

Illinois Parent Survey Panel

Second Survey

November 2023



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 RAPID survey project at the Stanford Center on Early Childhood to conduct a quarterly survey with an ongoing panel of parents.

Survey 2 at a glance

Survey Two Topics

1. Family time together & routines
2. Family time outside the home
3. Family meals and access to healthy food
4. Reliability of and access to child care

Time is an important resource for families. Our key findings from the Second Survey are as follows:

1. Parents value quality time with their families and spend it together in a variety of ways. Barriers to quality time include work and home responsibilities as well as stress and worries.
2. Families with lower incomes report more challenges with providing their family healthy food. Challenges include having time to shop and prepare meals, the cost of food and access to grocery stores.
3. Parents who have child care generally find their arrangement to be reliable and suitable to their work schedules. However, parents who had to look for new care had difficulty finding such an arrangement, and this impacted their ability to work.

How do families spend time together?

Quality Time with Family

We asked parents to define 'quality time' for their family. The most common responses were eating or making food together, playing together, and enjoying each other's company.

Other ways parents define quality time include (but are not limited to):

- Watching TV or movies together
- Outdoor activities such as visiting museums, libraries, or parks
- Having conversations with each other
- Having family activities or doing chores together
- Reading together
- Being present with full attention, without any technological distractions

Quality Time – Parent Quotes

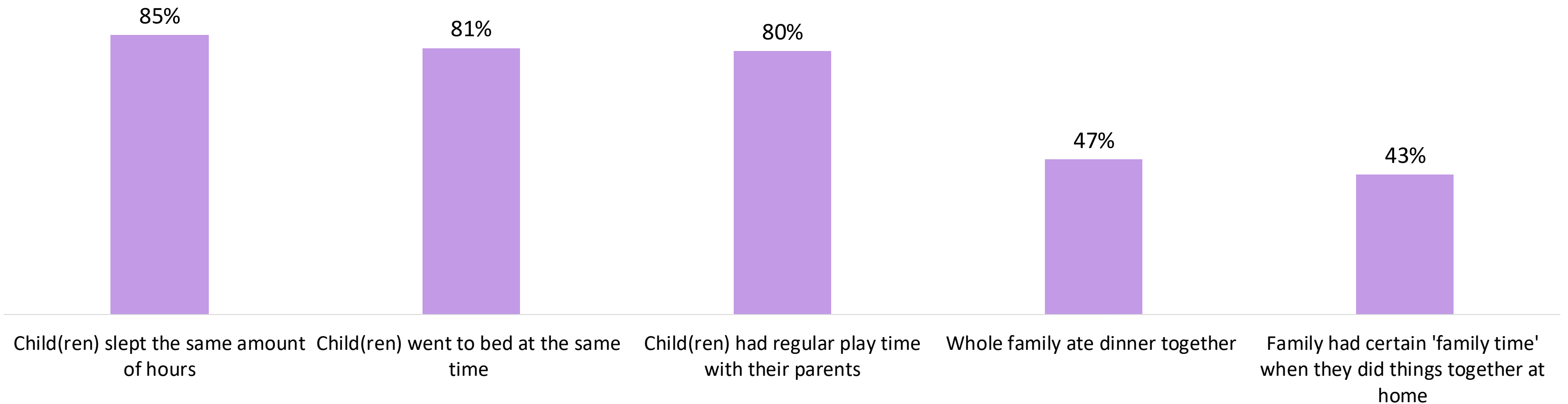
- "Eating dinner together every night. Engaging in conversations that are important to my children. Being supportive of their activities."
- "Playing board games together, baking together, going out for a family activity together, movie night at home with popcorn and other goodies, crafting. Quality time means no phones out and all our attention is on the current activity we are doing together."
- "Time spent with the family being relaxed and non-stressed. Time where we can enjoy each other's company and laugh. Time for cuddles and tickles. Time for smiling and loving one another."
- "I make sure we go outdoors as a family and play together. I think that spending time outdoors is important for our health and we bond as a family at the same time."
- "During family time we watch movies together, go on walks in the park, color, have game nights, or talk about what's bothering them and how I can fix it."

Family Routines

Family Routines

Most parents reported that their children went to bed at the same time and slept the same amount of hours every night and had a regular play time with their parents. Less than half of parents reported having a dedicated 'family time' or eating dinner together as a family every day.

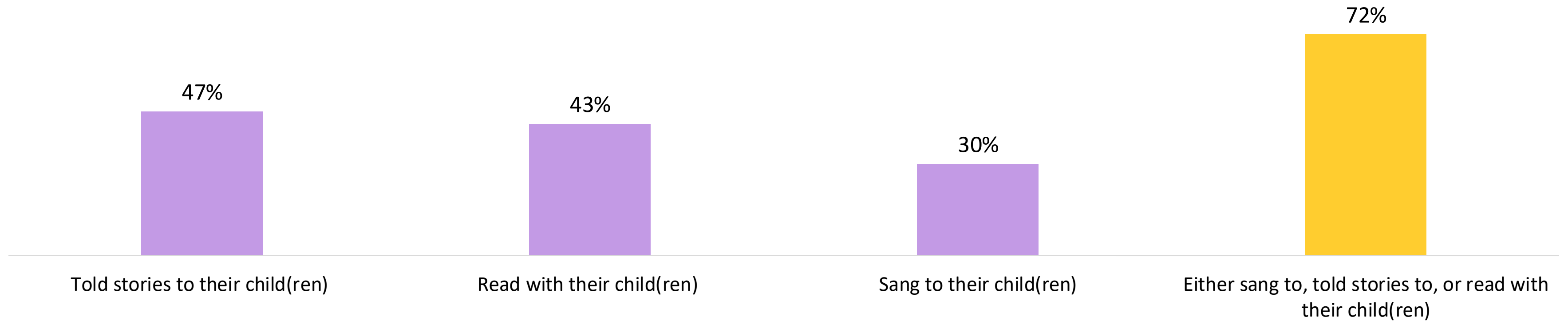
Families that had the following routines almost every day
(310 parents)



Routines that Support Language Development

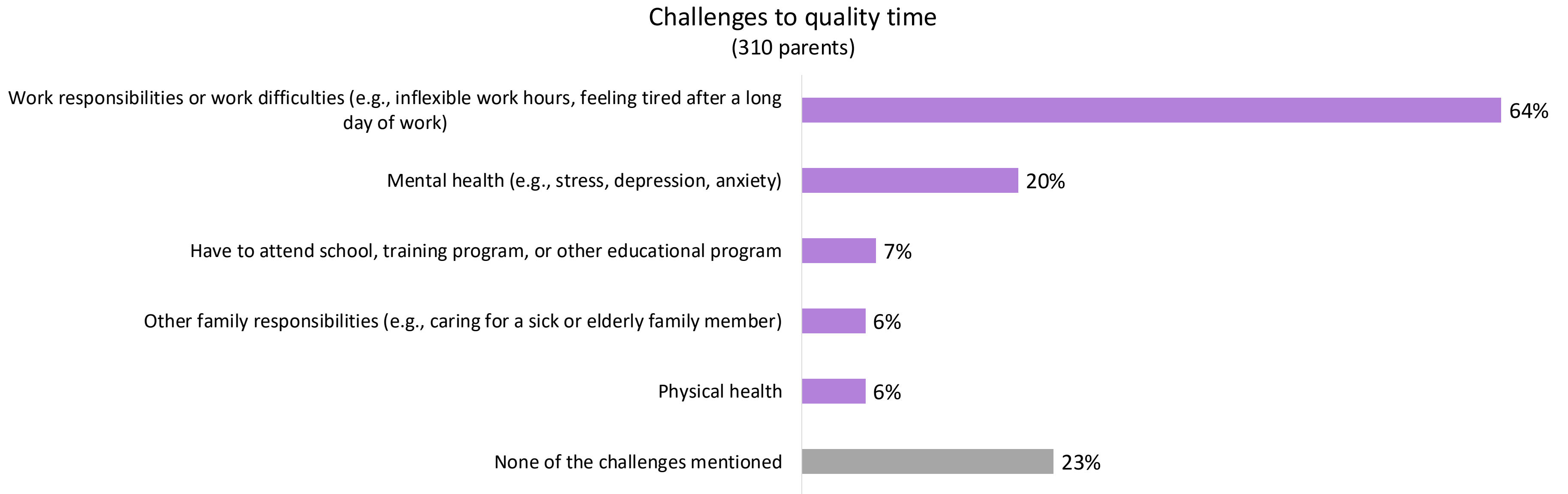
Fewer than half of parents read to their children every day, told stories to them every day or sang to them every day. However, 72% of parents did at least one of these activities every day.

Families had the following language development activities almost every day
(310 parents)



Challenges to Quality Time

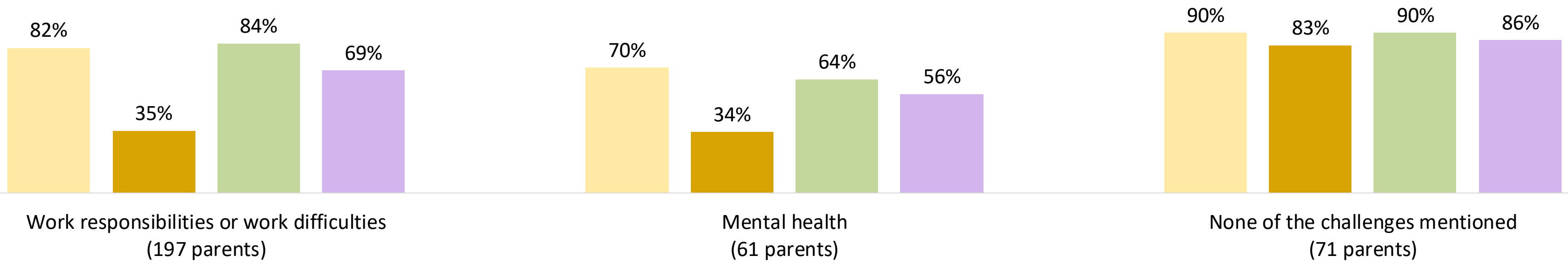
We asked parents to select challenges they face to having quality time with their families. Their most common challenge was work responsibilities and work difficulties, followed by mental health issues.



Challenges to Quality Time and Everyday Routines

Parents who had no challenges to quality time were more likely to have everyday routines with their children than parents who had challenges. Parents who said their mental health was a challenge to quality time were least likely to have these everyday routines.

Everyday routines families had based on their challenges to quality time.



■ Child(ren) had regular play time with their parents ■ Whole family ate dinner together ■ Child(ren) went to bed at the same time ■ Sang to, told stories to, or read with their child(ren)

Challenges to Quality Time

We asked parents to tell us more about their biggest challenges to spending quality time with their families. Parents shared that work, exhaustion from work, and household responsibilities were barriers to quality time.

