

# The FES News

The Family Economics Study  
Institute for Social Research  
University of Michigan

## *From the Director*

Dear FES Family,

Happy 2008! I would like to personally thank each and every one of you for participating in our 2007 data collection, and welcome the new families to this scientifically important study. During 2007, we talked with 8,332 families with more than 600 of them doing their first FES interview. It is exciting that we now have participation from three, and in some cases four, generations of FES family members. Your contributions to this study have made the FES one of the most important studies for scholarly research in the U.S. This year, 2008, is a landmark as it represents the 40th year of the FES. We cannot emphasize enough how much we appreciate the time and effort you give us in doing your interview. We hope you enjoy the 2008 FES Newsletter.

Sincerely,

Frank Stafford, Program Director

## *Happy Anniversary FES Families!*

The Family Economics Study began collecting data in 1968, making this year the study's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. During those 40 years we have interviewed over 67,000 individuals, asked questions about over 48,000 topics, and included parents, children, and grandchildren. Each year we are lucky to have such high participation rates, and that is all thanks to you!

With your help it has been an amazing year. This past year we have been gathering data for our core FES sample, the

Child Development Supplement, and the Transition into Adulthood Study. These studies, though the data is collected separately, have already proven to be extremely helpful for our users. The ability to compare information across generations on such a large scale is what makes this study unique, important, and in a class of its own.

We are still in the process of interviewing, and when we are done we will have talked to close to 13,000 families be-

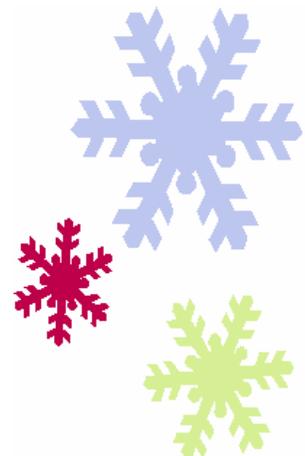
tween March 2007 and March 2008!

We are very thankful for your continued help and support with this nationally recognized project. Your interviews are the only way we have to collect this valuable information, and we are lucky to be able to count on you. We know that all of our FES families are very busy balancing work, family, and other obligations, yet each time we do our interviews, you always come through. You're the greatest!

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2008 will be an "off year" for our FES families. We won't be calling you until 2009. We hope this is a peaceful and enjoyable year for all of you.



## The FES Family Tree



*Over the years, new family units have been formed by the children of our original sample*



As many of you may already know, the Family Economics Study is currently divided into three parts. The core FES study consists of information collected from the adults in household units.

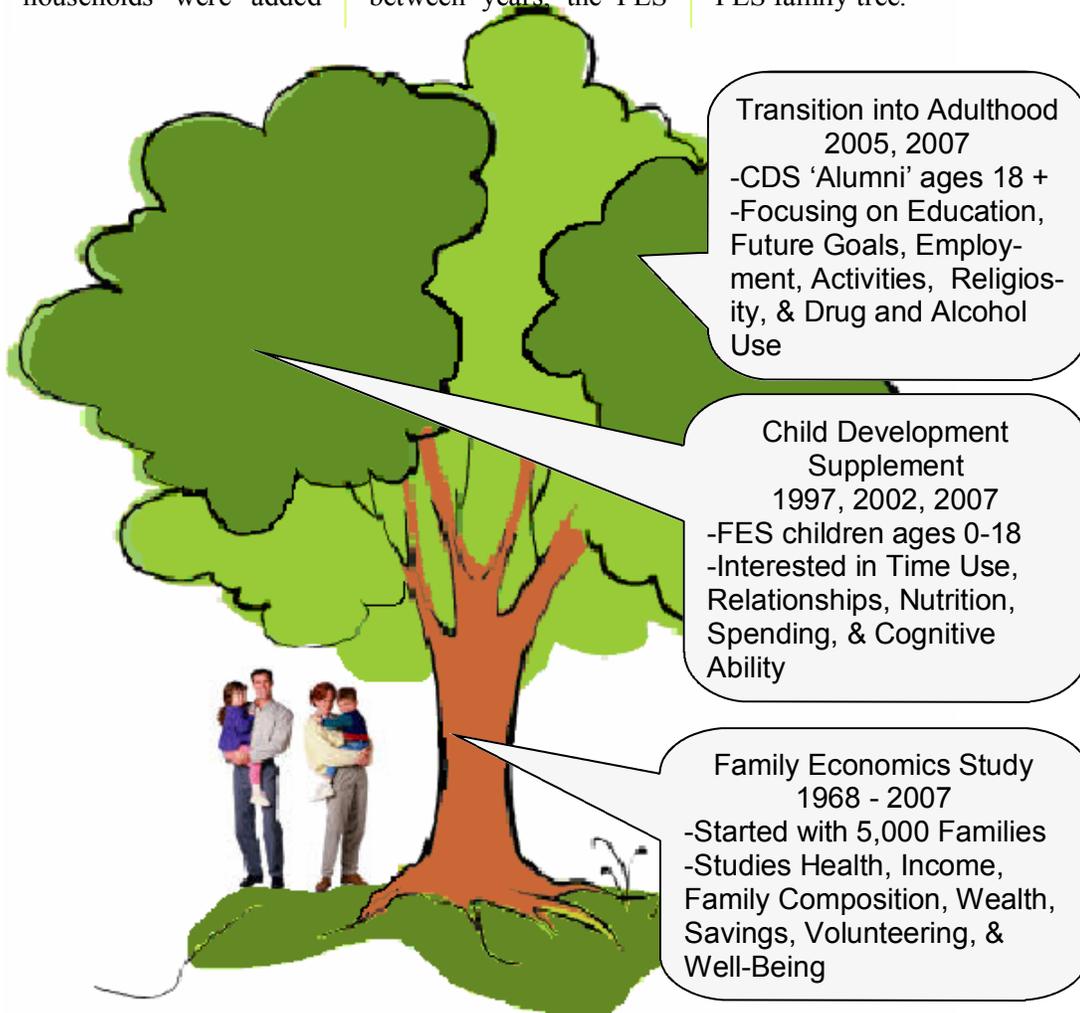
Over the years, new family units have been formed by the children of our original sample, and they have since been added to the core group of families from 1968. In addition to the next generation households, approximately 500 new households were added

