



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SERVICE ADMINISTRATION

The Difficult Transition to
Adulthood for Foster Youth in
the US:
Implications for the State as
Corporate Parent

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My Purpose Today

- *Describe the developmental and policy context of youth making the transition to adulthood from state care*
- *Propose “corporate parenting” as a normative policy framework*
- *Summarize research on adult outcomes for youth aging out of care and evidence of the impact of:*
 - Extending foster care to young adults
 - Interventions targeting transition-age foster youth
- *Explore the implications of the research for policy and practice*

How does the transition to adulthood look for young people generally in the US?

- *Scholars describe the transition:*
 - Markers of the transition (living independently; completing education; parenting) are happening later; half of young people between 18-24 live with a parent (US Census 2010)
 - Continuing and considerable parental support (\$38k in direct support between 18-34, Schoeni & Ross, 2004)
 - Developmental psychologists describe a new period of “emerging adulthood” (Arnett, 2004)
 - Developments in neuroscience (Luna et al, 2010; Steinberg, 2008; 2013).
- *Yet, U.S. policy provides relatively little support for young adults*
- *Little attention has been paid to the “other half”*

Corporate Parenting: A Normative Policy Framework

- *UK policy framework for “looked after children” adopted in the late 1990s (Bullock et al, 2006; Courtney, 2009)*
- *Three central concepts:*
 1. Care should be consistent with what a responsible parent would provide
 2. All institutions that support children and youth should share responsibility
 3. Local authorities, including local political leadership, should take primary responsibility for caring for youth in their community

How do foster youth fare during the transition to adulthood?

The Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth

- *“Midwest Study” is the largest prospective study of foster youth making the transition to adulthood since the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999*
- *Collaboration between state child welfare agencies and the research team*
- *Foster youth in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois who:*
 - Were still in care at age 17
 - Had entered care before their 16th birthday
 - Had been placed in care because they were abused, neglected or dependent
 - Not originally placed because of delinquency
- *Data from in-person interviews (structured and in-depth qualitative) and government program administrative data*

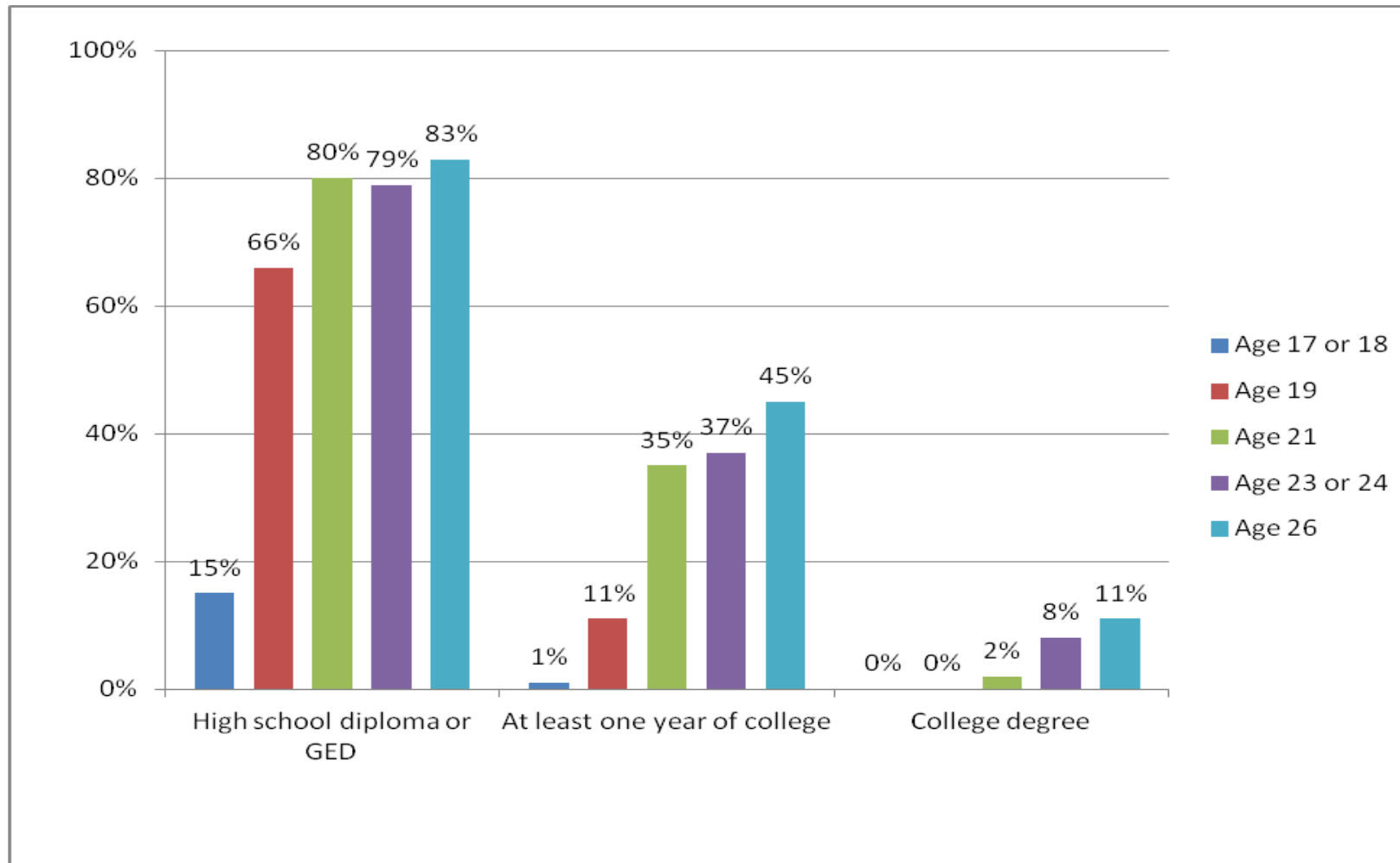
Study Design and Sample (continued)

Wave	Year	Number Interviewed	Response Rate	Age at interview
1	'02 – '03	732	96%	17 – 18
2	'04	603	82%	19
3	'06	591	81%	21
4	'08	602	82%	23-24
5	'10-'11	596	83%	26

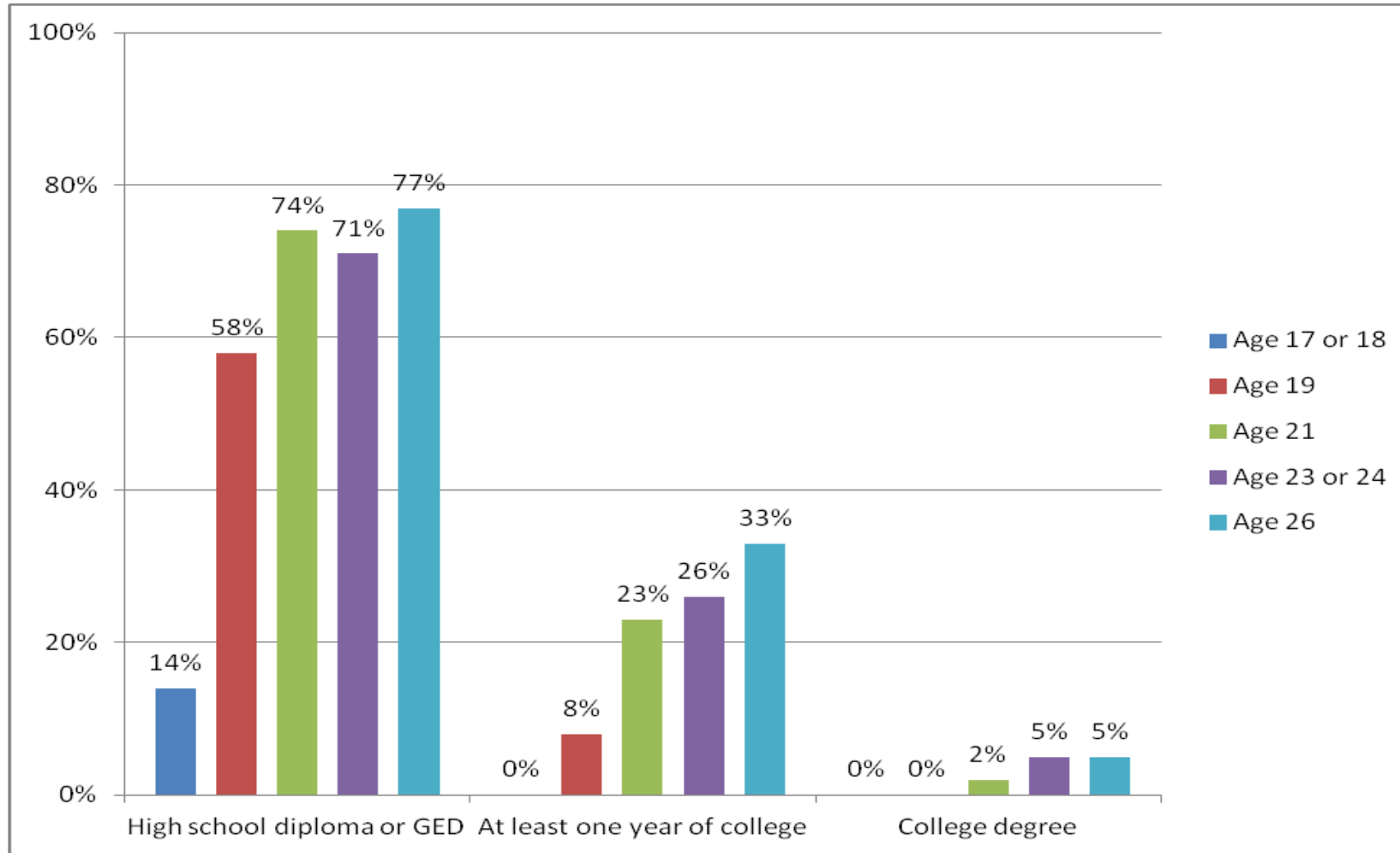
Demographic Characteristics

		Wave 1
N		732
Gender	Male	48.5
	Female	51.5
Race	Black	57.0
	White	30.9
	Other/Multi-racial	12.1
Ethnicity	Hispanic origin	8.6
State	Illinois	64.8
	Wisconsin	26.6
	Iowa	8.6

