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Do the Benefits of Extending Foster Care to Age 21 Outweigh the Costs?

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My Purpose Today

- *Situate the transition to adulthood for youth in state care within the broader context of changes in the transition to adulthood*
- *Briefly describe Wisconsin's population of older youth in care*
- *Describe trends in key outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood from care*
- *Summarize research on the potential benefits of allowing youth to remain in care to age 21*

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
 - Continuing and considerable parental support (\$38k in direct support between 18-34)
 - Developmental psychologists describe a new period of “emerging adulthood”
 - Developments in neuroscience
- *Yet, U.S. policy provides relatively little support for young adults*
- *Little attention has been paid to the “other half”*

Snapshot of Wisconsin's Transition-Age Foster Youth

- *6,516 children in out-of-home care in Wisconsin on December 31, 2013*
 - About 1/3 in Milwaukee County
 - About 1/3 in placements with relatives
 - 8% (n = 504) were 17-19 years old
 - 54% Caucasian; 37% African American; 6% American Indian/Alaskan Native
- *Older youth are much less likely than young children to be adopted or placed with relatives and much more likely to run away or “age out”*
 - In 2013, 377 youth (7% of all exits) left care to “emancipation” at the age of majority or to “independent living”

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*

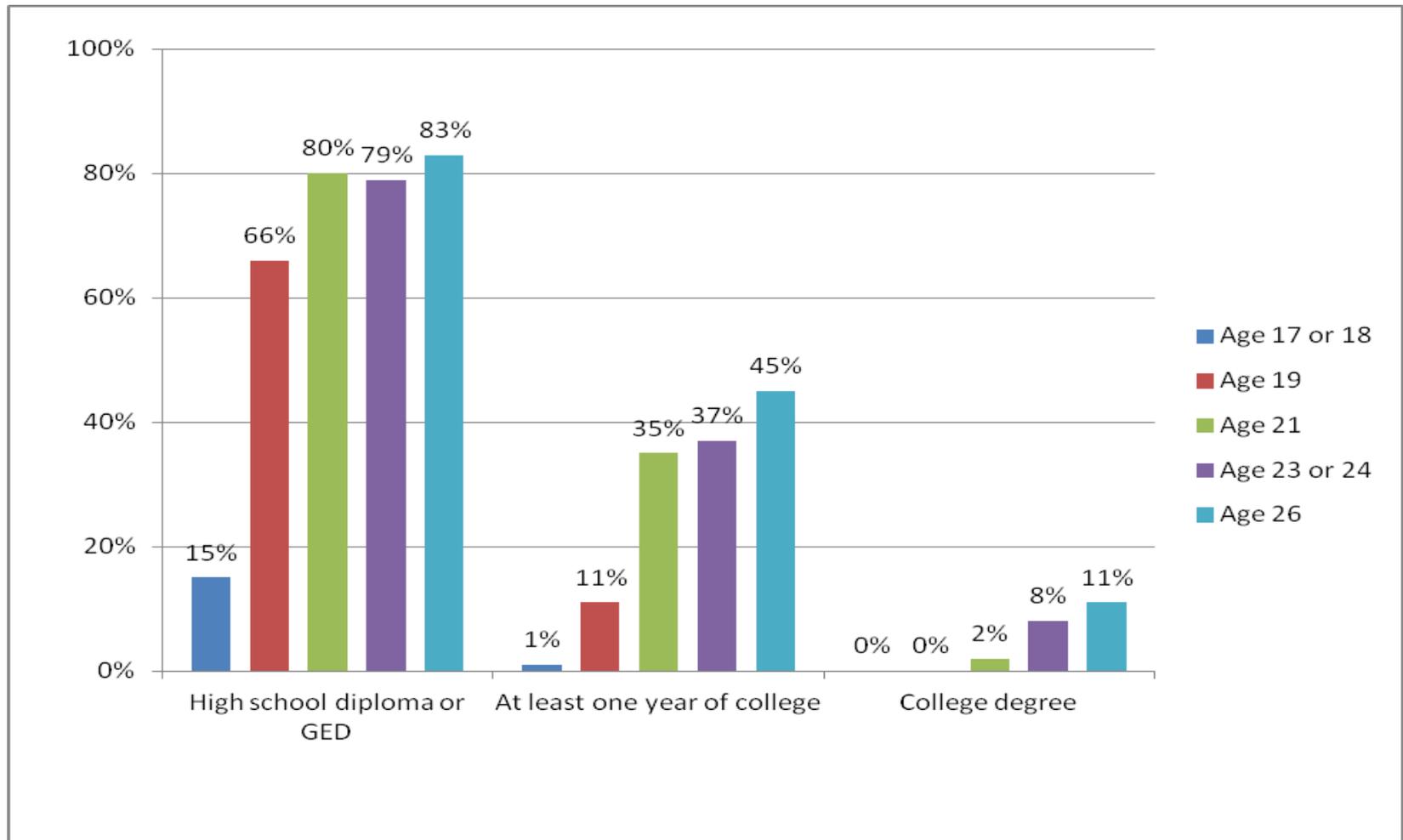
Study Design and Sample (continued)

