

## Neighborhood Safety

### Headline

About 3 out of every 10 non-Hispanic black and Hispanic children under age 18 live in neighborhoods that are never or sometimes safe, compared to less than 1 in 10 white children (8 percent), according to parent reports. ([See Figure 1](#))

### Importance

The neighborhood is a critical environment that influences child and youth development.<sup>1</sup> Social conditions of a neighborhood such as crime and physical disorder tend to occur along with negative child outcomes such as infant mortality and low birthweight, juvenile delinquency, high school dropout, and child abuse and neglect.<sup>2</sup> Children and adolescents living in neighborhoods characterized by crime or disorganization are also more likely to become victims of violent crime<sup>3</sup> and to perpetrate acts of violence.<sup>4</sup>

Children who witness crime and violence are more likely to experience social and emotional problems such as aggression, stress, and withdrawal, as well as delinquency and low school achievement.<sup>5</sup> Neighborhood safety is negatively associated with poor development among pre-school children.<sup>6</sup> Parents who believe that their neighborhood is unsafe may limit their child's independent play outside, which can decrease the child's opportunities for spontaneous play and exploration, but may also result in better social behavior due to the increased supervision.<sup>7</sup> Some studies have found that a parental perception of an unsafe neighborhood is associated with the child being overweight.<sup>8</sup>

### Trends

In 2003, the most recent year for which data are available, 16 percent of children lived in neighborhoods that are never or only sometimes safe, while 34 percent lived in neighborhoods that are usually safe, and half lived in neighborhoods that are always safe, according to parent reports. ([See Table 1](#))

### Differences by Race and Ethnicity

About three out every 10 non-Hispanic black and Hispanic children live in neighborhoods that are described as never or only sometimes safe, compared with less than 1 in 10 white children (8 percent), according to parent reports. ([See Figure 1](#))

### Differences by Family Structure

Children living in single mother households are more than twice as likely as children living with two biological or adoptive parents to live in a neighborhood that is described as never or only sometimes safe (27 versus 12 percent) and almost twice as likely as children living with one biological parent and one stepparent (14 percent). ([See Table 1](#))

### **Differences by Nativity**

Foreign-born children and native-born children with foreign-born parents are about twice as likely as children of native-born parents to live in a neighborhood that is described as never or only sometimes safe. ([See Figure 2](#))

### **Differences by Neighborhood Support**

Children whose parents report that people in the neighborhood help each other out are more likely to live in safe neighborhoods. Six percent of children whose parents definitely agree that people in the neighborhood help each other out live in unsafe neighborhoods, compared with 32 of children whose parents somewhat disagree that people help each other out and 47 percent who definitely disagree. ([See Figure 3](#))

### **Differences by Poverty Level**

Children living below the poverty line are three times as likely children living at 200 percent of the poverty level or more to live in a neighborhood that is described as never or only sometimes safe (30 percent versus 9 percent, respectively). ([See Figure 4](#))

### **State and Local Estimates**

2003 state estimates for neighborhood safety (parent report) are available through the *National Survey of Children's Health* at <http://nschdata.org/DesktopDefault.aspx> (Select Neighborhood Characteristics (survey section 10) under Survey Sections)

### **International Estimates**

None available

### **National Goals**

None

### **Definition**

This indicator is based on the question, "How often do you feel the child is safe in your community or neighborhood?"

### **Data Source**

Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health

### **Raw Data Source**

## National Survey of Children's Health

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/slaits/nsch.htm>

### Next Update

2008

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<sup>1</sup> Parke, Ross D. and O'Neil, Robin L. (1999). "Neighborhoods of Southern California Children and Families." *Future of Children*, 9(2): 58-63. Available at:

[http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/vol9no2Art6done.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/vol9no2Art6done.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Sampson, Robert J., Morenoff, Jeffrey D., and Gannon-Rowley, Thomas. (2002). "Assessing "Neighborhood Effects": Social Processes and New Directions in Research." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28: 443-478.

<sup>3</sup> Kendrick, Denise, Mulvaney, Caroline, Burton, Paul, and Watson, Michael. 2005. "Relationships between child, family and neighborhood characteristics and childhood injury: a cohort study". *Social Science & Medicine*. 60: 1905-1915.

