

Illinois Parent Survey Panel

First Survey Analysis



illinois
action for
children

Building Strong Families
& Powerful Communities™

RAPID

The Illinois Parent Survey Panel consists of Illinois parents with children under the age of 6.

- Parents on the panel have the opportunity to share information about their family, experiences, and challenges.
- The goal of the panel is to gather essential and ongoing information from parents and caregivers.
- With our findings, we hope to inform the public and public officials about parents' goals and challenges in raising young children in Illinois.

What is the Illinois Parent Survey Panel?

Illinois Action for Children has partnered with the national RAPID survey at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood to conduct a quarterly survey with an ongoing panel of parents.

Survey 1 at a glance

Parents have many hopes for their children this coming year

Parents were asked to share their hopes for their children for the coming year. Common responses were for their children to develop their speech, learn the alphabet or to read, learn how to walk, form good friendships, learn how to express themselves to others, become potty trained, and do well in kindergarten.

“I hope he starts **walking and talking** and completing his **baby milestones**. I’m grateful he is such a healthy and happy baby.”

“To start to **pronounce words more**, identify **colors and numbers**, and become fully potty trained”

“Continue **progressing in speech** and learn to **control emotions** appropriately.”

“To continue to **grow their vocabulary** and learn to express themselves”

“To be **developmentally ready for kindergarten.**”

“That he feels **confident and safe** to be himself.”

“To get rid of her pacifier, become **potty trained**, and **to began head start** by January 2024”

“For her to **start school** and **develop emotional connections** with others.”

Many parents experience financial hardships

Parents struggle with the rising cost of living and inflation, and many have difficulty paying for basic needs.

While the majority of parents on our panel are employed, approximately half of our panel experiences some level of hardship paying for basic needs. Basic needs that are the hardest to pay for are utilities, housing, baby supplies, and food.

Parents shared their challenges with the rising cost of living, their housing concerns, and their need for higher paying jobs to make ends meet.

We know race and income are closely linked in United States due to the societal systems in place. Our parent panel had a higher percentage of Black and Latinx families with low incomes in comparison to White families, and they experienced more hardship paying for basic needs.

Low-income parents were more likely to experience emotional distress symptoms and were more likely to report emotional distress symptoms in their children.

In our panel, approximately a fifth of parents experience frequent occasions of emotional distress (stress, anxiety, loneliness, or depression) in the past month. Furthermore, approximately 37% of parents observed distressing behavior in their children.

We found that parents with low incomes experienced higher rates of emotional distress and were also more likely to report emotional distress and challenging behaviors in their children.

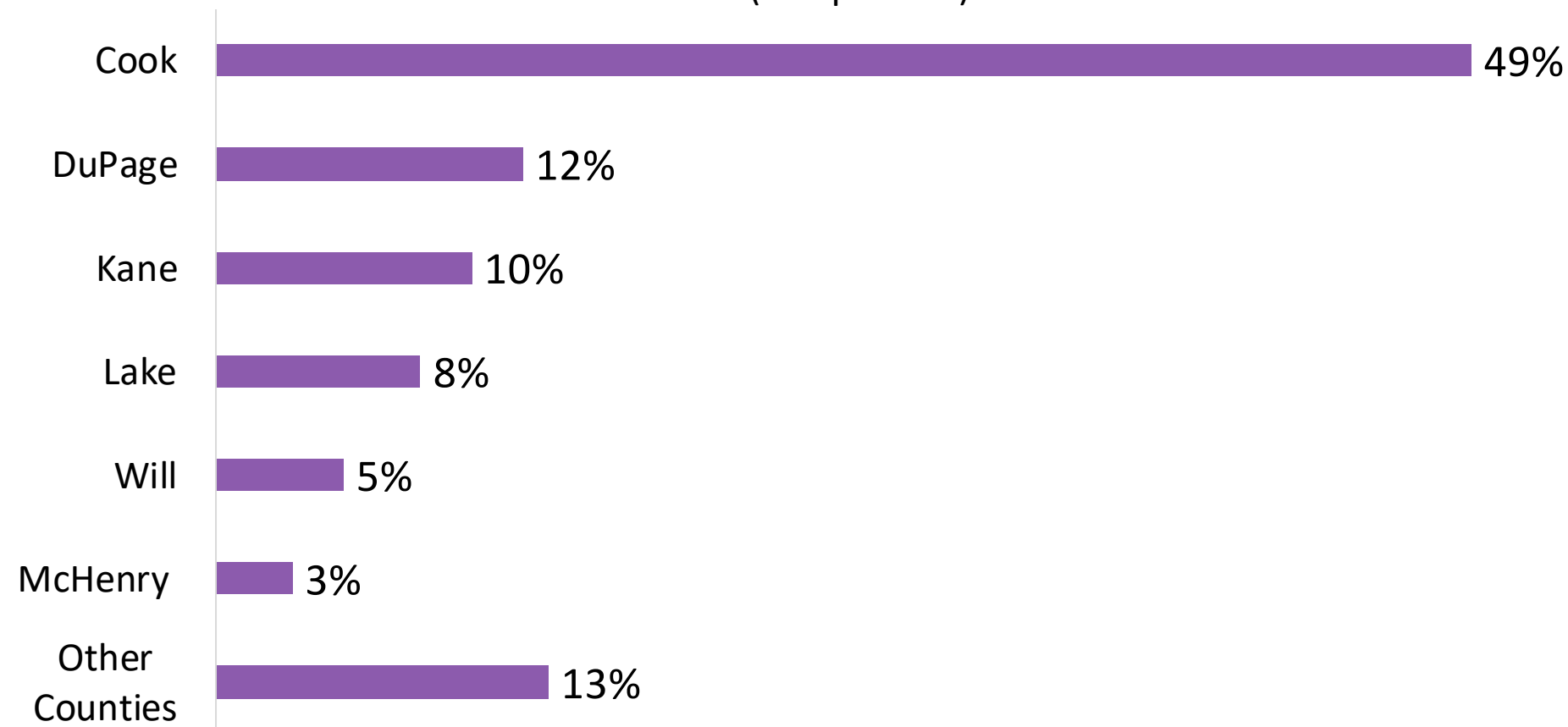
This can be because financial hardships have a profound impact on children and their behavior, impact the ability of parents to offer care and support to their children, put parents under high levels of stress which can increase their perception of children's behavior as distressing, or be a combination of these reasons.

Who are the parents on the panel?

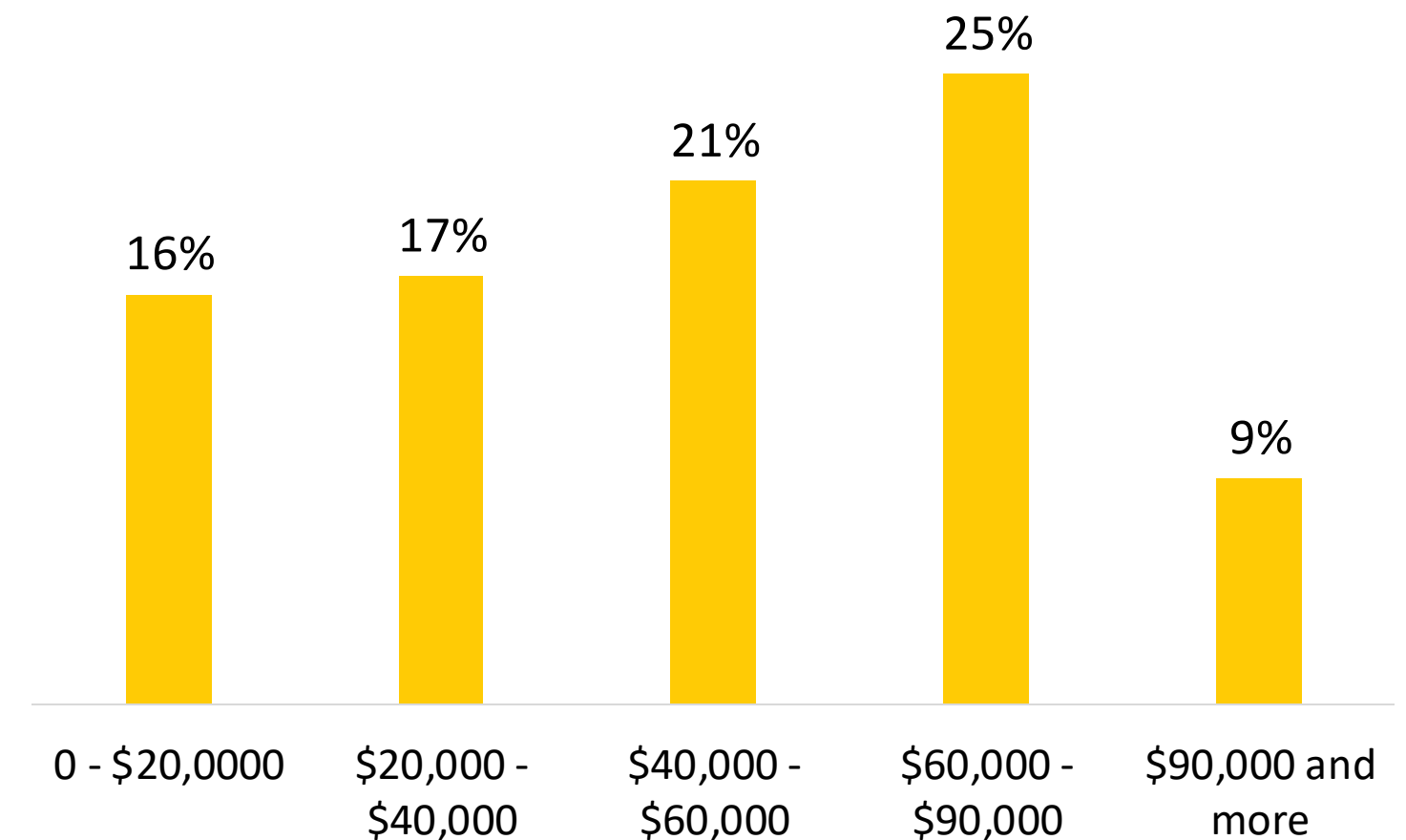
About the Parents on our Panel

Our panel consists of 419 Illinois parents who have children under age 6. Initially, parents were recruited mainly from the Metro Chicago region. Families have a range of incomes, with most earning less than \$90,000.

Parent County Residence
(419 parents)



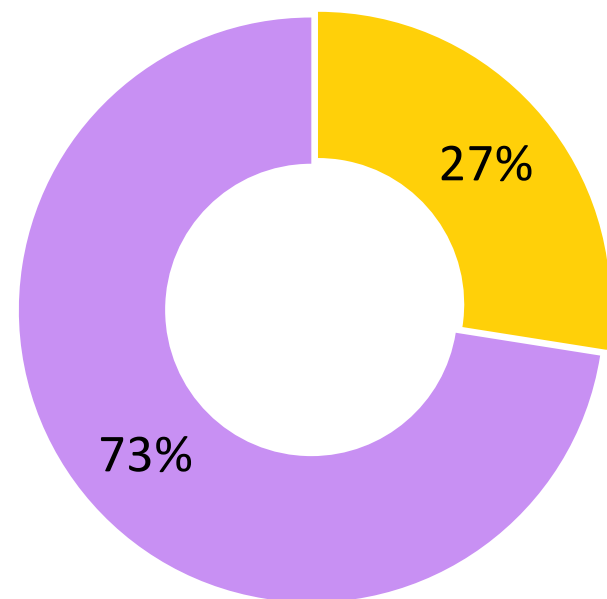
Annual Household Income
(419 parents)



About the Parents on our Panel

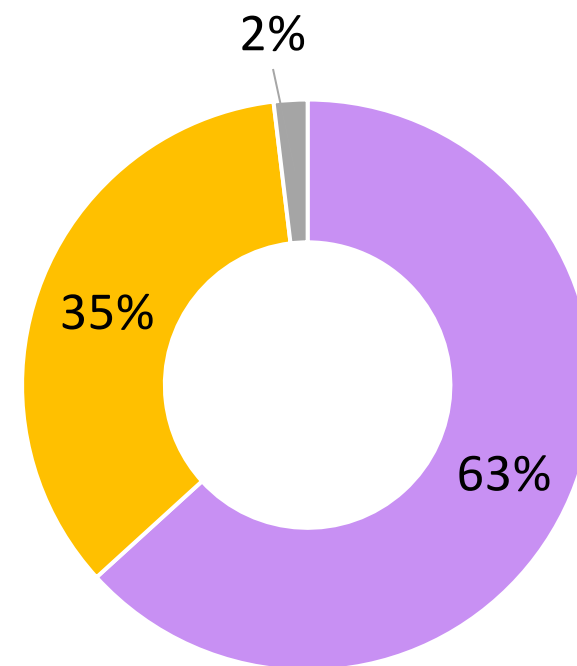
Three-quarters of the parents are female. Almost two thirds live in two-parent households. Parents are diverse in their education level.

Gender
(419 parents)



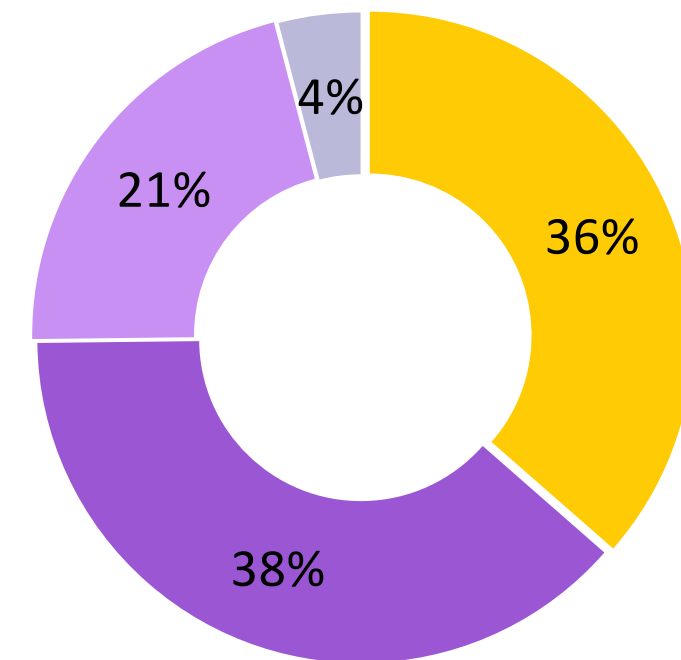
■ Male ■ Female

Number of parents in the home
(419 parents)



■ Two Parents
■ One Parent
■ No parents

Parent Education Level
(419 parents)

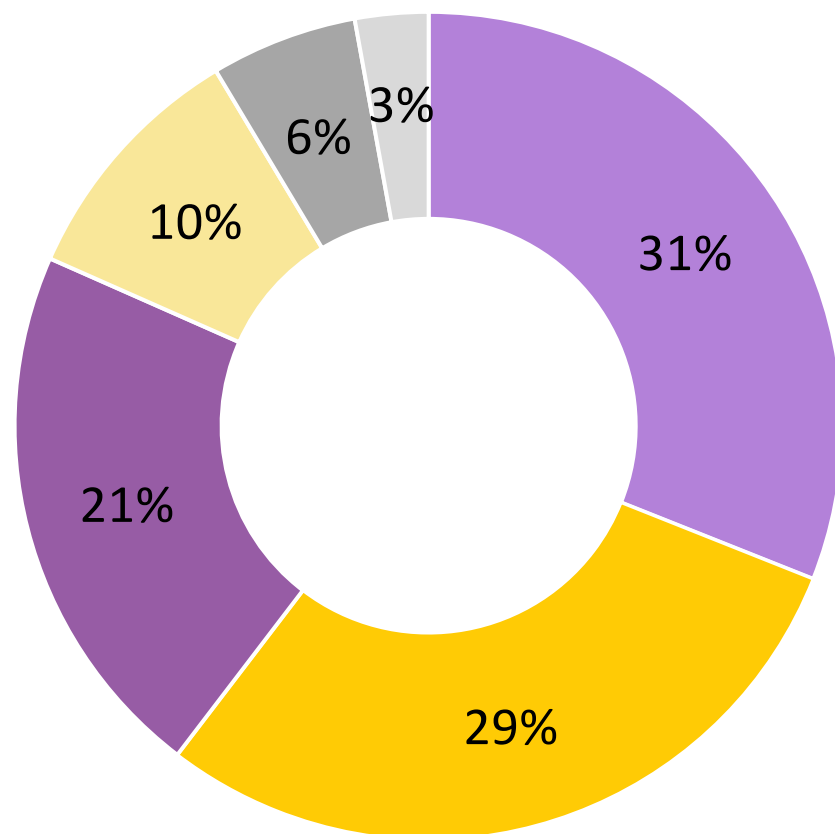


■ Up to High School Diploma or GED
■ Associate degree and some college
■ Bachelor's degree
■ Master's Degree

About the Parents on our Panel

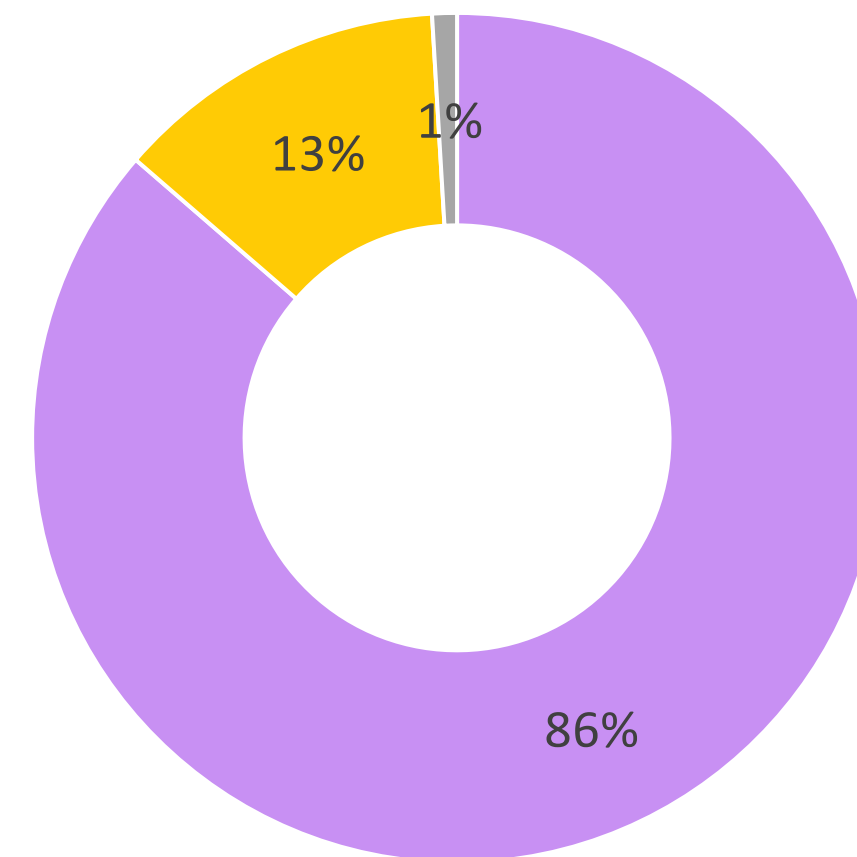
The panel is diverse in terms of race/ethnicity. 13% of respondents were born outside of the US.

Race and Ethnicity
(419 parents)



- White
- Black/African American
- Hispanic, Latine, or Spanish origin
- Asian
- 2 more more races
- Middle Eastern or North African, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and some other race

Parent Birthplace
(419 parents)



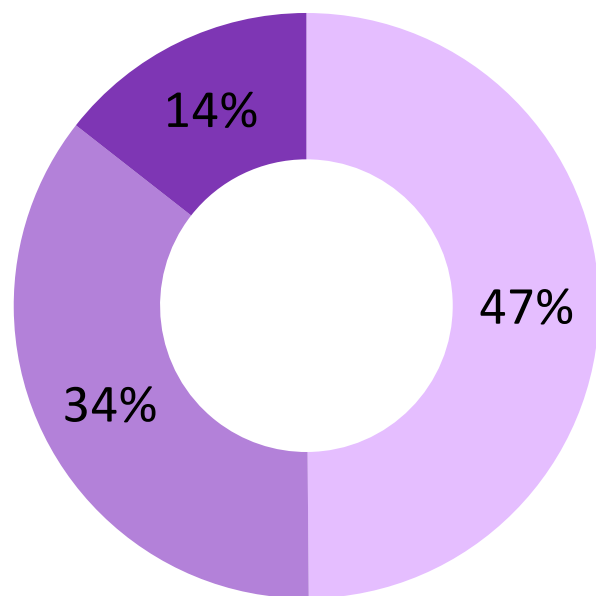
- Born in the United States
- Born outside the United States
- Unsure

Employment & Financial Hardships

Employment Status

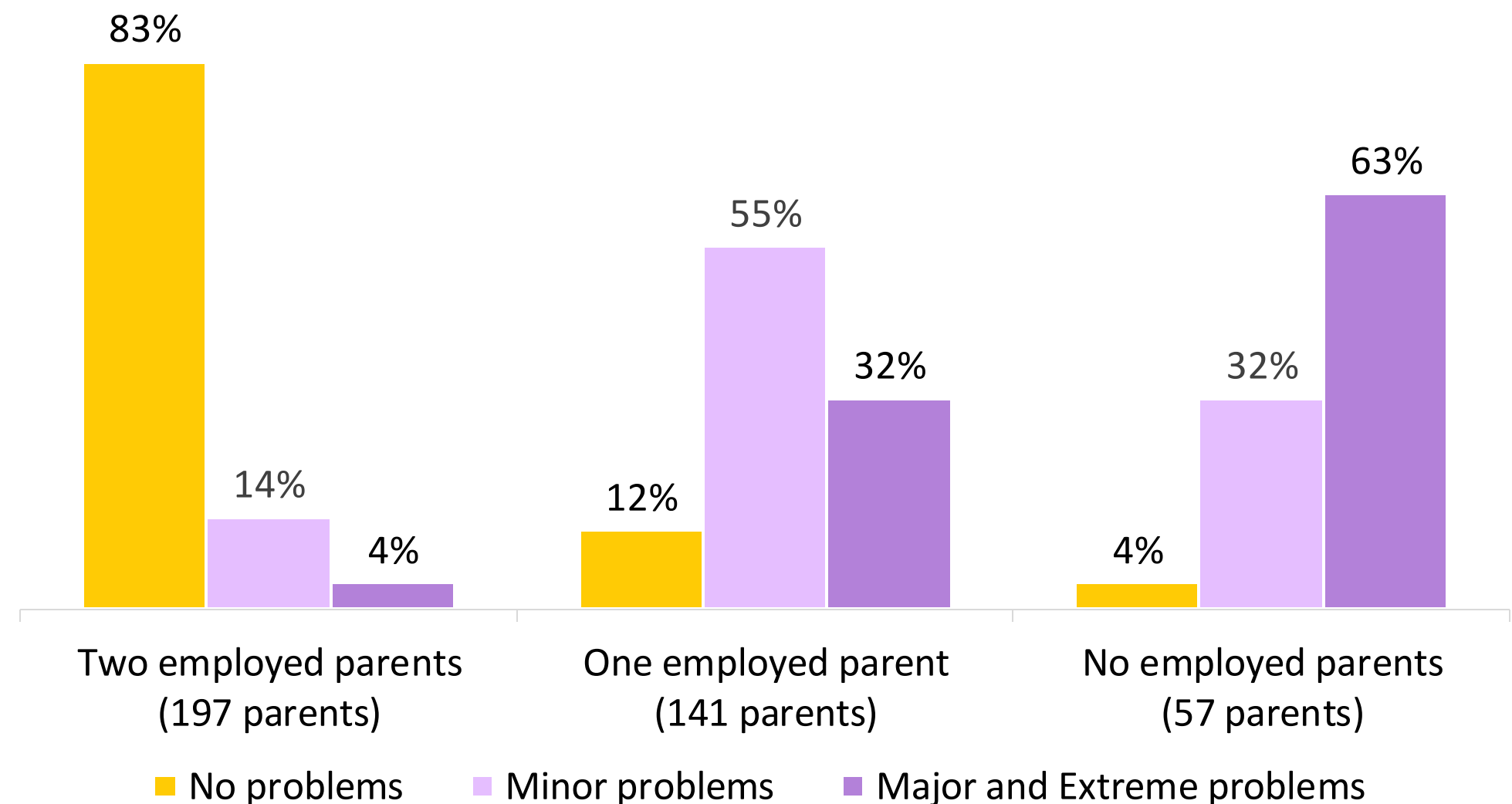
In our panel, nearly half of the households have two employed parents. **Households with one employed parent experience higher rates of major and extreme financial problems compared to households with two employed parents.**