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

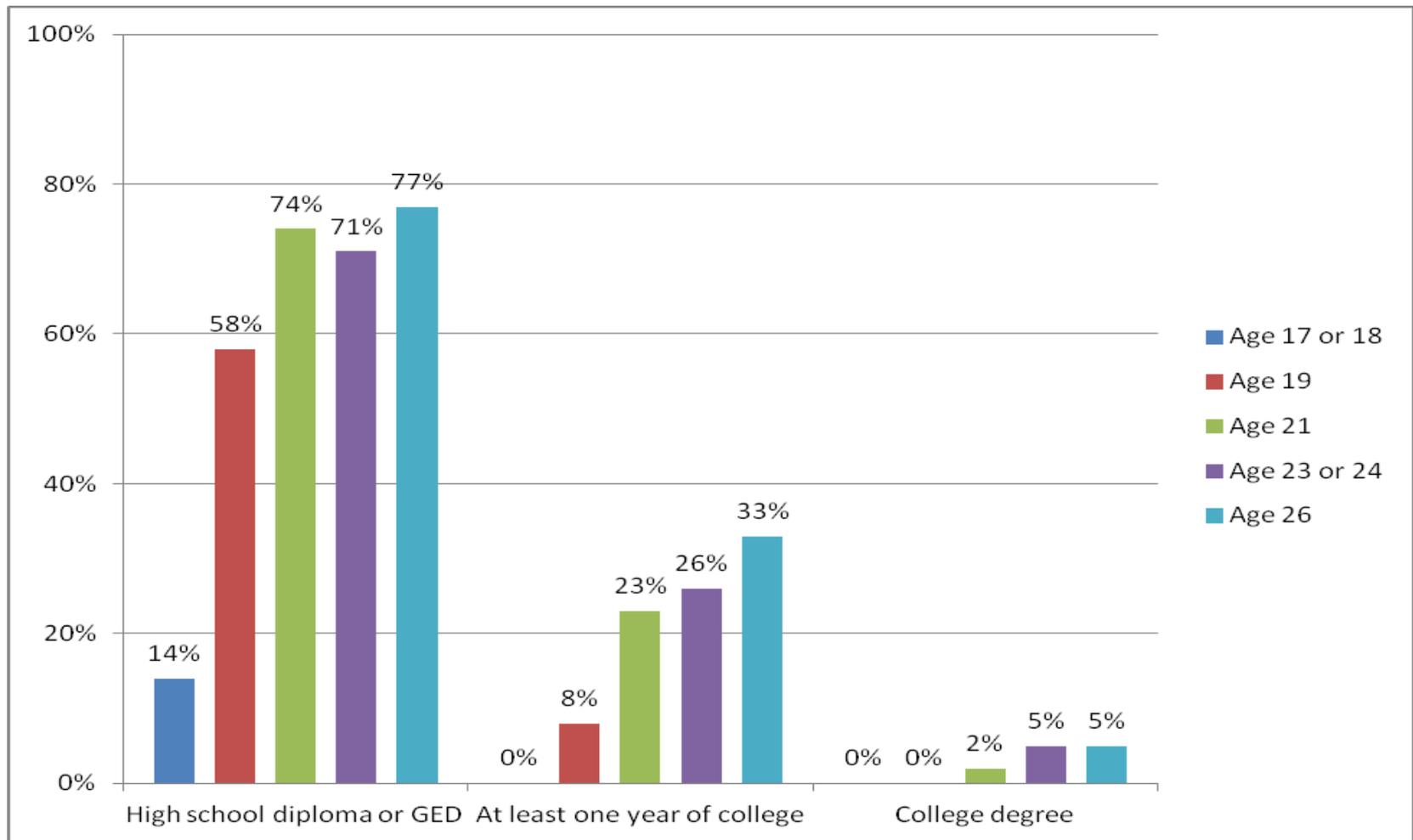
Demographic Characteristics

		Wave 1
N		732
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	52%
Race	Black	57%
	White	31%
	Other/Multi-racial	12%
Ethnicity	Hispanic origin	9%
State	Illinois	65%
	Wisconsin	26%
	Iowa	9%

