

## Children's Environment and Behavior

### Behavioral and Emotional Problems in Children

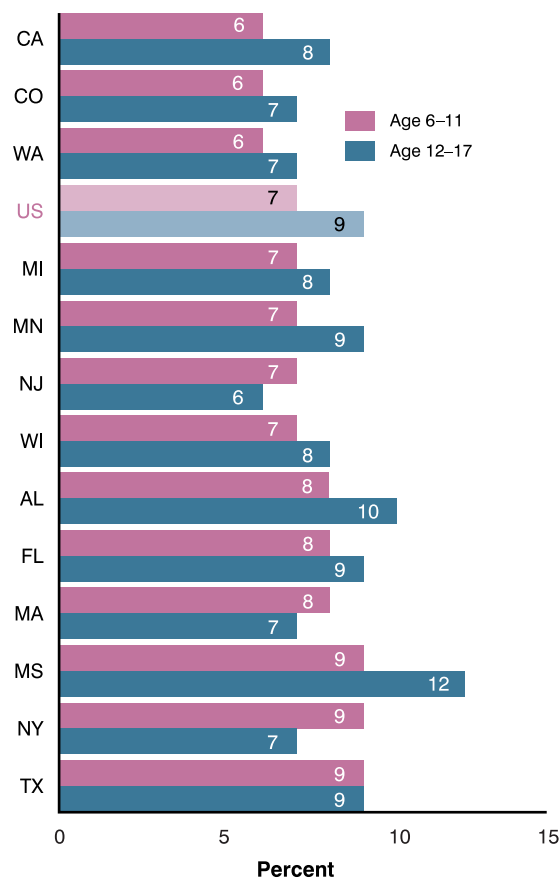
Several family and neighborhood characteristics are associated with the development of behavioral and emotional problems in children.

For example, studies have linked greater parental depression and stress with emotional and behavioral problems. Further, living in a neighborhood with more low-income residents is associated with a higher incidence of behavioral problems such as destroying property or feeling worthless.

If welfare reform results in low-income families living in improved communities and reduces parental stress and depression, behavioral and emotional problems in children may decline. However, if long or erratic hours of work reduce parental supervision and control or increase parental aggravation and stress, then children's problems may increase.

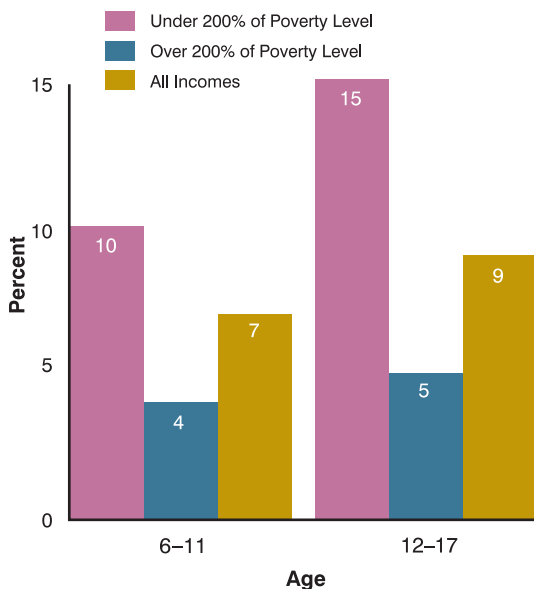
Parents were asked about the extent to which their children exhibited signs of external distress (not getting along with other kids, acting too young for their age, or lying and cheating) and internal distress (sadness, depression, or

**Children with High Levels of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, by Age and State, 1997**



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

**Children with High Levels of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, by Age and Family Income, 1997**



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

feelings of worthlessness) in the last month. A measure of behavioral and emotional problems was derived from their responses.

Nationally, 7 percent of children age 6 to 11 exhibited high levels of behavioral and emotional problems. That figure rose to 10 percent

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Assessing  
the New  
Federalism

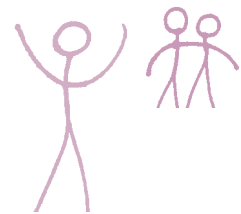
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This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 households with and without telephones that are representative of the nation as a whole and of 13 states. As in all surveys, the data are subject to sampling variability and other sources of error.

