


The State of America's Children

2015 Research Study

A Report to Congress and the Nation





American Humane Association is the country's first national humane organization and the only one dedicated to protecting both children and animals. Since 1877, American Humane Association has been at the forefront of virtually every major advance in protecting our most vulnerable from cruelty, abuse and neglect. Today we're also leading the way in understanding the human-animal bond and its role in therapy, medicine and society. American Humane Association reaches millions of people every day through groundbreaking research, education, training and services that span a wide network of organizations, agencies and businesses.

American Humane Association's mission is to ensure the welfare, wellness and well-being of children and animals, and to unleash the full potential of the bond between humans and animals to the mutual benefit of both. Our vision is to measurably, demonstrably and significantly increase the number of children and animals who are protected from harm – and the number of humans and animals whose lives are enriched – through direct action, thought leadership, policy innovation, and expansion of proven, effective programs.

To learn more about American Humane Association, its history of work in the child protection and animal welfare realms, and our programs, please visit us at www.americanhumane.org today.

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Children are our most precious assets. They represent our best hopes for the future. They are filled with potential, dreams, imagination and love.

It is the responsibility of adults to ensure their safety, their protection, their access to health care and education. It is up to adults to provide our most precious with hope, compassion and a better future.

American Humane Association has been at the forefront of the protections for our country's children for generations. It was in 1878 that child safety and protection concerns became part of our national agenda. We championed child labor laws in 1909; advocated for safe playgrounds in 1914; created national standards for defining child abuse in 1950; proposed that all fifty states pass laws requiring reporting of child abuse in 1963; testified in support of Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in 1973; urged the establishment of the U.S. House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families in 1983; and advanced the areas of differential response and family group decision-making in the 1990s. In recent years, American Humane Association has launched innovative research and programs helping children with cancer, children of military families, and others in need.

American Humane Association launched the Children's Innovation Institute in 2012, bringing together senior fellows in research to examine the key issues and challenges facing today's children. The State of America's Children research study is an in-depth qualitative exploration of adults' perceptions of the threats facing children.

We hope that this research will advance our collective knowledge and provide for a productive dialogue on how we can build a more humane world for our children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin R. Ganzert". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robin R. Ganzert, Ph.D.

President and CEO

American Humane Association

Introduction

The future of our families, communities, nations – and humankind itself – is built on one common and vitally important group: our children. To better understand the challenges they face, American Humane Association, which has been assessing problems and developing protections for children and animals since 1877, created *The State of America's Children* research study. This inaugural survey focuses on the perceptions of those with the greatest impact on young people, both individually and in shaping policy – adults.

To determine adults' views on the condition of today's children and the unique opportunities and threats facing them, we conducted in-depth surveys with a geographically, ethnically, and age-diverse group of parents, step-parents, grandparents, step-grandparents, grown siblings, aunts, uncles and other adults on a wide range of topics including:

- The top perceived threats to the welfare, wellness and well-being of today's children
- What barriers currently in their path can interfere with the future we want for our young people
- Physical and emotional issues, including health, obesity, bullying, and teen pregnancy
- Educational issues
- Drugs and alcohol
- Crime and violence
- Parenting
- Governmental and environmental issues
- Financial issues
- How we see our current treatment of America's children and their condition

We found that adults are attuned to the dangers affecting young people, but less positive and optimistic about their condition than we hoped. Gauging American adults' perceptions of threats, fears, or issues facing children and youth is critical to find where those perceptions are correct and where they are misinformed so that we may continue to develop meaningful programs and protections that unleash the power of the human-animal bond to aid our most vulnerable. In the future we intend to augment this research by conducting in-depth surveys with others including children themselves, teachers, political leaders, and those people and groups whose perceptions and subsequent actions affect children. Through a series of sequential and integrated studies on the key factors affecting our nation's young people, we hope to provide parents, social scientists, policymakers and others who see the condition and future of our youth as inextricably intertwined with our own with data and insights that may lead to a better collective understanding of the *State of America's Children*.





Executive Summary of Results

Key findings of the 2015 State of America's Children research study, surveying adult perceptions of the issues facing our nation's children, include data on a wide range of topics, including:

The Top Three Perceived Threats to Children

- When asked to list the top threat to children, the greatest number of respondents cited **educational concerns** as the top issue, followed by **physical and emotional threats**, **bad parenting/no moral values**, and **drugs/alcohol**.
- When combining all ranked responses in the perceived top three threats to children, 64 percent cited **physical and emotional**¹ concerns, 53 percent listed **education concerns**², 46 percent said **bad parenting/no moral values** or **crime/bad influences**, and **drugs/alcohol** came in at just 33 percent.