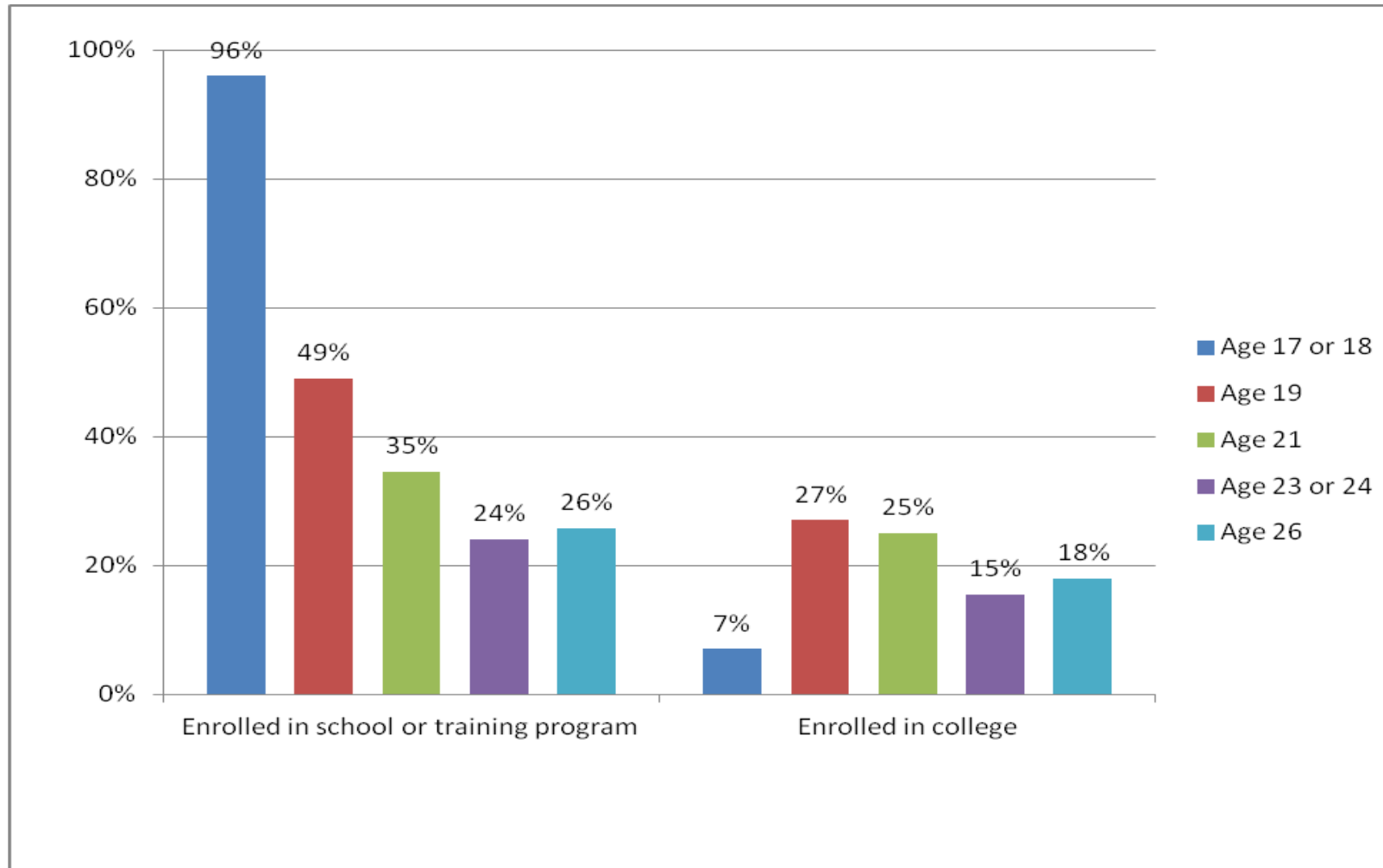
Young Women's Educational Attainment



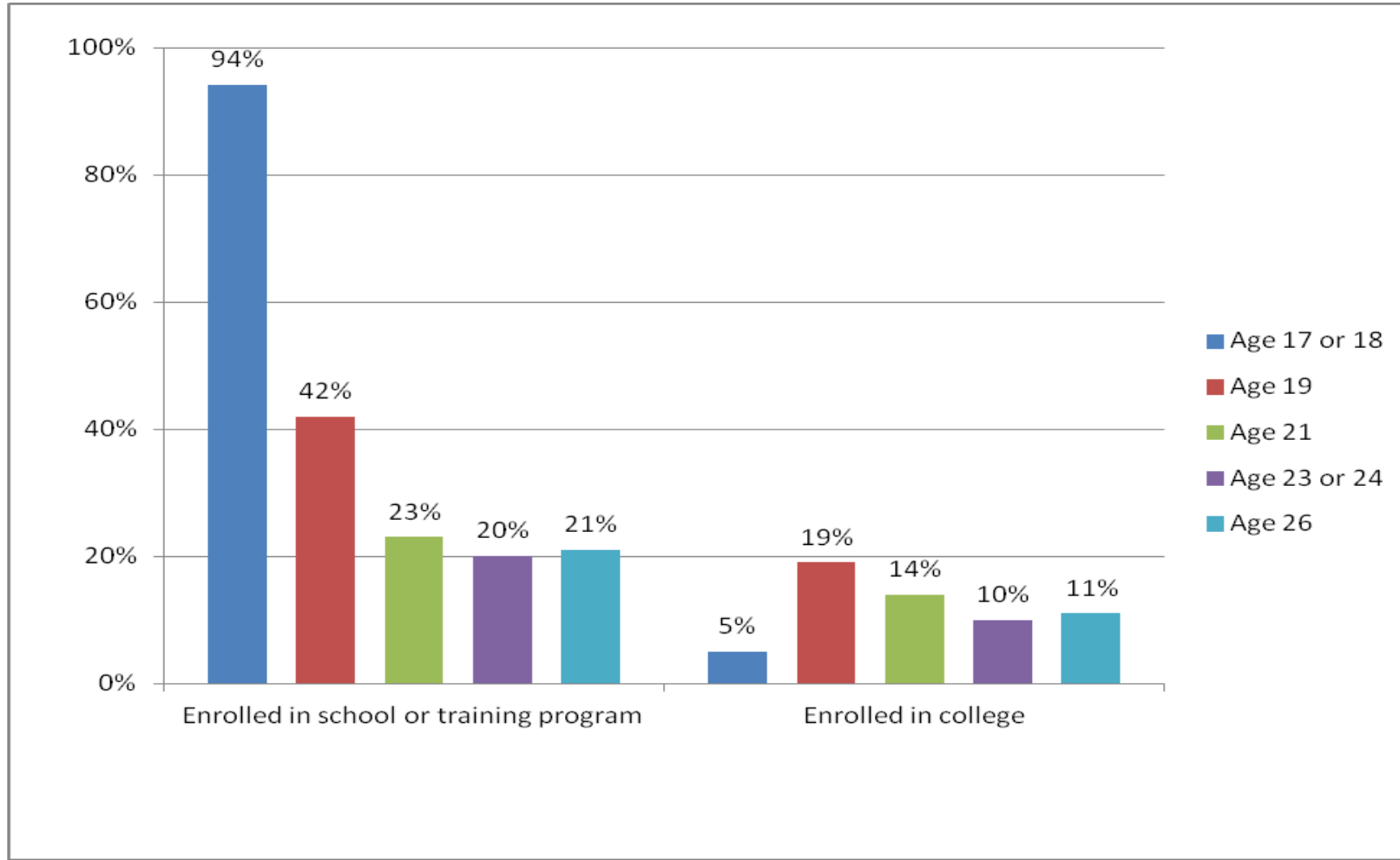
Young Men's Educational Attainment



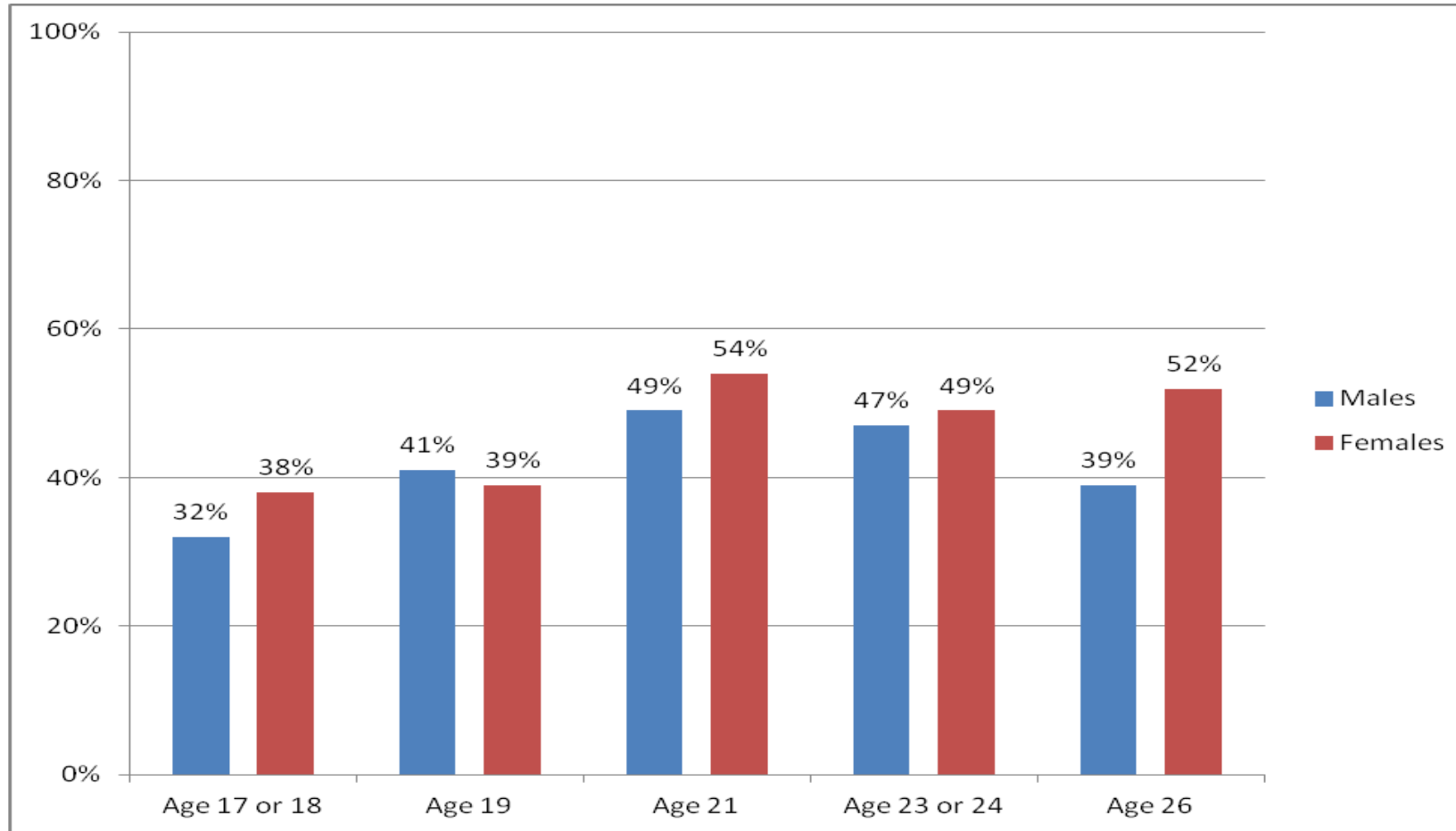
