

Children's Environment and Behavior

Reading and Telling Stories to Young Children

Child development specialists have long noted that reading books to children or telling them stories triggers their imagination and sharpens their literacy

skills. Poverty may jeopardize the quality of the home environment, particularly by reducing the quality or amount of time parents have for literacy activities with their children. This can limit a child's readiness for school, putting him or her at an educational disadvantage.

Under welfare reform, some low-income parents may find it more difficult to find time to read to young children because of the additional demands of job training and employment. However, for other parents, less worry about money and a more structured lifestyle may make daily reading more feasible. Monitoring these changes in family life will be important to shaping society's response to low-income children's cognitive needs.

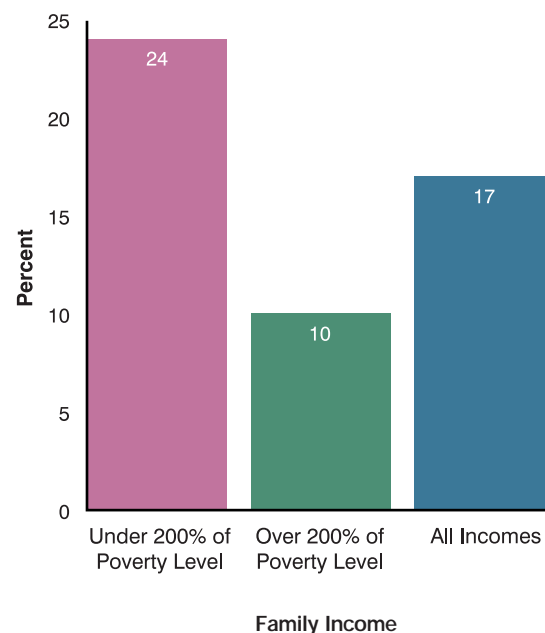
Parents were asked how many days during the week they read or told stories to their children. Nationally, 17 percent of all children age 1 to 5 were read to or told stories fewer than three days per week. Children in low-income families (below 200 percent of the poverty level) were more than twice as likely as other children to fall into this risk category (24 percent versus 10 percent).

In the 13 states surveyed, 13 percent to 24 percent of children were read to or told stories fewer than three times a week. In three states, the percentages of children in this risk category exceeded the national average: California, Mississippi, and Texas. A lower-than-average percentage of children fell into this category in Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Wisconsin.

Among low-income children in the surveyed states, 16 percent to 33 percent were read to or told stories fewer than three times a week. In California, Mississippi, and Texas, the per-

centage of children in this category exceeded the national average of 24 percent. In contrast, smaller-than-average percentages of low-income children fell into this category in Minnesota, New York, and Washington.

Children Age 1 to 5 Read to or Told Stories Fewer Than Three Days per Week, by Family Income, 1997



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

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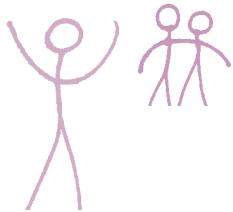
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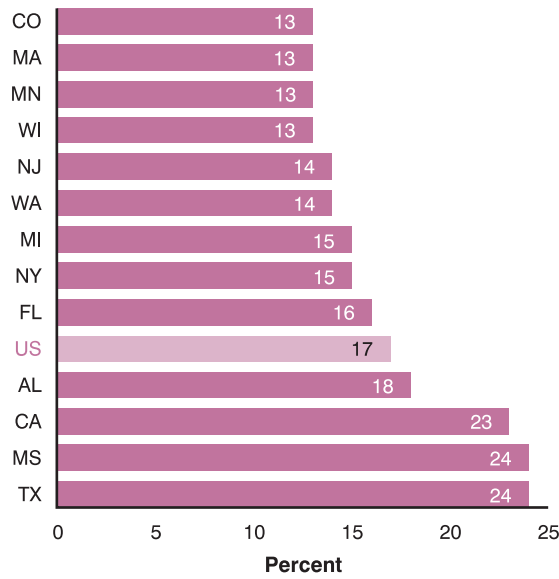
This *Snapshot* presents findings from the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), a 1997 survey of 44,461 house-

holds 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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Children Age 1 to 5 Read to or Told Stories Fewer Than Three Days per Week, by State, 1997



Source: Child Trends and Urban Institute

Children (%) Age 1 to 5 Read to or Told Stories Fewer Than Three Days per Week, 1997

Family Income	AL	CA	CO	FL	MA	MI	MN	MS	NJ	NY	TX	WA	WI	US
Under 200% of poverty level	20.6	30.9	20.7	25.4	23.3	24.9	17.5	29.6	28.7	17.8	33.0	16.3	19.9	24.0
Over 200% of poverty level	14.7	12.9	8.9	7.5	7.7	9.3	10.9	15.3	7.5	12.8	13.6	12.1	9.2	10.5
All incomes	17.7	22.7	13.2	16.2	12.6	14.7	13.1	23.8	14.2	15.1	24.3	13.8	12.9	16.8

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