Concerns Over Specific Threats

Adult's concern over specific threats to the welfare, wellness and well-being of our children is both reassuring in that they are not unaware of the problems facing our young people and worrisome in the degree to which adults believe that these problems are affecting today's children. In a number of issue areas it is clear that media attention and awareness programs on emerging dangers are reaching adults and having an impact. In fact, on a five-point scale of "Unconcerned," "Very Little Concern," "Somewhat Concerned," "Very Concerned," and "Extremely Concerned," many specific topics elicited the highest responses of "Very Concerned" or "Extremely Concerned," including:

¹ *Physical and emotional wellbeing concerns consist of bullying, teen pregnancy, obesity, health issues/healthcare, lack of exercise, affordable healthy food, peer pressure.*

² *Educational concerns consists of overall quality of education, Common Core standards and cost of higher education.*

- Texting while driving (87%)
- Absence of good adult supervision (86%)
- Absence of positive attention by adults (83%)
- Illicit drugs (83%)
- Bullying (73%)
- Exposure to family violence (72%)
- Drugs/alcohol (72%)
- Poverty (72%)
- Obesity (71%)
- Sexual abuse (71%)
- Physical abuse (70%)
- Dropping out of school (70%)
- Exposure to violence in neighborhood (68%)
- Cyberbullying (67%)
- Homelessness (65%)
- Social isolation (64%)
- Sexual trafficking (59%)
- Dating violence (56%)
- Teen pregnancy (56%)
- Depression (55%)
- Violent video games (50%)
- Violent TV (50%)
- Violent movies (49%)
- War (42%)
- Terrorism (43%)

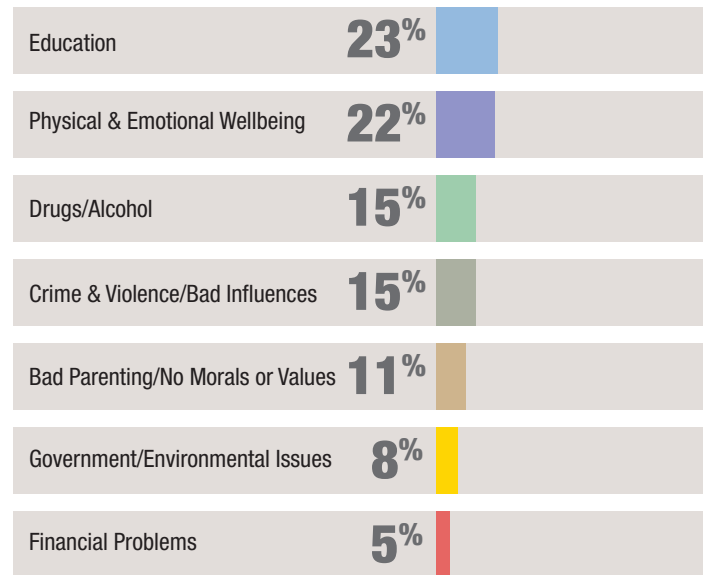
We were gratified to see some of the relatively newer, serious dangers such as cyberbullying and texting while driving, prompting significant concern (67% and 87% respectively). In addition it was also heartening that a majority of people ranked what can be less obvious emotional threats such as social isolation (64%) and depression (55%) as very or extremely concerning, giving them the kind of prominence once more commonly reserved for highly visible and/or more physical threats.

Interestingly, despite media attention, the threat of terrorism and the issue of racial disparities did not play high on adults' worries for today's young people. The respondents were split on other former hot-button issues, such as violence in entertainment, with only half believing violence in videos, movies and television are significant concerns. Abuse and real-life violence of all kinds were prominent in adults'

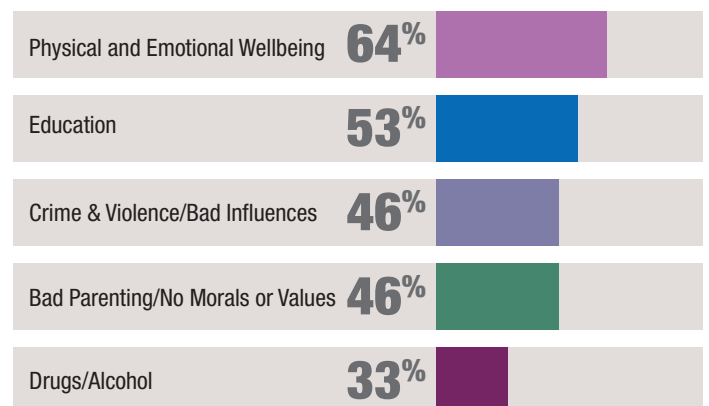
concerns, as they should be, while extremely rare threats such as kidnapping, hardly made an appearance.

These survey findings regarding concerns around physical and emotional well-being are consistent with what The Academic Pediatric Association (APA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) have deemed the most important problem for U.S. children – the effects of poverty on child health and wellbeing, e.g. lack of affordable healthy food, lack of exercise, obesity and other physical/emotional health issues.

What do you view as the TOP threat facing America's children today?



What do you view as major threats facing America's children today?