Young Women's Educational Enrollment



Young Men's Educational Enrollment

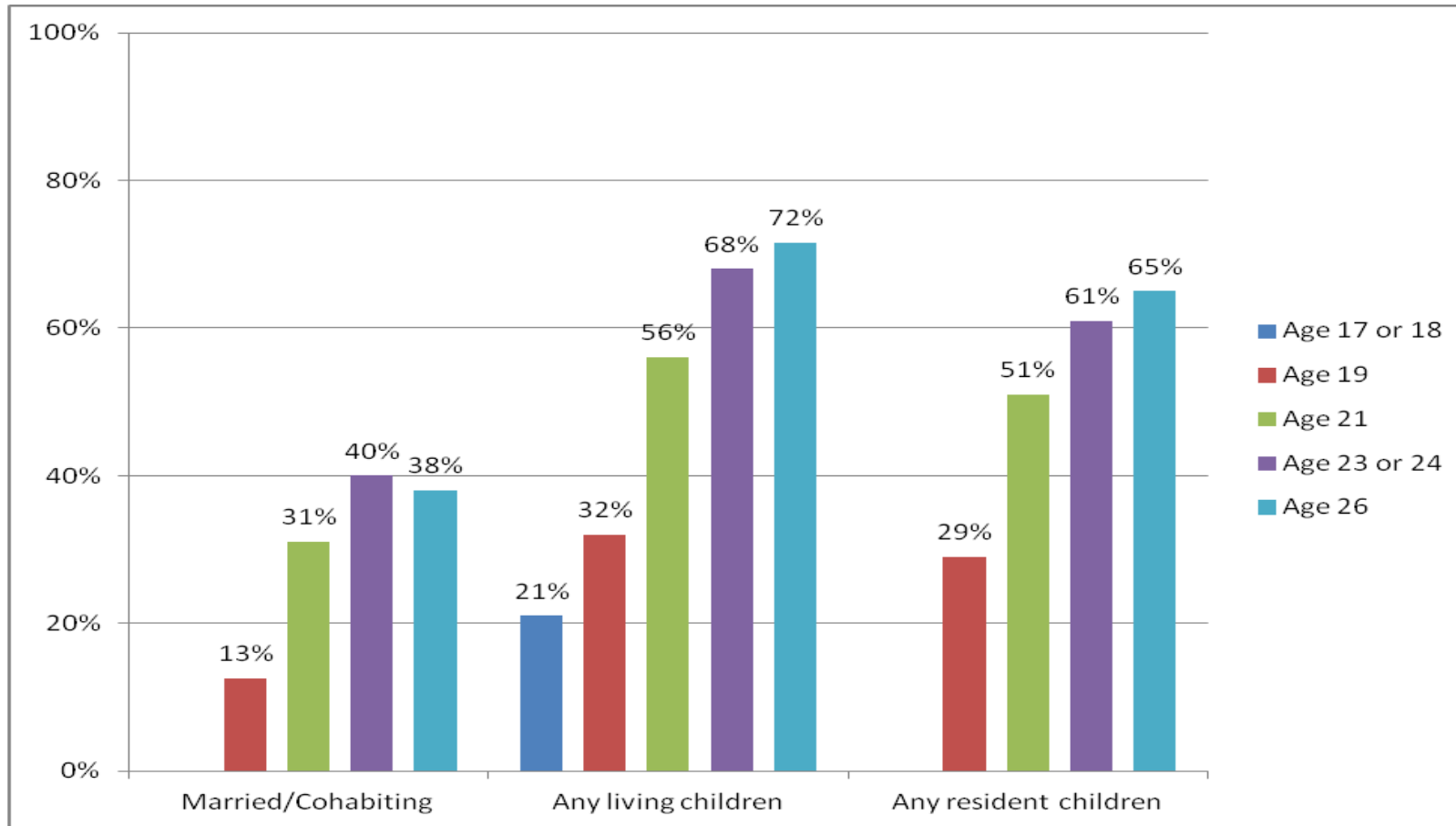


Young Men's and Young Women's Employment



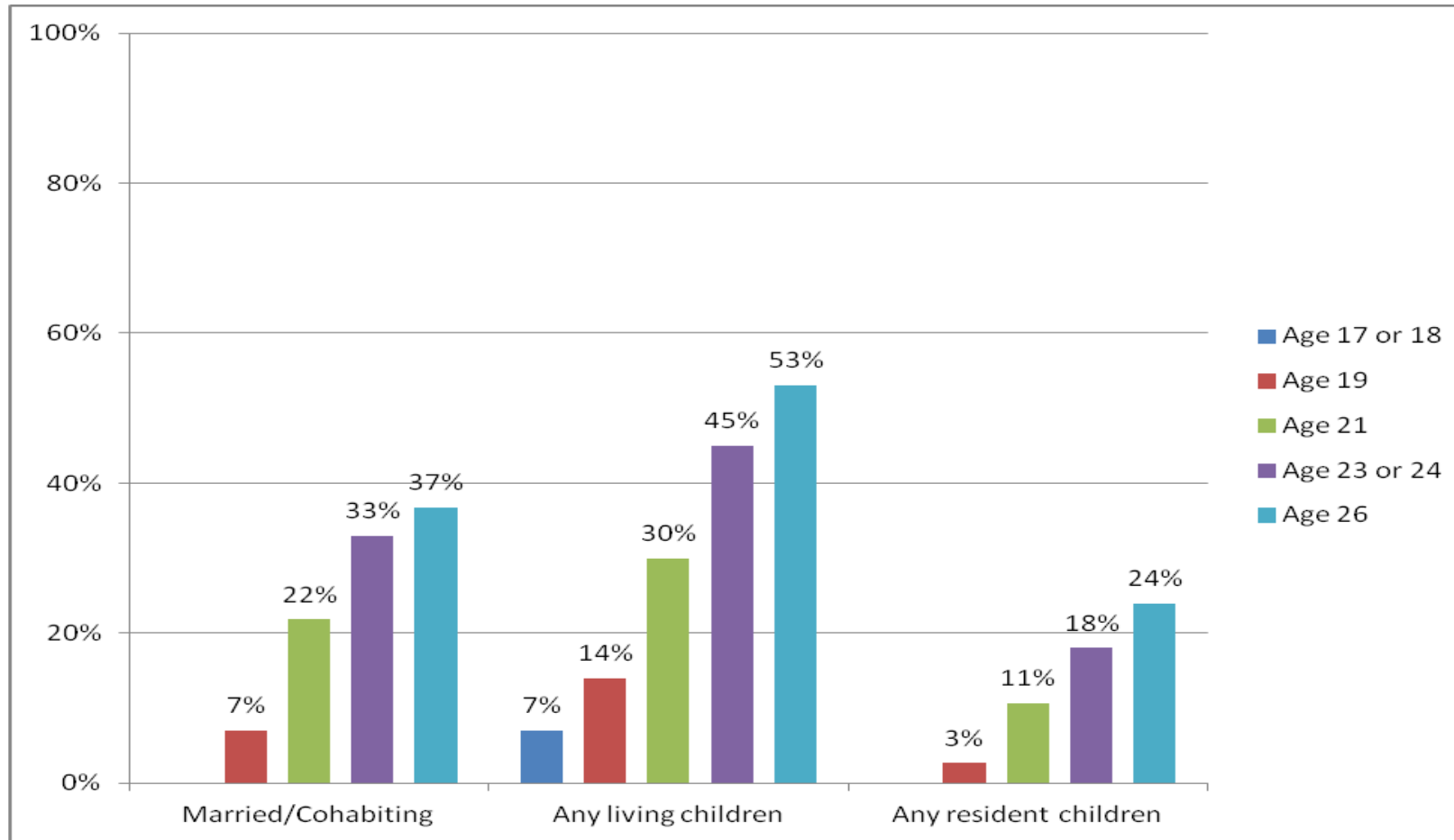