Number of employed parents in the household
(419 parents)



- Two employed parents
- One employed parent
- No employed parents

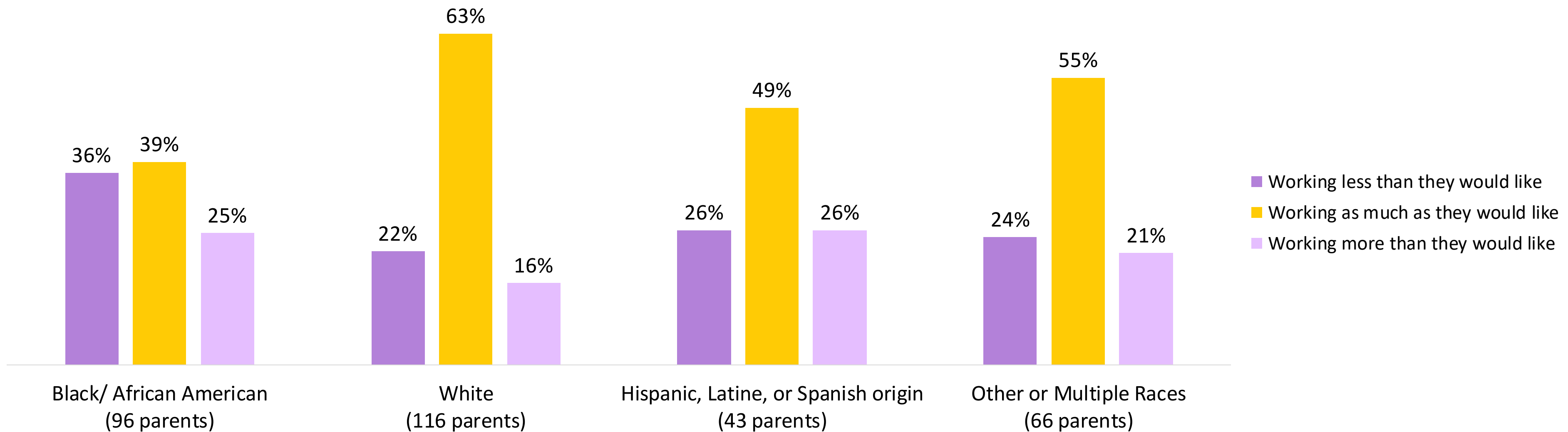
Family's financial problems



Satisfaction with Hours Worked

When asked how they felt about the amount of hours they worked, Black parents were least likely to be working the amount of hours they would like.

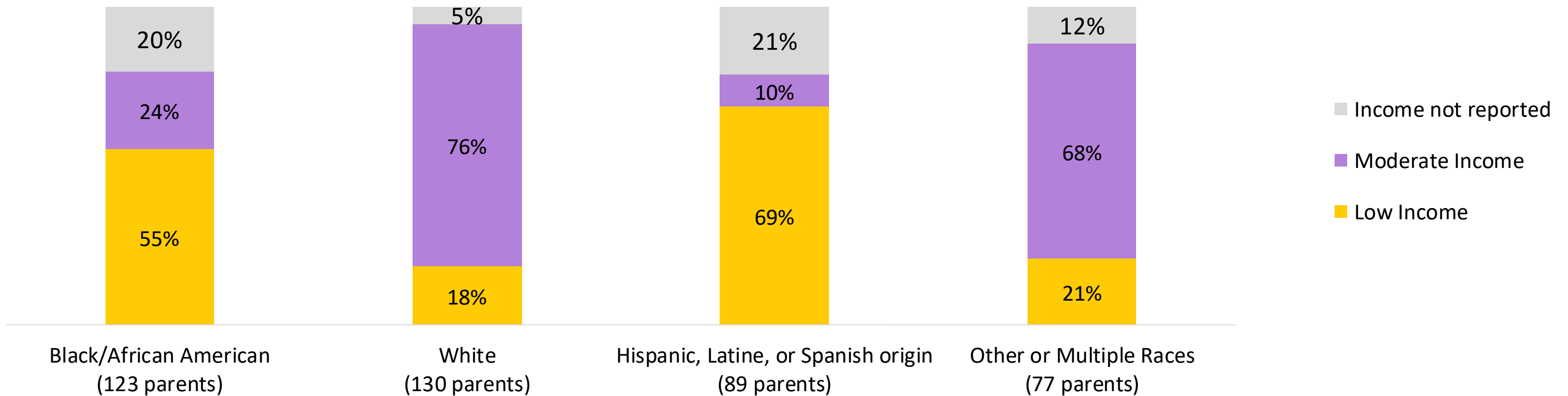
Satisfaction with hours worked, by race/ethnicity



Income & Race/Ethnicity

Family income is closely linked with race and ethnicity. In our panel, Black families are 3 times as likely and Hispanic families are almost 4 times as likely as White families to have low income.

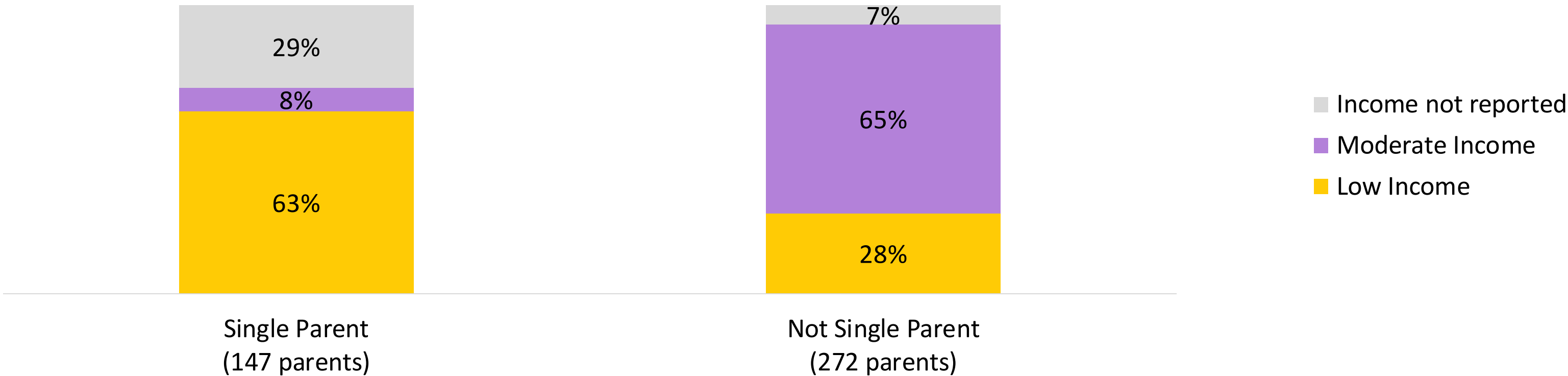
Income distribution, by race/ethnicity



Income & Single Parent Status

Income and single parent status are closely linked. In our panel, single-parent families are more likely than non-single-parent families to have low income.

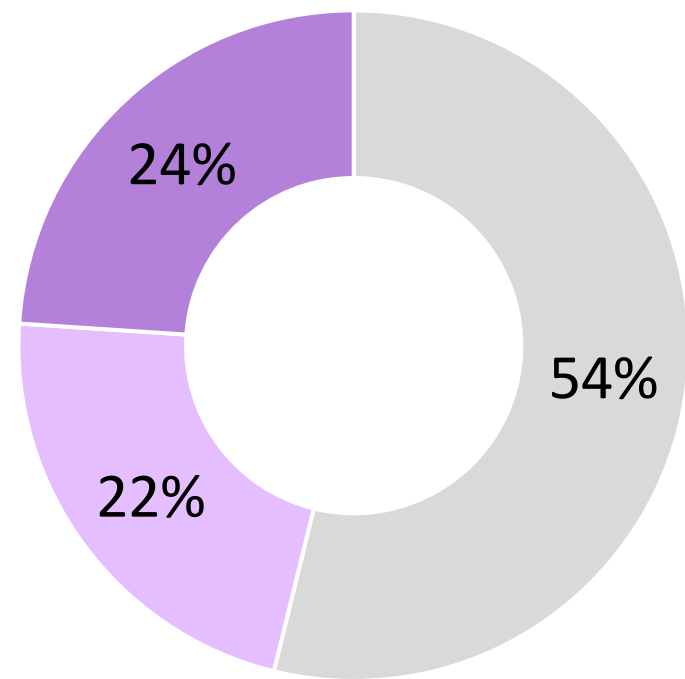
Income distribution, by single parent status