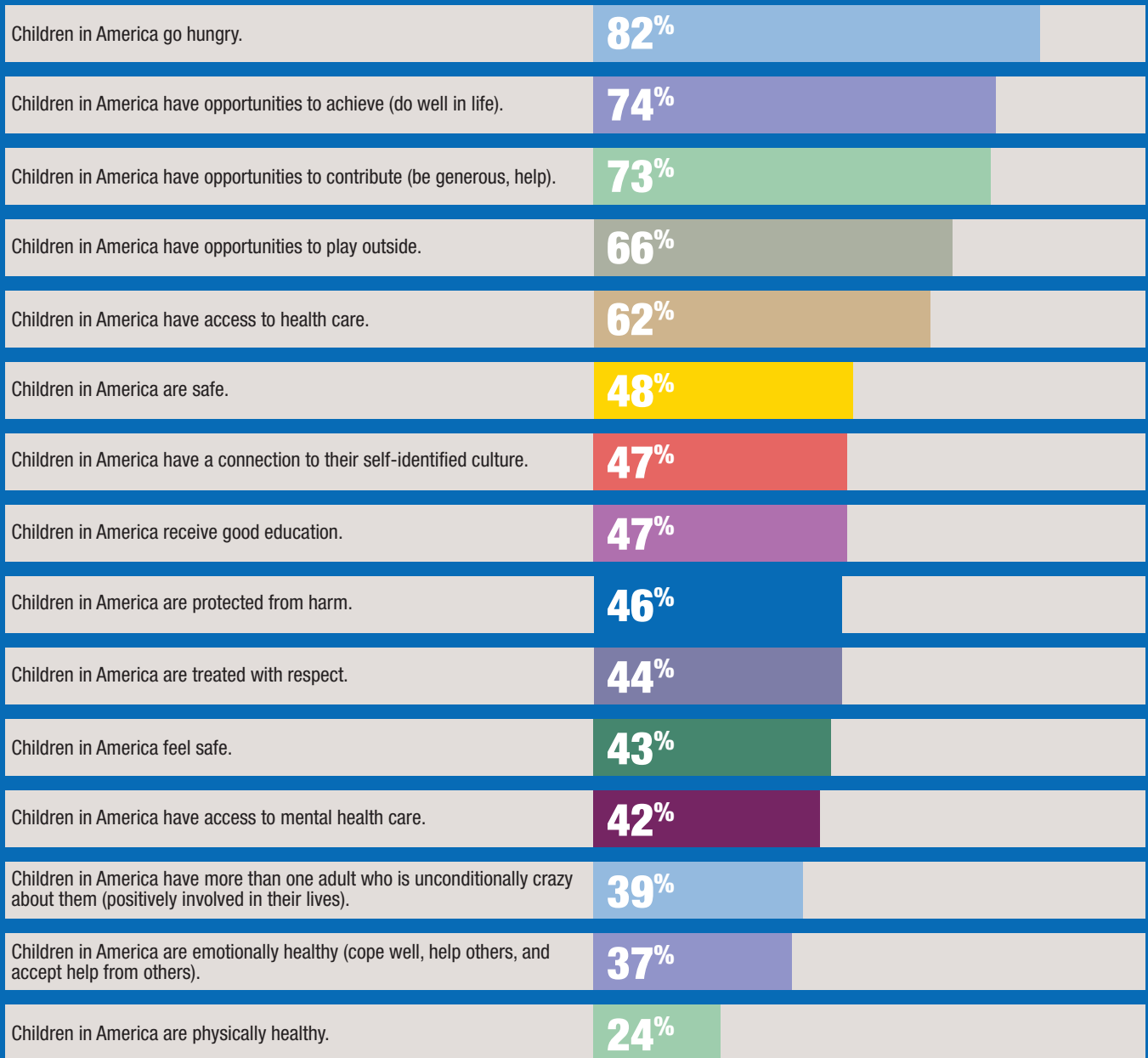
Perceptions About the Treatment of Children in America

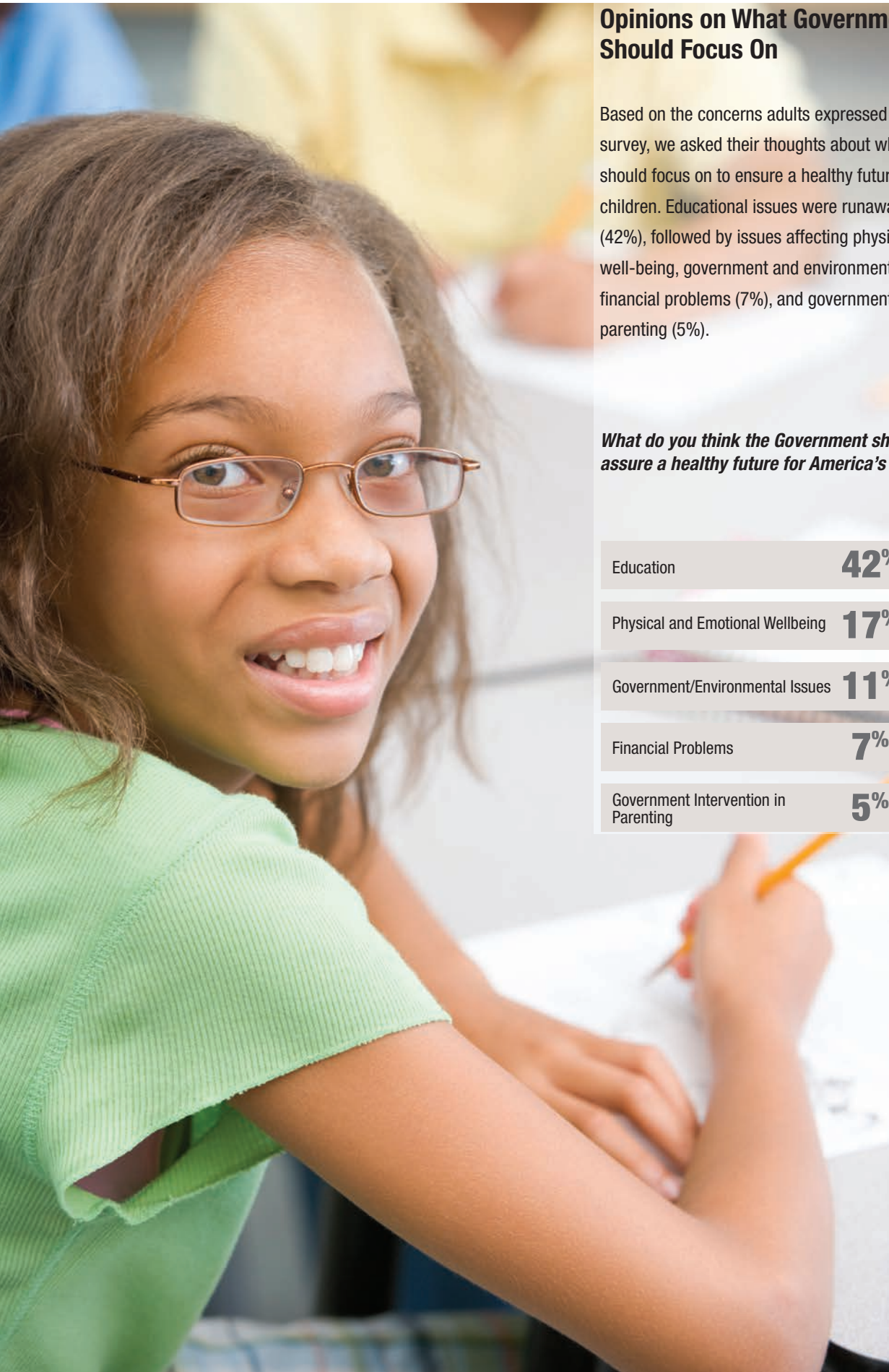
We asked the nation's adults to assess how they feel children in America are being treated in a broad number of ways.

Some of the results, especially those tied to the age-old American ideals of opportunity, reflected continuing hope for the next generation. But a marked preponderance of those dealing with the physical, emotional and educational realities facing today's young people were alarming with surprising numbers of people saying they either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with the following statements:

- Children in America go hungry (82%)
- Children in America have opportunities to achieve/do well in life (74%)
- Children in America have opportunities to contribute/be generous/help (73%)
- Children in America have opportunities to play outside (66%)
- Children in America have access to health care (62%)
- Children in America are safe (48%)
Note: Men were more sanguine (63.8%) than women (34%) on this point
- Children in America receive good education (47%)
- Children in America have a connection to their self-identified culture (47%)
- Children in America are protected from harm (46%)
Note: Staying consistent, men were twice as likely to agree (61.7%) as women (32.1%)
- Children in America are treated with respect (44%)
- Children in America feel safe (43%)
Note: More than twice as many men agreed (59.6%) compared with women (28.3%)
- Children in America have access to mental health care (42%)
- Children in America have more than one adult who is unconditionally crazy about them/positively involved in their lives (39%)
- Children in America are emotionally healthy/cope well/help others/accept help from others (37%)
- Children in America are physically healthy (24%)
Note: Once again, a notable difference opinion arose across gender lines with 31.9 percent of men and just 17 percent of women agreeing

How much do you agree with this statement?

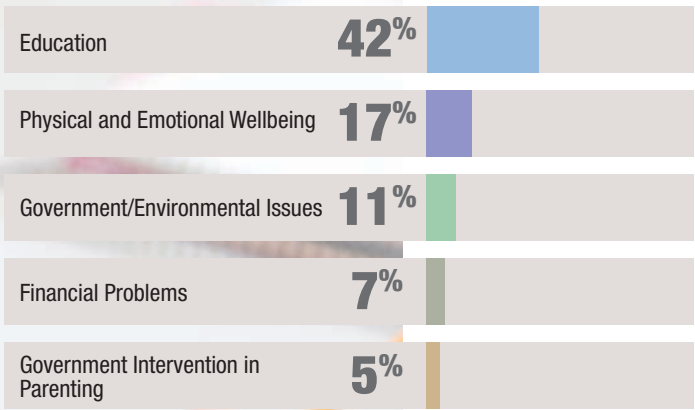




Opinions on What Government Should Focus On

Based on the concerns adults expressed in this survey, we asked their thoughts about what government should focus on to ensure a healthy future for America's children. Educational issues were runaway top responses (42%), followed by issues affecting physical and emotional well-being, government and environmental issues (11%), financial problems (7%), and government intervention in parenting (5%).

What do you think the Government should focus on to assure a healthy future for America's children?



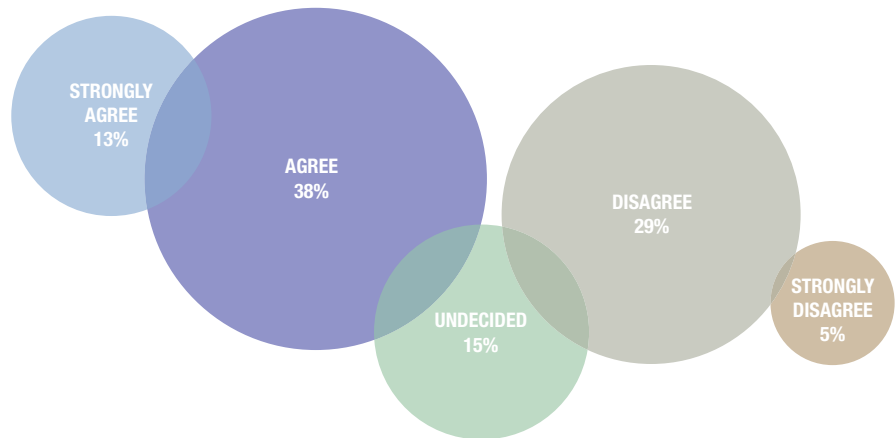
Are Children in America Valued or Exploited?

