

# The Well-being of America's Foster Children: A Comparison of Estimates from Two Nationally Representative Surveys

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July 16, 2003



# Overview

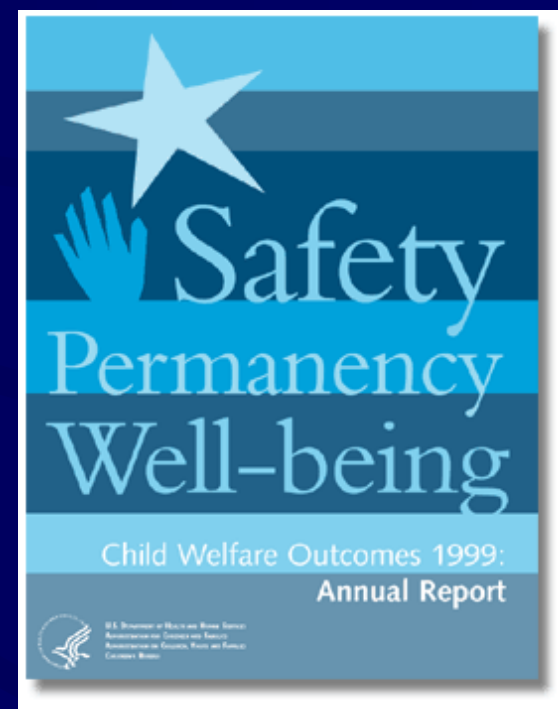
- Importance of measuring child well-being
- Background on the data
- Comparison of demographic, economic, parent, and child well-being
  - How similar are the foster care samples in the two surveys?
  - How different are foster children from non-foster children?
- Conclusion

# Why measure child well-being?

- To meet the requirements of The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which mandated the monitoring of children's safety, permanency, and well-being.
- To ensure that the well-being of foster children is a goal
- To show us how children are faring
- To obtain clues how services might be improved

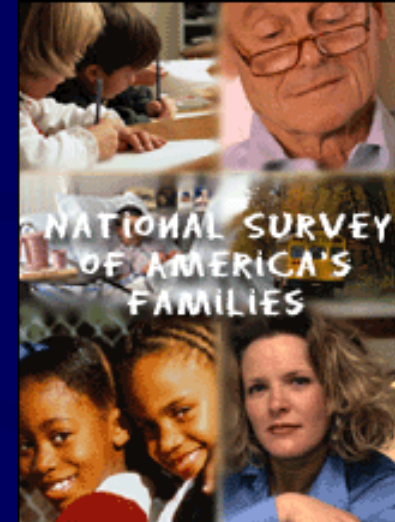
# Data on well-being of foster children are lacking

- HHS publication *Child Welfare Outcomes* includes measures of safety and permanency, but no measures of well-being.
- Few data exist on well-being of foster children nationwide.
- Few data exist that are comparable across states on well-being of state populations of foster children.



# Two sources of national data

- National Survey of America's Families (NSAF)
  - 1997 and 1999
- National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW)
  - 2000



# NSCAW vs. NSAF: Target population

## NSAF

- Civilian, non-institutionalized population under age 65 in the United States
  - Over 44,000 households in each wave
  - Can identify a subgroup of foster children under 18 (Kortenkamp and Ehrle, 2002)
  - Subgroup of foster children under age 15, from combined 1997 and 1999 waves, yields  $N = 669$

# NSCAW vs. NSAF: Target population

## NSCAW

- Child Protective Services Sample (CPS)
  - Children under age 15 in the U.S. who were subjects of child abuse or neglect investigations (or assessments)
  - N = 5,504
  - Subset of children in out-of-home care: N = 1,279
- Long-term Foster Care Sample (LTFC)
  - Children under age 15 who had been placed in out of care
  - N = 727

# Why use two studies?

- NSCAW
  - relatively large samples of foster children (and children involved in child protective services)
- NSAF
  - comparison sample of children not involved in child protective services
  - some of the same measures as the NSCAW
  - also includes a sample of foster children

# Demographic characteristics

- Age
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Metropolitan status of county of residence
- Parent/caregiver's marital status
- Relationship of parent/caregiver to child
- Foster care status
- Number of children in household