<sup>4</sup> Todd I. Herrenkohl, Eugene Maguin, Karl G. Hill, J. David Hawkins, Robert D. Abbott and Richard F. Catalano. 2000. "Developmental risk factors for youth violence". *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 26: 3: 176-186.

<sup>5</sup> Reich, Kathleen, Culross, Patti L., and Behrman, Richard E. (2002). "Children, Youth, and Gun Violence: Analysis and Recommendations." *Future of Children*, 12(2): 5-23. Available at:

[http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr\\_doc/tfoc\\_12-2b.pdf](http://www.futureofchildren.org/usr_doc/tfoc_12-2b.pdf).

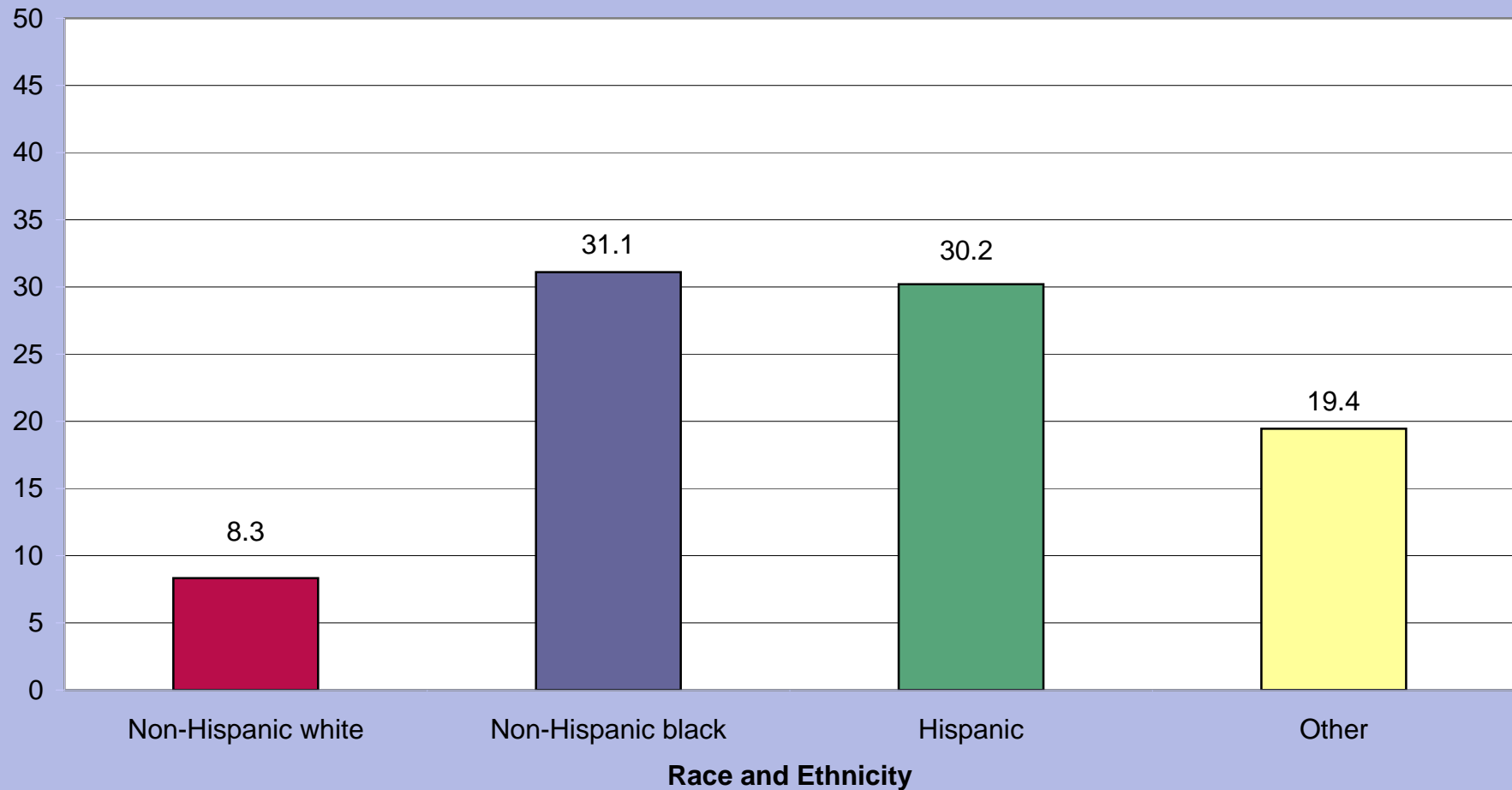
<sup>6</sup> To, T., Cadarette, S.M., and Liu, Y. "Biological, social, and Environmental Correlates of Preschool Development." *Child: Care, Health and Development*. Vol. 27 (2).