Americans are divided when it comes to an overall assessment of how children are treated in this country. When asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Childhood in America is valued,” 51 percent said they “agree” or “strongly agree.” As with their assessments of children’s safety, there was a notable difference of opinion on this point between men and women. Nearly 7 in 10 men (68.1%) felt childhood is valued in this country compared to just over a third of women (35.8%).

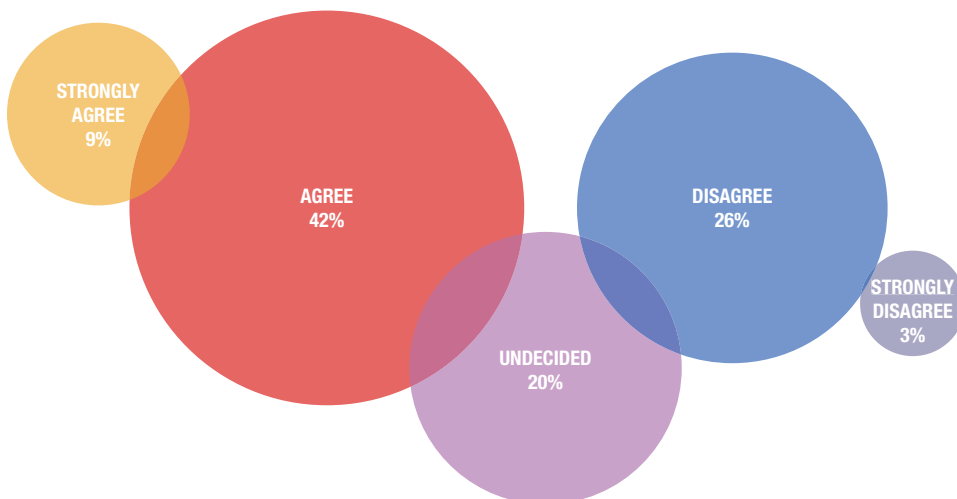
Similarly, when asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Children in America are exploited,” more than half (51%) said they “agree” or “strongly agree.” As with the previous question, women had a bleaker view than men with nearly 6 in 10 agreeing (58.5%) versus 4 in 10 men (42.6%).

In a nation that has long cherished and even idolized childhood, these are bleak, even startling results.

Childhood in America is valued.



Children in America are exploited.



Questionnaire

Opening Statement for Survey Respondents:

As an adult member of the community we value your opinions on important issues facing America's children. We are interested in what you have to say – as a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, and concerned adult – about the threats that face America's children today and the beliefs you have about what is working to ensure that our children have healthy, safe, and thriving futures.

1. What do you view as the top three major threats facing America's children today?
2. What do you think the government ought to focus on to ensure a healthy future for America's children?
3. Depression: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
4. Texting while driving: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
5. Dropping out of school: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
6. Using alcohol: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
7. Using illicit drugs: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
8. Bullying (in general): Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
9. Cyberbullying: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
10. Social isolation: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
11. Teen pregnancy: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
12. Poverty: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
13. Homelessness: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
14. Dating violence: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
15. Violent video games: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
16. Violent movies: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
17. Violent TV: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
18. Exposure to violence in neighborhoods: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
19. Exposure to family violence: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
20. Absence of good adult supervision: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
21. Absence of positive attention by adults: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens

22. Sexual abuse: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
23. Sex trafficking: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
24. Physical abuse: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
25. Obesity: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
26. War: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
27. Terrorism: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
28. Nuclear war: Please rate how concerned you are about this threat to children and teens
29. What do you think the government ought to focus on to ensure a healthy future for our children?
30. "Childhood in America is valued." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
31. "Children in America are exploited." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
32. "Children in America go hungry." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
33. "Children in America feel safe." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
34. "Children in America are safe." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
35. "Children in America have opportunities to achieve" (do well in life). How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
36. "Children in America receive good education." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
37. "Children in America are treated with respect." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
38. "Children in America are protecting from harm." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
39. "Children in America are physically healthy." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
40. "Children in America have more than one adult who is unconditionally crazy about them (positively involved in their lives)." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
41. "Children in America have opportunities to play outside." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
42. "Children in America have opportunities to contribute (be generous, help)." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
43. "Children in America have a connection to their self-identified culture." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
44. "Children in America are emotionally healthy (cope well, help others, and accept help from others)." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
45. "Children in America have access to mental health care." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?
46. "Children in America have access to health care." How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