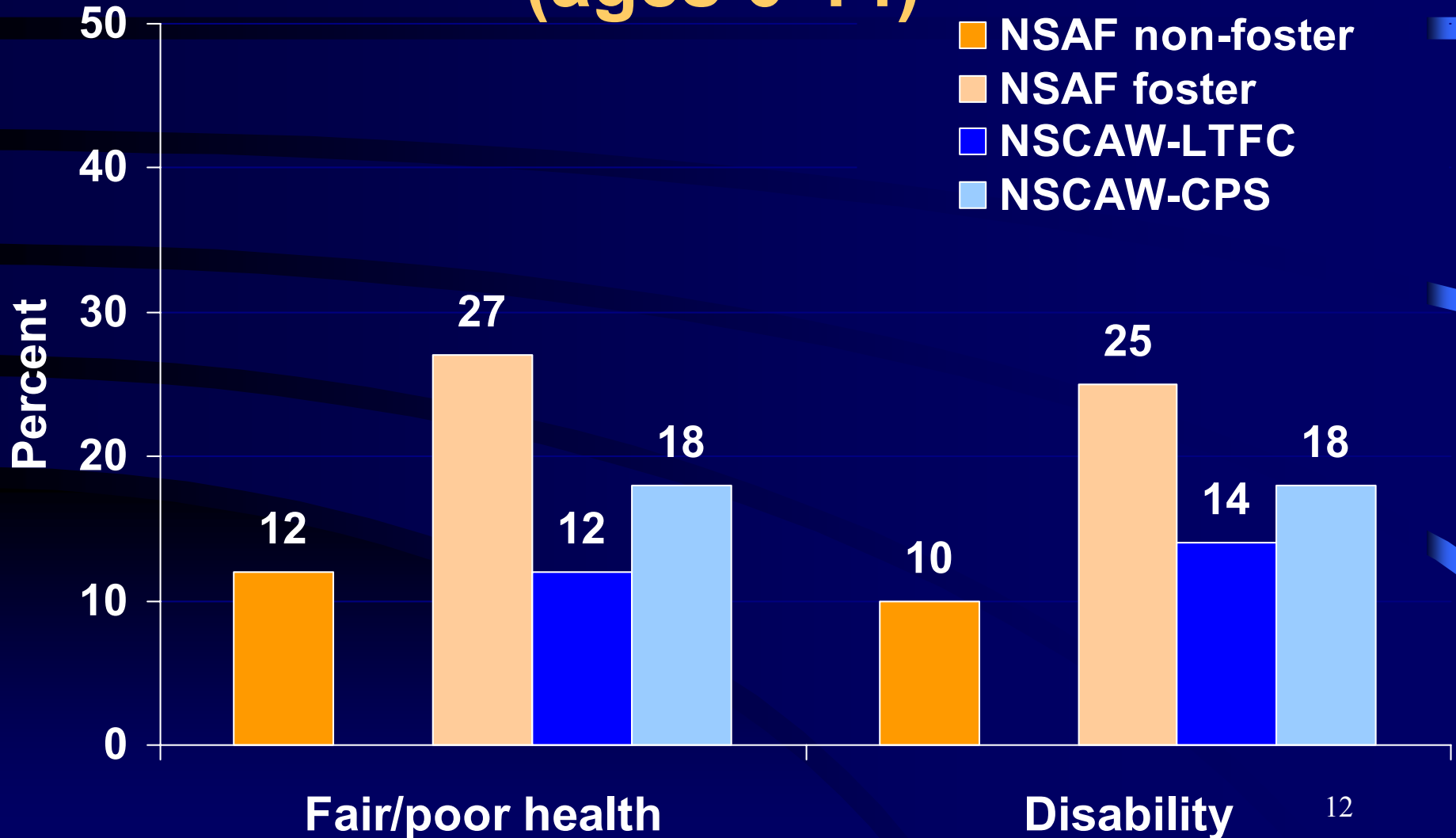
# Family economic well-being

- Receipt of TANF
- Receipt of WIC
- Receipt of Food Stamps
- Receipt of SSI in prior year
- Receipt of child support in prior year
- Receipt of government subsidies for rent, or residence in public housing

# Parent and caregiver well-being

- Parent/caregiver reports symptoms of poor mental health
- Parent/caregiver has a health condition that limits work
- Parent/caregiver has fair or poor health status
- Frequency that parent/caregiver attends religious services