Other challenges to quality time with family include (but are not limited to):

- Lack of emotional or mental energy, not being in the mood
- Physical health (exhaustion, postpartum recovery, health complications)
- Financial hardships (lack of means to do the things children want to do, stress due to bills)
- Children do not want to participate or have needs that are hard for parents to accommodate
- Parents being students
- Technological distractions

Challenges to Quality Time – Parent Quotes

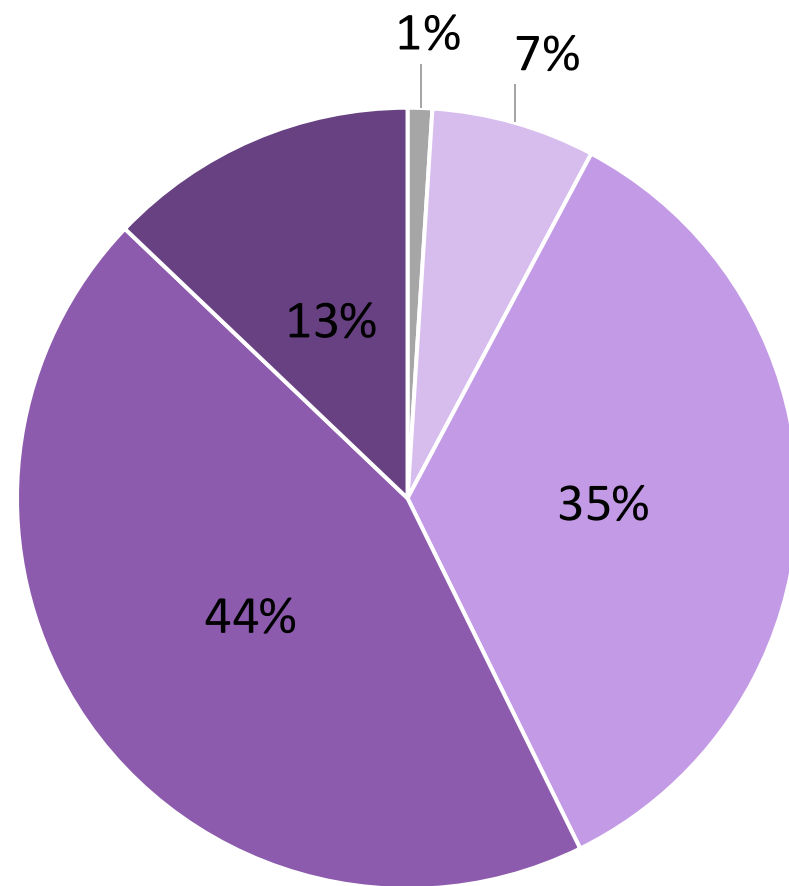
- "My husband and my work hours don't mesh well and [our] older girls are in school activities so family time is difficult to have. We make Sundays our family day."
- "My work hours changing and feeling too tired to do a lot after work. Working with kids all day then coming home trying to engage in fun activities with my own child has become hard."
- "It's hard to balance doing housework and also making individual one-on-one time with kids."
- "I'm a full-time student so whatever time I have available it's totally spent with my kids"
- "Sometimes I am too tired or just not in the mood but I will try to shake myself from the funky mood and still be present in the moment. Life is hard, especially when you don't have the means to do all the things your kids have the desire to do."
- "Getting them to turn off the TV."

Family time outside the home

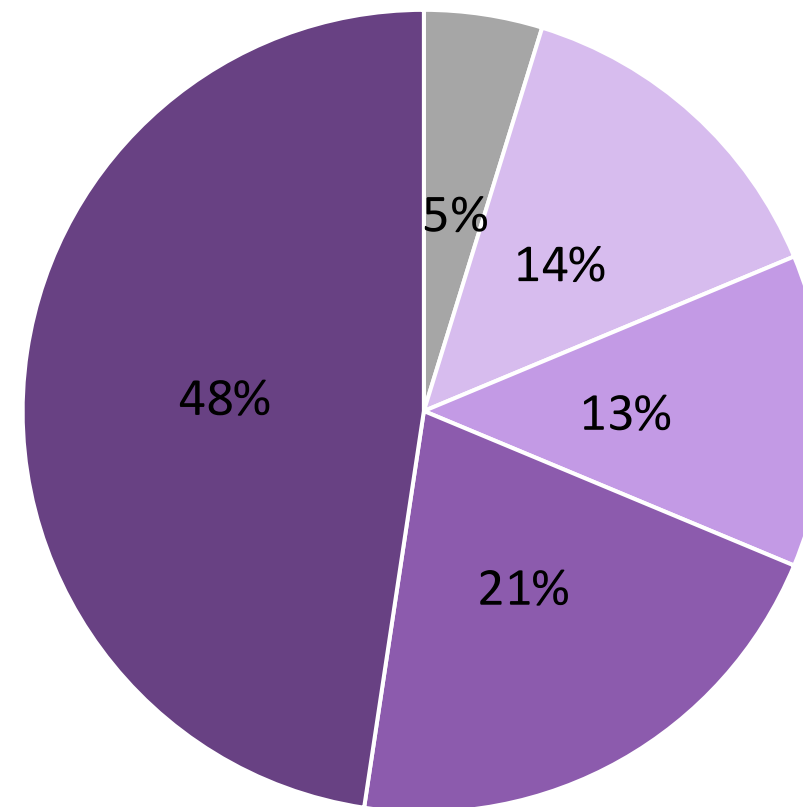
Visiting community spaces

We asked parents how often they visited certain spaces in the last month. More parents frequented parks and outdoor natural areas on a weekly basis compared to other community spaces.

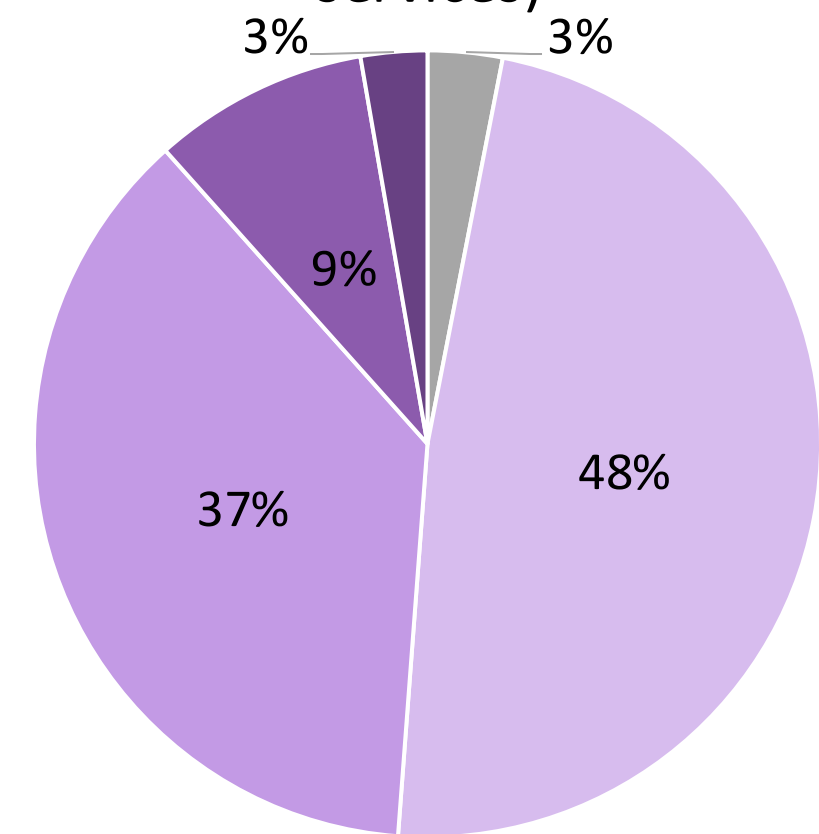
Public parks or playgrounds



Outdoor natural areas
(beaches, nature preserves, walking trails)



Community spaces or events
(museums, libraries, musical events, religious services)

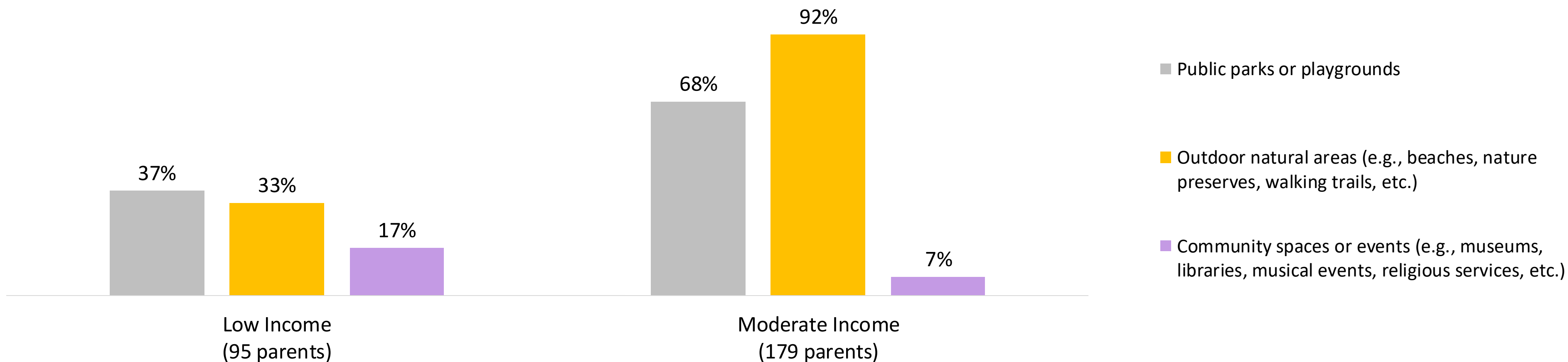


■ Never ■ Once per month or less ■ A few times per month ■ About once per week ■ More than once per week

Visiting community spaces

Families with moderate income were almost three times as likely to visit outdoor natural areas, and almost two times as likely to visit public parks at least once a week compared to families with lower incomes.

