

Attitudes Toward Spanking

Headline

In 2004, 79 percent of 18 to 24 year old females agreed that a child sometimes needs a “good hard spanking” compared with 61 percent of 45 to 65 year old females. ([See Figure 2](#))

Importance

One of the most frequently used strategies to discipline a child, especially a younger child, is spanking.¹ Research suggests that about 94 percent of parents of children ages three to four in the United States report having spanked their children in the previous year.² At the same time, however, use of corporal punishment is often linked to negative outcomes for children (e.g., delinquency, antisocial behavior, and low self-esteem), and may be indicative of ineffective parenting.^{3,4} Research also finds that the number of problem behaviors observed in adolescence are related to the amount of spanking a child receives, with the relationship becoming stronger as children age.⁵ Positive child outcomes can be obtained when parents refrain from spanking and other physical punishment and alternatively discipline their children through firm, rational control and nurturing communication.⁶ Studies find that this type of disciplinary style can foster positive psychological outcomes such as high self-esteem and cooperation with others, as well as improved achievement in school.⁷

The type of discipline employed is often influenced by both the age and the reasoning ability of the child.⁸ For example, younger children may have greater difficulty responding to rational communicative discipline, whereas older children may respond more readily to firm and nurturing communication. For younger children, an alternative strategy may be to redirect the child’s attention, rather than use rational communication or spanking.⁹

Trends

In the period between 1986 and 2004, the percentage of men who agreed or strongly agreed that it is sometimes necessary to give a child a “good, hard spanking” dropped from 84 percent to 77 percent. Among women, the percentage dropped from 82 percent to 69 percent during the same period. ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Gender

In 2004, men were significantly more likely than women to agree or strongly agree that it is sometimes necessary to give a child a “good, hard spanking” (77 percent and 69 percent, respectively). ([See Figure 1](#))

Differences by Educational Attainment

In 2004, there were no significant differences in attitudes towards spanking by level of education for males or females. In past years, females with greater levels of education were less likely to believe that giving a child a “good, hard spanking” is sometimes necessary.¹⁰

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin

Non-Hispanic black women are more likely than women of other races/ethnicity to agree or strongly agree that “a good hand spanking” a child is sometimes necessary. In 2004, 94 percent of non-Hispanic black women, compared with 72 percent of Hispanic women, 65 percent of non-Hispanic white women, and 46 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander women, agreed that a child sometimes needs a “good hard spanking.” ([See Figure 3](#))

Differences by Ages

Younger women are more likely than older women to agree or strongly agree that spanking a child is sometimes necessary. In 2004, 79 percent of 18 to 24 year old females agreed that a child sometimes needs a “good hard spanking” compared with 61 percent of 45 to 65 year old females. ([See Figure 2](#))

State and Local Estimates

None

International Estimates

None

National Goals

None

Definition

Adults in the General Social Survey were asked to report whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree “that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking”.

Data Source

Data for 1986 – 2000: Child Trends. 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.

<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf> (See Indicator P5 and Table P5.1)

Data for 2002-2004: Original analysis by Child Trends of the General Social Survey

Raw Data Source

General Social Survey

<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/>

Approximate Date of Next Update

2008

¹ Day, R., Peterson, G., & McCracken, C. (1998). Predicting spanking of younger and older children by mothers and fathers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 60, 79-94.

² Straus M.A., and Stewart, J.H. (1999). "Corporal punishment by American parents: national data on prevalence, chronicity, severity, and duration, in relation to child and family characteristics." *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 2 :55 -70.

³ McCord, J. (1995). *Coercion and punishment in long-term perspectives*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Straus, M.A. (2001). *Beating the devil out of them: Corporal punishment in American families and its effects on children* (2nd ed.). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

⁵ Bradley, Robert H., et al. (2001). "The Home Environments of Children in the United States Part II: Relations with Behavioral Development through age Thirteen." *Child Development*, 72(6): 1868-1886.

⁶ Baumrind, D. (1991). Effective parenting during the early adolescent transition. In P. Cowan & M. Hetherington (Eds.), *Family Transitions*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Petersen, G., & Rollins, B. (1987). Parent-child socialization. In M. Sussman and S. Steinmetz (Eds.), *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. New York: Plenum.