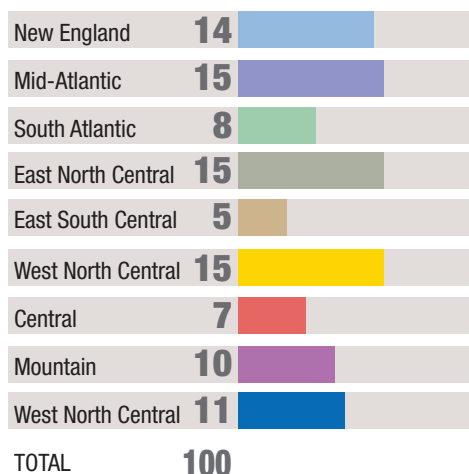


Methodology and Acknowledgements

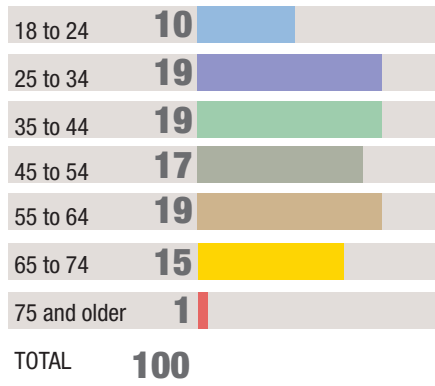
Our identified survey research partner was Fieldwork, a respected research service firm with over 30 years of experience. Fieldwork brings the credible research engine to the study, providing for statistically significant findings. The sample size was 100 with respondents representing geographical sampling. The demographics indicate a cross section of American households.

We gratefully acknowledge the work of child psychologist Dr. Caren Caty and Dr. Sue Lohrbach, children’s programming specialist, both senior fellows at American Humane Association’s Children’s Innovation Institute in designing and refining this survey instrument to capture a wide range of physical, emotional, and situational issues facing today’s children. We also wish to acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Mabel McKinney-Browning, children’s advocate and member of the American Humane Association board of directors. Thank you.

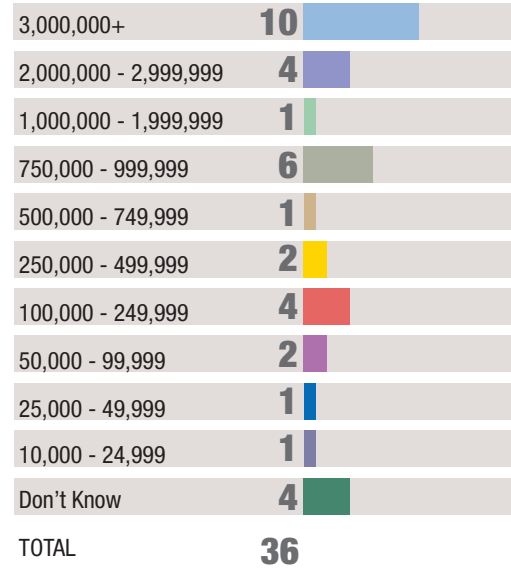
Survey Respondents: Region



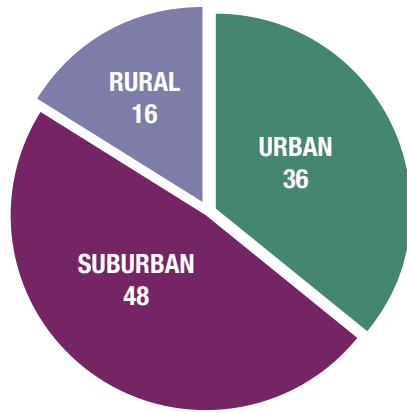
Survey Respondents: Age



Survey Respondents: City Population
What is the approximate population of your city?








Survey Respondents: Urban, Rural or Suburban

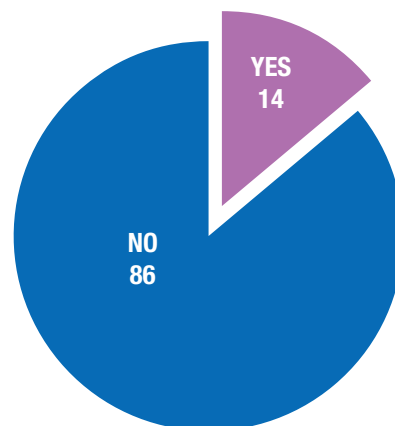




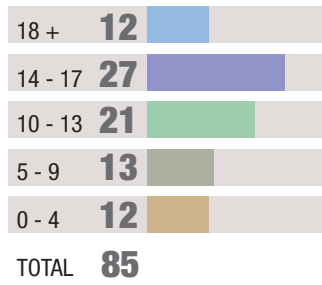
Survey Respondents: Race
 Please select one or more of the following categories to describe yourself.

Caucasian	74	
Black or African American	17	
American Indian or Alaska Native	4	
Asian	4	
Other	4	
TOTAL	103	

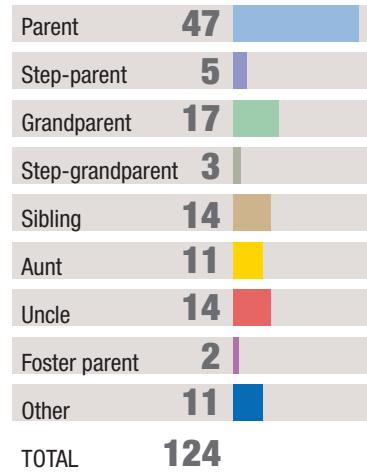
Survey Respondents: Hispanic or Latin
 Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic or Latin?



Survey Respondents:
This survey involves issues facing America's children. What are the ages of the children/teens you are thinking about when responding to this survey?



Survey Respondents: How are you responding today?



A Legacy of Child Protection

For 138 years American Humane Association has been a leader in the identification of problems affecting the nation's children and the development of solutions to address those problems. Here is a timeline of just some of our historic work in the area of child welfare, wellness and well-being:



1877

American Humane Association founded in Cleveland, Ohio, becoming the country's first national humane organization.