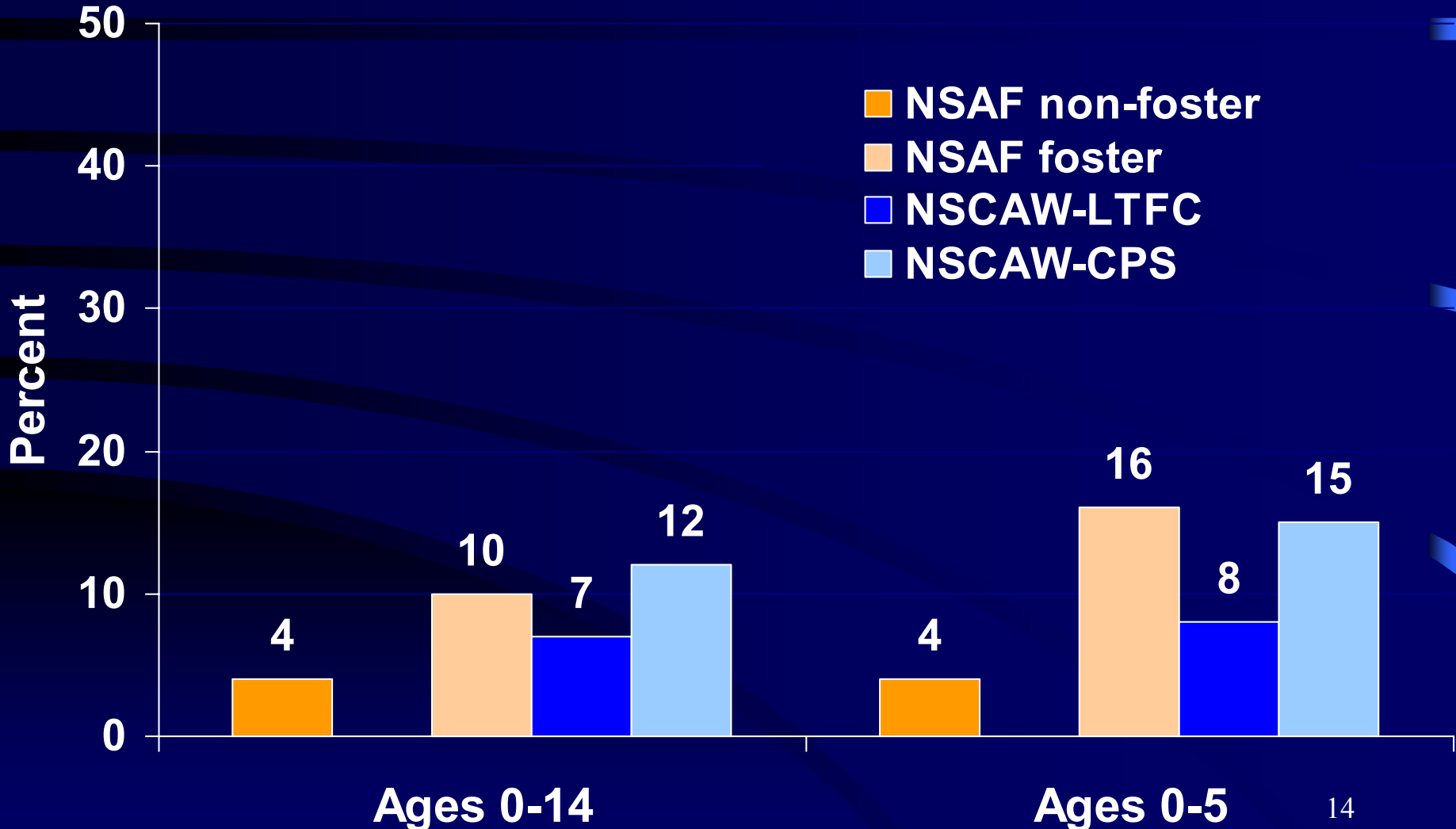
# Health and disability status of children's parents/caregivers (ages 0-14)