Parents' Financial Well-being

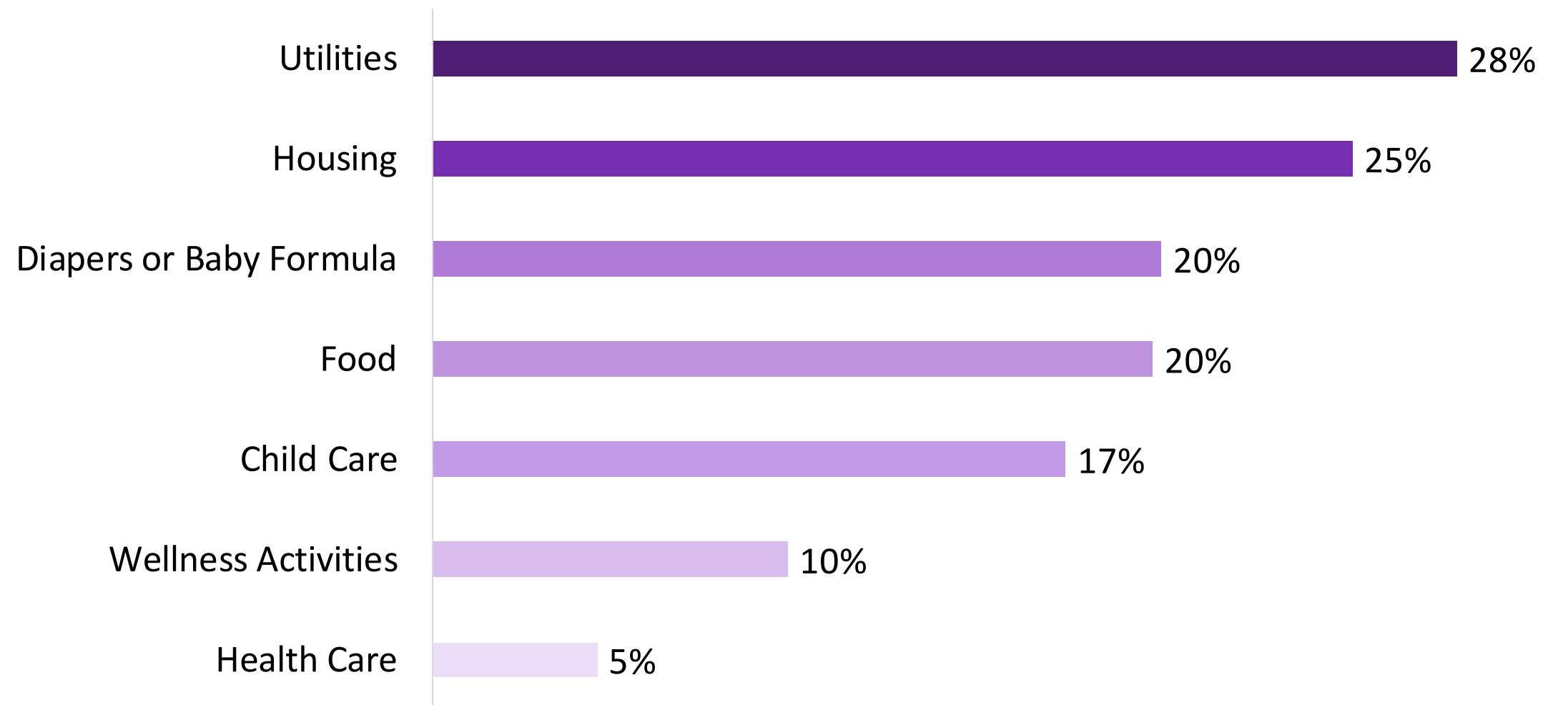
Approximately a quarter of parents on our panel had a *hard* or *very hard* time paying for basic needs such as utilities, housing, baby supplies, and food.

In the past month, how hard has it been for your family to pay for the very basics like food, housing, medical care, and utilities?
(405 parents)



■ Not very hard ■ Somewhat hard ■ Hard and very hard

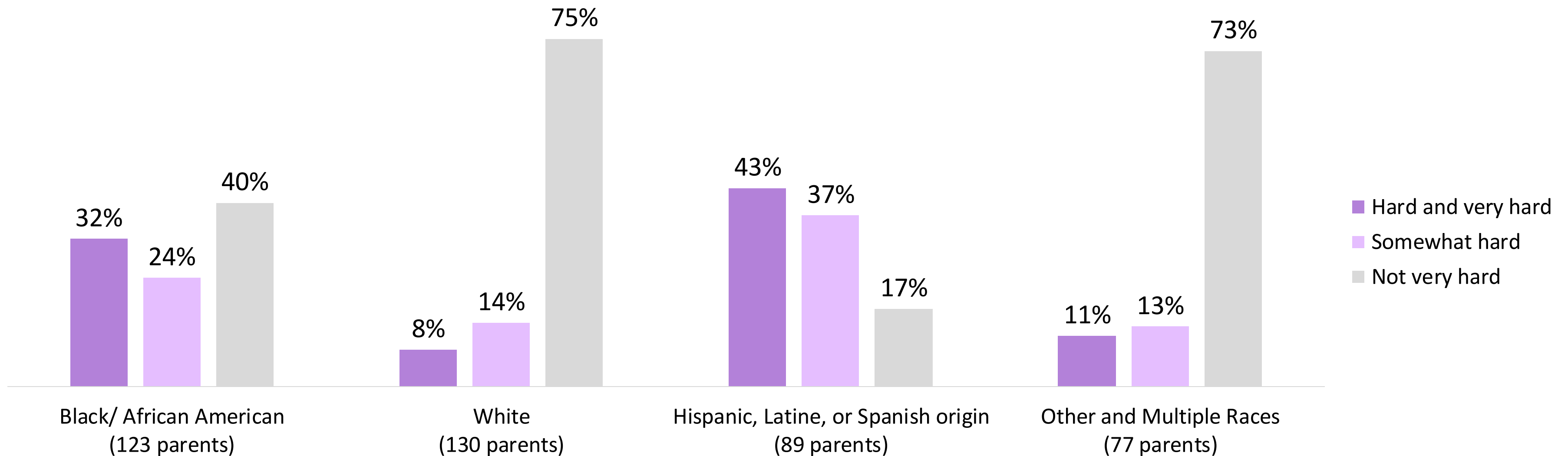
Basic Needs That Are Hardest to Pay for
(419 parents)



Parents' Financial Well-being

Hispanic parents are 5 times as likely and Black parents are 4 times as likely as White parents to have a *hard or very hard* time paying for their basic needs.

Hardship paying for basic needs, by race



Parents' Biggest Challenges

Parents shared that cost of living, housing, and the need for better paying jobs were their top challenges.

83 parents mentioned challenges with the high cost of living

"Being able to be financially stable and free. The cost of living had made everything worse and harder for single parents."

"Financially making it day by day the cost of living is extreme, and my money isn't enough to cover all my bills."

"The price of things just keep going up, trying to potty train my 1-year-old so I can stop spending money on diapers."

"That with inflation and prices going up, that we can continue to pay our bills and live comfortably."

48 parents mentioned housing concerns

"The biggest concern is that our economy is not getting any better. Everything is going up and I might lose my home. Bills are expensive and having 6 kids is hard to maintain them."

"Making rent payment."

"That we may lose our home."

"Affording better living conditions."

"Finding an apartment with a private landlord because ... I been denied more than 10 times when I apply to apartments."

45 parents mentioned needing higher paying jobs

"Finding a better job, and to find a better job I need to go to school... If I stay where I'm at making the little that I do, we'll still hardly survive the month. It's frustrating and I don't know where to start."

"I need to work more or find a better job to have more money coming in."

"I need to increase my income so I can get myself reliable transportation and my own home for Me and my child"

"Finding a good paying job to support my son and I"

Parents' Biggest Challenges

Other concerns reported by a significant portion of parents include (but are not limited to):

- Access to affordable food
- Child care stress
- Access to basic needs
- Unaffordable transportation or car repairs
- Interpersonal relationship stress
- Child's growth and development

“[It] feels like we are not spending quality time with our family. End of day, I feel I worked and gave good results for my company, but what about my family?”

“**Not having enough food.** Not being able to pay for childcare. Not having transportation due to vehicle issues and no money to pay for auto repairs. Not being able to pay for gas”

“My biggest challenges are to get my kids on time to and from school. I’m working full time and a **full-time parent with no help** from the father. It’s hard to manage my time.”

What is Helping Parents the Most

Parents shared that government assistance programs and support from their family are helping them the most.

56 parents mentioned government assistance programs

"A big help for us right now is being able to get formula for my baby through WIC. Sometimes we use the food pantries. That helps us a lot."

"The only thing that is been helping my family is my son disability check and SNAP benefits."

"Child care assistance program. SNAP. LIHEAP. Support from my parents."

"The state has helped with food and medical insurance."

49 parents mentioned their family's support

"We have a huge family. We are all very close and help each other. We would be lost without them."

"My children's faces, so I can get up and work."

"My mother is a big help whenever I need to get things done."

"Being together and spending family time together."

"Help from my aunt and friend with bills."

What is Helping Parents the Most

Other things that a significant portion of families said are helping them the most include (but are not limited to):

- Having employment
- Having child care
- Faith and spirituality
- Friends and community support
- Organizations & food banks
- Grounding exercises, therapy

“**Therapy and medication** help with my worrying thoughts. Staying present with my child so I can be a part of his developing world. My husband is a great support.”

“The love that we have for **each other.**”

“Food pantry & food banks”

“**Prayers.** I pray about everything I hope everything goes smoothly.”

“The fact that I do have **a job and secured income.**”

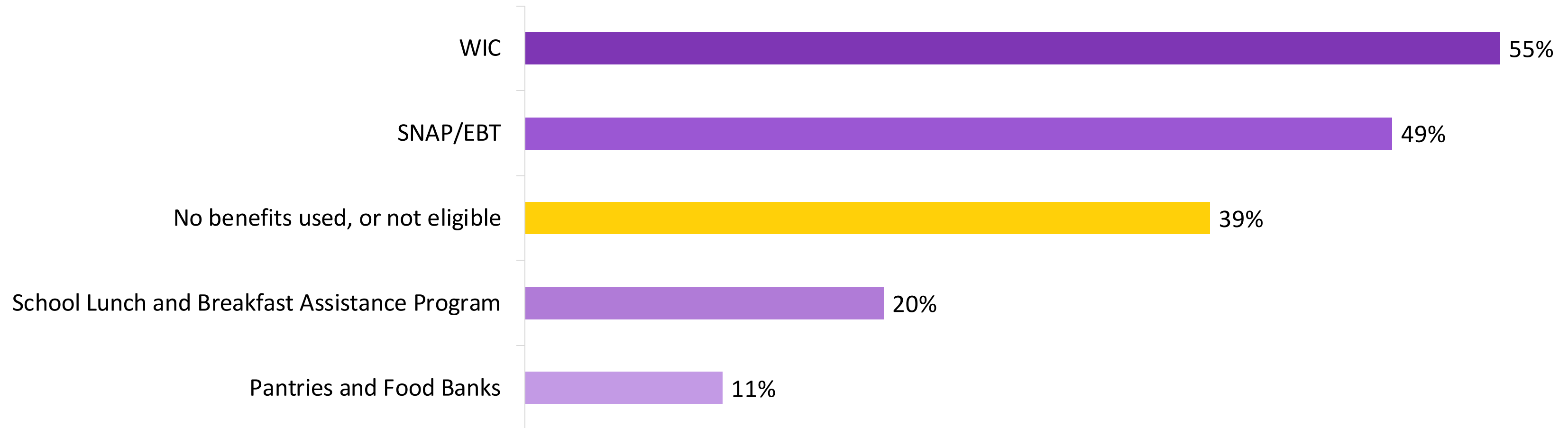
“The Daycare where I take my kids ... [has] a flexible schedule and the **teachers are so caring** and loving.”

“Nothing I’m trying to get as much help as possible.”

Support Paying for Food

Three out of five parents use some type of resource to help feed their families. Most commonly they use WIC and SNAP/EBT.

Food resources currently being used
(419 parents)

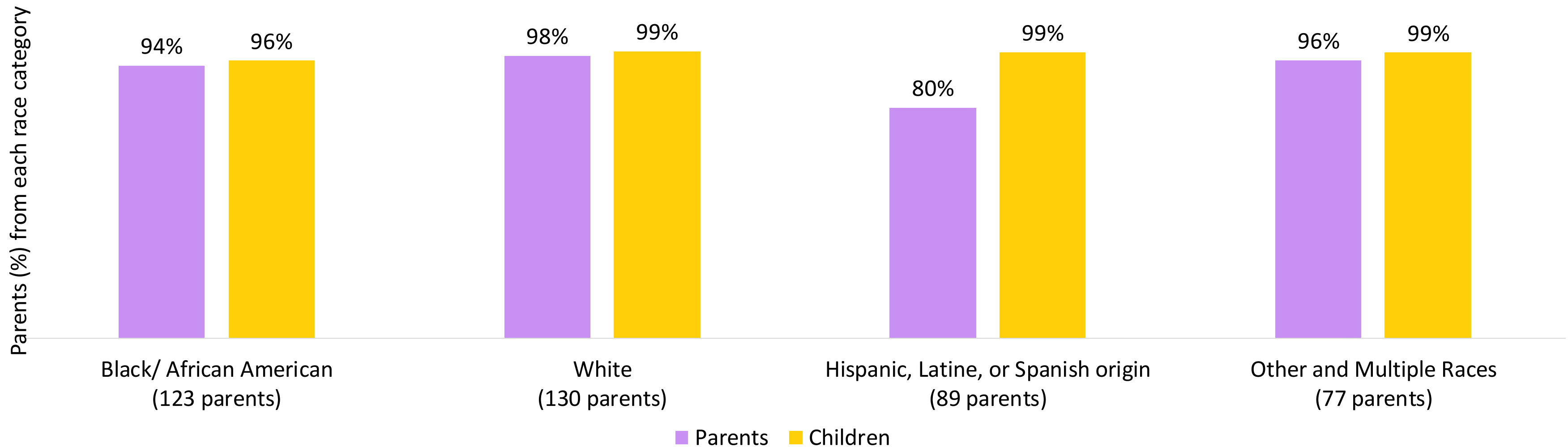


Family Well-being

Health Insurance Coverage

Most parents and children had health insurance coverage. However, one out of five Hispanic parents did *not* have coverage.

Covered by some type of health insurance, by race/ethnicity

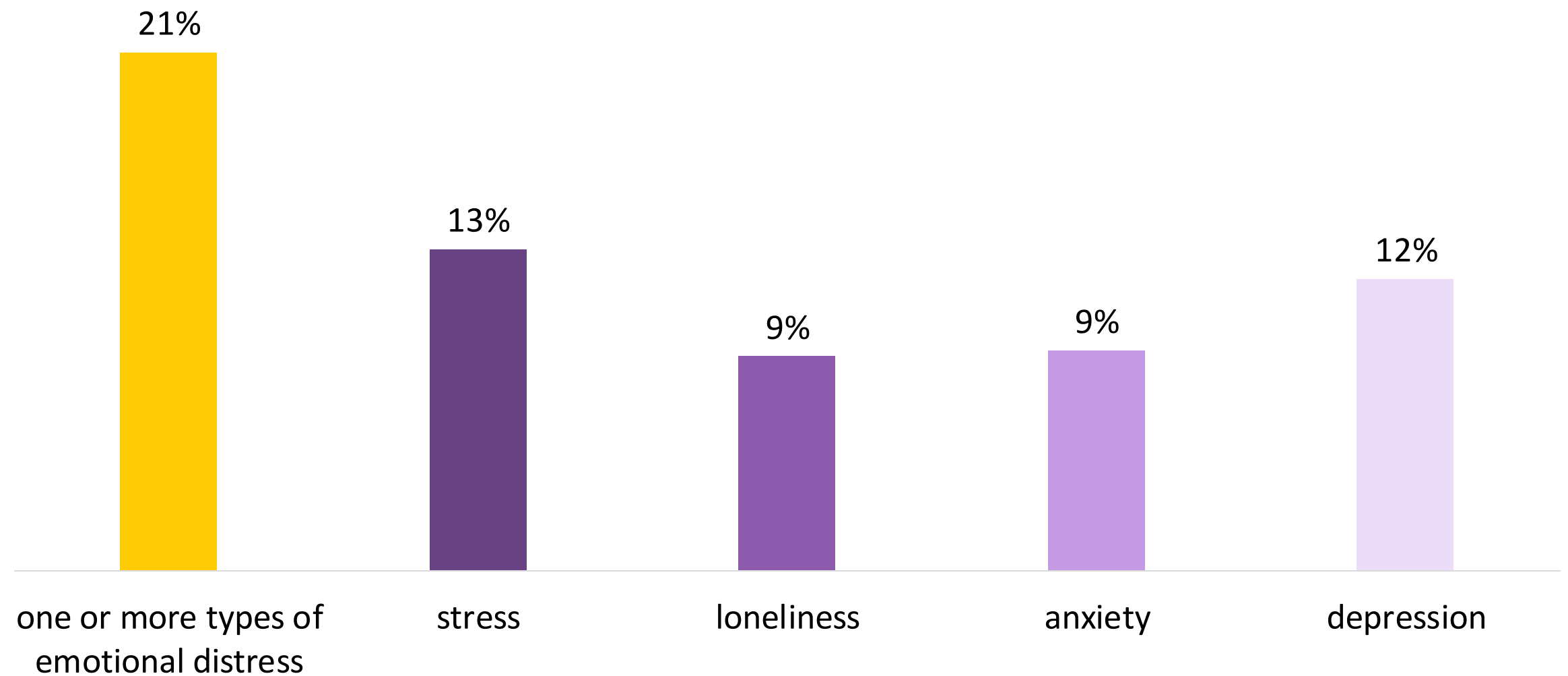


Parents' Mental Well-being

In our panel, 21% of parents experienced high occurrences of distressing emotions such as stress, anxiety, depression, or loneliness in the past month.

Parents experiencing frequent emotional distress
(419 parents)

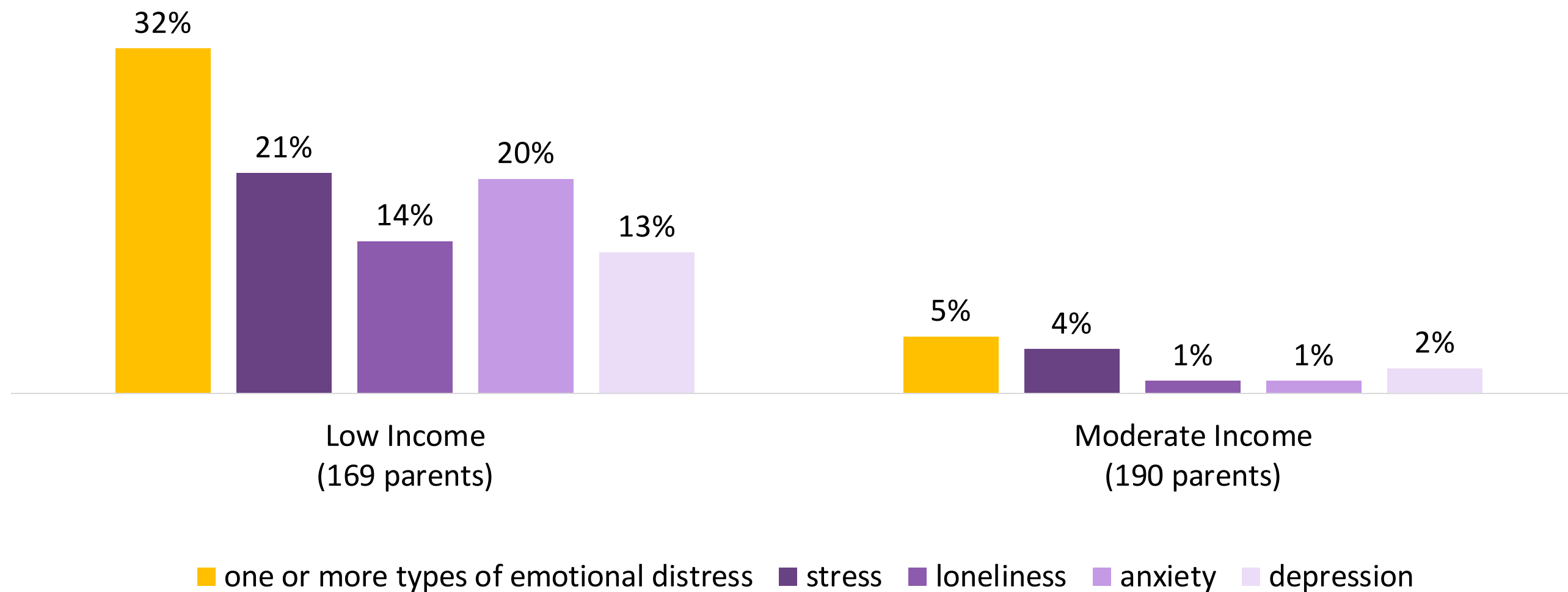
Parents who report experiencing anxiety or depression 'more than half the days' or 'nearly every day' in the past month, or who experienced stress or loneliness 'usually', or 'always' in the past month.



Parents' Mental Well-being

Parents with low income experience more frequent emotional distress. They are approximately 6 times as likely as parents with moderate income to experience frequent emotional distress in the past month.

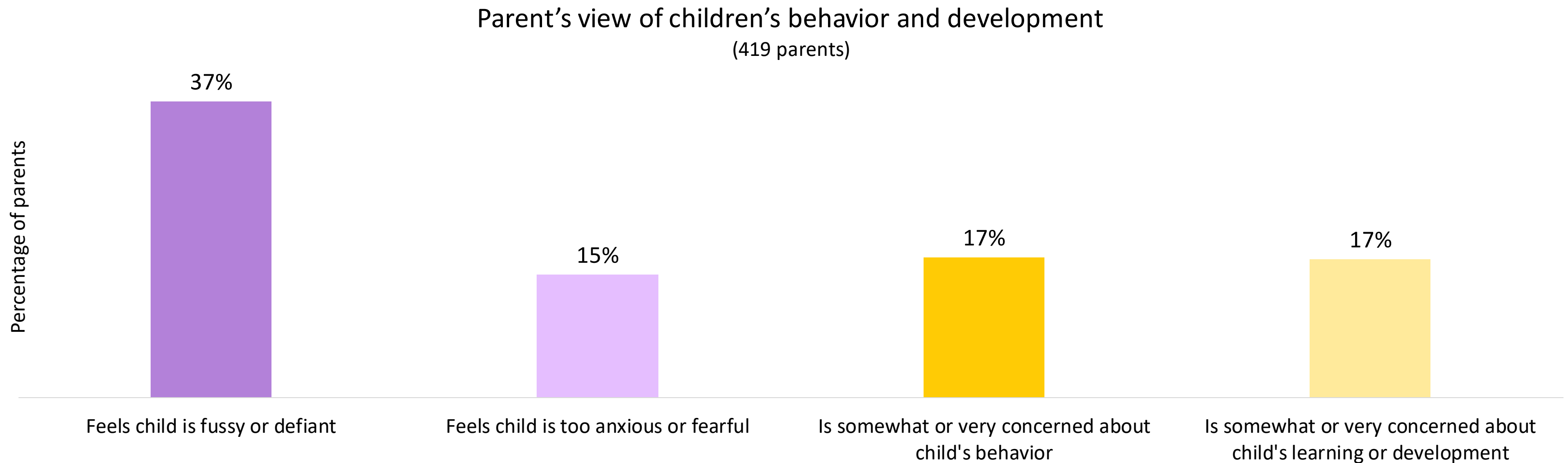
Parents experiencing frequent emotional distress, by income levels



Please note:
60 parents did not share their income. When we studied their mental well-being levels, they showed similar rates of emotional distress as the group of parents with low income.