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in families with low incomes (below 200 percent of the poverty level). It dropped to 4 percent in families with higher incomes, a statistically significant difference.

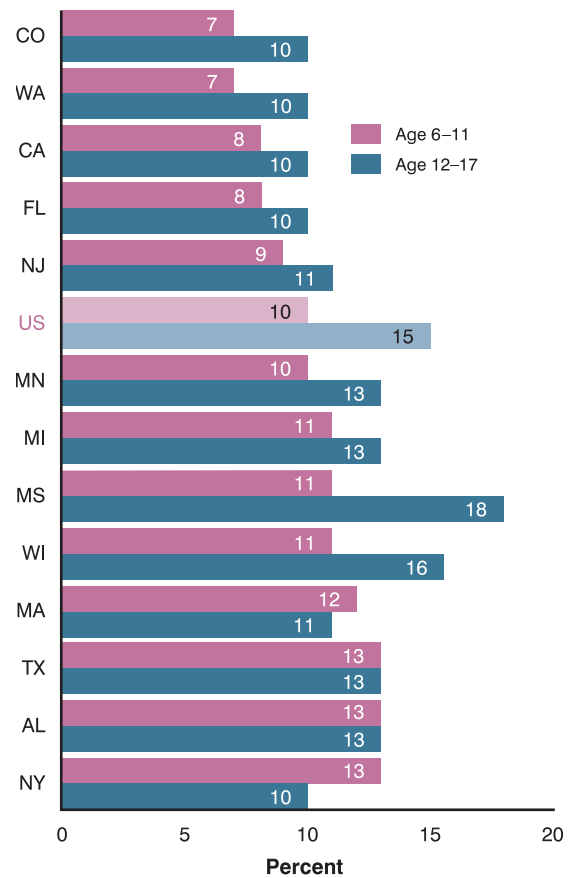
Nationally, 9 percent of 12- to 17-year-olds showed high levels of behavioral and emotional problems. Adolescents in low-income families were three times as likely to be troubled as adolescents in higher-income families—15 percent versus 5 percent, a statistically significant difference.

In the 13 states surveyed, 6 percent to 9 percent of all younger children and 6 percent to 12 percent of all older children had high levels of behavioral and emotional problems. None of the states had percentages above or below the national average in either age group.

In low-income families, the percentage of children age 6 to 11 with high levels of behavioral and emotional problems ranged from 7 percent to 13 percent. None of these percentages was above or below the national average.

Among adolescents in low-income families, high levels of behavioral and emotional problems ranged from 10 percent to 18 percent. None of the states surveyed had percentages above the national average, but three states had percentages below it: Colorado, Florida, and New York.

### Low-Income Children with High Levels of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, by Age and State, 1997



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

### Children (%) with High Levels of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, 1997

Age	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
<b>Under 200% of poverty level</b>														
6-11	12.9	8.2	7.2	8.4	12.5	11.4	10.2	11.5	9.1	12.7	12.5	7.3	11.2	9.6
12-17	12.8	10.5	9.6	9.5	10.9	13.0	12.6	17.7	11.4	10.3	12.5	10.3	15.7	14.9
<b>Over 200% of poverty level</b>														
6-11	2.1	3.3	5.3	7.5	6.5	4.6	5.3	5.1	5.5	5.3	6.1	4.6	5.2	4.2
12-17	7.3	5.8	5.7	8.5	5.6	5.4	8.0	5.0	4.2	4.9	5.7	5.3	5.3	5.2
<b>All incomes</b>														
6-11	7.6	5.7	6.0	7.9	8.3	7.0	6.8	8.9	6.5	8.5	9.1	5.6	7.2	6.5
12-17	9.5	7.8	6.9	9.0	7.1	7.7	9.2	11.7	6.2	7.0	8.8	6.8	8.3	8.8

Figures in color represent statistically significant differences from the national average at the .05 confidence level. Figures in black are not statistically significantly different from the national average. All figures in text, charts, and table are rounded.

Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute