

# The FES News

The Family Economics Study  
Institute for Social Research  
University of Michigan

## From the Director

Dear FES Family,

Thank you for one more successful wave of interviewing, and welcome to all the new families that completed their interview for the first time in 2009. During 2009, we talked with 8,738 families of which more than 750 were new FES families. Also in 2009, we talked with 1,558 young adults who were interviewed for the Transition into Adulthood study. It is exciting to have participation from three, and in some cases four, generations of FES family members. Your contributions have made the FES one of the most important research studies in the U.S. We cannot emphasize enough how much we appreciate the time and effort you give us in doing your interview. We hope you enjoy this newsletter and looking forward to talking with you again in the Spring of 2011!

We are pleased to announce that Professors Charles Brown and Robert Schoeni have agreed to serve as Co-Directors of the Family Economics Study. Both have a long and distinguished record of research using the FES in their own research and managing data projects to be used by the wider research community.

From the continued participation of you and your family since 1968, the Family Economics Study has become one of the most valuable projects at the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health. There are now other Family Economics Studies all around the world that have learned from the U.S. FES – in Switzer-

land, England, China, Australia, Korea, Germany, Mexico and many other countries.

With the new information you have given us in 2009, we are now trying to understand the many factors that led families to have widespread mortgage and housing problems. This is not just to do research but to figure out how to avoid such situations in the future. Similarly we are trying to understand health and financial well-being over the life course. As families move from working into retirement or from youth into work-life, what factors predict successful transitions? Here the information over the years of the FES is needed. These important events can be studied

from your answers as we interview you and your family over the years.

On a personal note, I want to thank each of you for your generous support over the years of data collection. I promise to continue as one of the researchers who will learn from the information you have given us – and that we will keep any information you provide as confidential. We will continue to fully protect your information as it is used to better understand American families and their well-being.

Frank Stafford  
Professor of Economics  
University of Michigan  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

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## New Leadership



Dr. Robert Schoeni



Dr. Frank Stafford



Dr. Charles Brown

It is a great honor for us to assume the Directorship of the FES, one of the most important resources for social scientists and policymakers in the world.

Frank Stafford (center) has directed the project for 15 years, expanding it in numerous directions. During Frank's leadership, the FES was named to the National Science Foundation's "Nifty Fifty", making it one of the 50 most significant advances ever funded by the National Science Foundation. We thank Frank for his years of service as director.

In the future, we will continue to ask you new and different questions, which in turn provides important information to

scientists and policymakers to help address some of the most significant issues facing our society. In addition, we will look for alternative and convenient ways for you to provide such information, to minimize your burden and maximize the quality of the information collected.

Let us tell you a little bit about ourselves. Bob Schoeni (left) was born and raised in Ohio, and has lived in Ann Arbor since 2001. He studies issues of labor markets, poverty, health, and aging. Bob first used the FES in his dissertation which examined the extent to which families assist each other out through cash transfers and time help.

Charlie Brown (right) was also born and raised in Ohio and taught at the University of Maryland before coming to Ann Arbor in 1985. He worked with the FES for several years, when Jim Morgan and Greg Duncan (Frank's predecessors) were directing the project. With Greg and others, he wrote a series of papers on the accuracy of responses to FES's questions on earnings, work hours, and time with current employer.

Again, it is our pleasure and honor to be the new directors. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance with the FES.

All the best,

Charlie Brown and Bob Schoeni

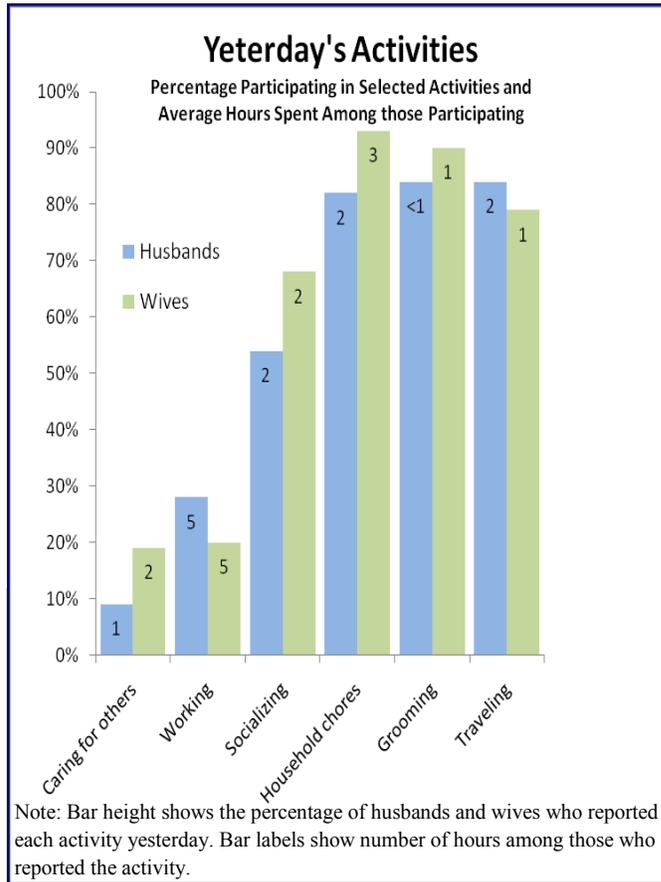


2010 is an off year,  
and we hope you all  
have a healthy and  
happy year!