1878

Child safety and protection concerns became part of American Humane Association's agenda.

1883

Concerned about child abuse and abandoned babies, American Humane Association promoted the passage of the first Cruelty to Children Act.

1886

The association proposed legislation to protect child stage performers.

1890

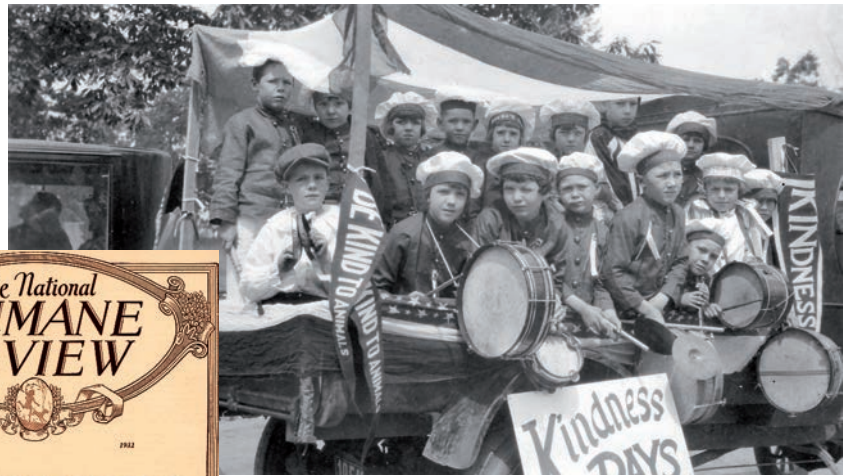
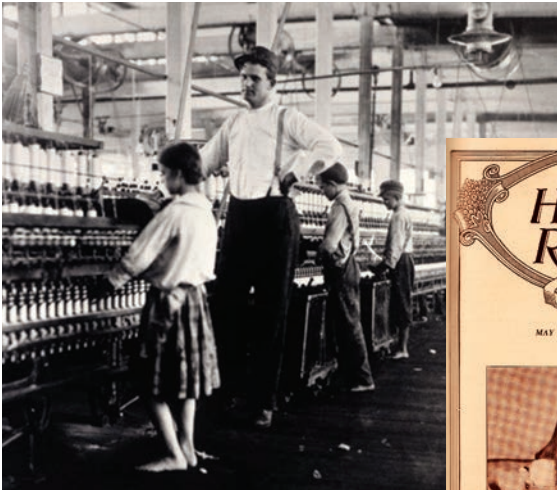
American Humane Association outspokenly opposed corporal punishment of children in school.

1891

American Humane Association launched a national campaign to draw attention to the increasing crime of infanticide.

1893

American Humane Association's member societies prosecuted 5,520 cases of cruelty to children.



1894

The Link[®] between violence toward animals and violence toward people was first noted at American Humane Association's annual convention: "The man who was cruel to his beast would be unkind to his wife and child."

1902

Along with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, American Humane Association formed a major committee to limit child labor in the emerging textile industry in the South.

1903

American Humane Association advocated for the rights of children in divorce cases.

1909

American Humane Association spearheaded a campaign for the passage of national child labor laws.

1912

American Humane Association spoke out in favor of the rights of the child: "[A child] has a right to good health; to good sanitary conditions in home and school; to three good meals a day; and to an everyday, useful education."

1914

American Humane Association called for safe, off-street playgrounds. Calling for reform of the foster care system, American Humane Association insisted that all potential foster parents undergo background investigations and established standards for children's shelters, recommending separate facilities for boys and girls and insisting that authorities separate abused and neglected children from those who committed delinquent acts.

1921

American Humane Association called for legislation to protect children working in the motion picture industry.

1931

American Humane Association approved a set of standards for child protection societies, which urged them to maintain the privacy rights of the children and adults they serve and to employ professional caseworkers. The organization also encouraged child welfare agencies to protect families and remove children from their parents only when absolutely necessary.

1932

American Humane Association campaigned against children being given and using firearms.

1943

The National Education Association and American Humane Association launched a campaign asking teachers throughout the United States to refrain from any kind of hatred in education and to protect children from racial or religious taunts.

1945

American Humane Association urged that child labor laws be amended to forbid children under the age of 16 from performing dangerous manufacturing or mechanical jobs and from holding any sort of job that would require them to work during school hours.

1950

American Humane Association issued *Standards for Child Protective Services Agencies*, which clearly defined physical abuse, neglect and emotional abuse and identified a three-stage process of child protective work, including fact-finding, diagnosis and treatment.

1955

American Humane Association published detailed guidelines on child protection standards and practices for child welfare practitioners, educators, and administrators.

1956

Vincent De Francis, director of Children's Services at American Humane Association, published the results of the first national inventory of child protective services, which provided a comprehensive report of the state of child welfare practice in the United States.

1957

American Humane Association published *No Substitute for Child Protection and Interpreting Child Protective Services to Your Community* by Vincent De Francis, aimed at broadening public understanding of child protection.

1958

Vincent De Francis helped update the Child Welfare League of America's standards for child protective services, which establish federal standards and funding for county and state welfare.

1960

American Humane Association published *The Court and Protective Services: Their Respective Roles*, which clarified the relationship and responsibilities of child protection and the courts.

