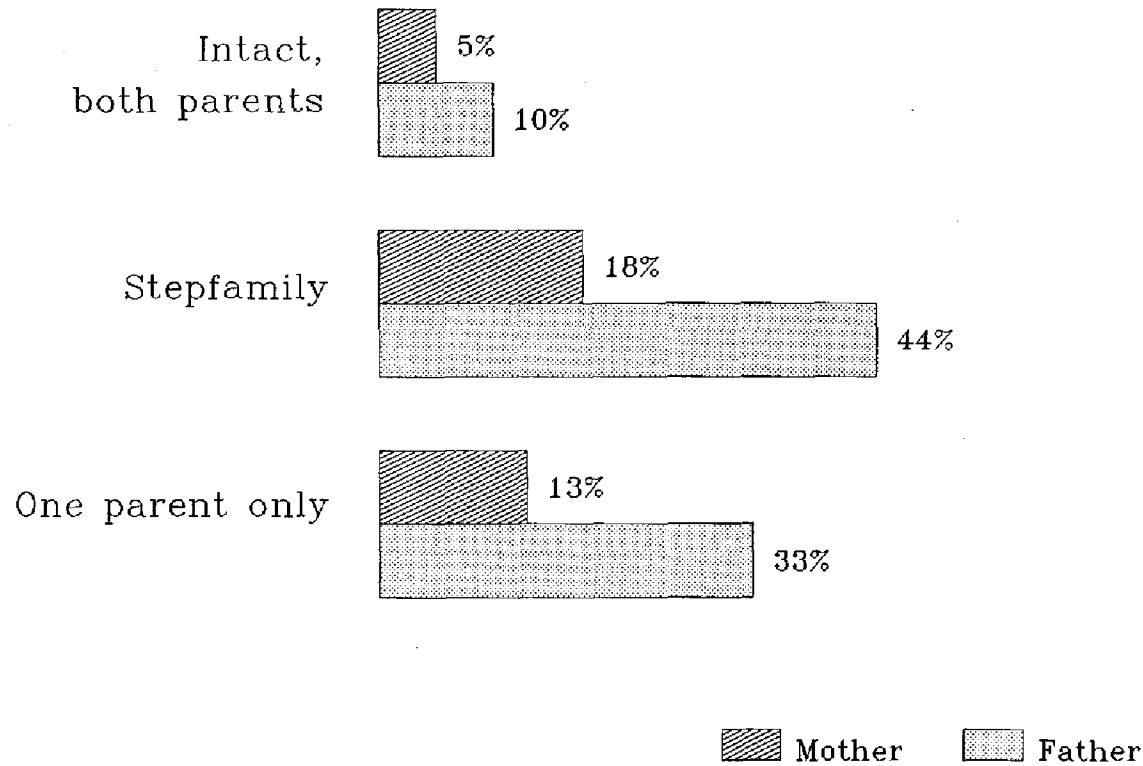


Income:



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Percentage of Children (Age 10-17) Who Report That Their Mother or Father Often Misses Events and Activities That Children Consider Important, by Family Type, 1990