to the sample in 1997 in order to keep up with the continually diversifying population of the United States.

Also in 1997, the Child Development Supplement was started. It consists of three waves, the last of which has been collected over the past year. After the age of 18, however, these young adults are able to be considered for the core FES sample, but many of them have yet to establish their own households. For these in between years, the FES

has added the Transition into Adulthood Study in order stay up to date with the CDS 'Alumni.' They were interviewed in 2005 and their latest update has been collected this past year as well. By following these CDS children over the past 10 years we have been able to obtain valuable information that was previously non-existent.

So whether your family is part of one, two, or all three of these studies, we would like to say thank you, and welcome to the FES family tree.



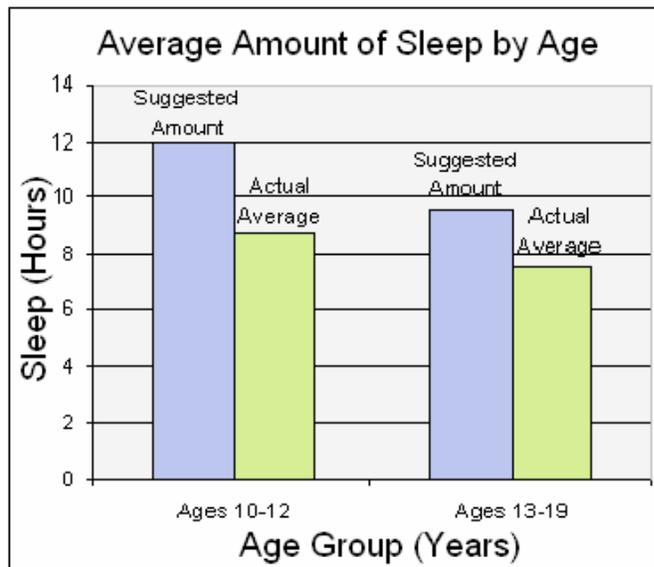
## Recent FES Research

### Sleep and Weight Gain

Starting with our youngest FES members, there have been many topics researched using data from the Child Development Supplement. One such study looked at the sleep habits of children in connection to obesity. With such a rapid increase in obesity rates among adults and children over the last 20 years, this is certainly an important topic.

Using the CDS data, researchers at Northwestern University compared information from 1997 and 2002. The results were striking. Not only were children not getting enough sleep, but just one additional hour of sleep reduced a child's chance of becoming overweight from 36% to 30%. Comparable results have been found in adults, and researchers think the causes might be similar.

There are a few ideas behind this theory, one of which is that those who do not get enough sleep are often more tired and thus less active during the day. Another more physiological approach explains that when the



body does not get enough sleep, it produces more *ghrelin*, which is an appetite-stimulating hormone that triggers our bodies to feel hungry. A slightly more indirect idea is that if a person is staying up late, they are usually participating in sedentary activities like watching television, and there is a large chance that extra caloric intake goes along with those activities.