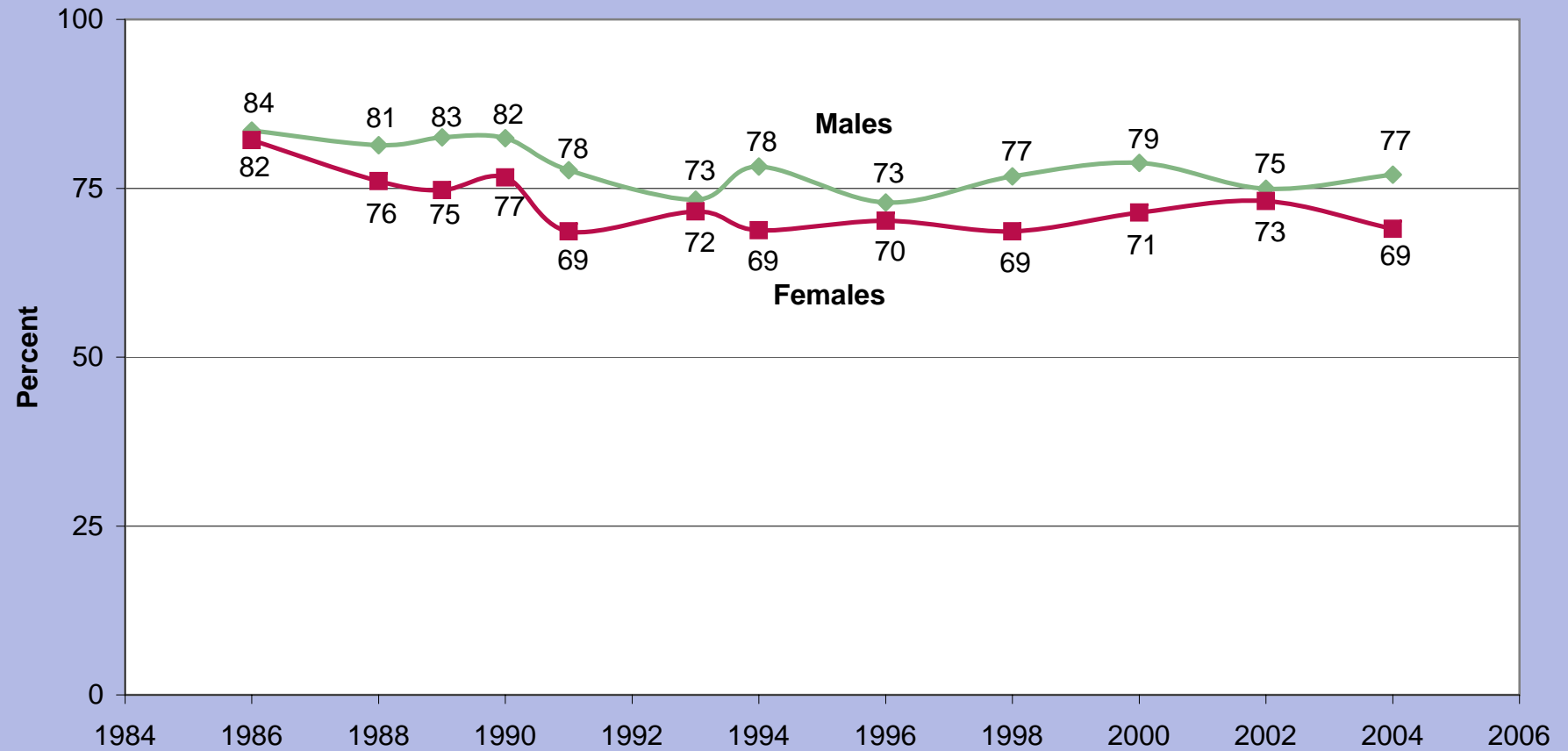
⁹ Child Trends. (2002). "Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers." Washington, D.C.: Child Trends. <http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf>

¹⁰ This indicator originally appeared in another Child Trends publication, Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers. Washington, D.C.: Child Trends.