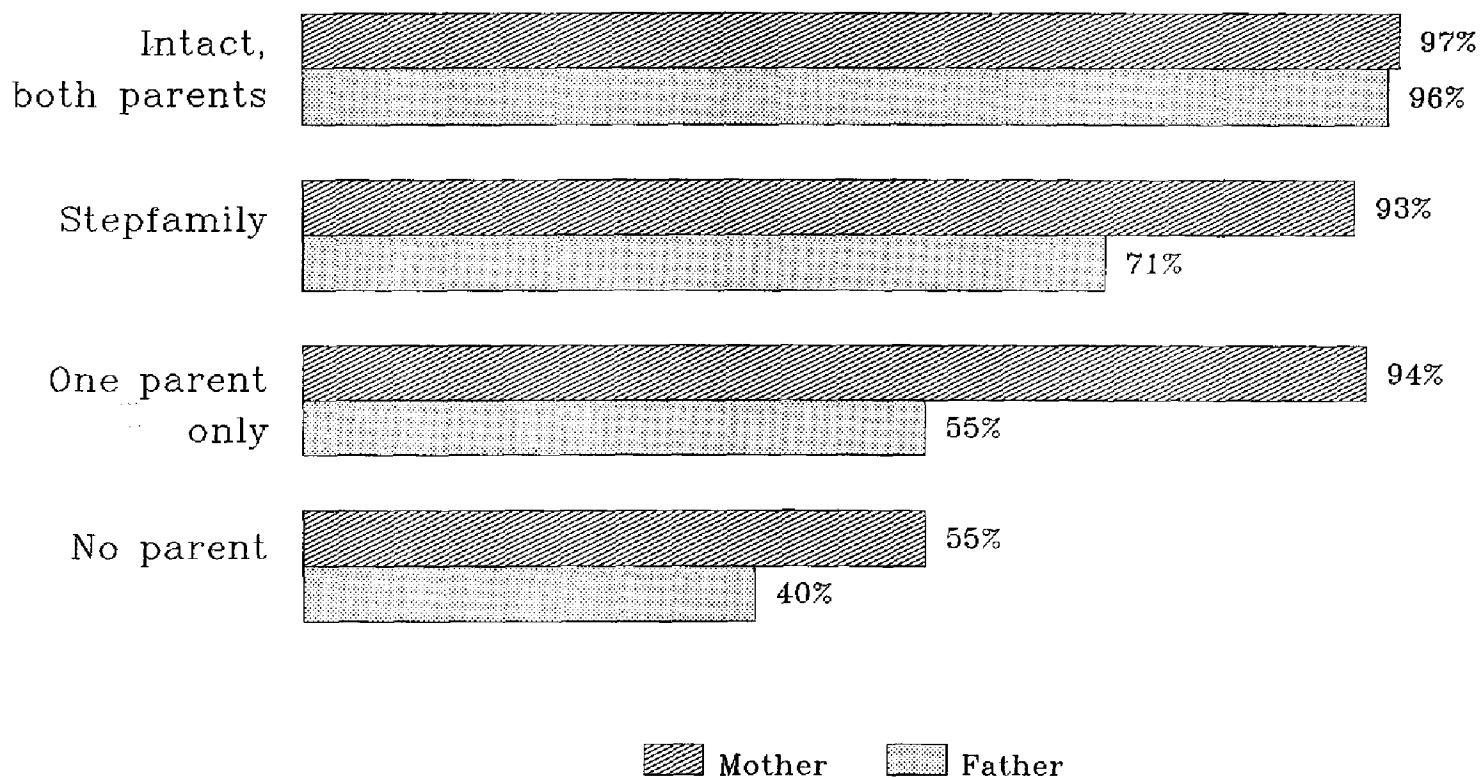


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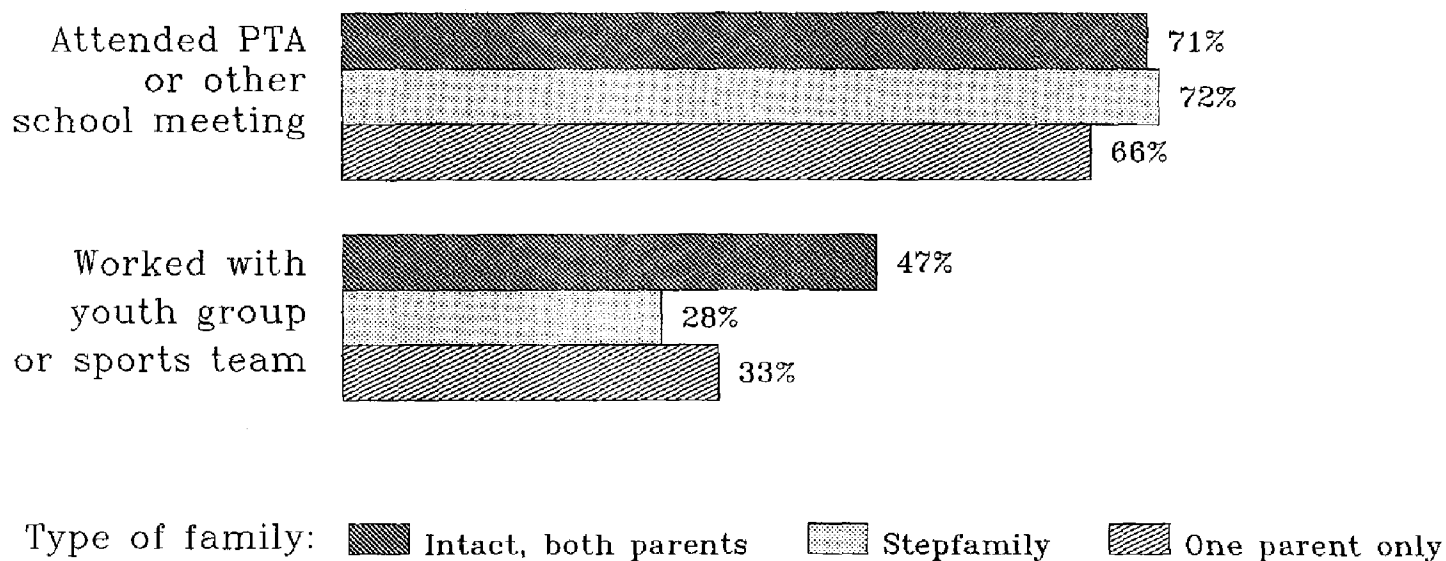
Percentage of Children (Age 10–17) Who Feel  
That Their Biological Mother and Biological Father  
"Really Care," by Family Type, 1990