Children's Behavior (children ages 0 to 5)

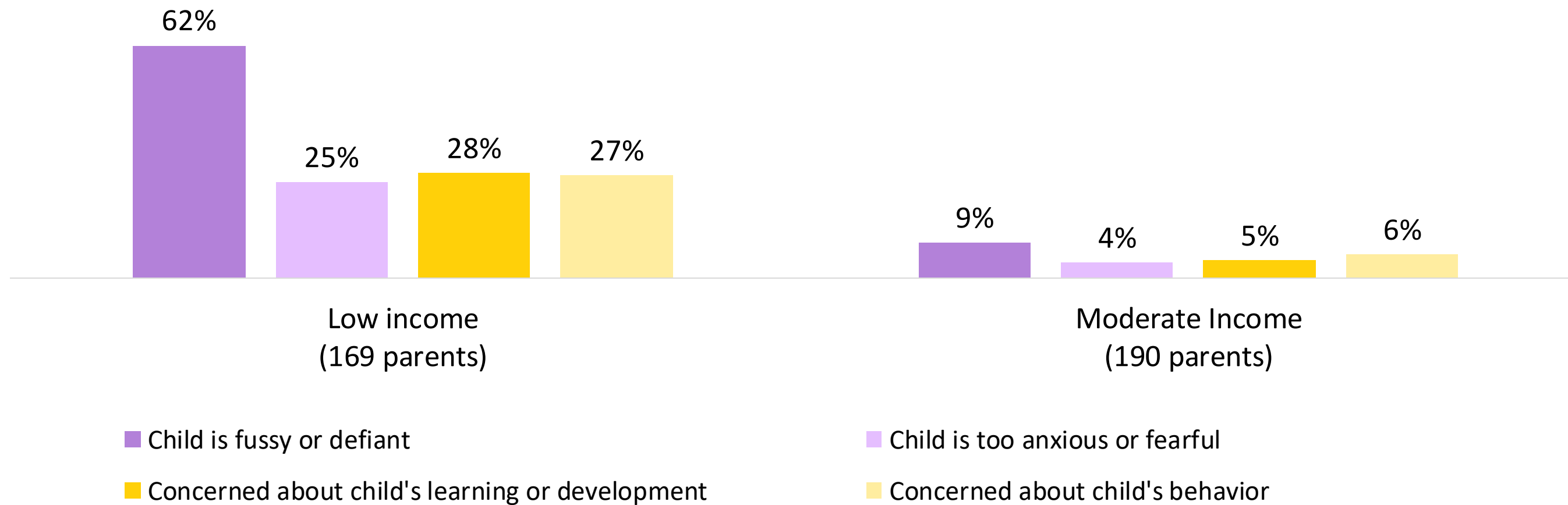
Over a third of parents have a young child they feel is fussy or defiant, and 15% have a young child they feel is too anxious or fearful. 17% of parents were at least somewhat concerned about their child's behavior.



Children's Behavior (children ages 0 to 5)

Parents with lower incomes are seven times as likely as parents with moderate incomes to feel their child is fussy or defiant. They are also more likely to feel their child is too anxious or fearful and to have concerns about their child's behavior and development.

Parent's view of children's behavior and development, by income levels

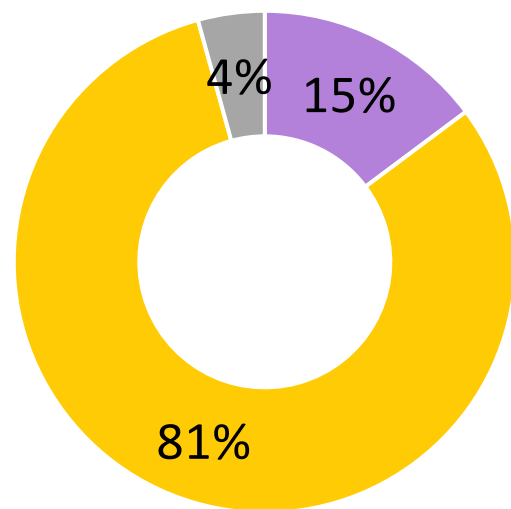


Please note:
60 parents did not share their income. When we studied their perception of their children, they showed similar rates of observing fussiness and fearfulness as the group of parents with low income.

Children with Disabilities or Developmental Delays

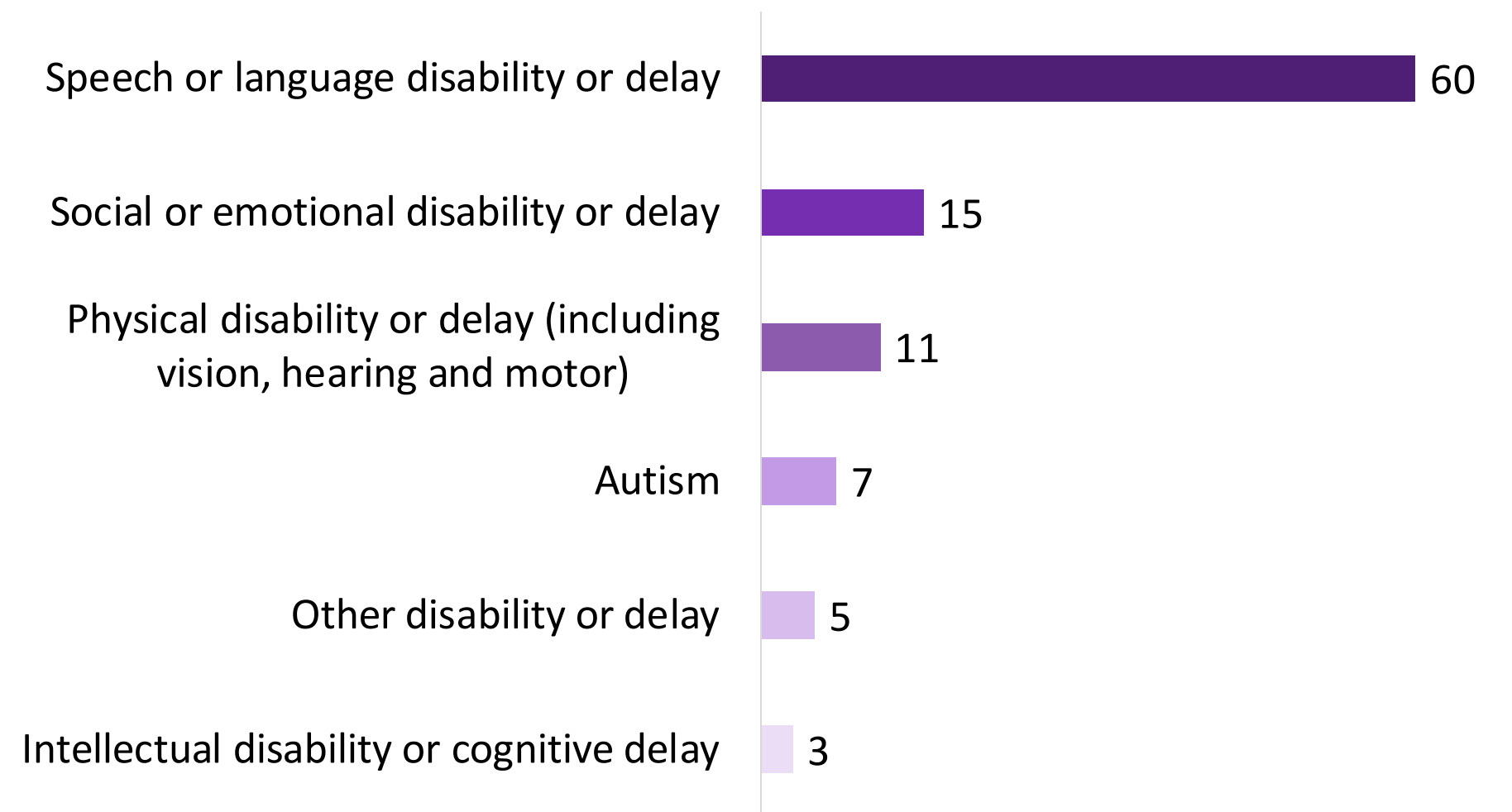
Fifteen percent of parents have at least one child with a disability or developmental delay. Speech or language disabilities or delays were most common.

Parents who have a child with a disability or developmental delay
(419 parents)



- At least one child has a disability or developmental delay
- Child(ren) do not have a disability or developmental delay
- No responses

Type of disability or developmental delay
(419 parents)



Parents had many reasons to be proud of their children

Parents shared what makes them proud of their child. Parents were proud of how smart their child was, of their ability to learn, the conversations their child has, the caring and sweet nature of their child, and the joyfulness of their child.

“He is very **smart**. He knows his colors, **talks a lot**, and is trying to count.”

“He's very **helpful and eager**. He **loves to learn** and read.”

“She is so **smart and funny**. She can brighten the worse day with a giggle and smile.”

“Watching him **grow and be self-sufficient**. Seeing him happy when he's learned something new and shows me!”

“She's well-spoken, articulate, and **well-mannered**.”

“She is so sweet and **cares about her family**.”

“She **interested in the world** around her. She questions everything. Her **imagination** is the best thing about her.”

“I'm proud of that they **try to do new things even if they are nervous**.”

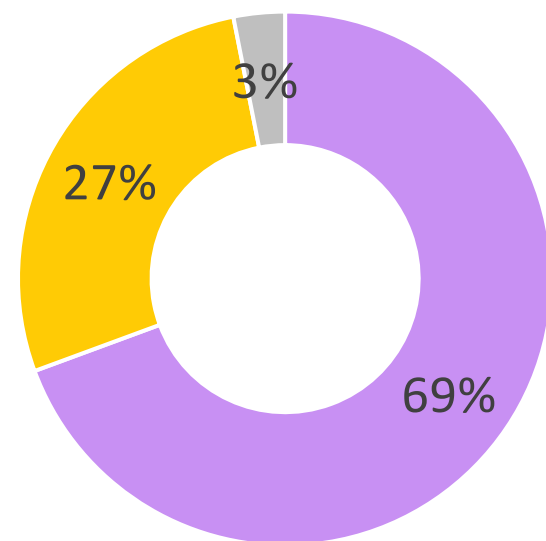
“**Everything**. He's the biggest cuddle-y love bug.”