Though these initial findings do not prove that less sleep *causes* obesity, they shed some light on a topic that has very few data resources. By using the CDS time diaries, re-

searchers are able to look at primary activities (sleeping or TV watching for example), secondary activities (snacking), as well as specific details like the duration of time over the span of an entire day. The CDS time diaries are an incredibly valuable data source, because they provide the only information on children's time use in the United States.

### Paternal Affection

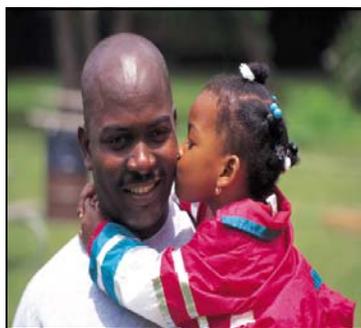
A study by Scott Coltrane of the University of California Riverside used CDS data, along with FES core data, to test hypotheses about generational changes in affec-

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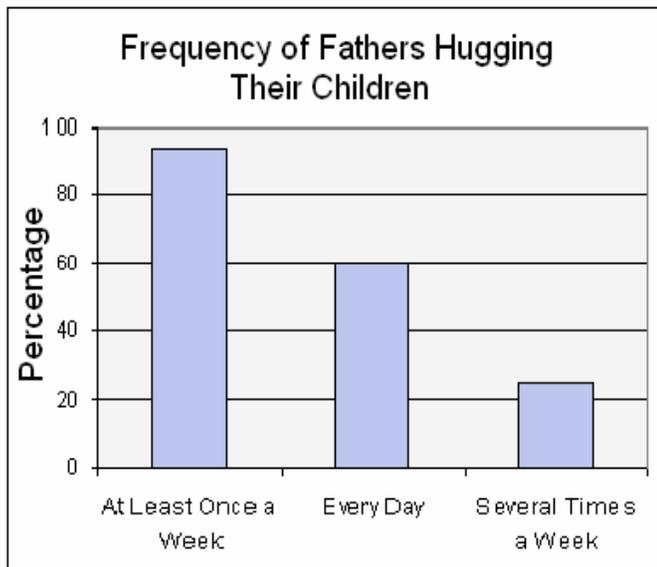


**One additional hour of sleep reduced a child's chance of becoming overweight from 36% to 30%**

## Recent FES Research



***Dads who had involved fathers themselves were more likely to be involved with their own children***



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tion between fathers and their children. It has been said that fathers have experienced changing roles within their families, due to women being in the workforce and men spending more time at home. By using a combination of FES and CDS data, this team of researchers was able to look at more specific parent/child interactions.

Through his analysis, Coltrane found that 93% of fathers hug their children at least once a week, while 79% of fathers tell their children that they love them several times a week. Men usually play sports or participate in outdoor activities with their children, but they

are increasing their contributions to household tasks and inside activities as well. As these numbers increase, the likelihood for children to hold gender stereotypes in the future decreases.

One of the most interesting findings from this study is the connection between the children’s dads and their own fathers. They found that the dads who had involved fathers themselves were more likely to be involved with their own children. Though this may seem intuitive, there is now generational data from the CDS to support this claim.

### Game On

Video games have become the ‘go-to’ answer for many of the problems adolescents are having with their grades in school, social behaviors, and concentration. Hope Cummings of the University of Michigan, along with Dr. Elizabeth Vandewater of the University of Texas at Austin, spent time looking into video game use in adolescents. Their main interest centered around video games in connection to other social activities with family and friends as well as its effect on reading and schoolwork.

Their study included 1,491 adolescents from the CDS study between the ages of 10 and 19. Once again, the time diaries were used to calculate the amount of time these adolescents were spending engaged in different activities. Though popular belief would have us think that video gaming would isolate adolescents from their friends and family, this does not seem to be the case.

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# Recent FES Research

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First, only 36% of the sample reported playing video games at all, with 80% of them being male. They found that not only did playing video games not keep the adolescents from socializing with others, but it actually increased socialization in some instances. For example, the more time an adolescent spent playing video games with friends or parents during the week was connected to more time spent with them on other activities.

These findings, however, were not completely good news. They also showed that more time spent playing video games was connected to less time reading and doing homework, and playing video games alone meant less time with both family and friends in other activities.