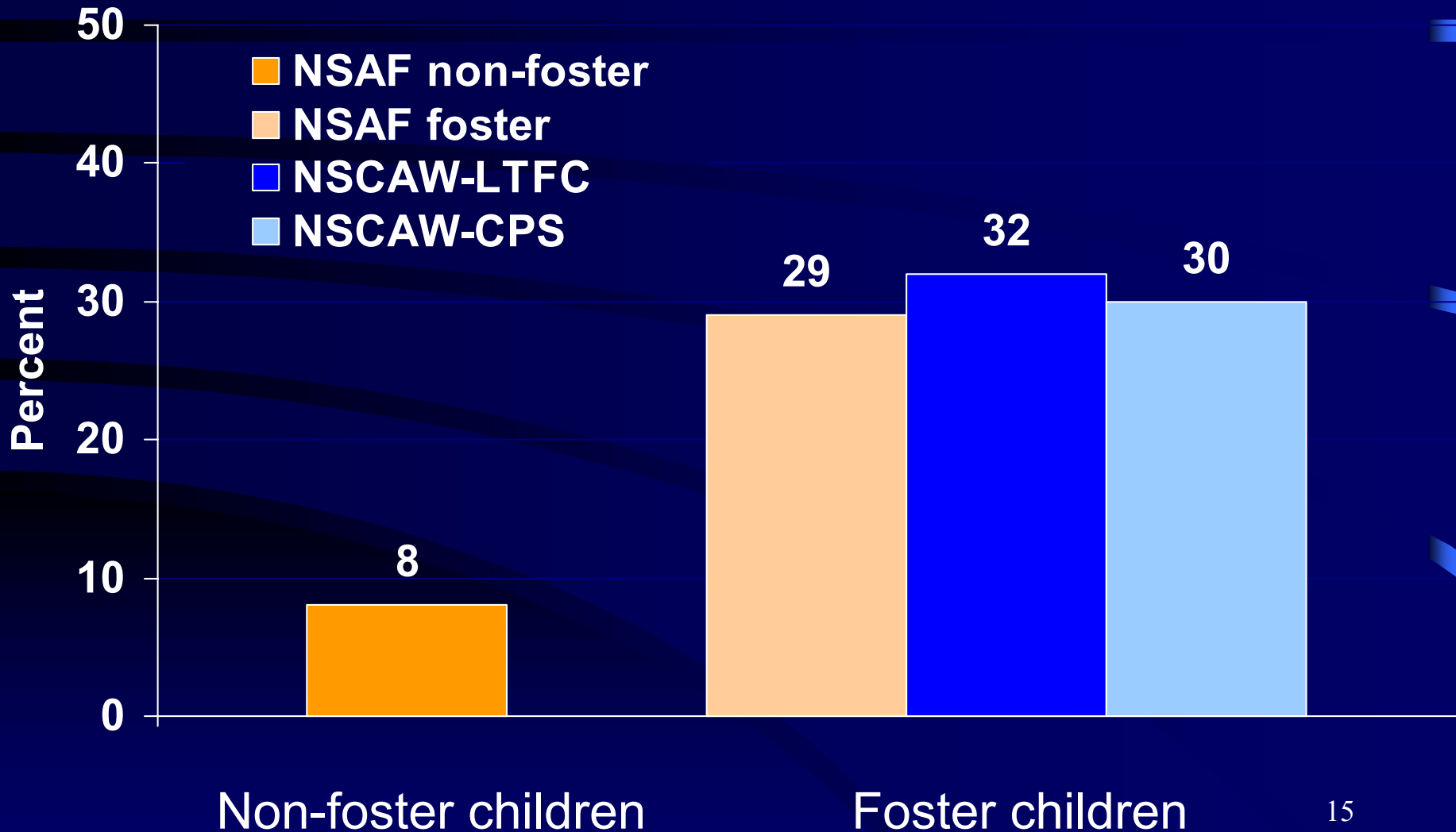
# Child's health and health care

- Child in fair or poor health
- Child had a disability
- Child was a patient in a hospital overnight
- Child had an emergency room visit
- Child's insurance coverage
- Child had a dental visit