Child Care Experiences

Use of Child Care for Children Under 6

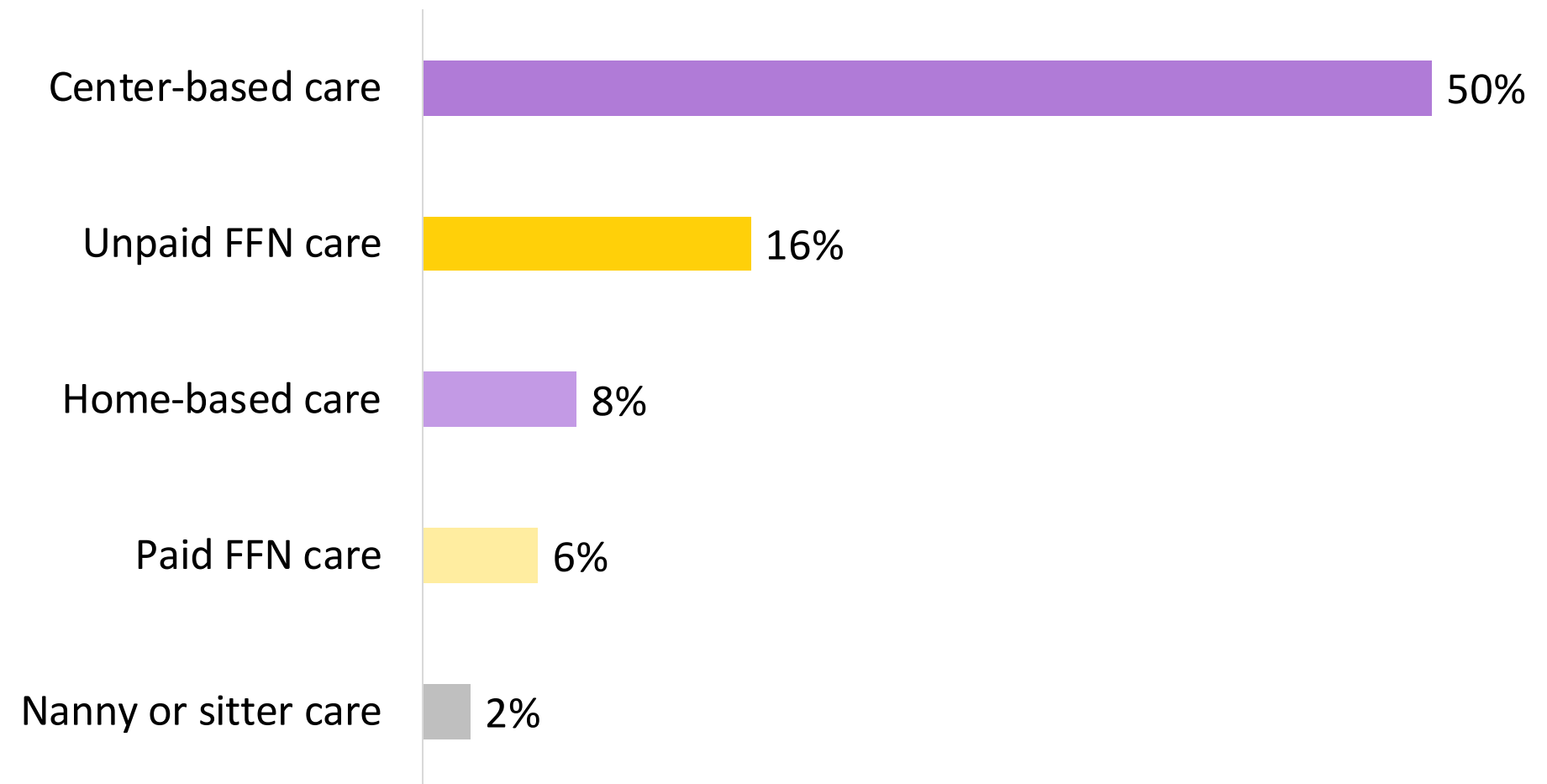
Sixty-nine percent of the parents use some form of non-parental care for their child under age 6. Half use center-based care and over a quarter use home-based care, particularly paid or unpaid family, friend and neighbor (FFN) care.

Parent use of non-parental child care for children under 6 (419 parents)



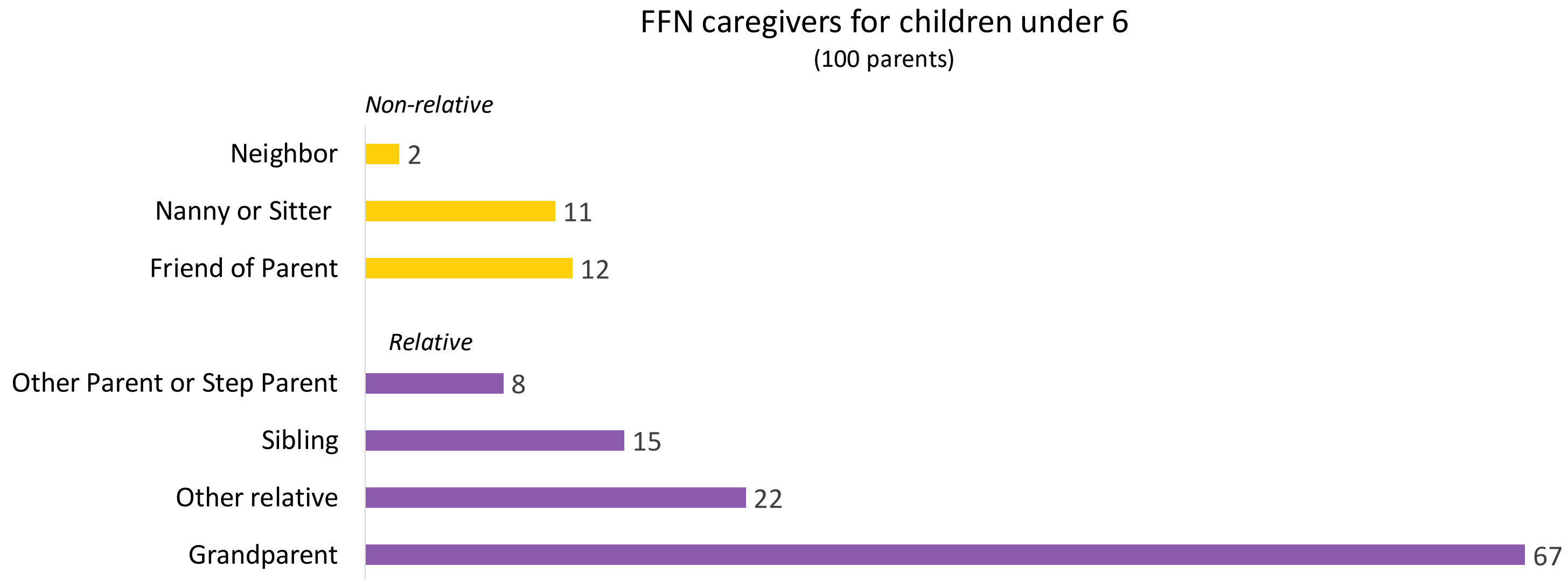
- Uses child care
- Does not use child care
- Unsure

Type of child care for children under 6 (419 parents)



Family, Friend, and Neighbor (FFN) Caregivers

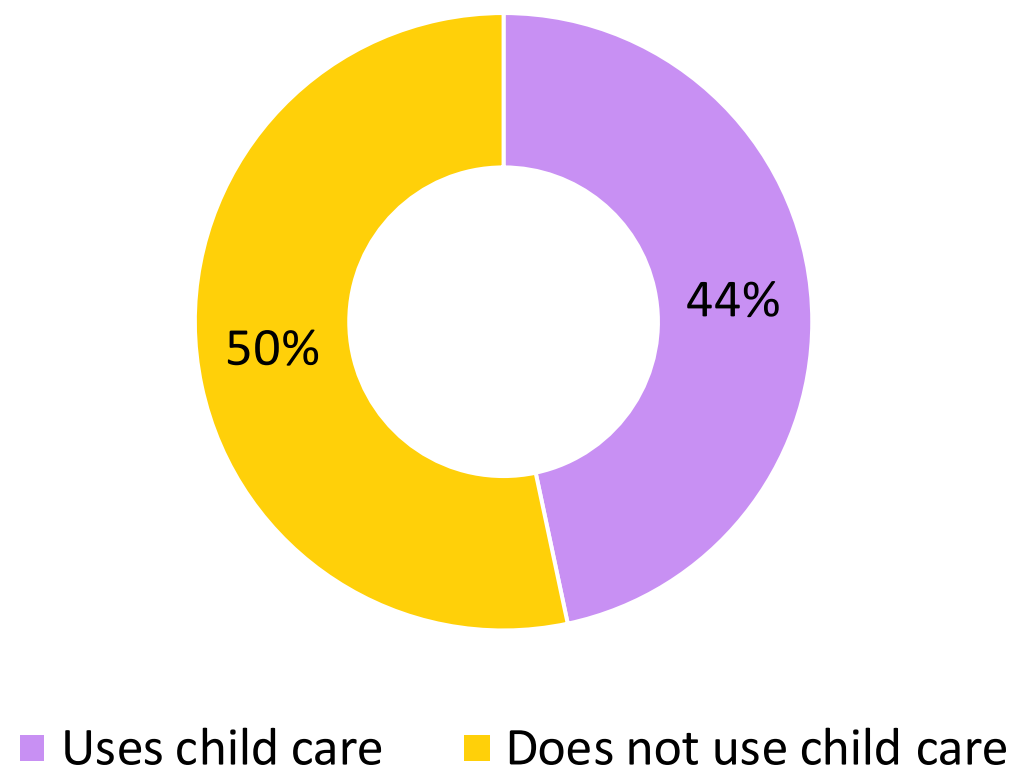
Two-thirds of families that use FFN care use a grandparent to look after their children. A quarter of families use non-relative FFN care.



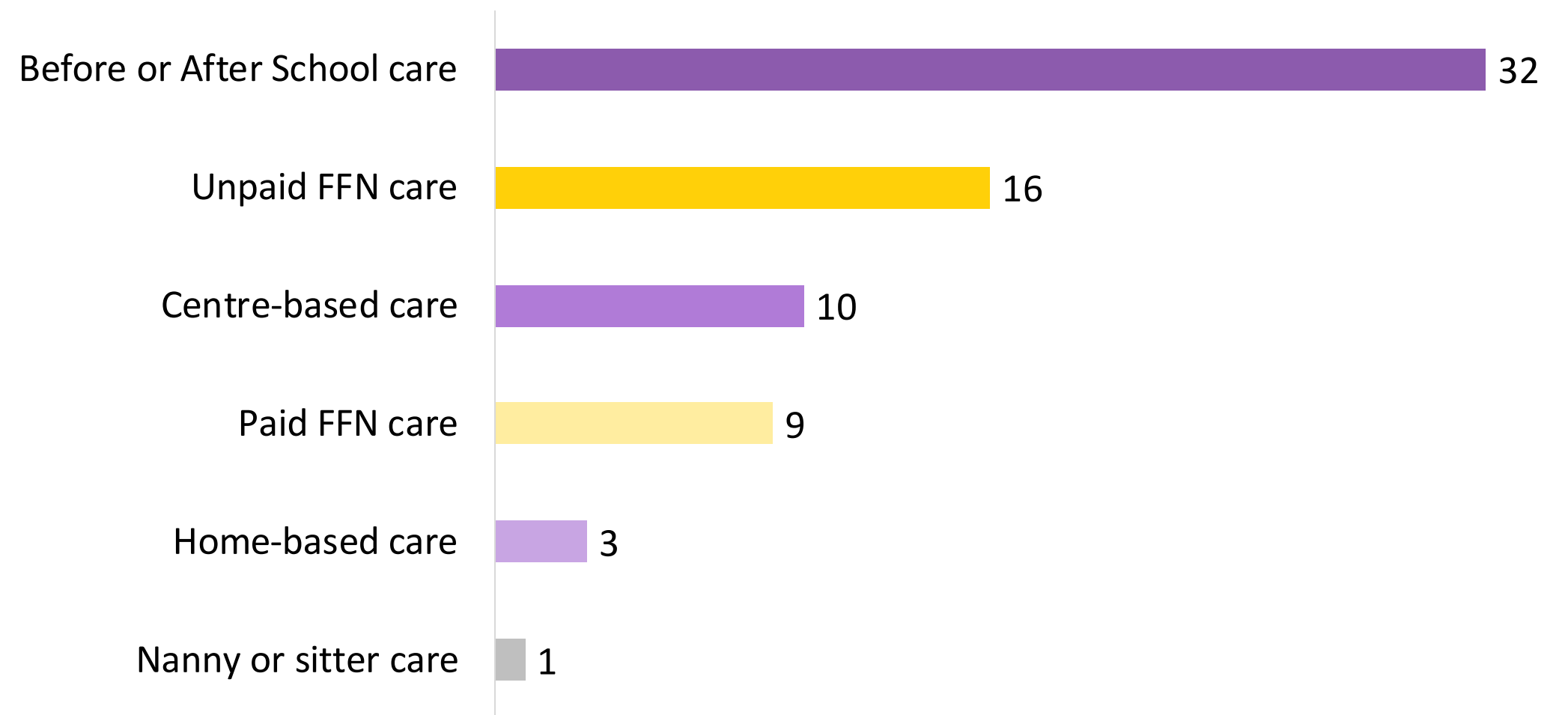
Use of Child Care for 6 to 12 Year Olds

Less than half of parents who have a child age 6 to 12 use child care. The most common type of care used is before- or after-school care, followed by paid or unpaid FFN care.