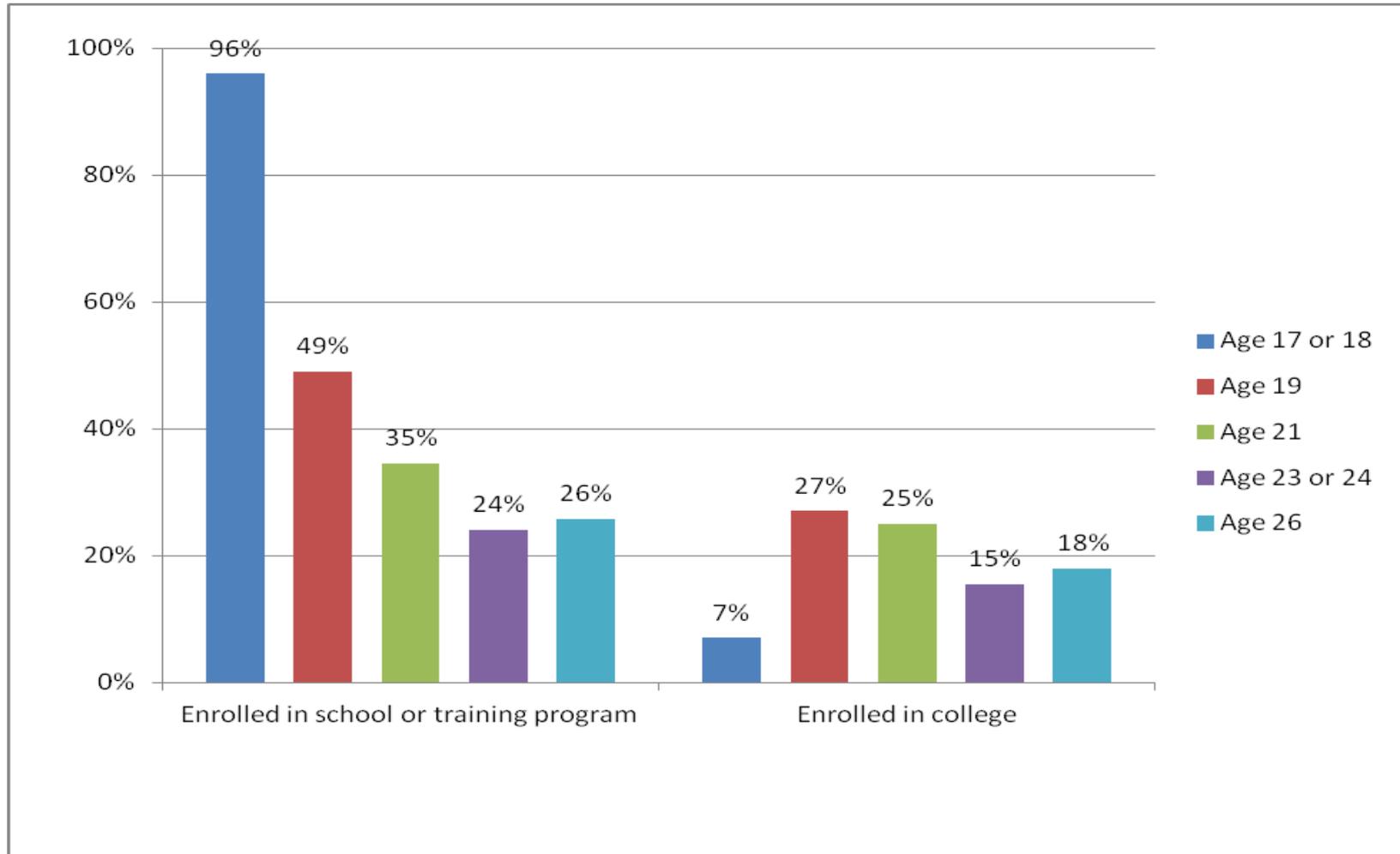
Young Women's Educational Attainment



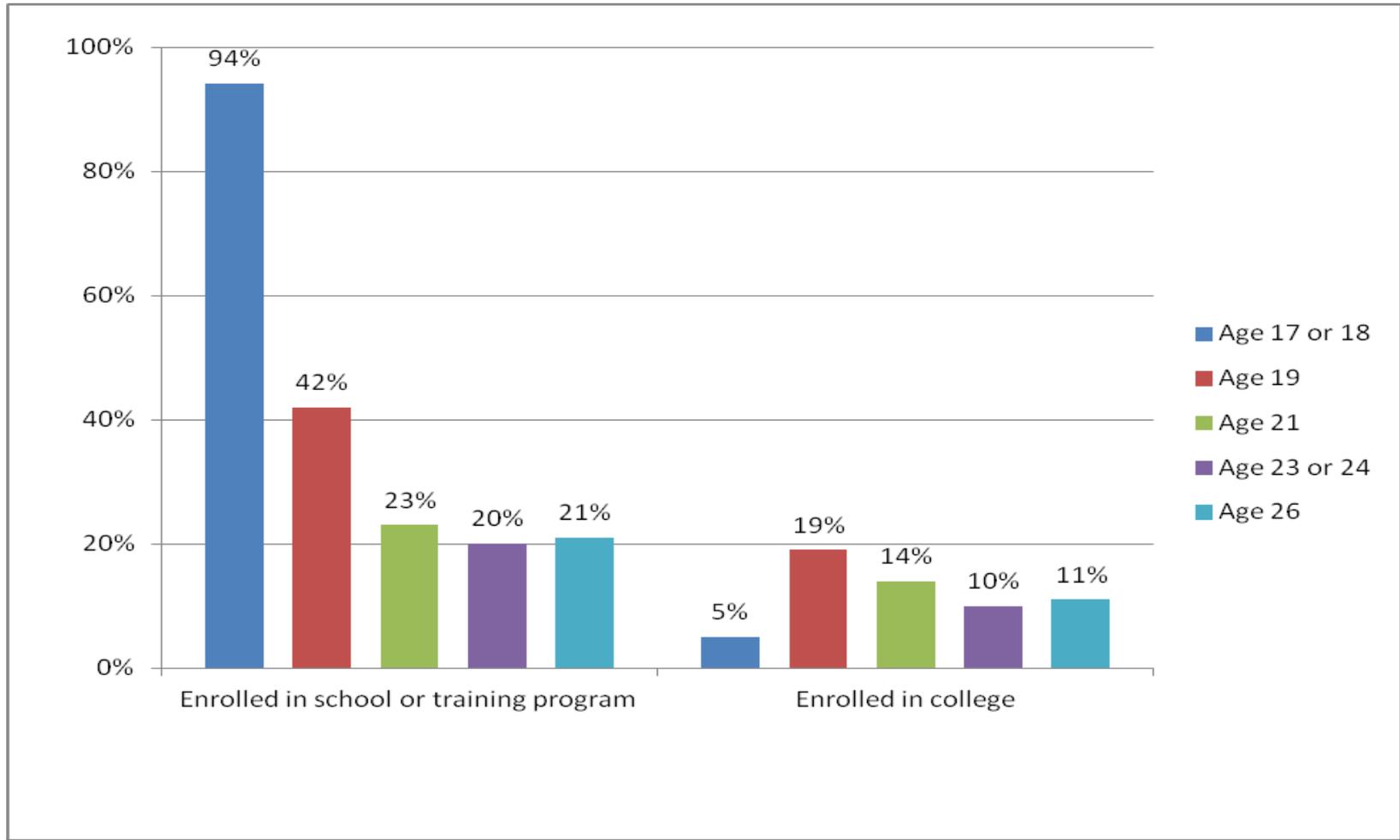
Young Men's Educational Attainment