<http://www.childtrends.org/Files/ParenthoodRpt2002.pdf>

Figure 1

Percentage of Males and Females Ages 18 to 65 Who Either Agree or Strongly Agree that it is Sometimes Necessary to Discipline a Child with a "Good, Hard Spanking," Selected Years 1986-2004

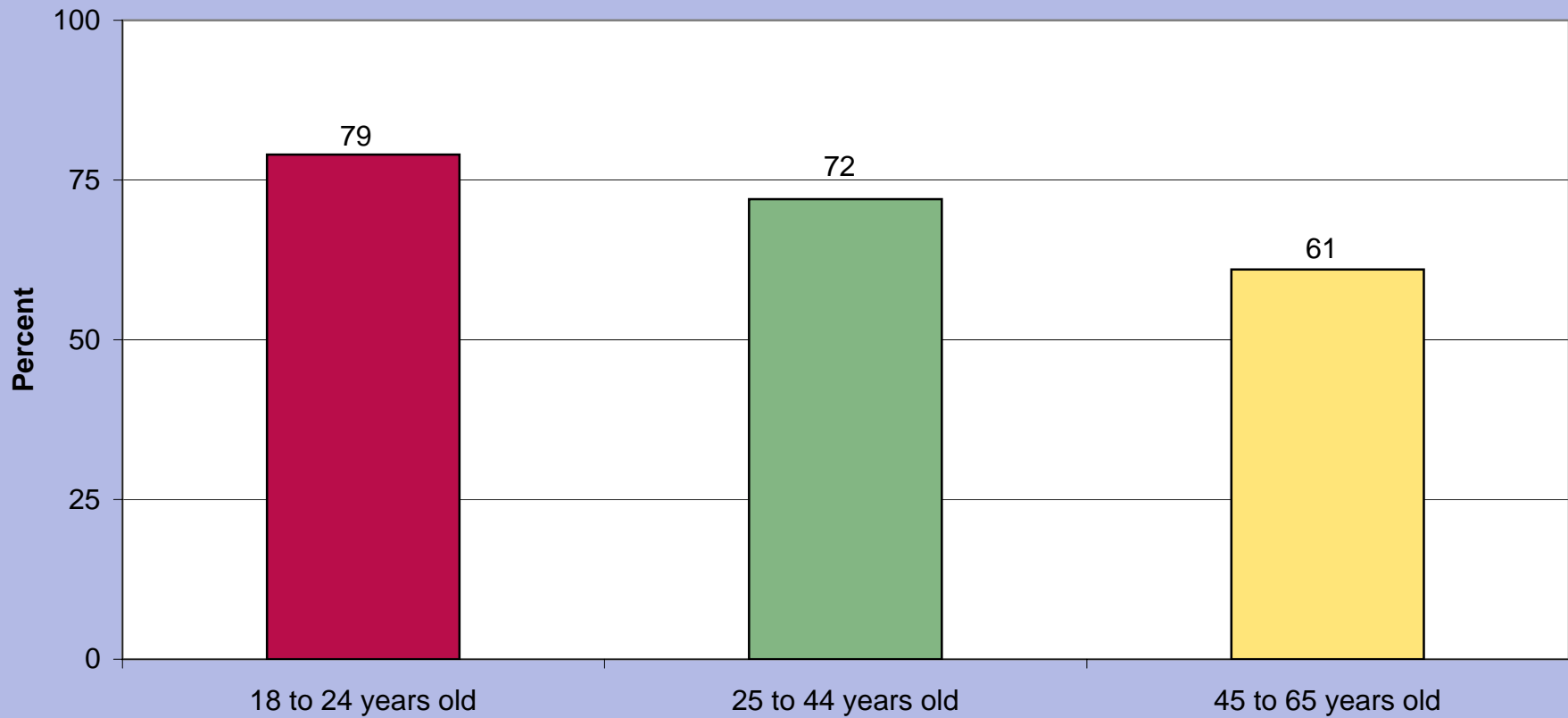


Source: Data for 1986-2000 was reproduced from Child Trends. 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. Table P5.1. Data for 2002-2004: Original analysis by Child Trends of the General Social Survey