(Children with living parents only)



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Commission on Children's National Survey of Children and Parents.

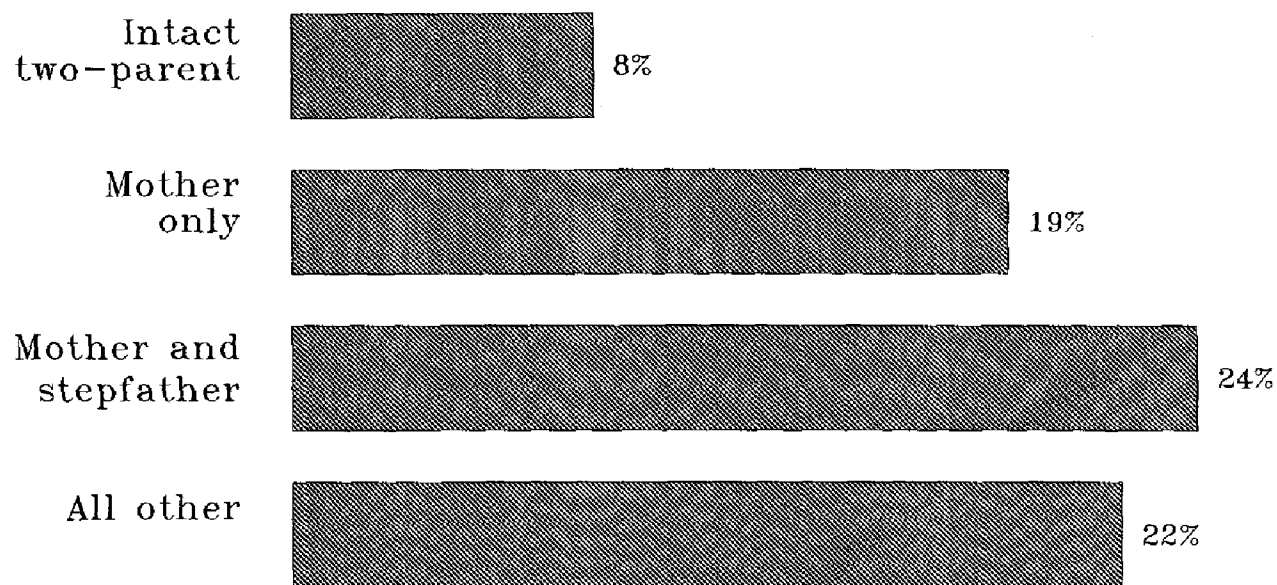
Percentage of Parents of Children (Age 6-17)  
Who Have Taken Part in School-Related Activities  
in the Past Year, by Family Type, 1990



Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Commission on Children's National Survey of Children and Parents.