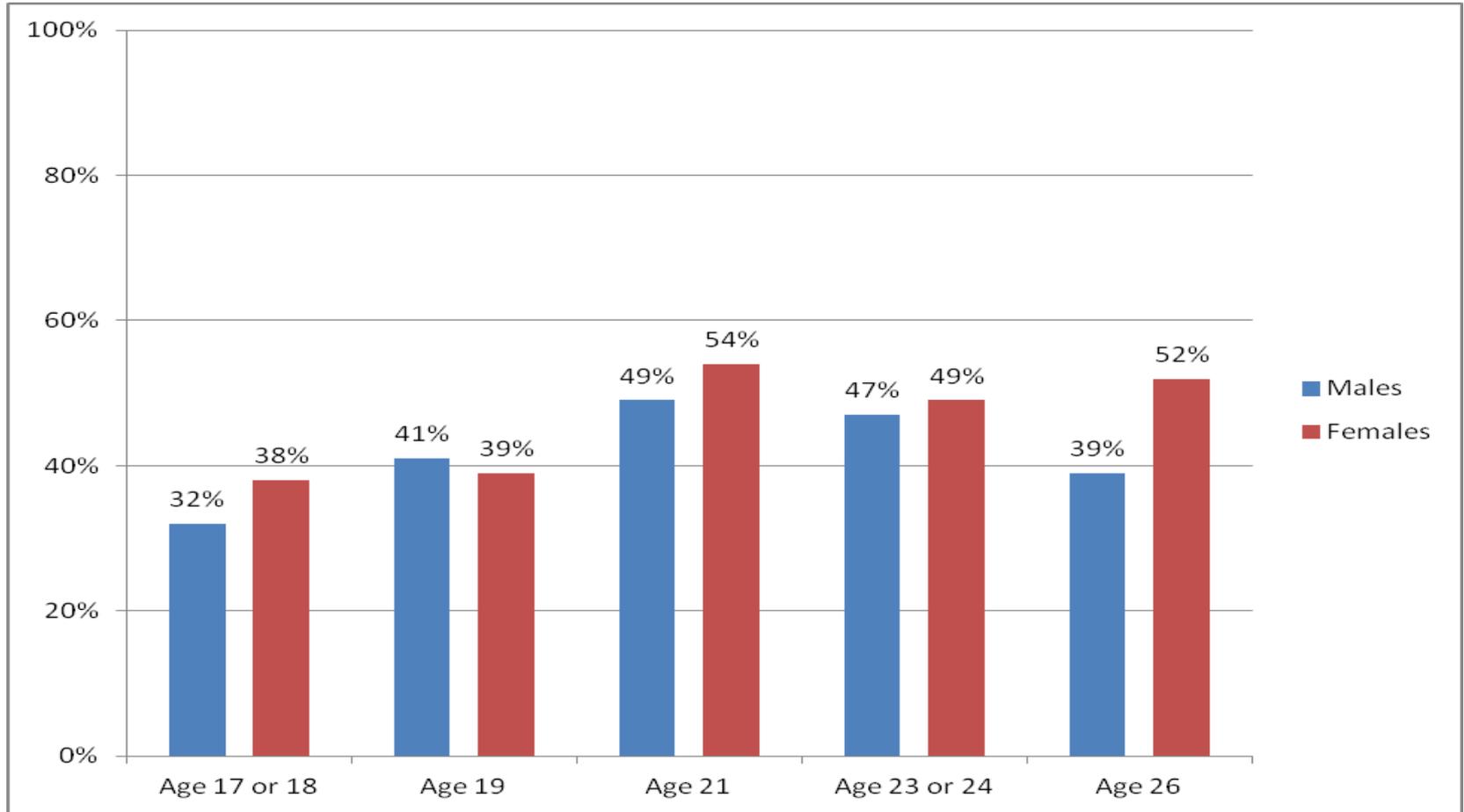
Young Women's Educational Enrollment



Young Men's Educational Enrollment

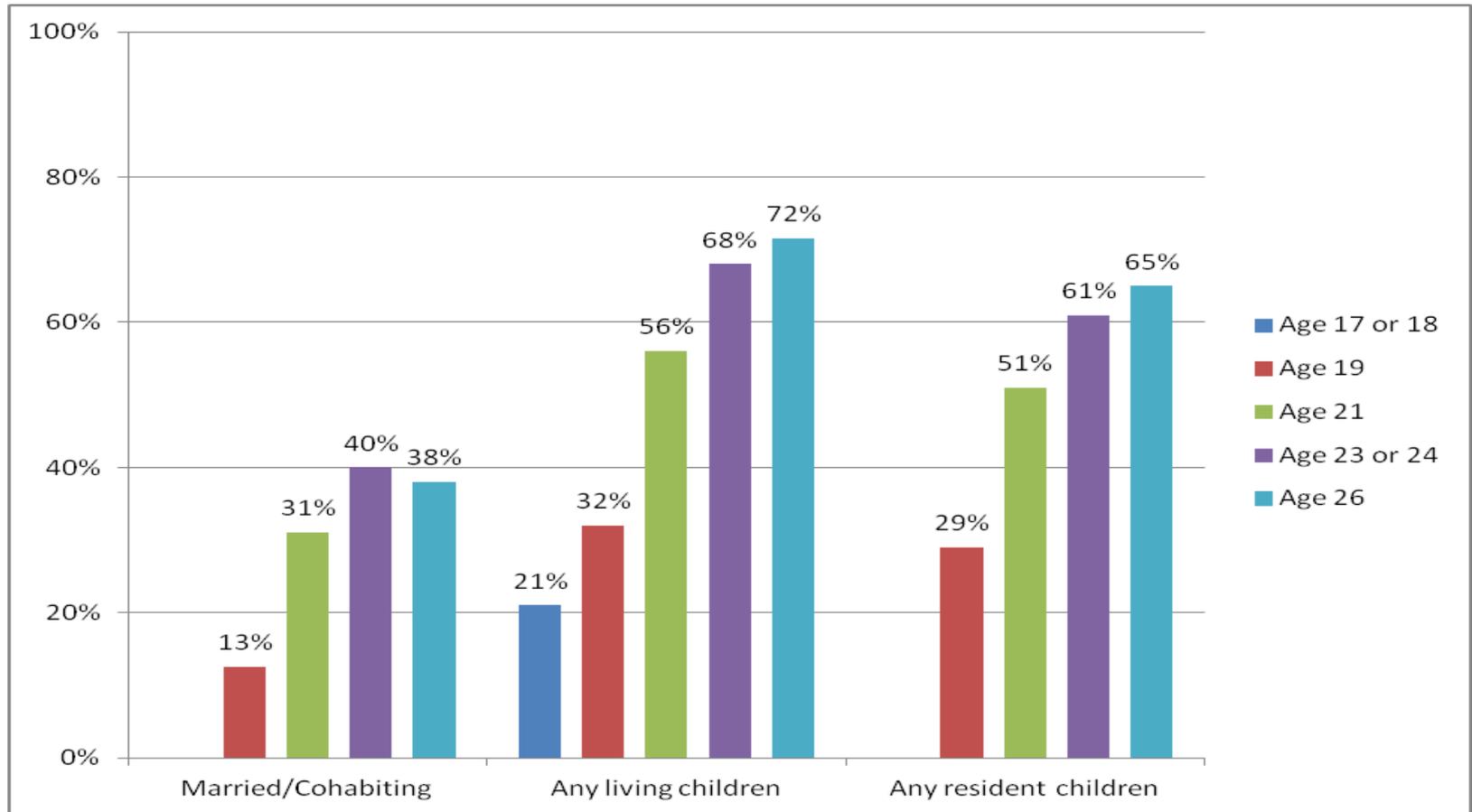


Young Men's and Young Women's Employment



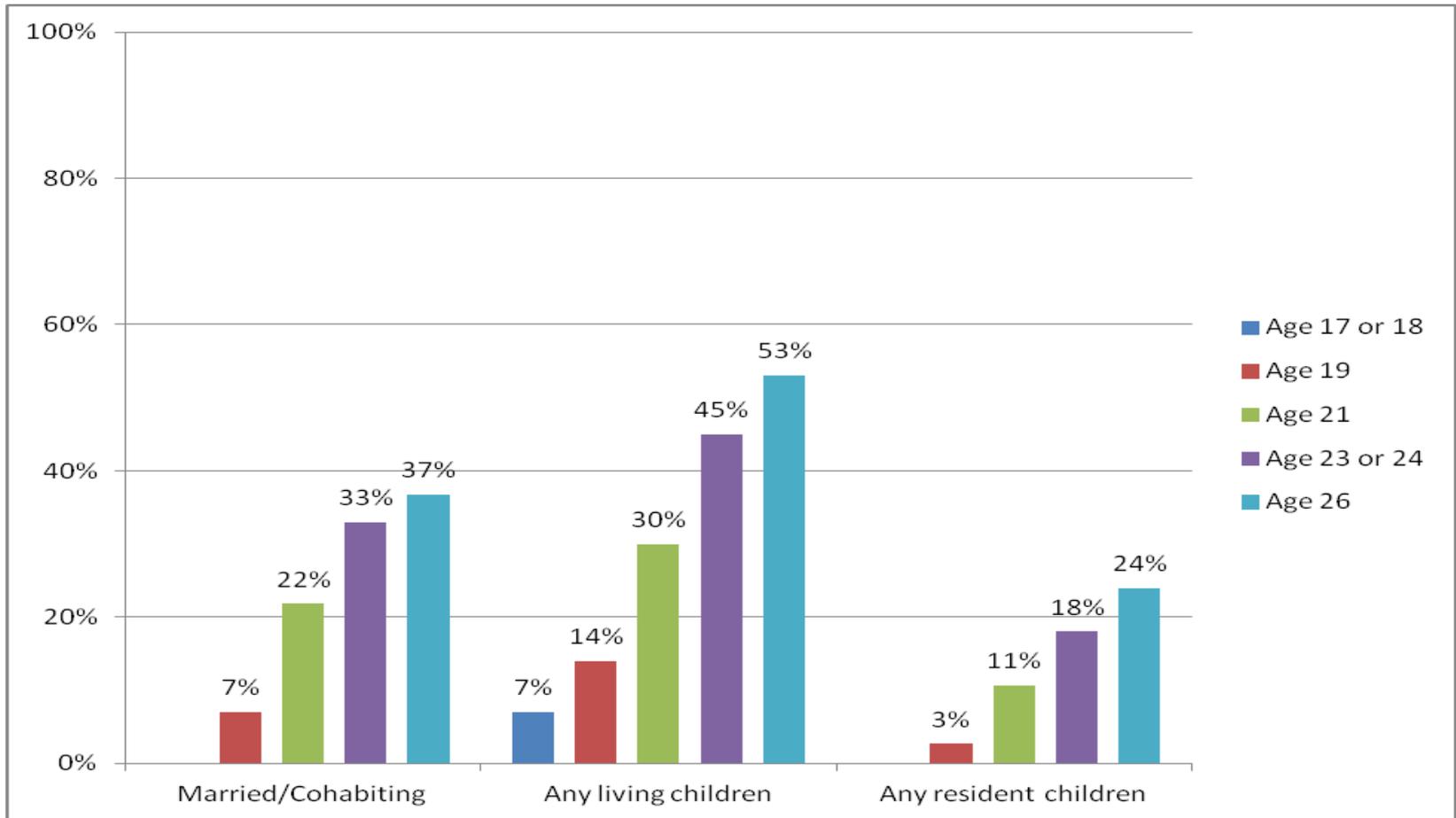
72% employed during year; mean earnings among employed = \$13,989