72% employed during year; mean earnings among employed = \$13,989

Family Formation Among Young Women



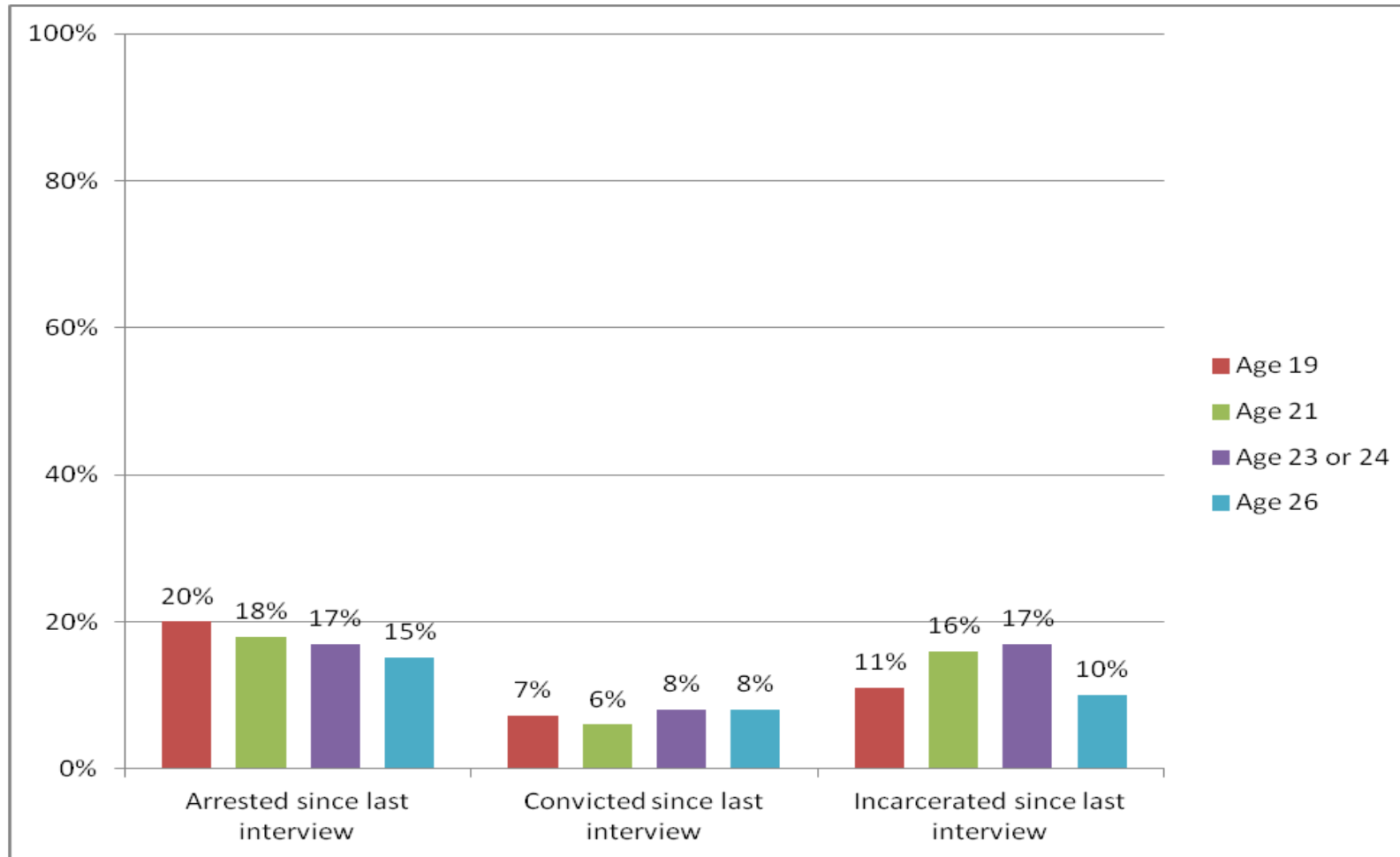
19% of women with children have a nonresident child