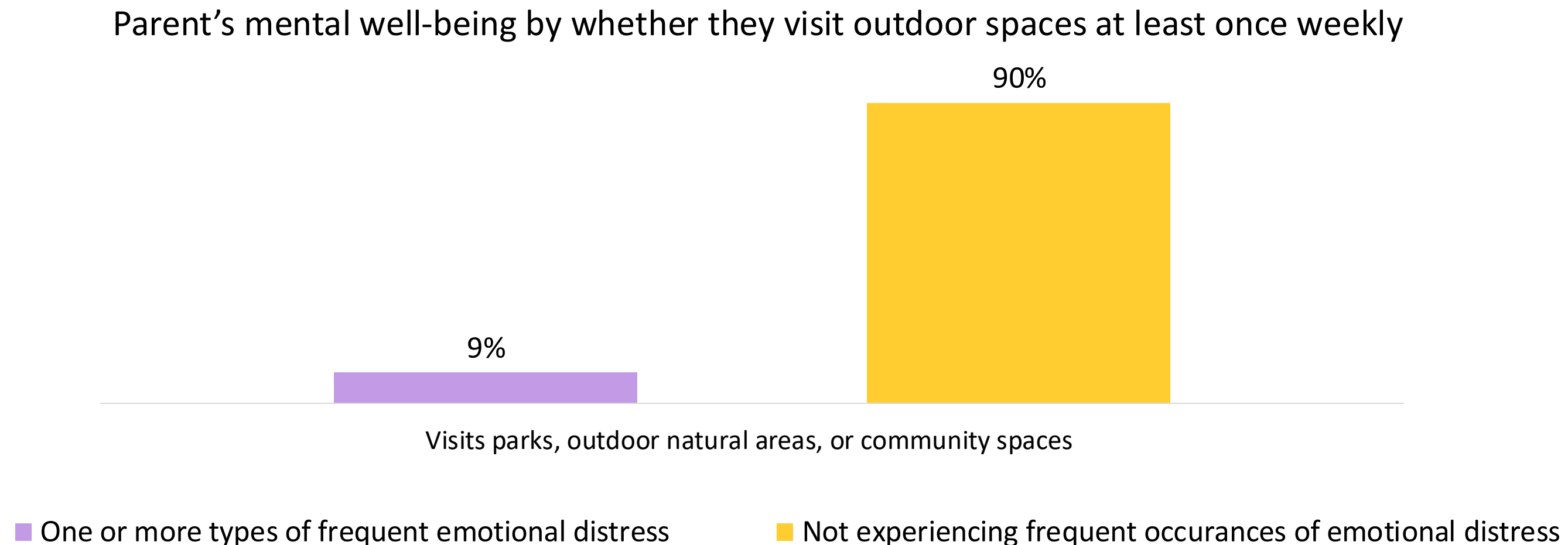
At least once a week visiting community spaces, by income levels



*Note: We define **low income** as parents living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, and **moderate income** as those living above the 200% of federal poverty level. 200% of the federal poverty level is \$39,440 for a family of 2, \$49,720 for a family of 3, and \$60,000 for a family of four.*

Visiting community spaces

Parents who report experiencing frequent emotional distress are only one tenth as likely to visit outdoor spaces weekly as parents who are not experiencing frequent emotional distress.

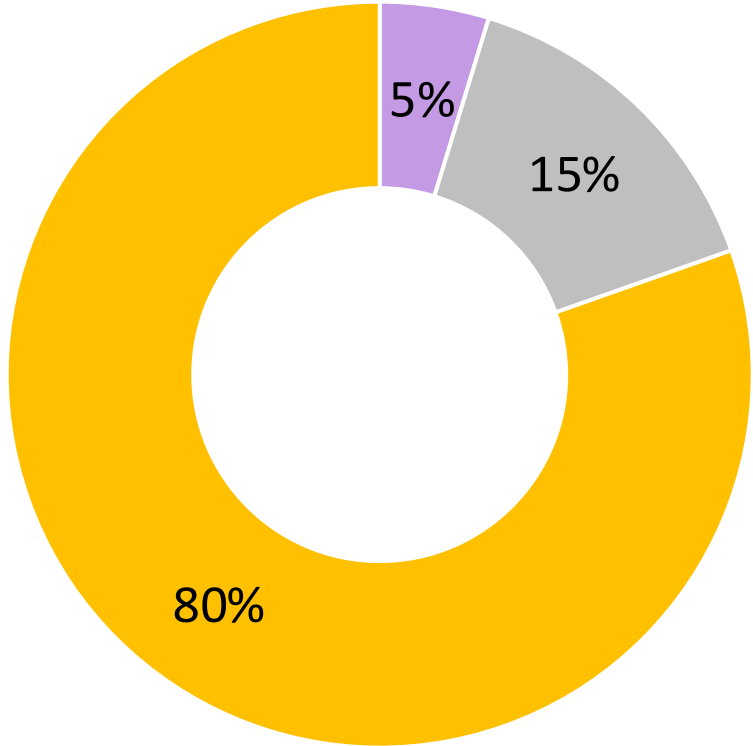


Parents who experience frequent emotional distress are defined as those that report experiencing anxiety or depression 'more than half the days' or 'nearly every day' in the past month, or who experienced stress or loneliness 'usually', or 'always' in the past month.

Safety and comfort of their environments

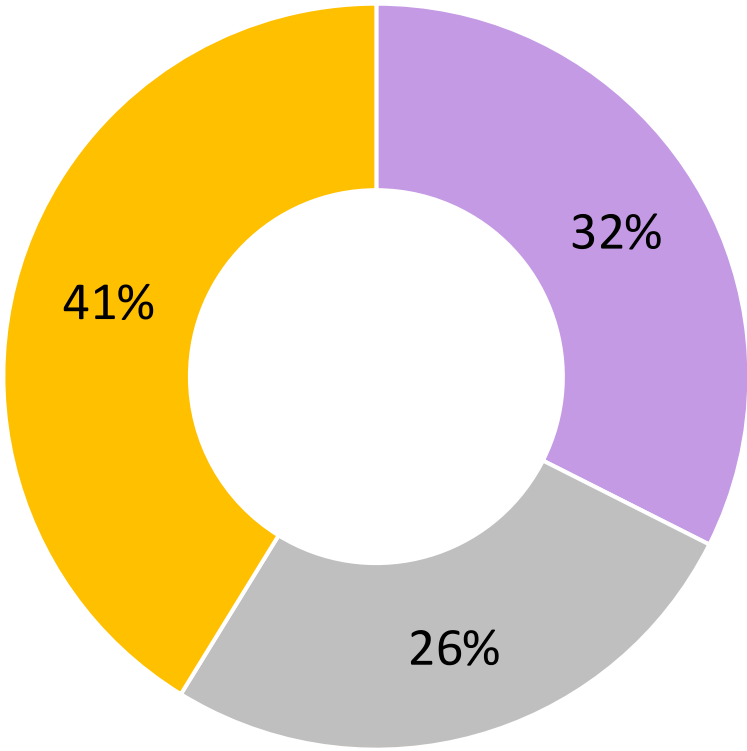
In our panel, 80% of parents feel comfortable at their local park. However, only 41% feel their neighborhood is safe for children to walk or bike alone. This trend was similar across income levels of the parents in our survey.

My family feels comfortable at our local park
(296 parents)



Disagree Neutral Agree

It is safe for children to walk or bike alone in my area
(296 parents)



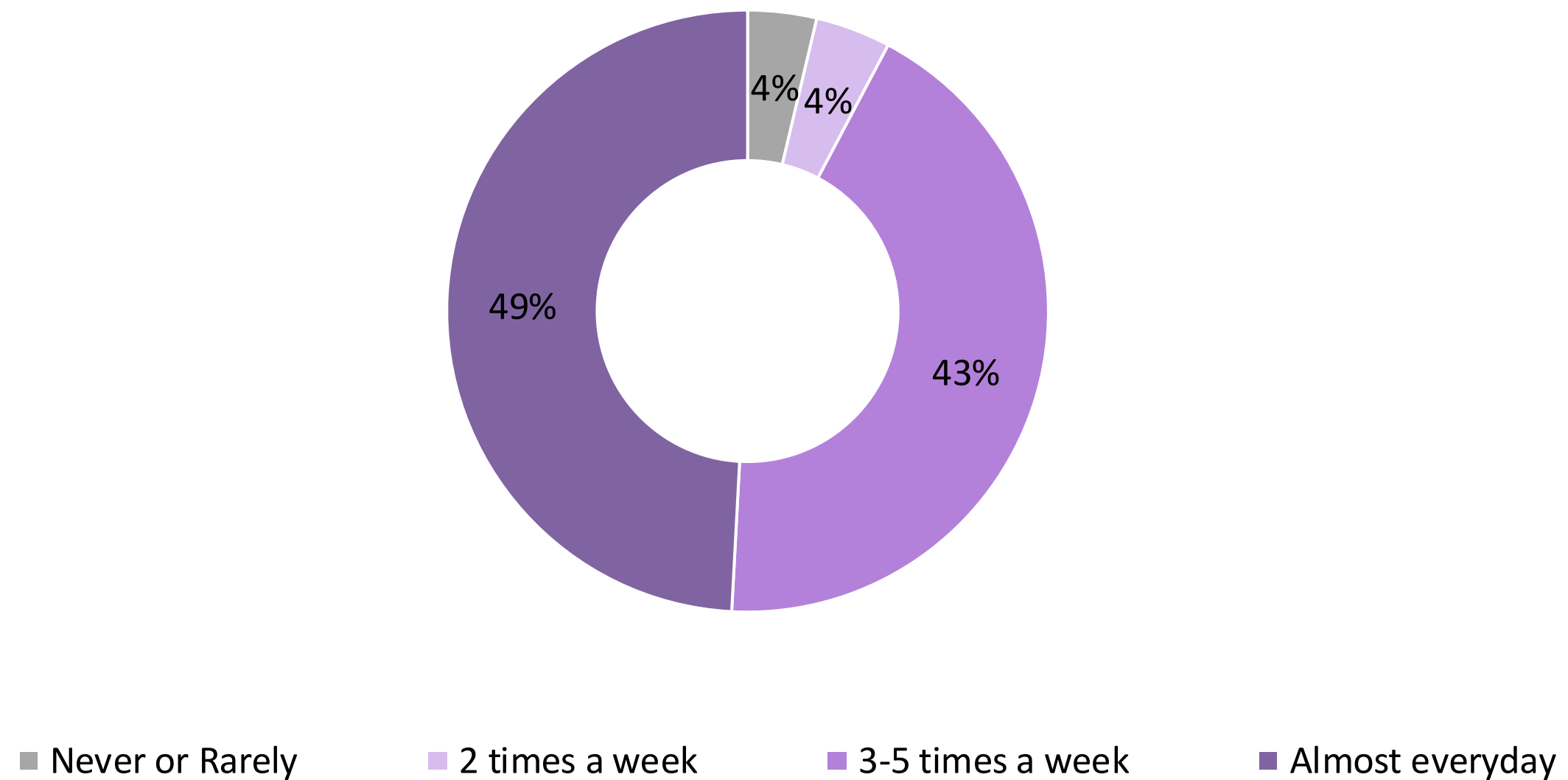
Disagree Neutral Agree

Family meals

Family Dinner Routines

Though less than half of families eat dinner together every day, 92% eat together at least 3-5 times per week.