Family Formation Among Young Women



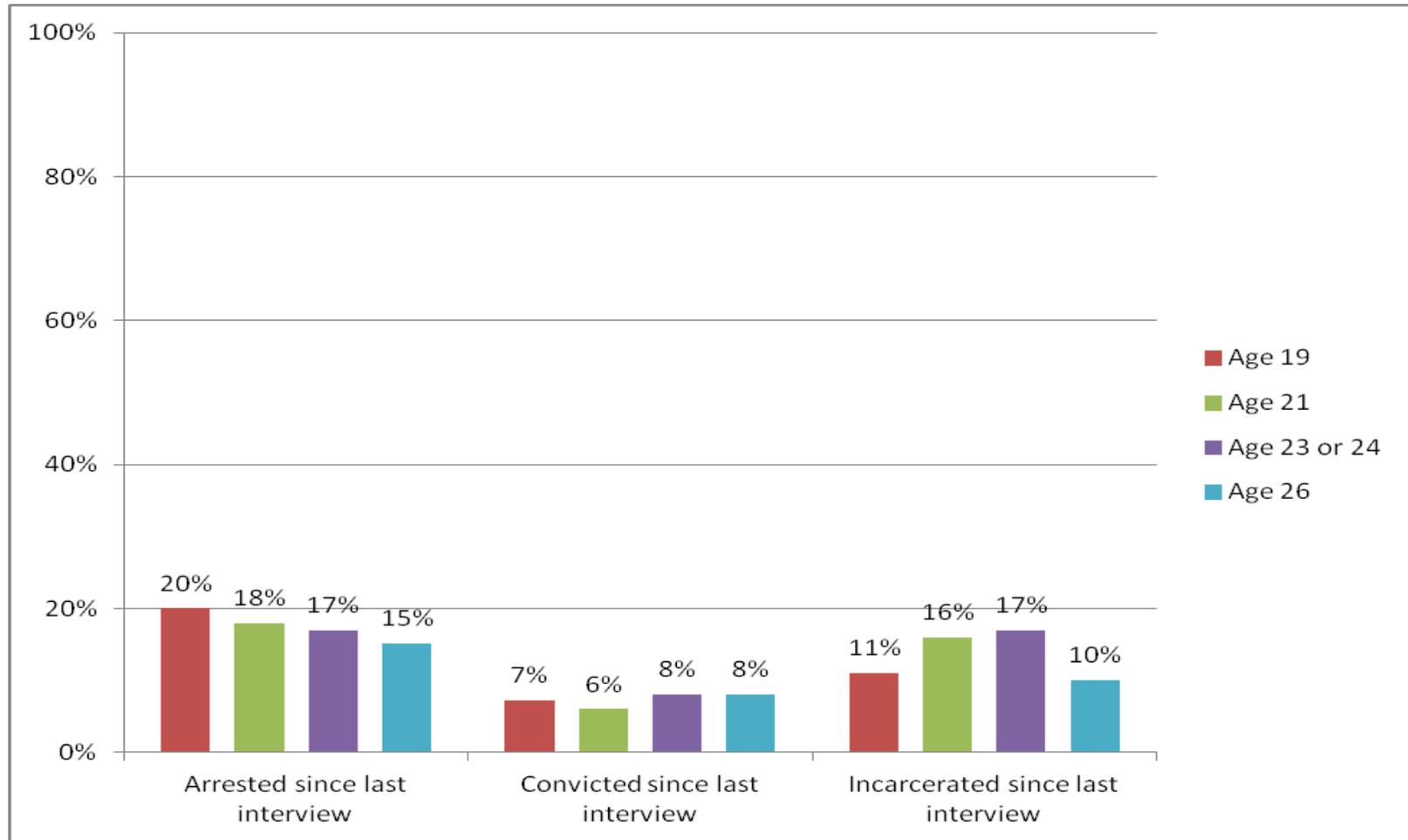
19% of women with children have a nonresident child