Family Formation Among Young Men

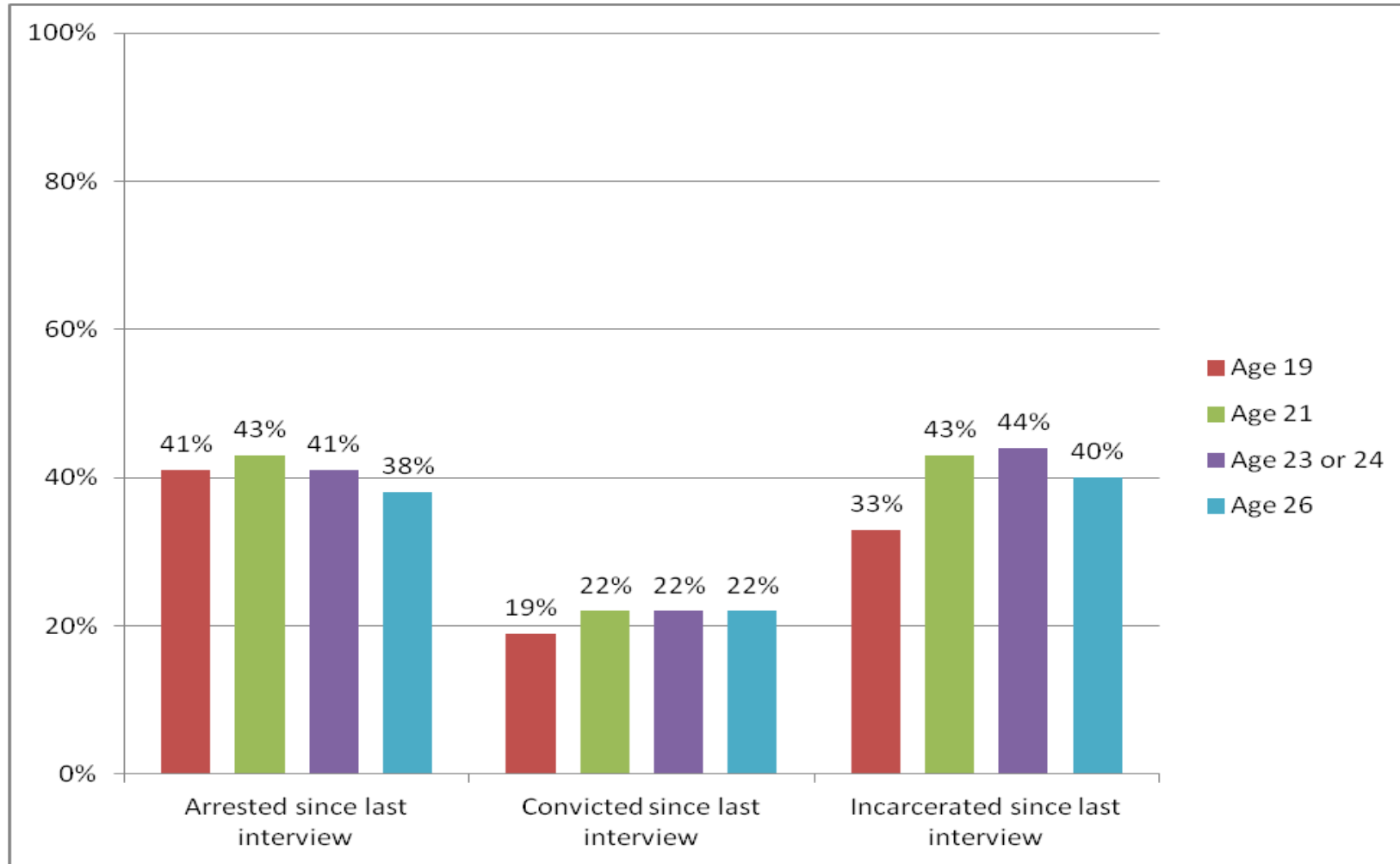


66% of men with children have a nonresident child

Young Women's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Young Men's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Summary of Early Adult Outcomes Post 1999