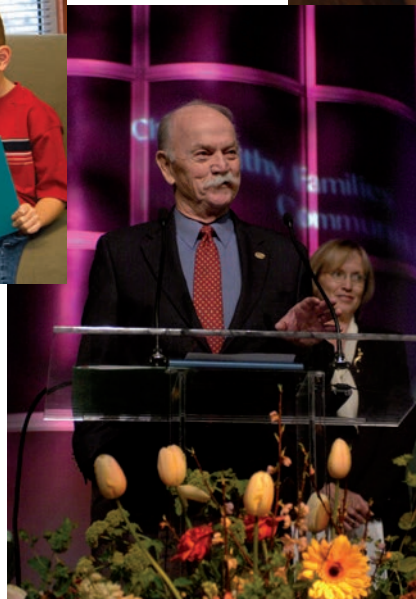
1961

American Humane Association published *Protective Services and Community Expectations* by Vincent De Francis, which set the stage for community engagement in child protection.

1963

American Humane Association proposed that all 50 states pass laws requiring doctors who discover injuries inflicted on children to report the cases to child protective services.





1972

American Humane Association developed a professional training curriculum and standards for child protection workers.

1973

To bring attention to psychological abuse and neglect, American Humane Association's Vincent De Francis testified at hearing leading to the creation of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

1976

With a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, American Humane Association began its National Study on Child Neglect and Abuse reporting in every state, collecting and analyzing child abuse reports to determine their characteristics.

1979

American Humane Association published its third nationwide survey of child protective services. The major finding was that the increase in child abuse reports was not matched by an increase in personnel, producing overwhelming caseloads and resulting in inadequate services. American Humane Association published the first edition of its landmark text, *Helping in Child Protective Services*, an influential resource for the public child welfare field.

1981

American Humane Association developed a comprehensive child protection certification curriculum for the highly specialized field of child protective services.

1983

At American Humane Association's urging, the U.S. House of Representatives established the Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families.

1984

The first issue of American Humane Association's journal by child welfare professionals, *Protecting Children*, is published. American Humane Association national reporting data showed documented child maltreatment reports topped 1 million for the first time.

1986

American Humane Association research revealed a five-year increase in child sexual abuse reports of 170 percent, prompting the organization to develop its child sexual abuse curriculum for child protective service workers.

1987

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services designated American Humane Association the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, which provided leadership, resources, and training to the child welfare field.

1988

American Humane Association brought together leaders in the child protection field to develop a consensus on public policy philosophy. The result, called a Framework for Advocacy, recommended that legislation and procedures focus on keeping families together and placing children in permanent homes.

1989

American Humane Association developed its child protective services policy database, to gather and review state child welfare policies and procedures, the first and only national repository of state child welfare policy information in the United States.

1990

American Humane Association took a leadership role in addressing ethnic and cultural issues related to child protection. The organization supported the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Protection Act, which required reporting of abuse and provided for prevention and treatment in Native American Communities. American Humane Association held its first national humane education workshop giving educators curriculum ideas and methods of teaching humane values.

1992

The federal government reappointed American Humane Association to operate the National Resource Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. At the request of the U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary, American Humane Association held a national meeting of all major sectors of society concerned with child abuse. American Humane Association testified before Congress in support of funding for state and local level family support and parenting programs and innovative child welfare services as family preservation, reunification, and respite care.

1995

American Humane Association became a primary proponent of family group decision making (FGDM) in the U.S. FGDM is an innovative method of getting extended families involved in making critical decisions about children who are in the child welfare system.

1996

American Humane Association issued a Campaign Against Violence kit to be used to gain stronger anti-cruelty laws in all states.

1997

American Humane Association launched The Front Porch Project® to directly involve community members in child protection. American Humane Association supported the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, which speeds up decision making to free a child for adoption when living with his or her birth family is inadvisable.

2000

American Humane Association received support from the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to operate one of the first four Regional Quality Improvement Centers, focusing on substance abuse and child maltreatment.

2006

American Humane Association hosted its first differential response conference. Differential response is an approach that allows child protective services to respond differently to each child abuse report, depending on the severity of the abuse, the family's history and other factors. To address growing issues in child welfare, American Humane Association established the Immigration and Child Welfare initiative and the Fatherhood initiative.





2007

American Humane Association established the Child Protection Research Center to address long-standing issues related to the improvement of public child protective services. The Center examines the child welfare system's racial disproportionality, among other issues. American Humane Association established the Child Welfare Disparities Resource Center to address issues of how services are managed, resourced and provided based on race and ethnicity.

2009

UNICEF chose American Humane Association's Child Protection Research Center and its partner, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, to work on its international household surveys on child discipline.

2010

Began a ground-breaking partnership with Pfizer to determine how animal-assisted therapy can improve the health and well-being of children with cancer, and their families.

2012

Launched the Children's Innovation Institute to improve the welfare, wellness and well-being of America's children. Following the shootings in Aurora, CO and Newtown, CT, American Humane Association reached out to children and families nationwide with coping information.

2013

Served the children of military families across the country through our work with Operation Purple Camps, and those affected by tragedies such as the Boston Marathon bombings and Atlanta school shooting.

2014

Convened a Congressional Briefing on "Canines and Childhood Cancer," revealing the results of the literature review and pilot phase of an effort to help pediatric oncology patients and their families.

2015

Released the inaugural State of America's Children research study to assess adults' perceptions of the physical, emotional and situational threats to our nation's children.





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