<sup>7</sup> Parke, Ross D. and O'Neil, Robin L, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Lumeng, Julie C., Appugliese Danielle, Cabral Howard J., et al. (2006). "Neighborhood Safety and Overweight Status in Children." *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med*. 160:25-31.

Figure 1

## Percentage of Children Living in Unsafe Neighborhoods\*, by Race and Ethnicity, 2003

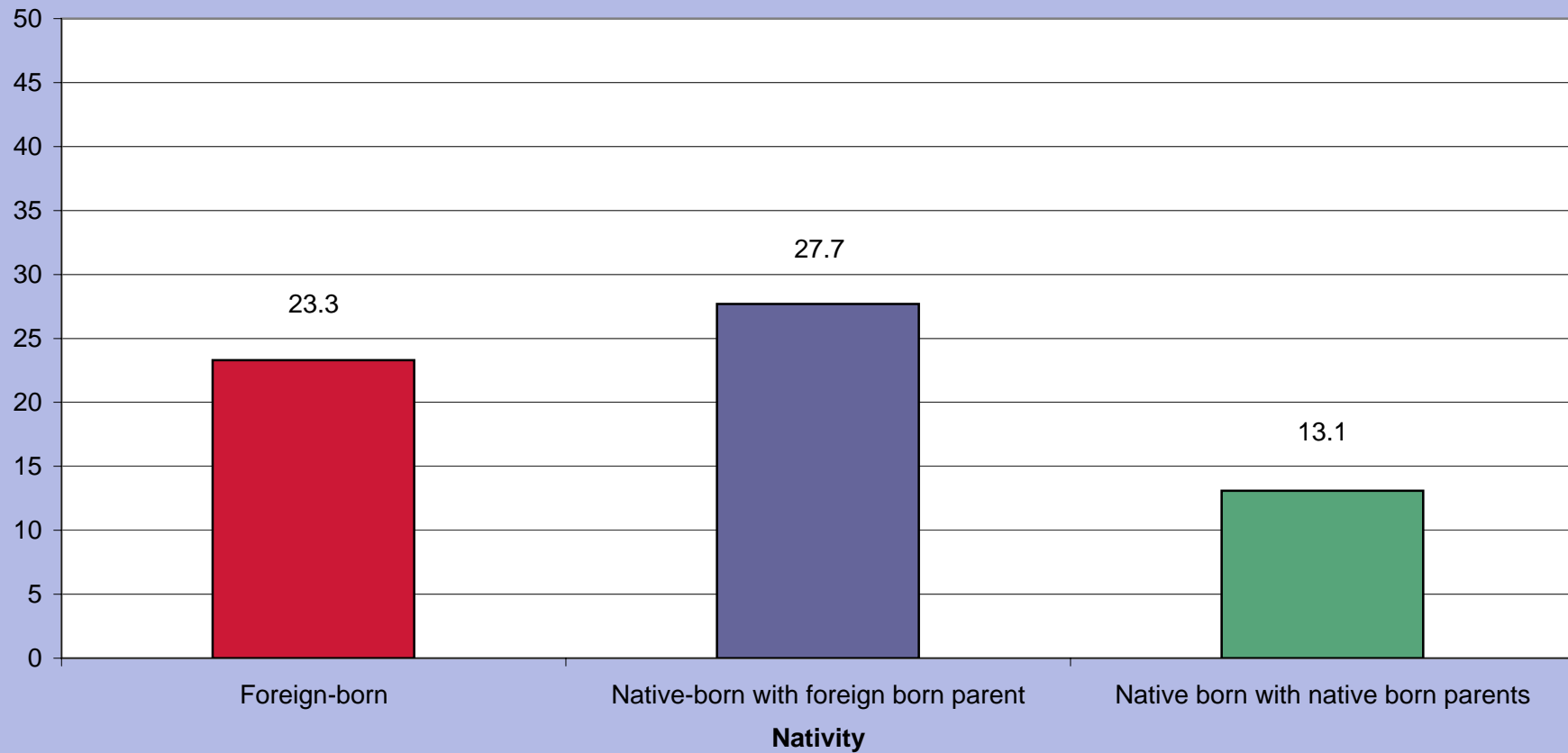


Source: Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

\*Children in unsafe neighborhoods refers to children whose parents responded "never" or "sometimes safe" when asked "How often do you feel the child is safe in your community or neighborhood?"