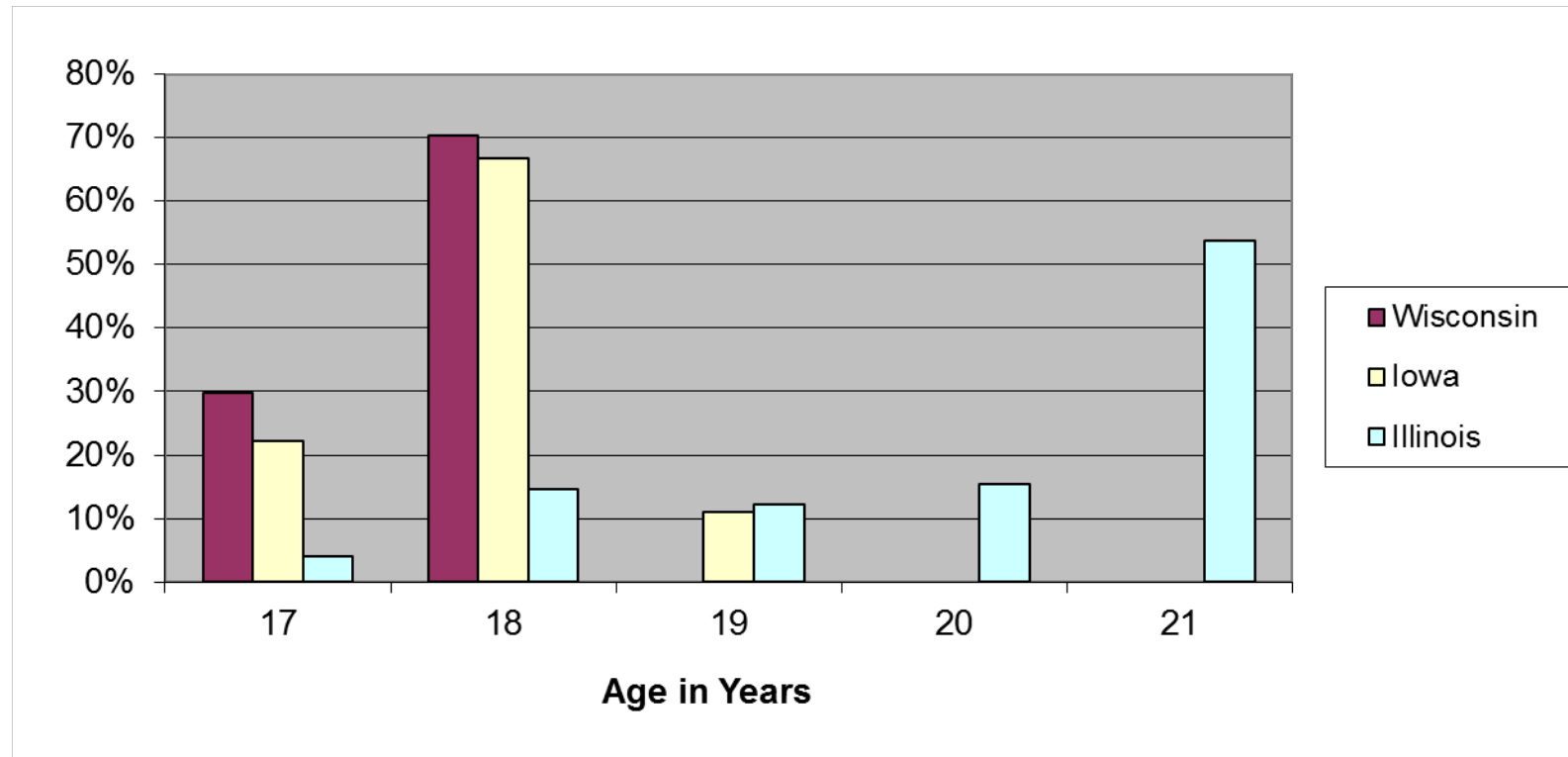
- *Outcomes are relatively poor across a variety of important transition domains*
- *Outcomes vary by gender; males fare worse*
- *Despite a sobering picture overall, many young people leaving the care of the state do well*

*What is a concerned parent (policymaker)
to do about these poor outcomes?*

Testing the Wisdom of Extended Care: A Natural Experiment

- *Ability of foster youth to remain “in care” beyond age 18 varies across states*
- *Illinois was at the time one of the few jurisdictions where courts could and did routinely extend care and supervision until age 21*
- *Wisconsin and Iowa generally discharged youth around their 18th birthday during the study period*
 - Exception for Iowa foster youth who were on track to graduate from high school
 - Exception for Wisconsin foster youth who were pregnant

Age at Discharge by State



Mean age at
discharge

Wisconsin=17.8

Iowa=17.9

Illinois=20.0

Summary of Findings on Extending Care

Overall outcomes obscure between-state differences driven by extended care in Illinois; policy does matter!

- *Allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 is associated with:*
 - Increased likelihood of obtaining post-secondary education (Courtney, Dworsky, & Pollack, 2007; Courtney & Hook, 2017)
 - Increased earnings (Hook & Courtney, 2011)
 - Delayed pregnancy (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010)
 - Reduced crime, particularly among females (Lee, Courtney, & Hook, 2012)
 - Delayed homelessness (Dworsky, Napolitano, & Courtney, 2013)
 - Increased involvement of noncustodial fathers with their children (Hook & Courtney, 2013)
- *Allowing foster youth to remain in care until age 21 also increases their likelihood of receiving independent living services after age 18 (Courtney, Lee, & Perez, 2011).*

A Brave New World: The Fostering Connections to Success Act of 2008

- *Extends Federal Title IV-E funding (including guardianship and adoption subsidies), at state option, to age 21*
 - Youth must be 1) completing high school or an equivalency program; 2) enrolled in post-secondary or vocational school; 3) participating in a program or activity designed to promote, or remove barriers to, employment; 4) employed for at least 80 hours per month; or 5) incapable of doing any of these activities due to a medical condition
- *Foster Care Independence Program remains intact (i.e., \$140 million; ETVs)*