## Percent of Children Having Psychological Problems,\* by Family Type, 1990

18

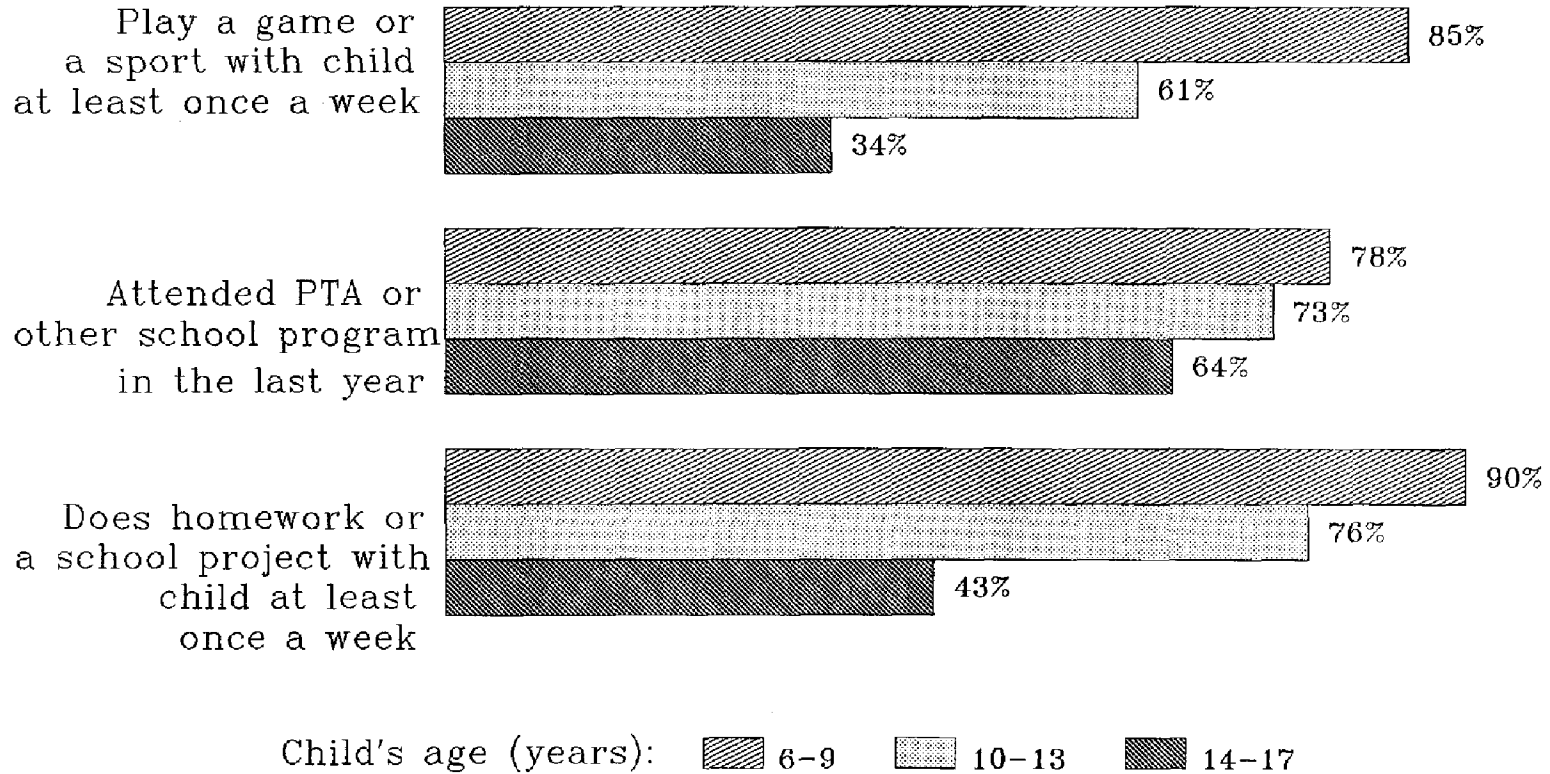


\*Children 3-17 ever with emotional or behavioral problem lasting 3 or more months or needing treatment.

Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Center for Health Statistics.