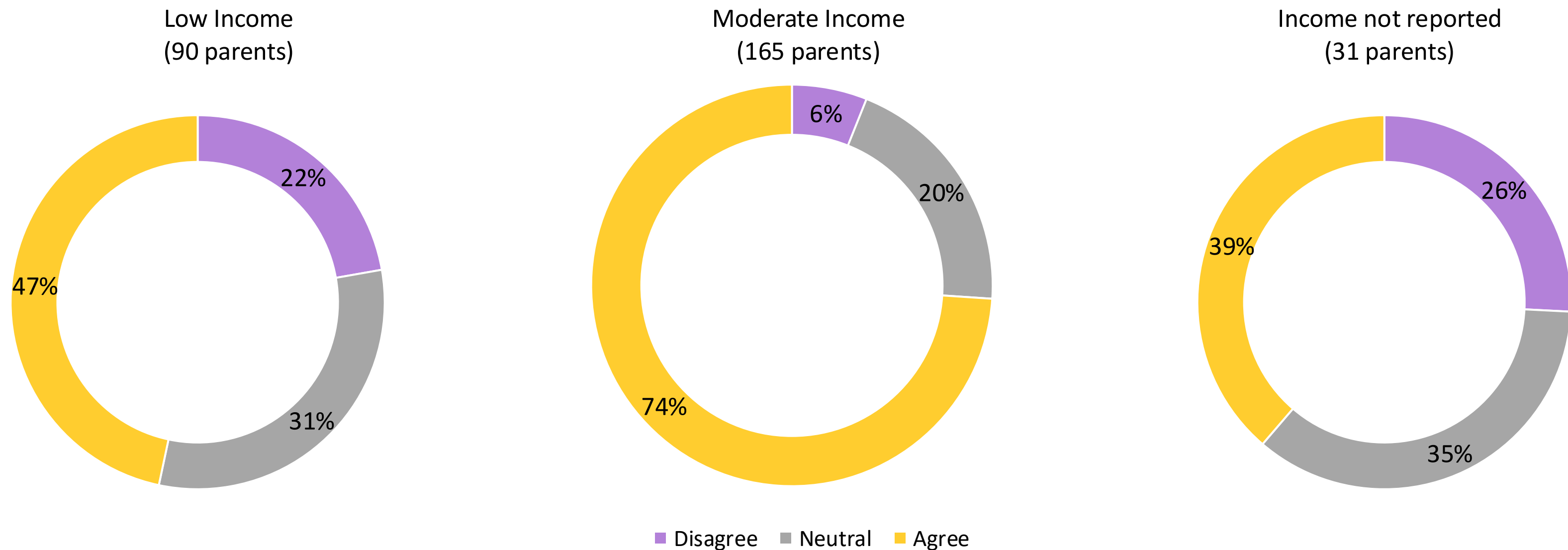
Family Routines: whole family eats dinner together
(297 parents)



Access to Healthy Foods

We asked parents if it was easy and affordable to buy fresh fruits and vegetables where they live. Families with lower incomes were almost four times as likely to disagree compared to families with moderate income.

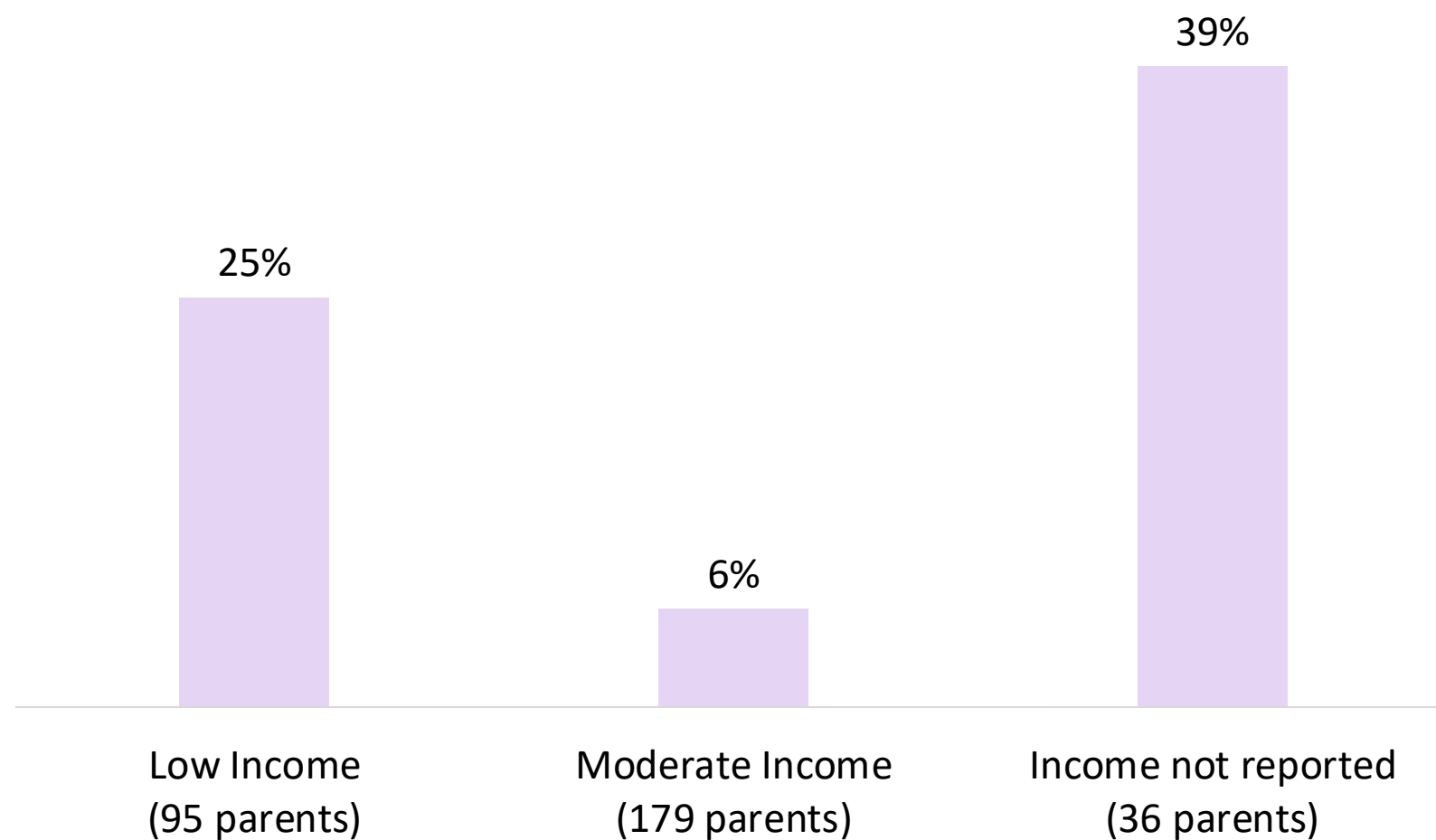
In my neighborhood, it is easy and affordable to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.



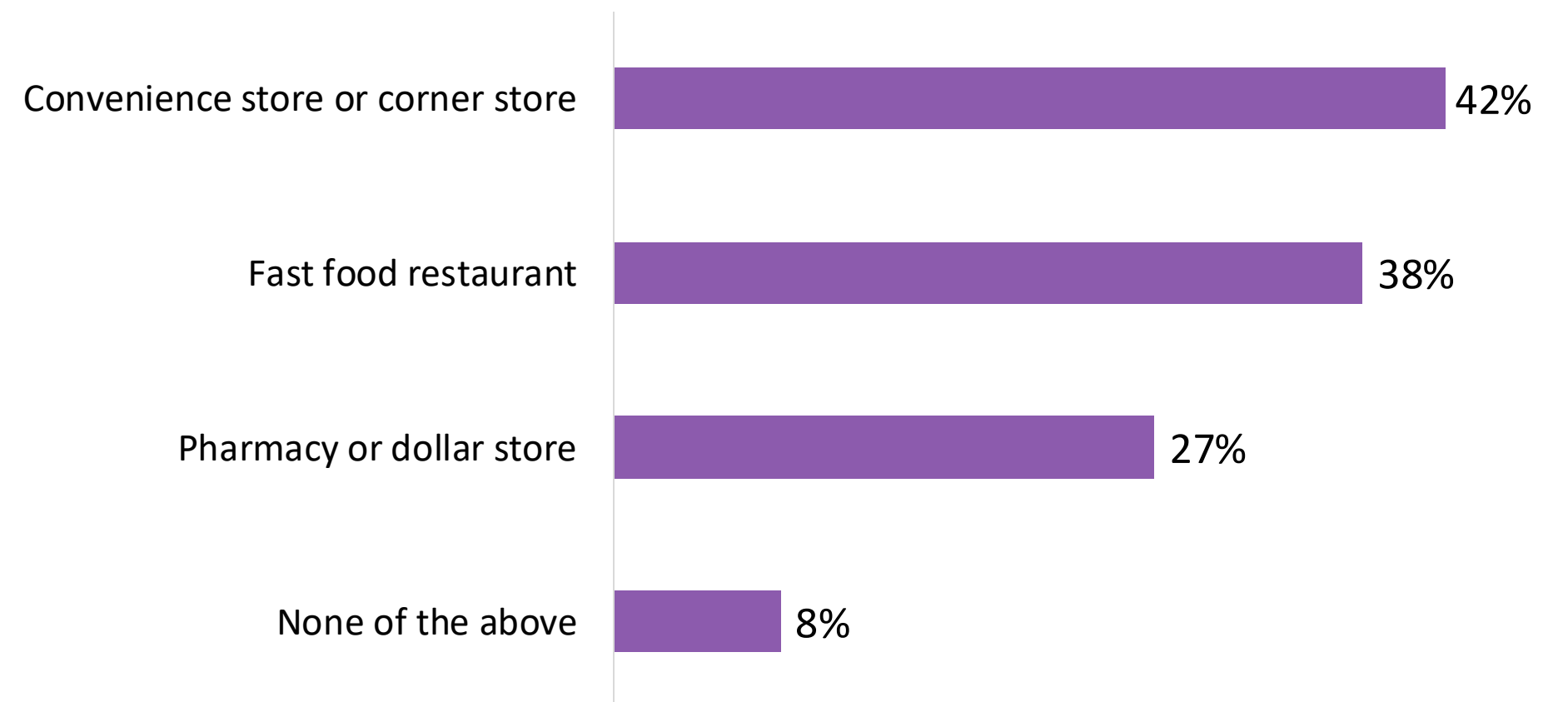
Access to Food Sources

A quarter of parents with low incomes do not live near a grocery store. Of all parents who do not live near a grocery store, 42% had access to a convenience store or corner store.

Percentage of parents who do not live near a supermarket or grocery store, by income levels



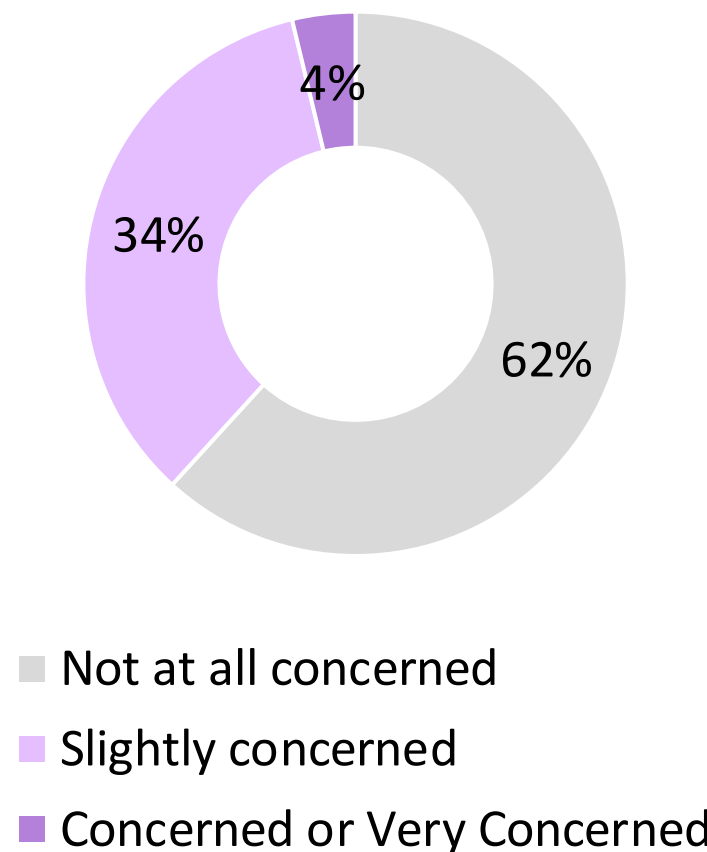
Food sources near those that do not live by a supermarket or grocery store (48 parents)



Challenges to Healthy Meals

Over a third of parents report being slightly concerned about their children eating enough healthy food. The most common challenges to eating healthy meals include finding time to prepare meals, learning how to make healthier meals, the cost of healthy meals and that children dislike or won't eat healthy foods.