Figure 2

## Percentage of Children Living in Unsafe Neighborhoods\*, by Nativity, 2003

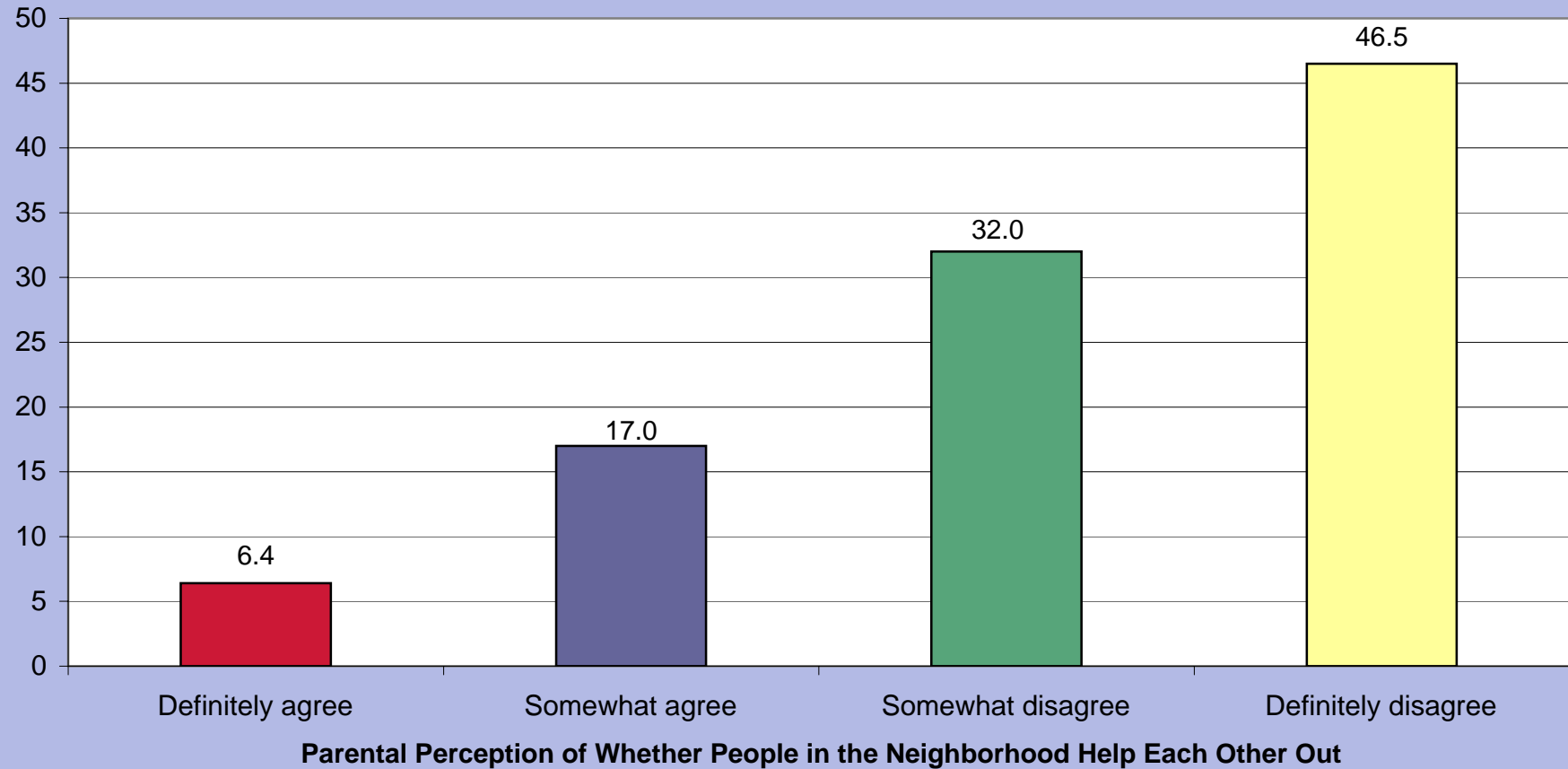


Source: Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

\*Children in unsafe neighborhoods refers to children whose parents responded "never" or "sometimes safe" when asked "How often do you