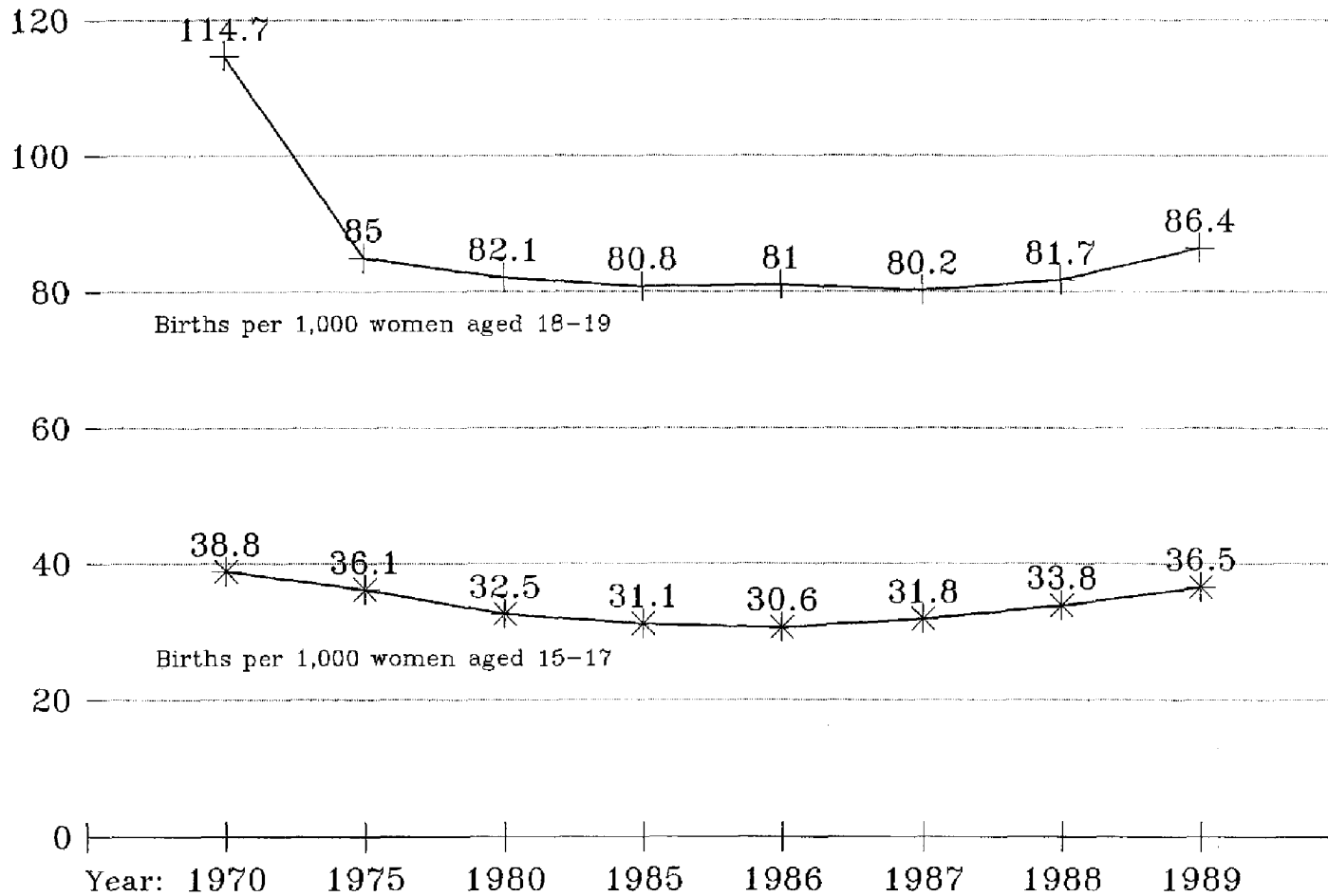
## Parents' Involvement with Their Children's School and Activities, by Age of Child, 1990

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Source: Kristin A. Moore, "Our Nation's Children: Trends." Testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Post Office and Civil Service, Subcommittee on Census and Population, June 23, 1992. Compiled by Child Trends, Inc., Washington, DC, from data from the National Commission on Children's National Survey of Children and Parents.

## Teen Birth Rate, 1970-1989



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