Family Formation Among Young Men

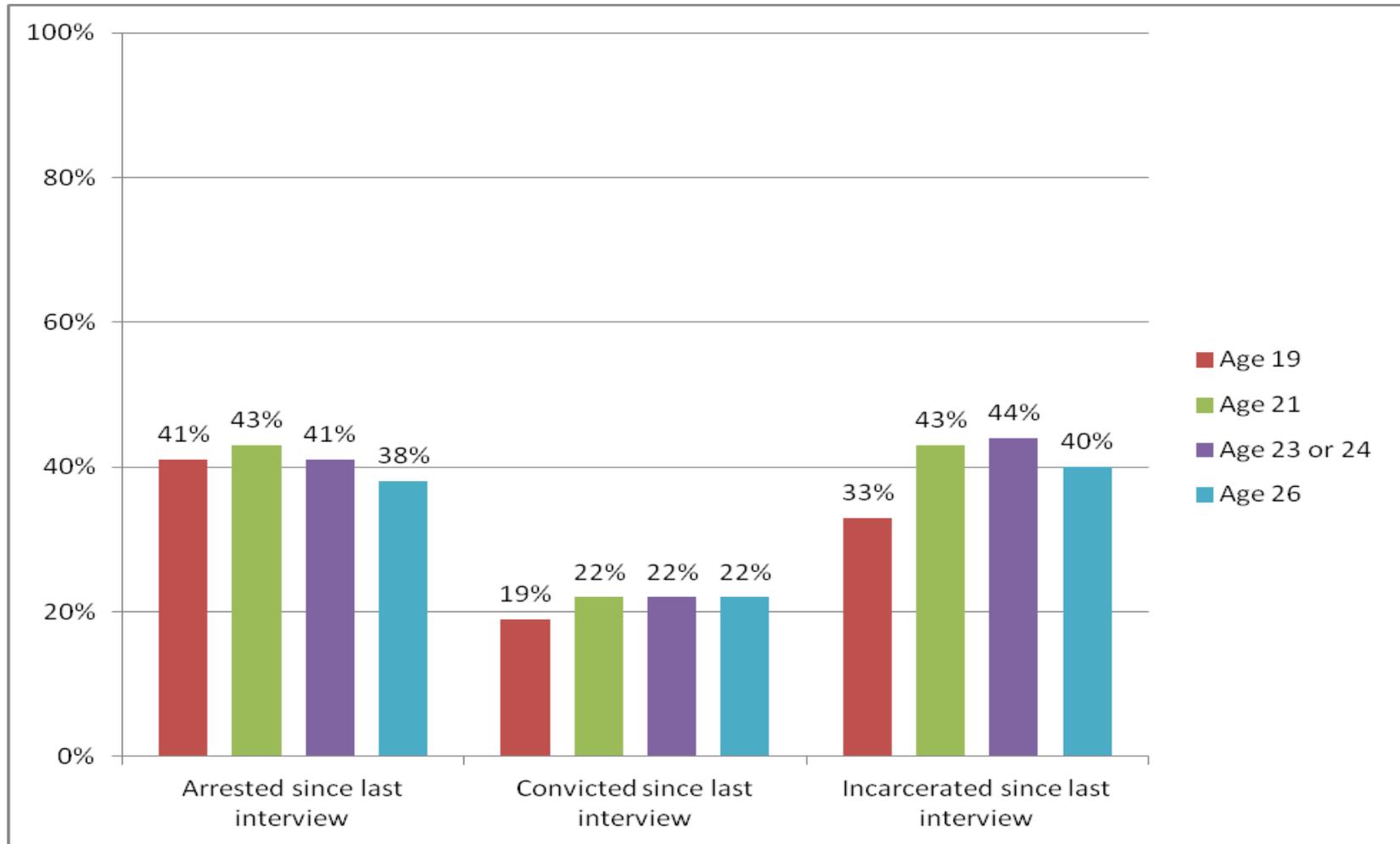


66% of men with children have a nonresident child

Young Women's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Young Men's Criminal Justice System Involvement