# Percentage of children whose health is fair or poor (ages 0-14)



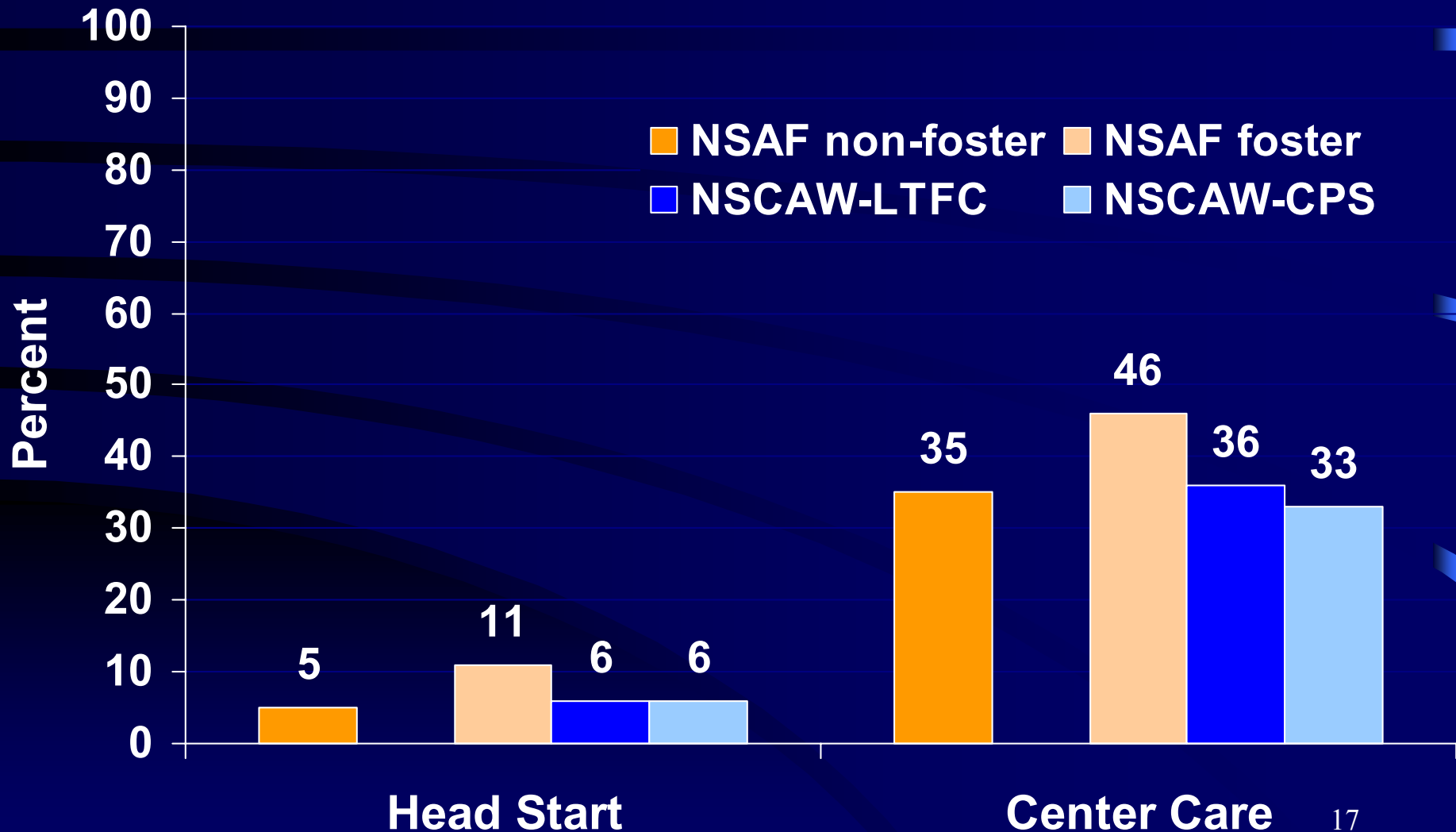
# Percentage of children with a disability (ages 0-14)