Concern for children eating healthy meals
(293 parents)



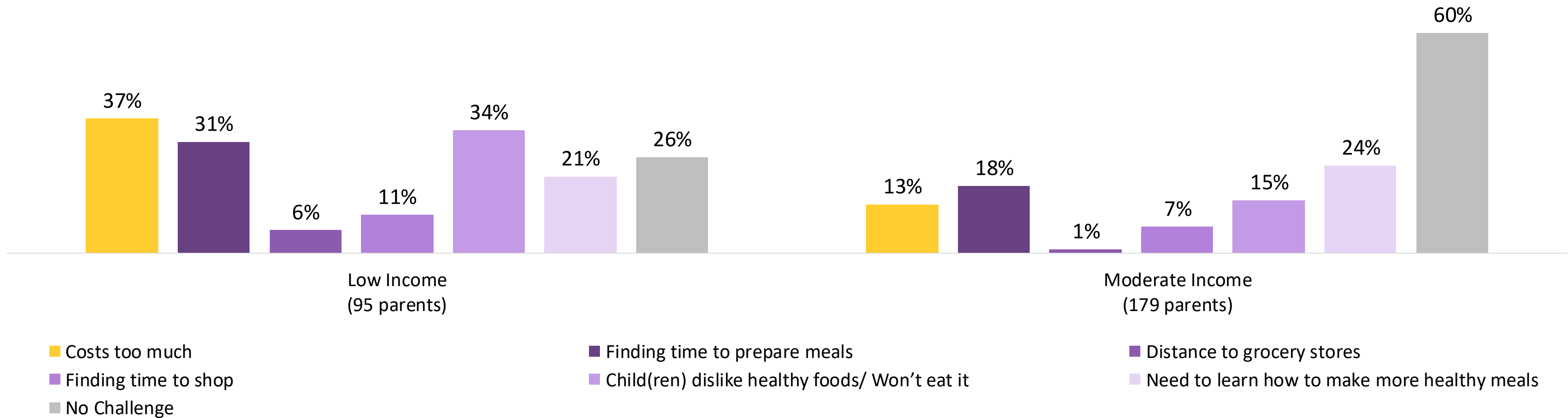
Challenges to eating healthy meals
(310 parents)



Challenges to Healthy Meals

Families with moderate income were more likely to report no challenges to eating healthy meals while families with lower incomes were more likely to report challenges to healthy meals.

Challenges to eating healthy meals, by income levels

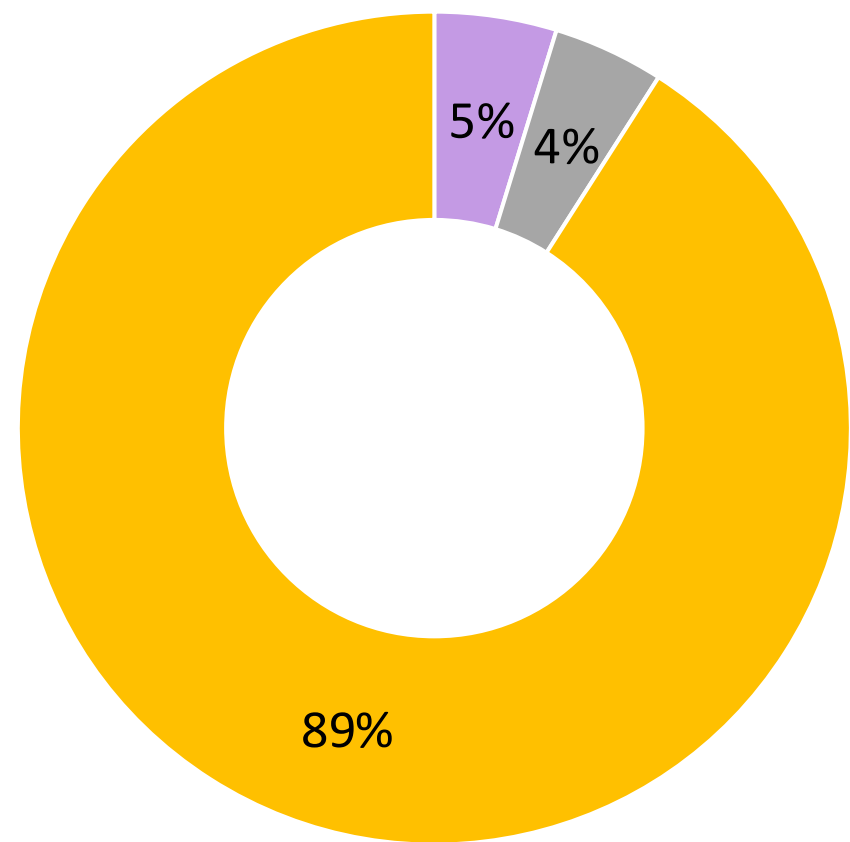


Reliability of and Access to Child Care

Reliability of Child Care

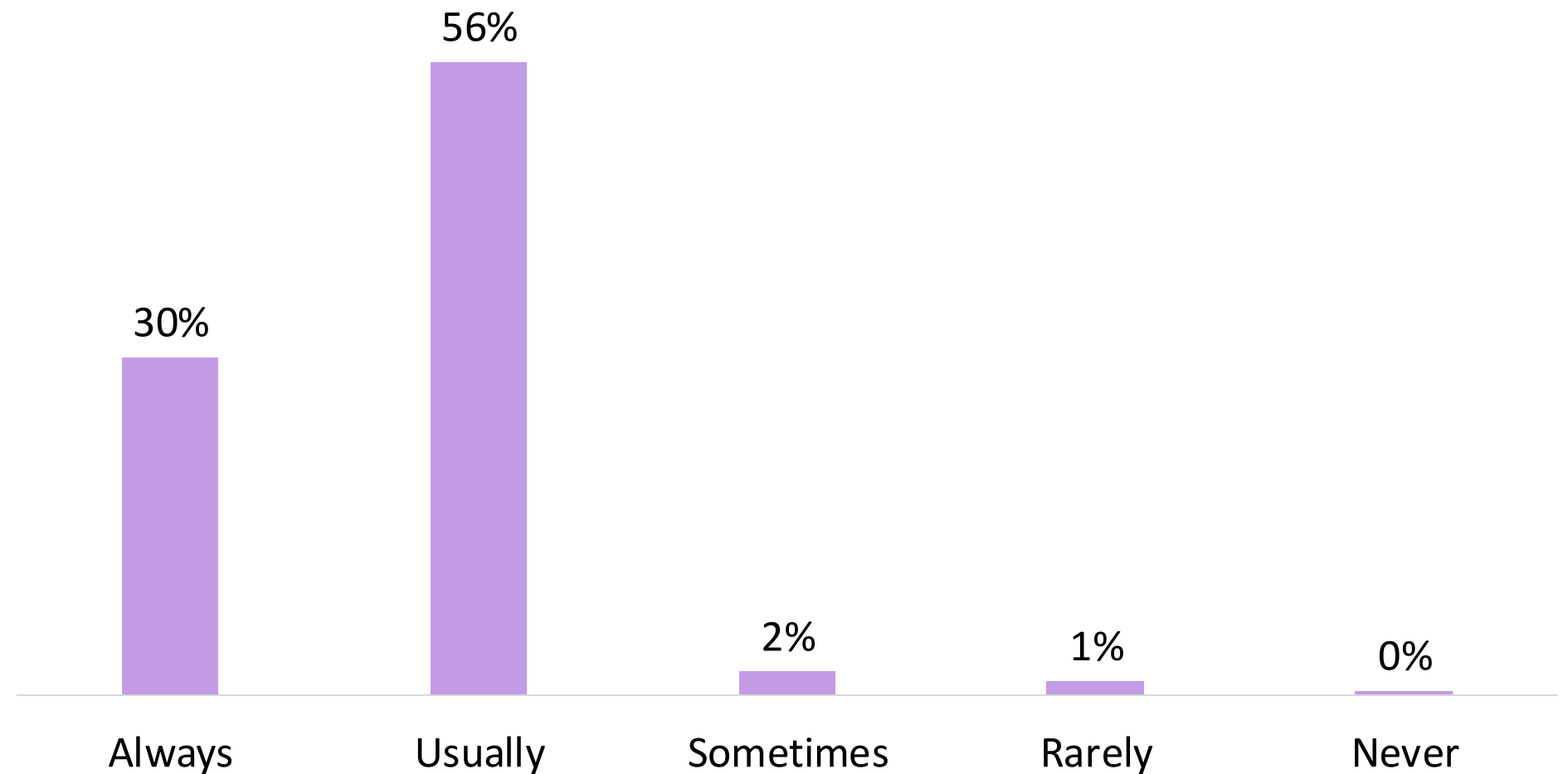
Most parents that use child care report that their child care is reliable. Additionally, 86% of parents shared that their child care arrangement usually or always works well with their work schedule.

Reliability of current child care arrangement
(236 parents)



■ Unreliable ■ Neutral ■ Reliable

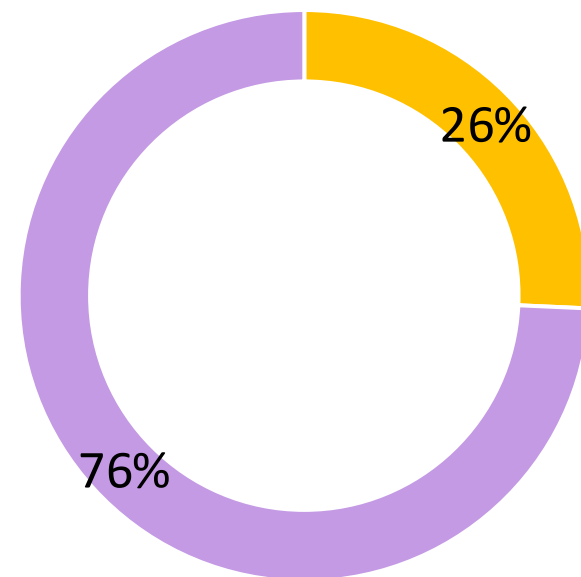
How well do child care arrangements work with parents' work schedules
(236 parents)



Finding New Child Care

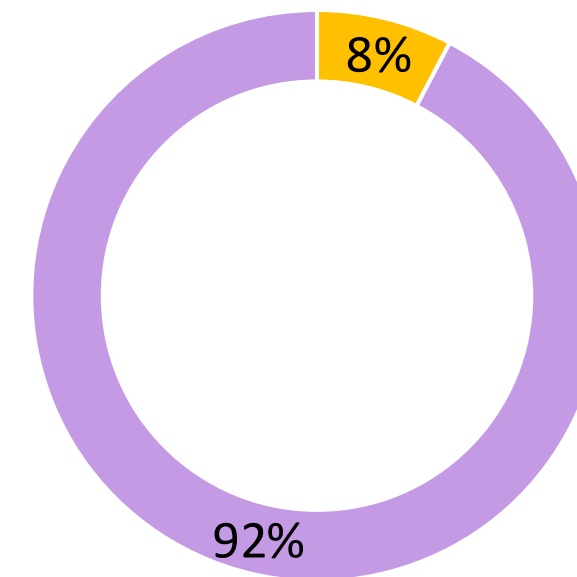
In the past month, 36 parents looked for new child care arrangements for their children under 6. Three quarters of these parents had difficulty finding space in a child care program. Most said this difficulty impacted their ability to work.