Figure 2

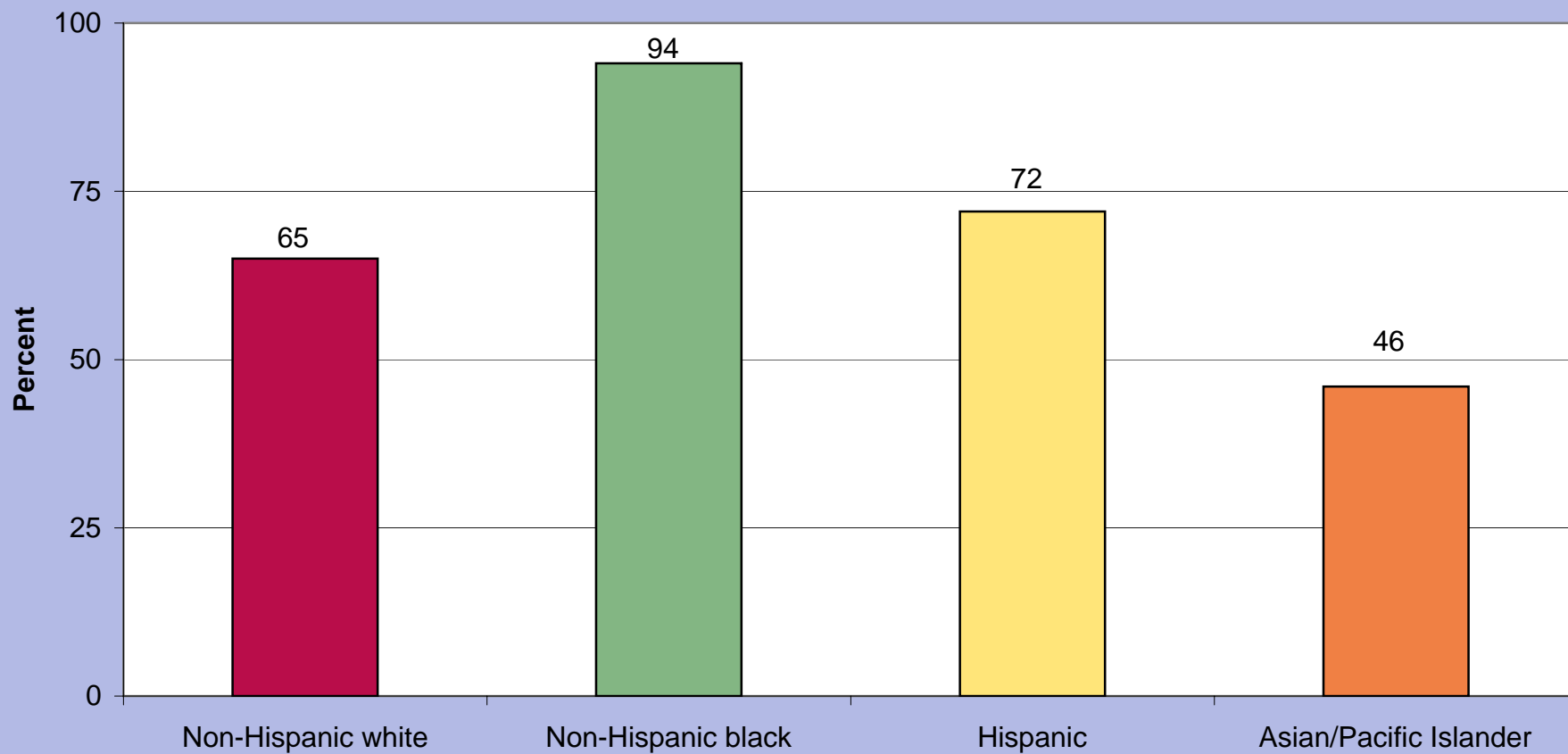
Percentage of Females Who Agree that it is Sometimes Necessary to Give a Child a "Good Hard Spanking," by Age, 2004



Source: Child Trends' original analysis of the General Social Survey 2004

Figure 3

Percentage of Females Who Agree that it is Sometimes Necessary to Give a Child a "Good Hard Spanking," by Race, 2004



Source: Child Trends' original analysis of the General Social Survey 2004.

Table 1

Percentage of Males Ages 18 to 65 Who Either Agree or Strongly Agree that it is Sometimes Necessary to Discipline a Child with a "Good, Hard Spanking," Selected Years 1986 and 1988-2004