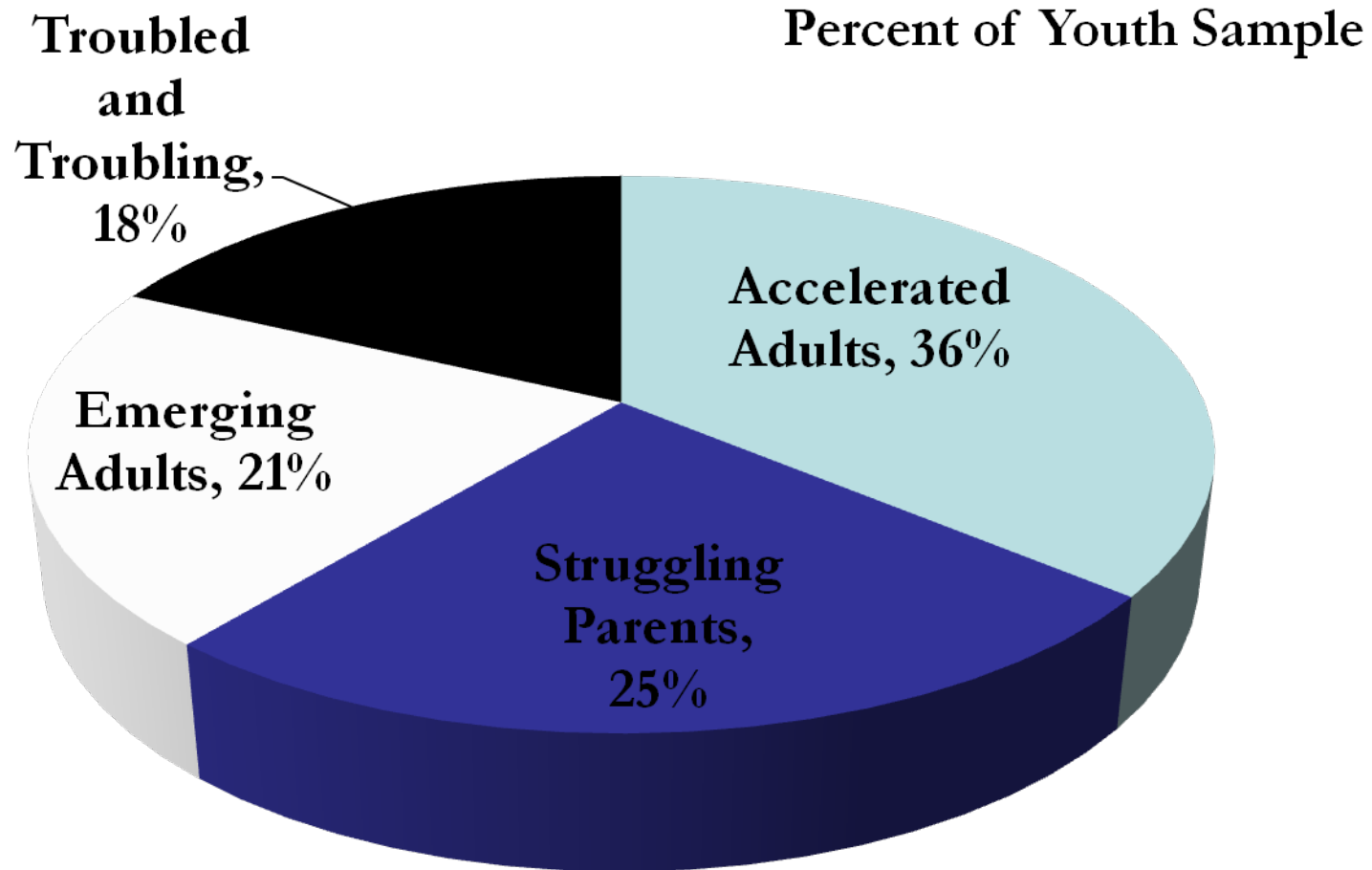
State option implies great inter-state variability!

*Okay, so let's not abandon our youth at 18,
but how do we best parent young adults?*

Understanding Heterogeneity Provides Direction for Policy and Practice

- *Keller, Cusick, & Courtney (2007) used Latent Class Analysis (LCA) to identify subpopulations at age 17-18 (n = 732) defined by distinctive profiles on indicators reflecting multiple domains of life experience*
- *Analysis resulted in four distinctive groups: Distressed and Disconnected 43%; Competent and Connected 38%; Struggling but Staying 14%; Hindered but Homebound 5%*
 - Some of the most challenged youth were also unlikely to be easily engaged
- *Group membership at 17-18 is strongly associated with several distinct transition outcomes at age 21: education; employment; parenthood; incarceration*
- *More recent study (Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2012) used key transition indicators to classify youth using LCA at age 23-24 (n = 584): living arrangement; educational attainment; employment; resident and non-resident children; conviction since 18*

Distribution of Former Foster Youth by Latent Class at Age 23-24



(Courtney, Hook, & Lee, 2012)

Implications for Policy (and Practice)

- *Distinct subgroups at the age of majority and during early adulthood suggest the need for targeted, developmentally appropriate policy and practice*
 - A large group--like many other young people--mainly needs support making the transition to higher education and succeeding there and likely does not need intensive interventions
 - About one-fifth needs significant intervention, perhaps for many years, with a range of psychosocial problems
 - Parents as a distinct group arguably need distinct kinds of support
- *A wide variety of public systems should be accountable: **corporate parenting** that includes active participation of **young adults** (Courtney, 2009)*

But what about evidence-based practice?

General implications of research for practice

- *Handful of longitudinal studies have identified some predictors of later outcomes, mostly fairly obvious risk and protective factors (e.g., prior education; prior employment; mental and behavioral health; connections to supportive adults)*
- *Qualitative and descriptive studies have identified some of the strengths and needs of foster youth in transition (e.g., broad conception of “family” and lasting connections to family of origin; connections to other foster youth)*
- *Studies seeking the opinions of young people and professionals who serve them have identified promising practices and programs*
 - Supports for transitions to higher education
 - Asset development programs
 - Mentoring
 - Specialized case management

Evidence from Experimental Evaluations

- *Youth Villages Transitional Living Program*
 - Intensive case management for youth leaving the foster care and JJ systems
 - Positive impacts on earnings, economic hardship, mental health, and intimate partner violence
- *Massachusetts Adolescent Outreach*
 - Intensive case management for youth, 16-17, in therapeutic foster care homes
 - Some positive effects, most notably on college enrollment and persistence, mediated by the impact on youth remaining in care past age 18
- *“Better Futures” evaluation*
 - 16-18 years old (n = 67), in foster care, significant mental health problems
 - 3-night summer institute; individual peer coaching; and mentoring workshops
 - Impacts on postsecondary education participation and preparation, hope, self-determination, and mental health empowerment
- *“My Life” evaluation*
 - 16.5 to 17.5 years old (n = 69), in foster care and special education
 - Coaching in self-determination skills; mentoring workshops with foster care alumni
 - One-year post-intervention impacts on employment and high school completion

So, let's get serious about learning from all of the experimenting going on now...

- *Learn from early adopters of the extended care provisions of the Fostering Connections Act*
 - CalYOUTH study in California (N = 727, interviews at 17, 19, and 21)
- *National Youth in Transition Database*
 - State-level data on selected outcomes at 17, 19, and 21
 - Potentially powerful data platform for between-state comparison of populations and the impact of policies on youth outcomes
- *Rigorous evaluation is possible, and ethical!*
 - Midwest Study and Multisite Evaluation show that follow-up is possible
 - Most programs do not serve all of the target population...we ration services all the time
 - It's time to stop treating foster youth as guinea pigs in an ongoing experiment with no human subjects protections!!!



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For more info:

<http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/midwest-evaluation-adult-functioning-former-foster-youth>

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/abuse_neglect/chafee/index.html

<http://www.mdrc.org/publication/becoming-adults>

<http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/findings-california-youth-transitions-adulthood-study-calyouth>