One thing that Cummings and Vandewater want to keep clear, however, is that the study does not prove that without video games children would be spending more time with family or friends, or reading and doing homework. The connection is there, though one cannot say what these adolescents

would be spending their time on in the absence of video games.

## The Transition into Adulthood

Society today is no longer evenly split between adults and children. Tweens, teens, and young adults have established their own category, and rightfully so. This age group of certainly-not-children and not-quite-adults is often defined by the idea of experiencing the adult world without expecting grown-up responsibilities or consequences.

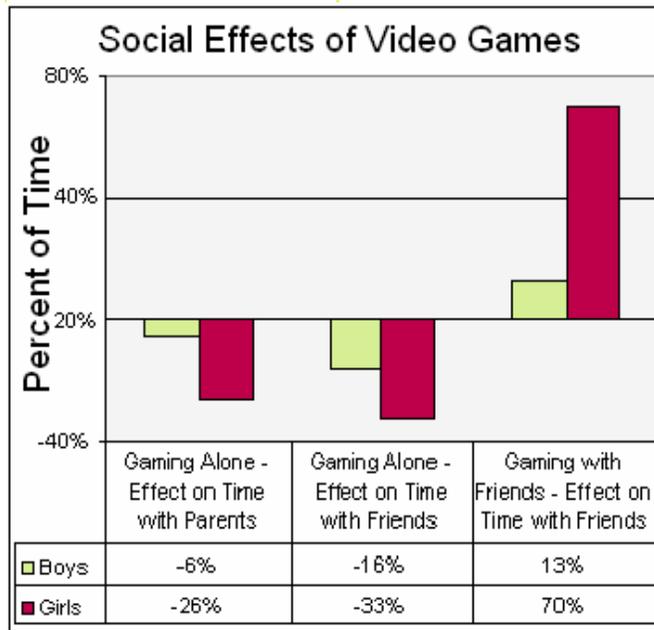
It seems as though with more teens going to college, the age of getting married, having children, and starting a career has been pushed back. Society is taking notice, for instance, by extending foster care services from an old maximum age of 18 to a new cut-off anywhere from 19 to 23.

Aside from the behavioral changes in this group, it was found that the median household net worth of people in their 20s fell by nearly 30% from 2003 to 2005. Several hypotheses have been made, from differing brain chemistry and maturation age, to job market lows

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*The more time spent playing video games with friends or parents was connected to more time spent with them on other activities*



## Recent FES Research



*The lowest divorce rates occurred in couples where wives earned about 40% of the income and husbands did about 40% of the housework*

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and the return to school for professional degrees. We still have much to learn about this age group, and we are now able to look at it more closely, thanks to your participation.

### Clean Up Your Marriage

Lynn Prince Cooke from the University of Kent in Canterbury, England, recently released a study based on FES data that looked into marriage and divorce rates. With about 50% of marriages in the United States ending in divorce, what is the secret to a healthy marriage? We certainly cannot give you that answer today, but some interesting FES

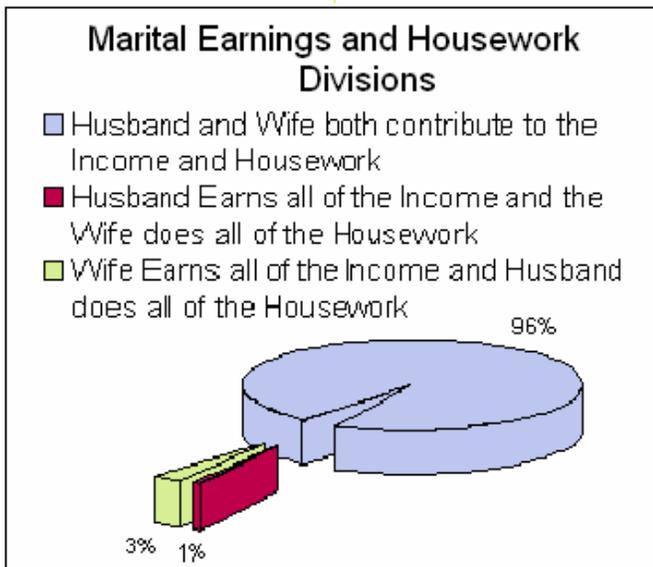
data is moving us one step closer.

Cooke used previous findings to continue her analysis. It had been found that divorce rates were higher for couples in which the wives were employed, but whether the employment was the cause of the increased rate was not certain. Instead, Cooke found that divorce rates were lower for the couples that shared employment and housework, as compared to the households where the husband only worked and the wife only cleaned.