	Males											
	1986	1988	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Total	84	81	83	82	78	73	78	73	77	79	75	77
Race and Hispanic Origin¹												
White non-Hispanic	84	80	83	82	75	73	76	73	75	79	74	77
Black non-Hispanic	80	93	80	93	91	80	90	82	90	87	80	87
Hispanic	80	-	-	-	-	-	79	55	75	69	82	77
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	72	-	-	59
American Indian/Alaskan Native	-	81	-	-	-	-	-	75	84	91	-	60
Poverty Status												
Poor	84	76	80	79	80	69	na	na	na	na	na	na
Borderline poor ²	-	-	-	-	-	-	na	na	na	na	na	na
Nonpoor	83	81	82	82	78	74	na	na	na	na	na	na
Marital Status												
Currently married	86	86	82	82	82	74	78	75	78	78	76	76
Not currently married	81	77	83	82	74	72	78	72	76	79	73	78
Parental Status												
Parent	82	84	82	84	83	76	80	74	78	79	76	78
Nonparent	87	77	83	80	70	69	76	71	75	79	74	75
Age of Respondent												
18 to 24 years old	83	71	85	76	73	67	58	69	79	79	68	78
25 to 44 years old	84	81	81	81	75	74	79	73	76	76	78	75
45 to 65 years old	83	84	83	86	82	73	81	74	77	81	75	78
Educational Attainment												
Less than high school	83	85	80	87	80	74	78	77	85	87	81	78
High school diploma or GED	84	82	85	86	79	76	81	75	79	82	76	76
Vocational/technical or some college	78	88	-	81	81	82	86	72	75	88	na	na
College graduate	83	76	78	74	70	66	72	68	69	66	67	78
Employment Status												
Not in labor force	86	81	83	82	82	75	76	73	77	77	77	80
Looking for work	72	72	76	72	58	66	73	67	71	85	84	69
Less than 35 hours per week	-	-	-	-	-	74	95	76	71	73	61	71
35 hours or more per week	81	82	84	86	75	71	83	76	77	84	76	78

Note: Scores based on two categories: Strongly Agree or Agree, and Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

¹Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

²Since GSS respondents reported their income in categories, it was unclear whether some respondents' incomes fell above or below the poverty threshold. These cases were designated "borderline poor."

"-" = This information has been suppressed due to an insufficient number of cases.

na = data not available

Source: Data for 1986-2000 was reproduced from Child Trends. 2002. *Charting Parenthood: A Statistical Portrait of Fathers and Mothers in America*. Washington, DC: Child Trends. P5.1. Data are 2002-2004 is a product of Child Trends' original analysis of the General Social Survey, 2002 and 2004.



Table 2

Percentage of Females Ages 18 to 65 Who Either Agree or Strongly Agree that it is Sometimes Necessary to Discipline a Child with a "Good, Hard Spanking," Selected Years 1986 and 1988-2004

	Females											
	1986	1988	1989	1990	1991	1993	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Total	82	76	75	77	69	72	69	70	69	71	73	69
Race and Hispanic Origin¹												
White non-Hispanic	80	74	72	74	64	69	66	67	66	67	74	65
Black non-Hispanic	92	88	88	93	84	88	87	84	82	84	80	94
Hispanic	81	77	86	-	83	66	65	67	73	76	56	72
Asian/Pacific Islander	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	55	62	-	46
American Indian/Alaskan Native	92	85	-	-	-	69	65	81	76	78	-	-
Poverty Status												
Poor	87	77	81	81	77	76	na	na	na	na	na	na
Borderline poor ²	77	81	90	80	86	85	na	na	na	na	na	na
Nonpoor	81	76	73	76	65	70	na	na	na	na	na	na
Marital Status												
Currently married	82	77	71	74	72	72	68	70	71	70	71	68
Not currently married	82	76	77	78	67	71	69	71	67	72	75	70
Parental Status												
Parent	84	77	76	77	71	73	70	71	70	73	73	71
Nonparent	75	73	71	75	61	68	65	68	65	64	73	63
Age of Respondent												
18 to 24 years old	86	75	68	70	72	72	65	60	71	67	85	79
25 to 44 years old	81	76	73	78	69	72	69	70	67	73	72	72
45 to 65 years old	82	77	77	77	68	72	69	72	70	70	69	61
Educational Attainment												
Less than high school	86	85	80	84	80	83	77	82	77	80	78	63
High school diploma or GED	81	77	76	77	69	71	73	71	69	75	76	70
Vocational/technical or some college	-	68	69	73	69	70	69	71	73	73	na	na
College graduate	76	61	63	69	53	63	54	58	61	55	63	63
Employment Status												
Not in labor force	81	79	75	81	68	68	70	70	67	72	77	67
Looking for work	89	71	67	68	66	65	55	66	59	67	62	61
Less than 35 hours per week	-	-	-	-	-	-	64	64	-	71	66	58
35 hours or more per week	82	75	76	75	70	75	72	72	73	72	75	76

Note: Scores based on two categories: Strongly Agree or Agree, and Disagree or Strongly Disagree.

¹Estimates for whites and blacks exclude Hispanics of those races. Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

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