Summary of Early Adult Outcomes Post 1999

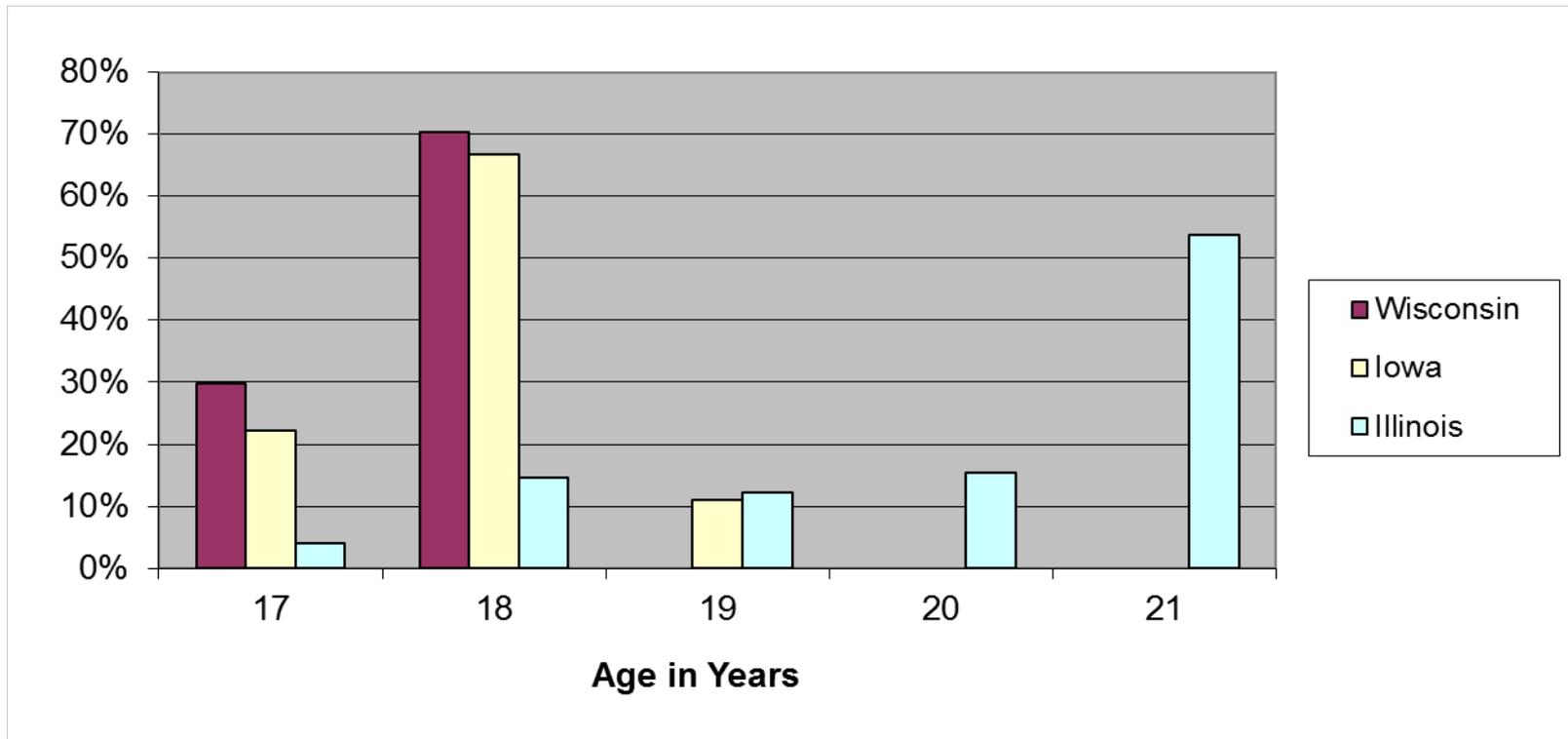
- *Outcomes are relatively poor across a variety of important transition domains*
- *Outcomes vary by gender; males fare worse*
- *Despite a sobering picture overall, many young people leaving the care of the state do well*

*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; though few youth have completed a degree by age 26, many remain in college
 - Increased earnings
 - Delayed pregnancy
 - Increased involvement of young fathers with their children
 - Reduced crime among females
 - Delayed homelessness

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 also increases their likelihood of receiving independent living services after age 18
- Benefit-cost analysis based on increased post-secondary education finds that each dollar spent on extended care generates \$2 in increased lifetime earnings
 - This likely understates the ratio of benefits to costs since other benefits have not yet been monetized

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; Education and Training Vouchers)*

State option implies great inter-state variability; 18 states have federally-approved plans to extend care beyond 18



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For more info:

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

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