feel the child is safe in your community or neighborhood?"

Figure 3

### Percentage of Children Living in an Unsafe Neighborhood\*, by Parental Perception of Whether People in the Neighborhood Help Each Other Out, 2003



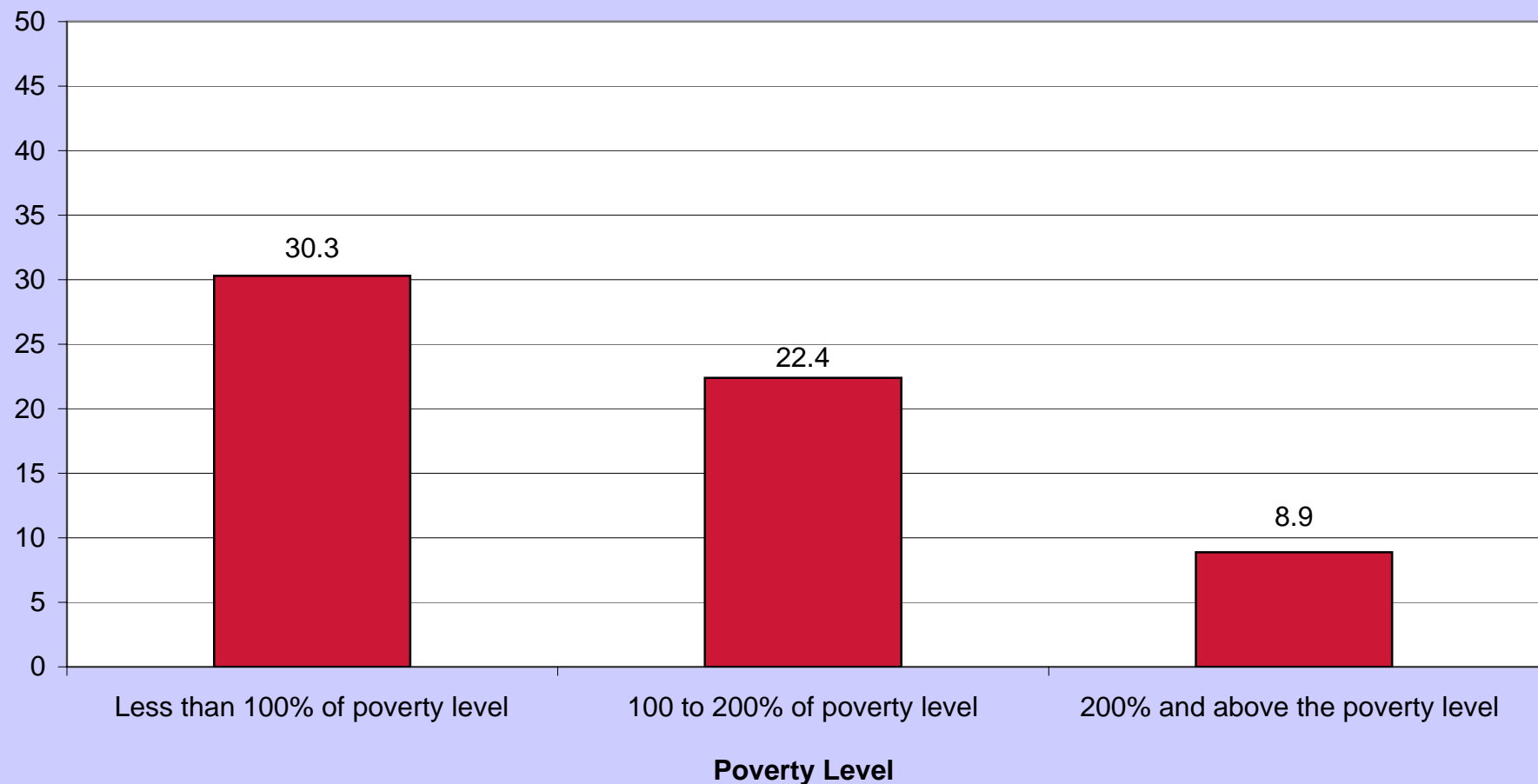
Source: Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