Out of the parents that looked for child care, did parents have difficulty finding space?
(36 parents)



- Did not have difficulty finding space in child care program
- Had difficulty finding space in child care program

Out of the parents that had difficulty finding care, did this impact their ability to work?
(26 parents)



- Did not impact their ability to work
- Impacted their ability to work

Challenges to Accessing Child Care - Parent Quotes

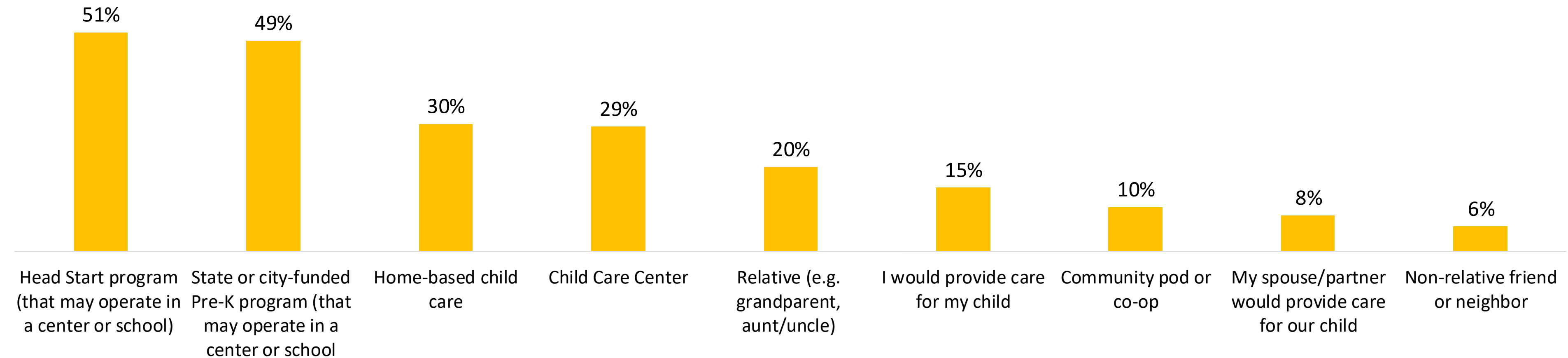
We asked parents what challenges they faced to accessing child care. Their top challenges were finding child care that supports their work schedules, care during non-traditional hours, and care that is affordable.

- "My daycare doesn't open until 7 am. I had [to] turn down positions because of that... some jobs want you to be there at 4 am, 5 am, 6 am, or 7 am."
- "There are not many people who you trust with your child and care on the weekends is slim. "
- "My husband works on call so that is unpredictable. Financially, we cannot afford child care and don't qualify for income help so I stay home with the kids."
- "Short child care hours, children too young for pre-k, no reliable child care around the area for young children."
- "Sometimes it's hard to find someone to drive the babies to daycare. "
- "Not enough hours. She is only in daycare from 11:45 am-3 or 4 pm."

Ideal Child Care Arrangements

We asked parents what the ideal child care arrangement would be for their youngest child if all types of care were equally priced and available. Approximately half of the parents chose Head Start programs and state or city funded pre-K programs as their ideal choice.

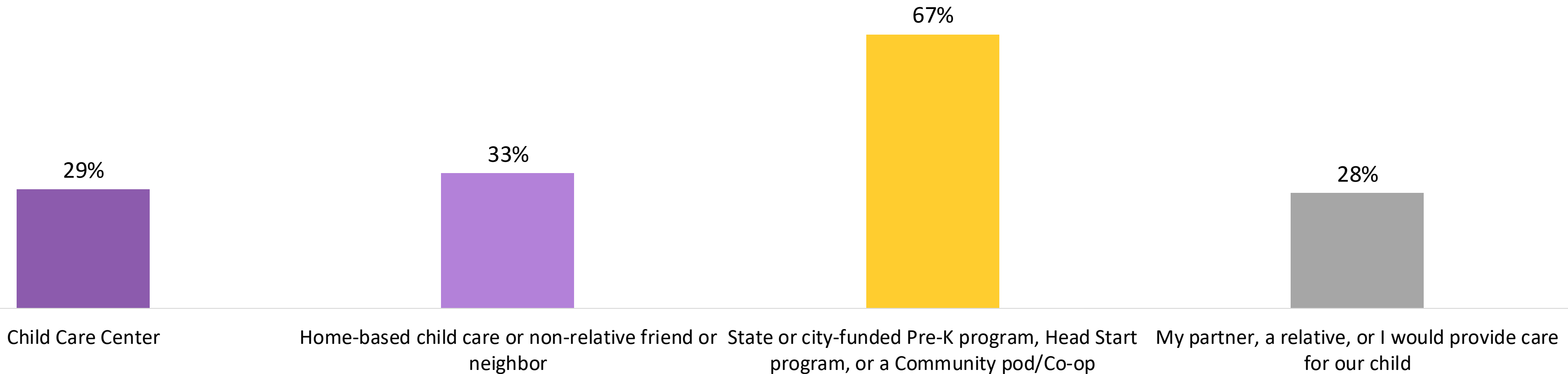
Parents' ideal child care arrangement
(310 parents)



Ideal Child Care Arrangements

When we grouped the arrangements that parents tended to select together, we found that 67% of parents preferred either a Pre-K, Head Start or community pod program.

Parents' ideal child care arrangement
(310 parents)

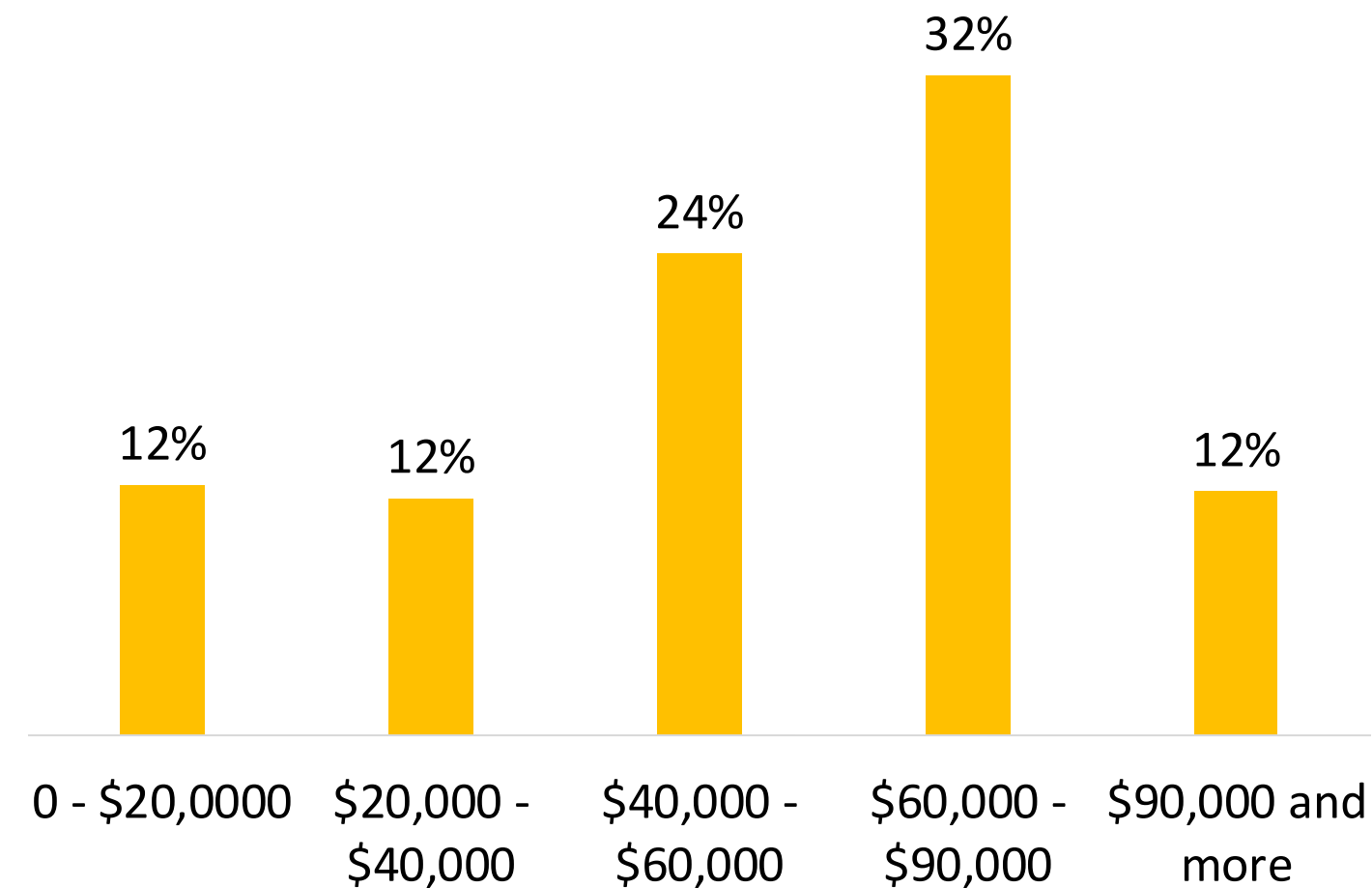


About the Parents taking our Second Survey

About the Parents Taking our Second Survey

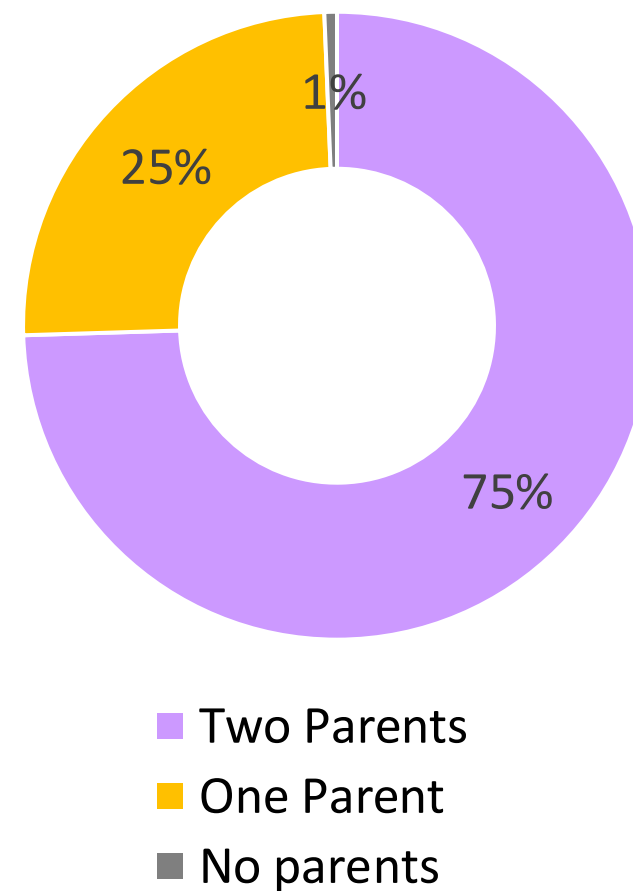
Three quarters of families have two parents in their household. Families have a diverse range of incomes, with most earning less than \$90,000. Parents are diverse in their education level as well.