# Recent FES Research

## Introducing: Couples' Health and Daily Life

Yesterday at 4:00 AM, what were you doing? If you were sleeping, you are in good company. According to the 400 or so couples who agreed to be interviewed for the Family Economics Study's new study of Couples' Health and Daily Life, most were asleep until 7:00 am. Once awake, these couples—which all included at least one spouse age 60 or older—spent 15-16 hours on average engaged in a variety of activities. Early calculations of selected activities suggest husbands' and wives' days had much in common (Figure right). For instance, the majority of respondents spent some time socializing, taking care of household chores, grooming, and traveling. Some differences between husbands and wives are also observed. Wives in the study may be spending more time on household chores – 3 hours on average compared to 2 hours spent by their husbands. There are also clues that wives are taking on more of the care giving duties: one in five wives spent some time yesterday caring for an



other person (for about 2 hours on average) whereas one in ten husbands did so (for 1 hour on average). On the other hand, husbands appear to be more likely to work; about 30% of husbands and 20% of wives in the study worked yesterday (for about 5 hours on average). University of Michigan researchers have spent two years developing and testing the diary

protocol, getting input from couples and interviewers every step of the way to make the experience as smooth and enjoyable as possible. Funded by the National Institute on Aging, the study's fieldwork was conducted from July through November 2009. About 75% of couples selected for the interview agreed to participate. Each participant agreed to speak with an interviewer

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Over 1,500 diaries were completed in all, yielding information on nearly 36,000 activities

## Recent FES Research



On average it takes about 25 minutes to reconstruct the details of the previous day

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multiple times and on the same day as their spouse. Over 1500 diaries were completed in all, yielding information on nearly 36,000 activities.

Interviewers walked respondents through their own personal “yesterday”, helping them to create a diary of what they did, where they were, who was actively engaged with them, and who else was there. On average it takes about 25 minutes to reconstruct the details of the previous day. Interviewers are expressing a great deal of excitement for the final product. One interviewer opened a debriefing session by exclaiming, “I love this interview. The respondents love this interview.”

Additional questions asked of participants focused on their physical and cognitive ability to carry out every day activities and their participation during the last week in a variety of activities. According to Principal Investigator Dr. Vicki Freedman, an epidemiologist with long-standing interest in disability and aging, “time diaries offer us an important window into disabil-

ity because they reflect individuals’ actual level of participation in daily life.”

Researchers are hoping to find out how health and functioning affects not only what an individual does during a 24-hour period, but also what effect one spouse’s health and functioning has on the other’s daily experience and well-being. Frank Stafford, a co-Principal Investigator on the study and internationally recognized expert on time use, notes, “Previous studies on time use have almost always been limited to one person per family. Speaking to couples offers a much sharper picture of daily life and offers us both husbands’ and wives’ perspectives. We are grateful to the FES families who participated in this study.” Look for early results from the study in the next issue of the FES News.

### Communication technology is revolutionizing the way children form social networks

The world has become more connected the past two decades through development of electronic communication devices, and the transformation has not been limited to adults. Indeed, in most cases children and young adults are leading the way.

In the most recently completed Child Development Supplement we asked families about the use of web pages and cell phones by their children. Not only has use of cell phones increased among children, a very large fraction of children have their own cell phone. Among children 16 to 18 years old, three quarters have their own cell phone. And even among children 10-11 years old, just over one third have a cell phone.

It has also become increasingly popular to use websites such as Facebook to post information and communicate with friends. One quarter of children 10 to 18 years

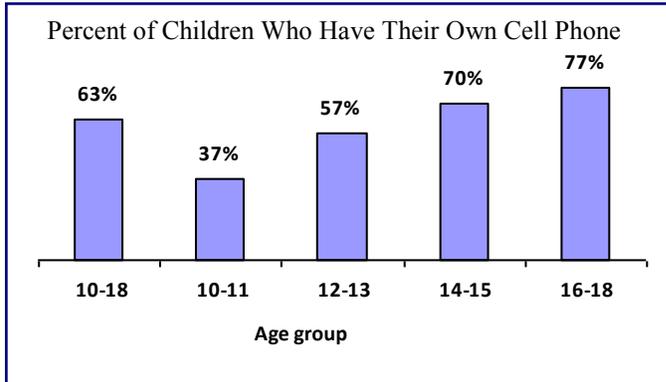
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# Recent FES Research

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old post information on such websites at least two to three times per week, with 15% of children communicating in this way every day or almost every day.