\*Children in unsafe neighborhoods refers to children whose parents responded "never" or "sometimes safe" when asked "How often do you feel the child is safe in your community or neighborhood?"



Figure 4

## Percentage of Children Living in Unsafe Neighborhoods, by Poverty Level, 2003



Source: Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

\*Children in unsafe neighborhoods refers to children whose parents responded "never" or "sometimes safe" when asked "How often do you feel the child is safe in your community or neighborhood?"



Table 1

## Level of Neighborhood Safety of Children and Adolescents , 2003

|   | Never or<br>Sometimes Safe | Usually Safe | Always Safe |
|---|----------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| <b>Total</b>                                      | 16.2                       | 33.8         | 50.0        |
| <b>Gender</b>                                     |                            |              |             |
| Male  | 15.5                       | 33.3         | 51.2        |
| Female  | 16.9                       | 34.2         | 48.8        |
| <b>Age</b>  |                            |              |             |
| 0 to 5  | 17.2                       | 30.0         | 52.9        |
| 6 to 11   | 16.6                       | 35.0         | 48.5        |
| 12 to 17  | 15.0                       | 36.2         | 48.8        |
| <b>Race/Ethnicity</b>                             |                            |              |             |
| Non-Hispanic white                                | 8.3                        | 38.7         | 53.0        |
| Non-Hispanic black                                | 31.1                       | 26.1         | 42.8        |
| Hispanic  | 30.2                       | 23.4         | 46.4        |
| Other   | 19.4                       | 32.2         | 48.4        |
| <b>Poverty level</b>                              |                            |              |             |
| Less than 100% of poverty level                   | 30.3                       | 22.9         | 46.8        |
| 100 to 200% of poverty level                      | 22.4                       | 29.9         | 47.7        |
| 200% and above the poverty level                  | 8.9                        | 39.5         | 51.6        |
| <b>Family Structure</b>                           |                            |              |             |
| Two biological/adoptive parents                   | 12.4                       | 35.8         | 51.7        |
| One biological parent/one stepparent              | 14.0                       | 34.4         | 51.7        |
| Single mother                                     | 26.9                       | 29.8         | 43.3        |
| <b>Parental Education</b>                         |                            |              |             |
| Less than a high school degree                    | 33.6                       | 17.5         | 49.0        |
| High school degree                                | 23.2                       | 26.7         | 50.1        |
| More than a high school degree                    | 11.4                       | 38.6         | 50.0        |
| <b>Nativity</b>                                   |                            |              |             |
| Foreign-born                                      | 23.3                       | 28.2         | 48.5        |
| Native-born with foreign born parent              | 27.7                       | 25.7         | 46.6        |
| Native born with native born parents              | 13.1                       | 36.2         | 50.2        |
| <b>People in neighborhood help each other out</b> |                            |              |             |
| Definitely agree                                  | 6.4                        | 28.5         | 65.1        |
| Somewhat agree                                    | 17.0                       | 40.7         | 42.3        |
| Somewhat disagree                                 | 32.0                       | 37.2         | 30.8        |
| Definitely disagree                               | 46.5                       | 21.8         | 31.6        |

Note: Estimates of neighborhood safety and whether people in the neighborhood help each other out and are based on parents' reports.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of data from the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health.