Annual household income
(310 parents)

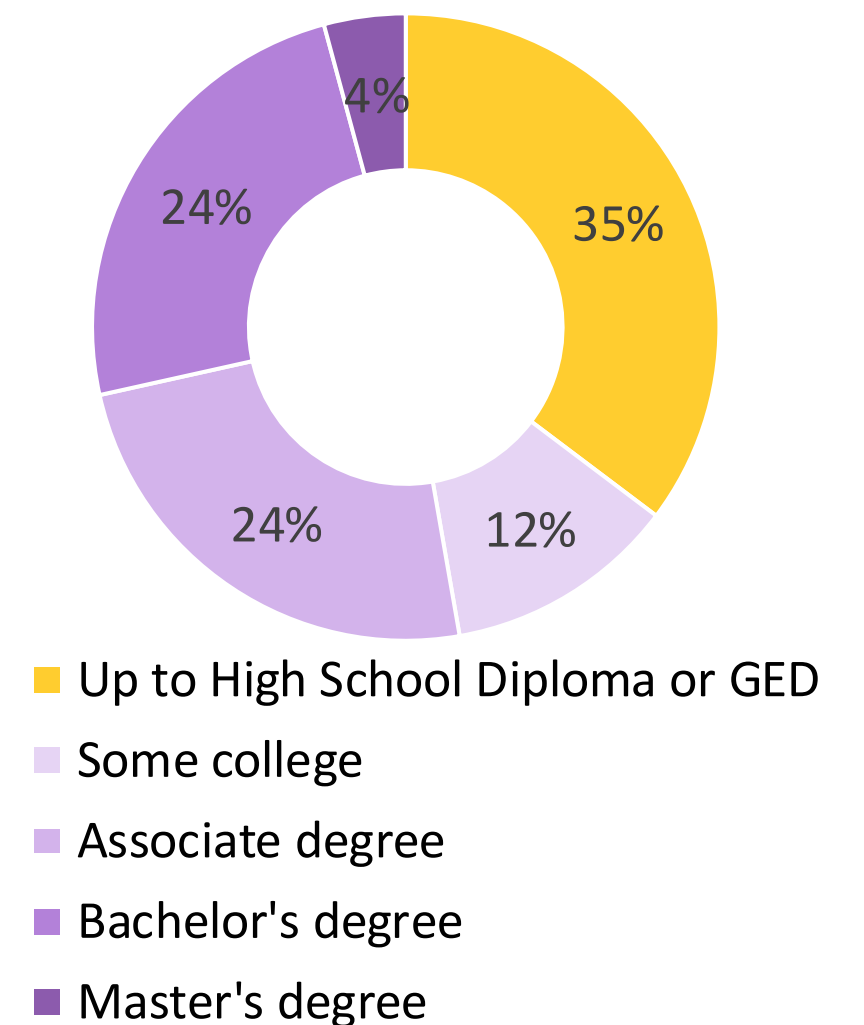


Note: This represents yearly income before taxes and deductions, from all sources.

Number of parents in the home
(310 parents)

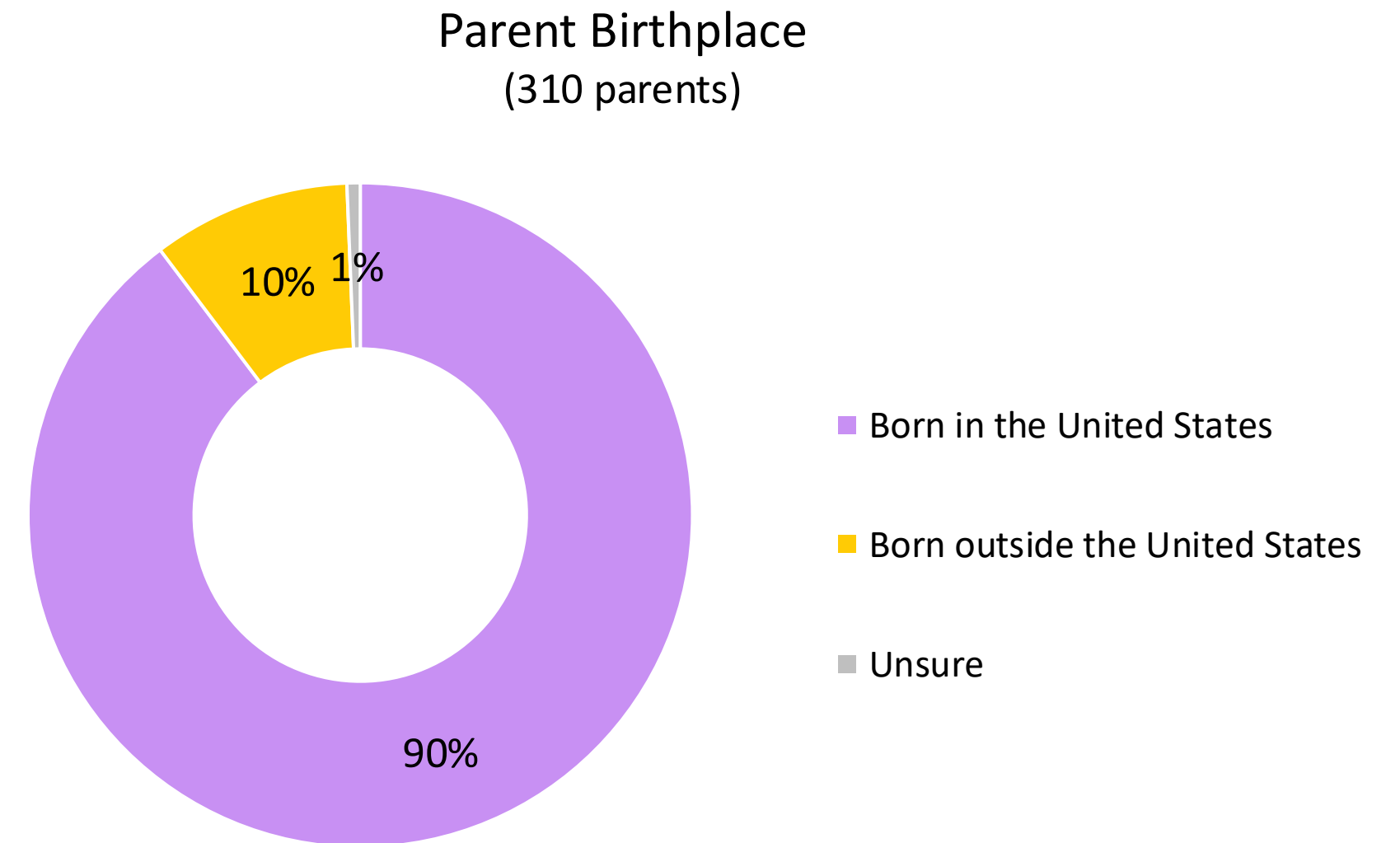
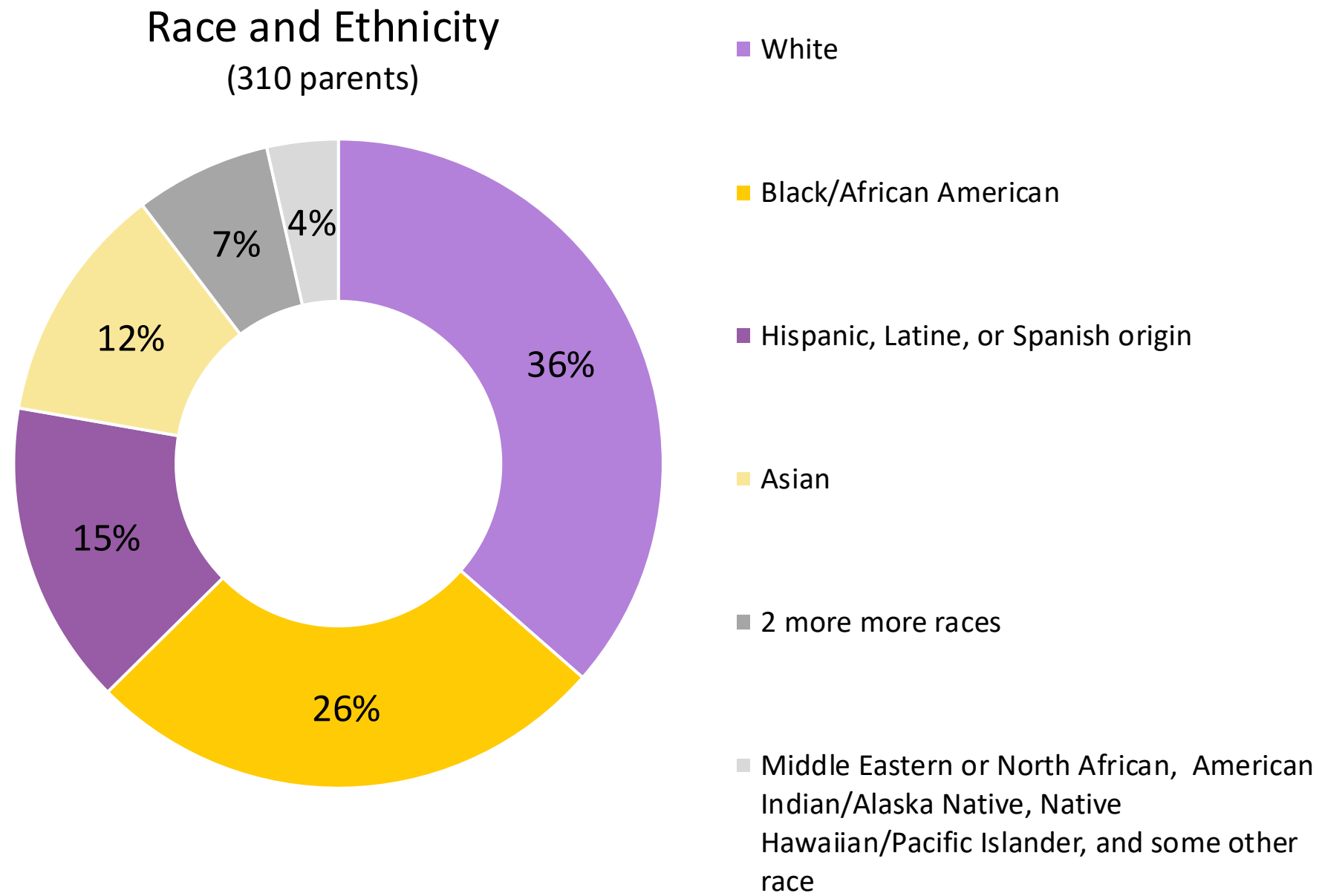