The increased divorce rate seems more con-

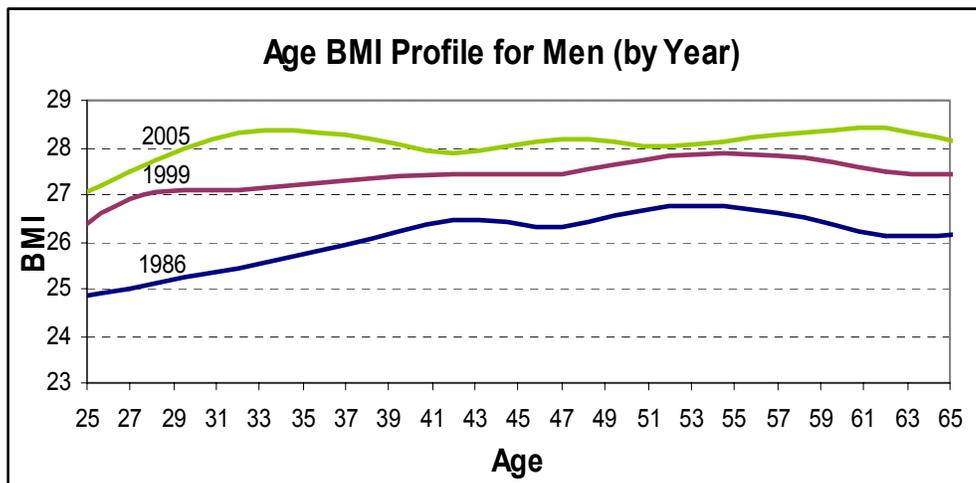
nected to the couples where the woman not only works outside the home, but does most or all of the housework as well. Statistically, Cooke found that the lowest divorce rates occurred in couples where wives earned about 40% of the income and husbands did about 40% of the housework. This system does seem more equal, but the divorce rate does not continue to fall from there.

As women earn a larger share of the total income, the divorce rate begins to rise again. When the wife contributes 50% or more of the earned income and the husband does 50% or more of the housework, the number of divorces begins to climb.



Overall, it looks like American couples are headed in the right direction, though many of them need to find a balance. Moving away from the male breadwinner mentality to a more equal contribution model may take some time, but the numbers show that it may be worth it.

## By The Numbers



**BMI—Body Mass Index**—A measurement of the relative percentages of fat and muscle mass in the human body, in which weight is divided by height<sup>2</sup> and the result is used as an index of obesity.

**BMI Health Ranges:**

Underweight: Under 18.5

Normal Weight: 18.5-25

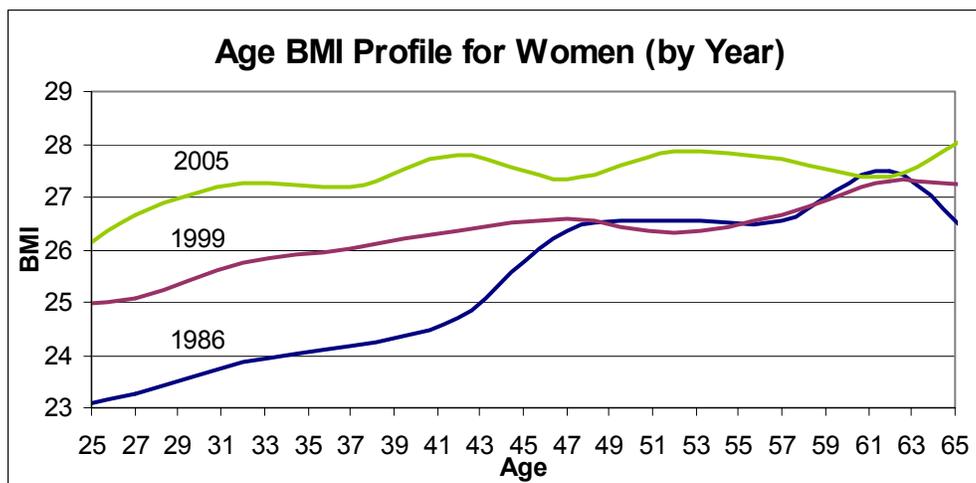
Overweight: 25-30

Obese: 30 and Over

**Calculate Your Score:**

$$BMI = [(Weight\ in\ Pounds) / (Height\ in\ Inches)^2] \times 703$$

With the FES panel data we were able to look at entire BMI lifecycle comparisons at different points in time. This enabled us to clearly see the shifting average BMI scores over the past 20 years.



*With the FES panel data we were able to look at entire BMI lifecycle comparisons*

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