Parent use of non-parental child care for children Age 6 - 12 (127 parents)



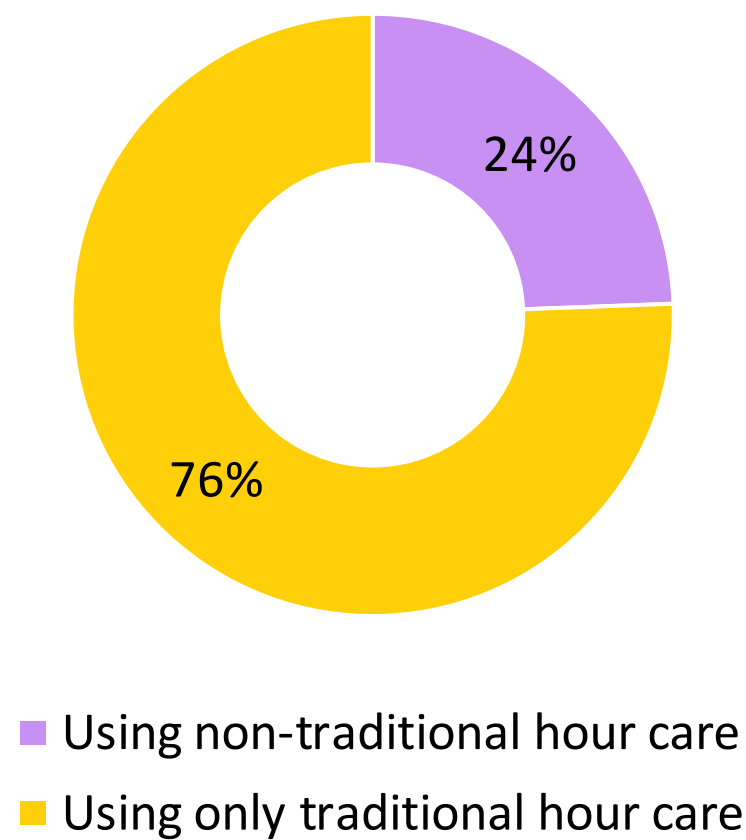
Types of child care for children Age 6 - 12 (56 parents)



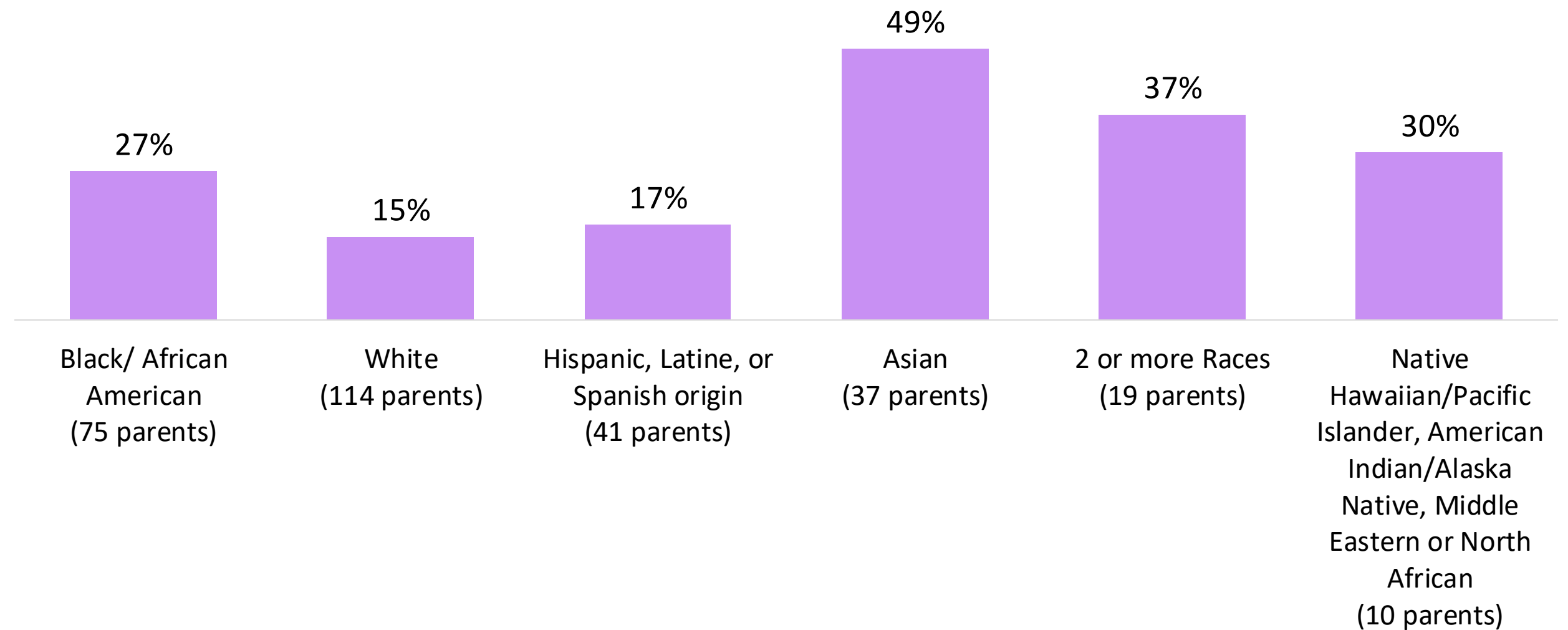
Non-Traditional Hour Child Care

Among parents who use child care, 24% use child care during non-traditional hours (in the evening, early morning, or on weekends).

Parents using Non-Traditional Hour Child Care
(295 parents)

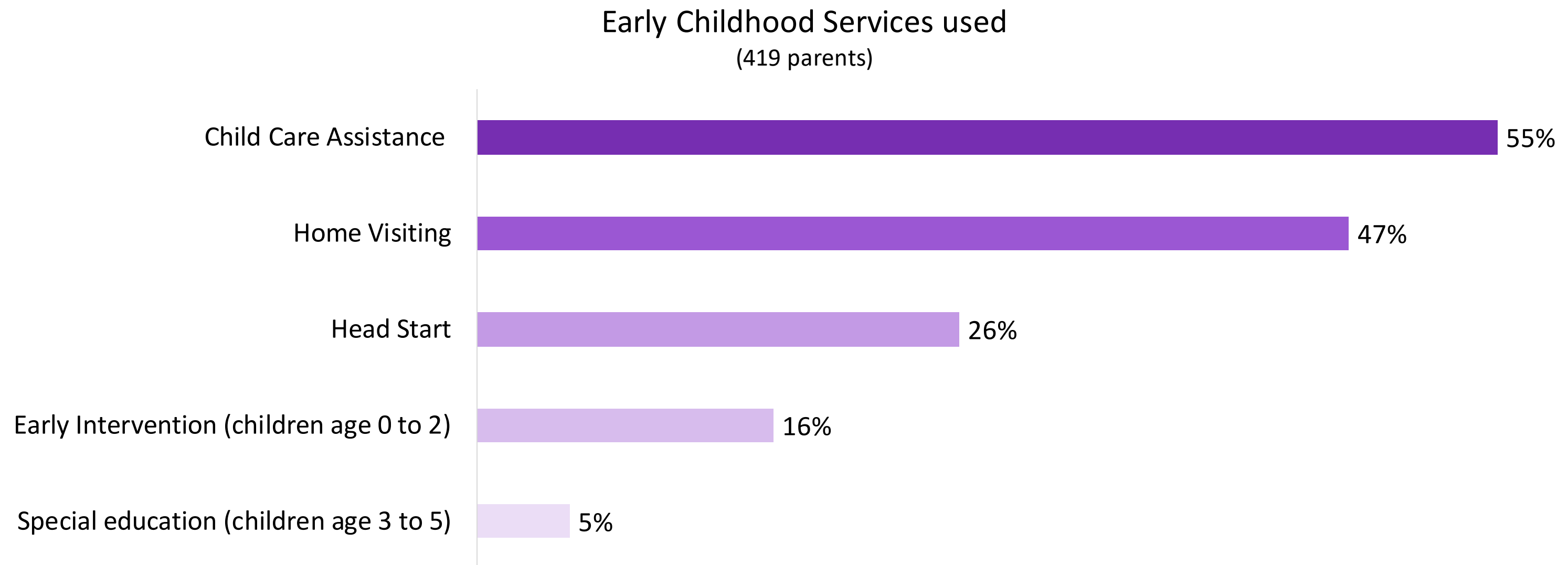


Parents using Non-Traditional Hour Child Care, by race/ethnicity



Use of Early Childhood Services

Our panel members have participated in a variety of early childhood services. Over half have received Child Care Assistance and nearly half have used home visiting services.



Messages from parents to policymakers and elected officials

What parents want policymakers and elected officials to know

Parents want officials to know that they are struggling with the growing cost of living and that they need higher wages and better job opportunities.

38 parents mentioned the rising cost of living and inflation

"[The] middle class is suffering. It's discouraging to know that we cannot turn to state or government officials to help. The cost of living has increased but everything else has stayed the same."

"Single moms ... are just trying to somehow find a way to raise our kids in a world whose expenses are growing exponentially."

"We all need help financially. Rent keeps getting raised, food keeps getting raised, everything goes up on prices especially except for the money we make. This needs to be addressed ASAP"

49 parents mentioned a need for higher wages and job opportunities

"We are living paycheck to paycheck with no additional money for anything else. We need an increase in pay and decrease in living costs. We shouldn't have to worry about feeding our families and working just to get by."

"We need more help financially, raise the minimum wage without raising the cost of living."

"We need more job availability that will work with parents to create a feasible schedule."

What parents want policymakers and elected officials to know

Parents would like to see more resources available to their families to help with food, housing, child care, and transportation.

"We need **cheaper housing, affordable childcare, and more Snap Benefits**. We need more help to get on our feet. We need **healthier food and water**."

"They need to re-evaluate and make new guidelines for the eligibility for free and reduced lunch ... every school to have **free or reduced lunch** (universal)."

"More opportunities for low income families. Offering better wages. Providing more **programs for housing**."

"I need more **reliable childcare**. Facilities I can trust. **Transportation for my kids** to and from school."

"To raise the **income limits on certain government assisted programs**. Like EBT and housing assistance."

"More assistance with making **food needs accessible and affordable**."

Parents are extremely proud of the many positive strengths of their children and have many hopes for them to live happy, healthy, successful lives.

Yet many parents are also experiencing a spectrum of financial difficulties, their biggest challenges being the rising cost of living and inflation. These have an impact far beyond providing for their family's basic needs and are associated with parents' and children's emotional challenges.

Certain historically disadvantaged communities continue to face the largest challenges to their employment, finances, and emotional health – people of color, single mothers, families with children who have a disability or developmental delay, and other marginalized identities.

Our message to policymakers and elected officials

These communities experience higher rates of financial hardships compared to their counterparts, and therefore also experience higher levels of mental and emotional distress within their families.

It is crucial that families in all communities have robust and well-informed support services that reflect their hopes and strengths for their children as well as their needs. and hardships.

Thank you

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to have the opportunity to make this research possible because of the support and contribution of Illinois Action for Children staff, our partners at the national RAPID survey at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood, and the organizations listed below who helped us recruit parents.

-
- Altgeld-Riverdale Early Learning Coalition
 - Evanston Cradle to Career
 - Palatine Early Learning Alliance
 - Elgin Partnership for Early Learning
 - Jewish Early Childhood Collaborative
 - SPARK Aurora
 - We, The Village
 - Raising IL Coalition
 - YWCA Metropolitan Chicago
 - 4-C: Community Coordinated Child Care
 - Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI)
 - North Lawndale Early Learning Collaboration