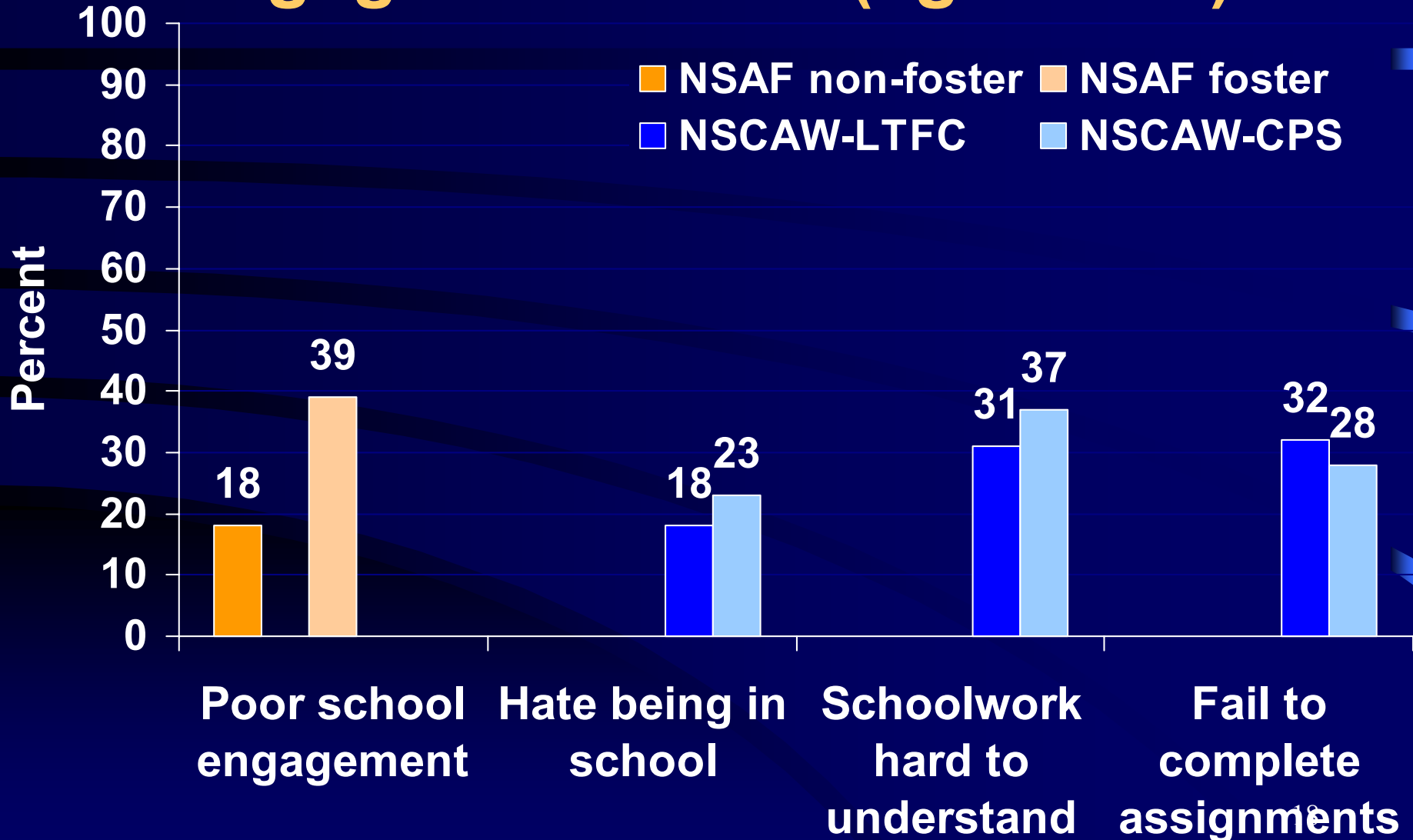
# Child care and school engagement

- Child in Head Start
- Child in center care
- Level of school engagement

# Percentage of children in Head Start or in Center Care (ages 0-5)



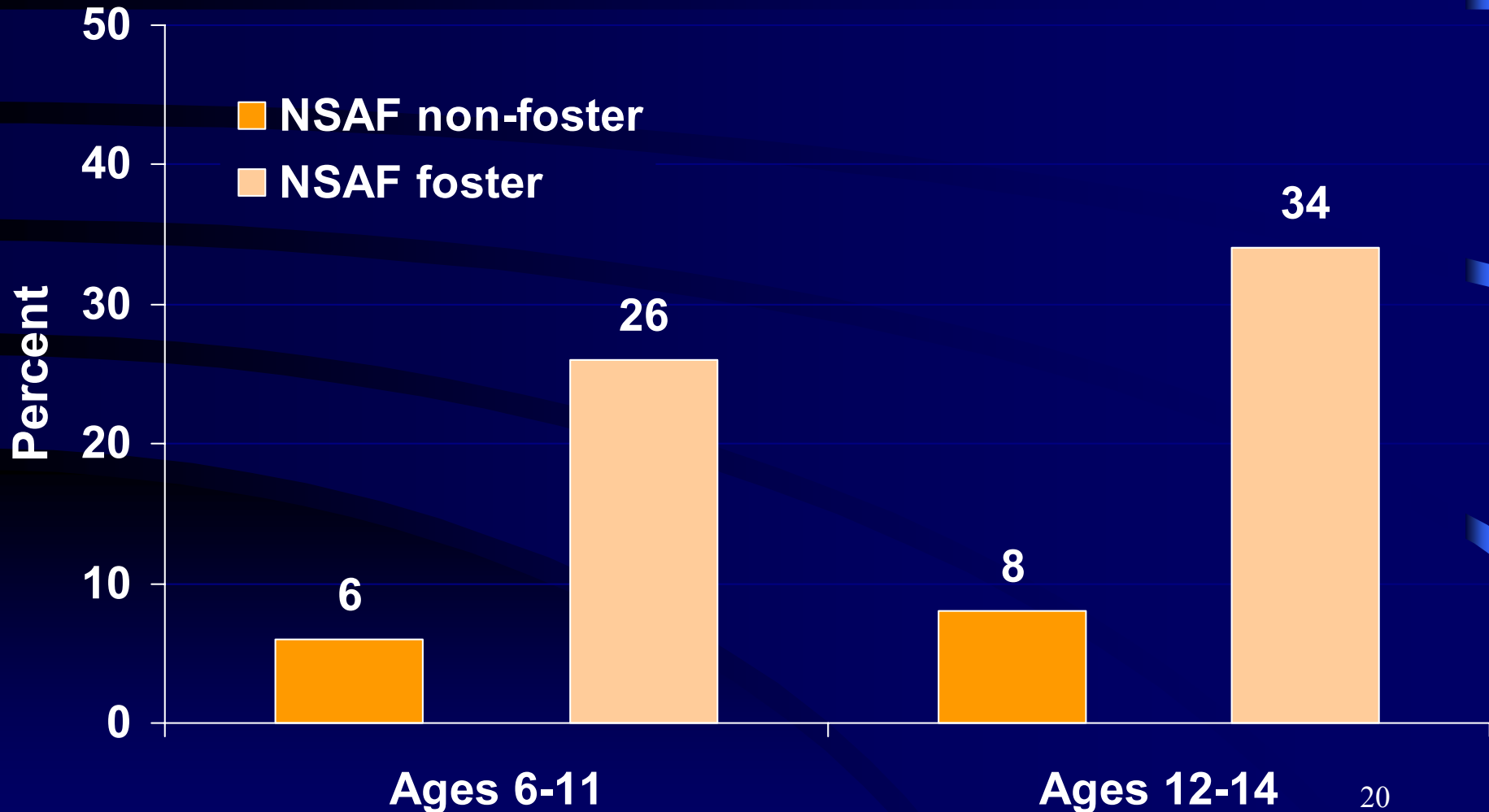
# Percentage of children poorly engaged in school (ages 6-14)



# Child behavioral and emotional problems

- Behavioral and emotional problems scale
- Child Behavior Checklist (NSCAW)
- Behavior Problem Index (NSCAW)

# Percentage of children with high level of behavioral and emotional problems (ages 6-14)



# Conclusions

- The characteristics of foster children in the NSAF and NSCAW tend to look similar, with some exceptions
- Possible reasons for differences
  - In foster care for different lengths of time
  - Kinship care vs. non-relative foster care
  - Differences in surveys

# Conclusions

- Foster children tend to fare worse on measures of well-being than do non-foster children
- The analyses presented here cannot inform us about the effect of foster care on children
- In fact, foster care may improve child outcomes

# Next steps

- Multivariate longitudinal analyses
- Monitoring of the levels of well-being of foster care children
  - At the national level
  - At the state levels
  - In the context of the well-being of all of America's children