Parent education level
(310 parents)



About the Parents Taking our Second Survey

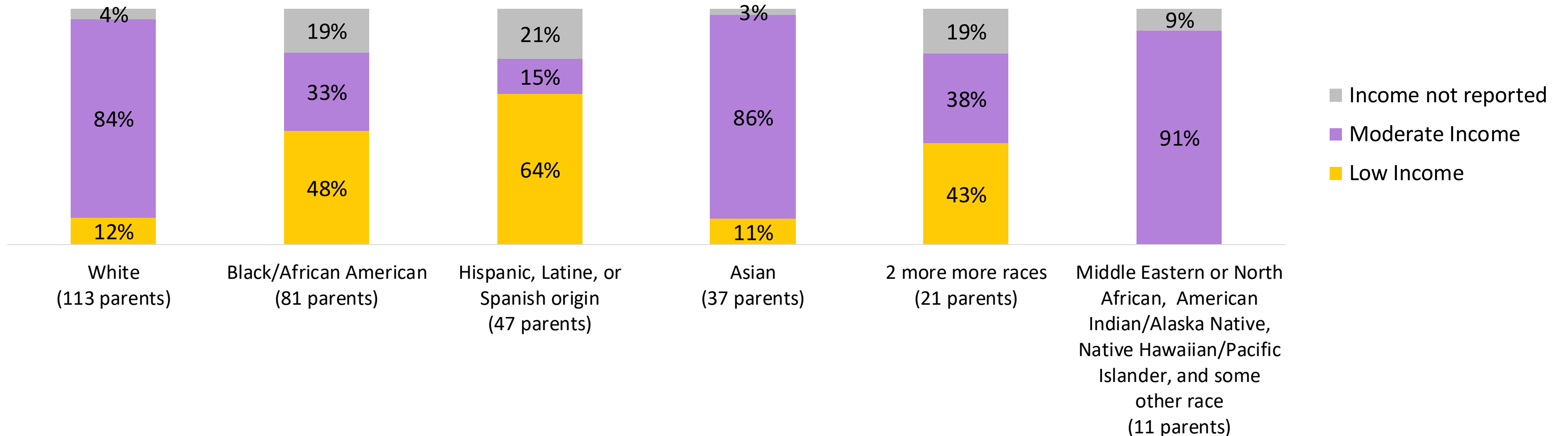
Parents were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity. 90% of respondents were born in the United States



Income & Race/Ethnicity

Family income is closely linked with race and ethnicity. In our second survey, Black families are 4 times as likely and Hispanic families are almost 5 times as likely as White families to have low income.

Income distribution, by race/ethnicity

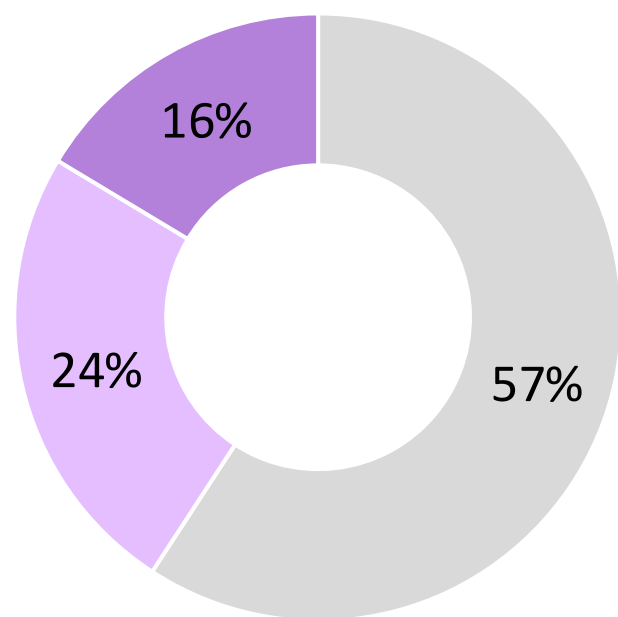


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Employment Status

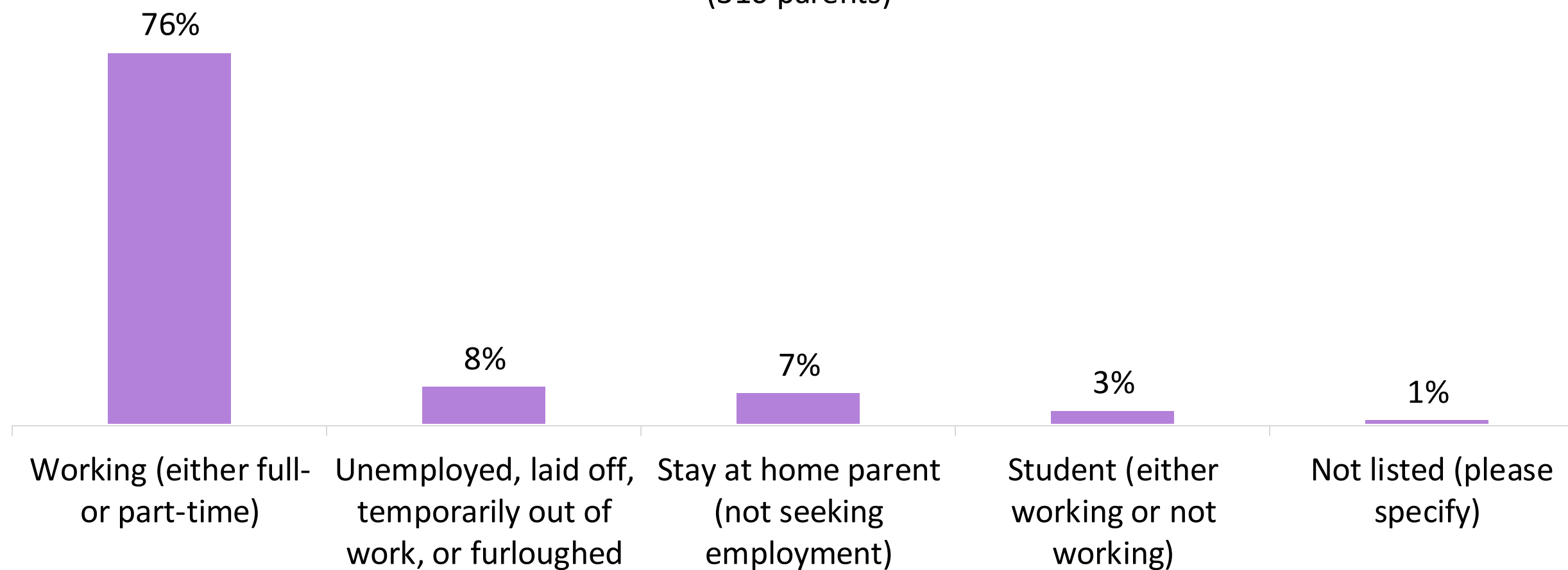
16% of parents shared that they have major or extreme financial problems. 76% of respondents were working full time or part time.

Family's Financial State
(310 parents)



- No Problems
- Minor Problems
- Major or Extreme Problems

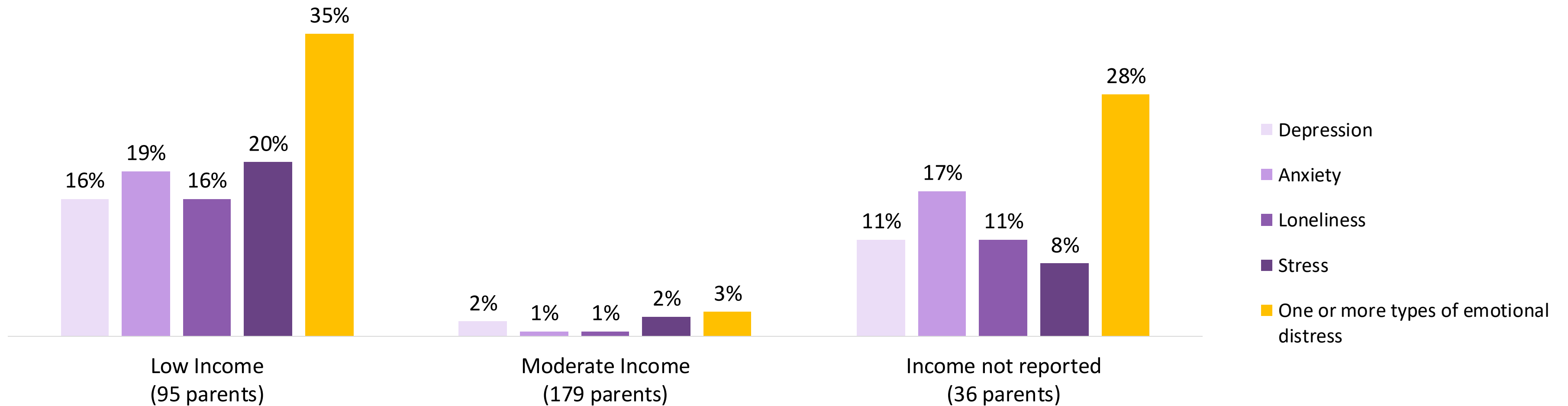
Employment status
(310 parents)



Parents' Mental Well-being

Parent with low income experienced more frequent emotional distress. They were approximately 12 times more likely than parents with moderate income to experience frequent emotional distress in the past month.

Parent's experiencing frequent emotional distress, by income levels



Parents experiencing frequent emotional distress include those 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.

Thank you

Parents greatly value quality time with their families and have a wide diversity of ways in which they enjoy spending time with them. **They also experience many challenges to quality time** with the biggest challenge being work responsibilities and difficulties.

Challenges with time impact family routines, which can often add essential structure to family life.

Furthermore, **household income plays an important role in determining where parents live and therefore if their living situation has access to basic resources such as grocery stores and parks**. If parents live in areas where basic resources such as schools, supermarkets, hospitals, and parks are inaccessible – they have to carve out more time to reach those needs, in contrast to those that live closer to these resources.

Our message to policymakers and elected officials

Time is an invaluable resource for families. Many parents are attempting to balance their work schedules with their household responsibilities. This can impact their mental well-being, making it difficult for them to spend quality time with their children.

To support families, it is crucial to take into consideration the time constraints families face. Coordinating systems and services can improve parents' experiences of accessing resources. Simpler paperwork and joint eligibility for programs are few changes that could reduce their burden of having too little time.

Supporting parents' ability and ease of spending time with their family is at the heart of furthering family well-being.

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.

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- 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