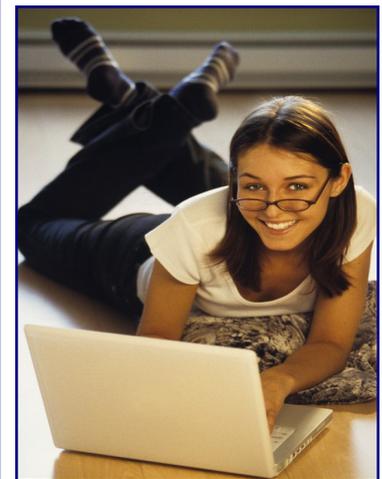
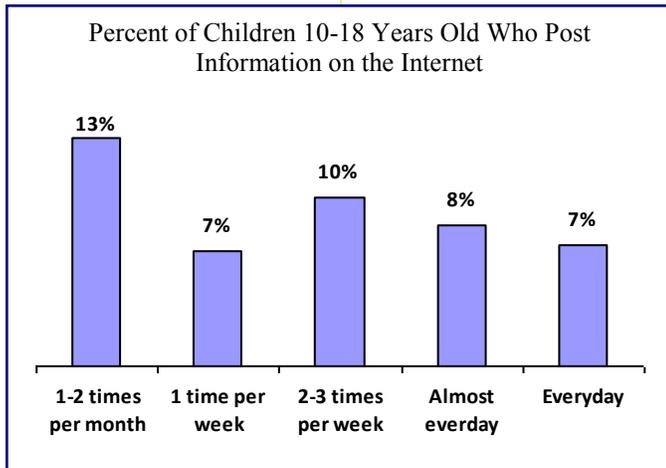
Among children 10-18, girls are more likely to post information on the Internet, and they are also more likely to have their own cell phone. 26% of these girls post information on websites at least two to three times per week, while the rate among boys is 22%. Similarly, 66% of these girls and 60% of these boys report that they have their own cell phone. Children and young adults use cell phones and webpages for a variety of purposes, including establishing new friendships and maintaining existing friendships. Indeed, post-



ing information on the Internet is much more common among children who have close friends. The proportion of children 10 to 18 years old who post information every day is nearly 3 times higher for those who report being “extremely close” to their friends as opposed to “fairly close.” 11% vs 4%, respectively. Children who are extremely close to their friends as opposed to fairly close

to their friends are also much more likely to have their own cell phone: 72% vs 57%, respectively.

Children from higher income families are more likely to stay in touch with their friends through electronic medium, and this is in part due to the fact that these families can afford computers and cell phones. For example, among children whose families have income at the top 25% of income range, 40% have their own cell phone. At the same time, 14% of children in families with income at the bottom 25% of income range have their own phone. As communication technology evolves and these children get older, we will continue to monitor these important trends among FES families.



26% of girls aged 10-18 post information on websites at least two to three times per week

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## Recent FES Research

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### Thank You for the Special 2009 Mortgage Information!



Owner-occupied housing is a major asset in over two-thirds of FES families

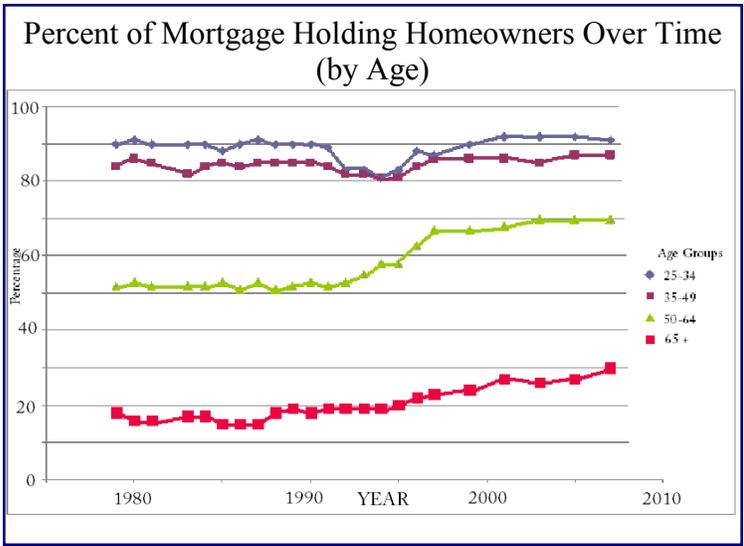
The Family Economics Study has asked for housing and mortgage information over the years, and that information is now being used to understand America's growing housing problems. Owner-occupied housing is a major asset in over two-thirds of FES families, often over long periods of time, and problems arising from the changing housing market are affecting many families. A family's investment decision in housing can have huge effects for all those within it and for the economy at large. Investment in housing is often financed through a mortgage con-

tract, a feature important for understanding the causes and consequences of the recent crises. In particular, the decrease in housing prices and associated defaults on subprime mortgages are generally considered to be the major cause of the crisis in credit markets that then spilled into the other parts of the economy.

Here we present basic patterns of the FES families' participation in the home mortgage market over time. The chart has the proportion of mortgage holding of home owners by age group. The top line is for those headed by a family age 25-34 (in blue), and just below are the families age 35-49 (in purple). Both show the consistently high rates for those families

headed by a 25-49 year old, generally 80 to 90 percent. The middle line is for families headed by a 50-64 year old (in green). About half of these families held a mortgage from 1979 to 1993 which rose to about 70% after 1999.

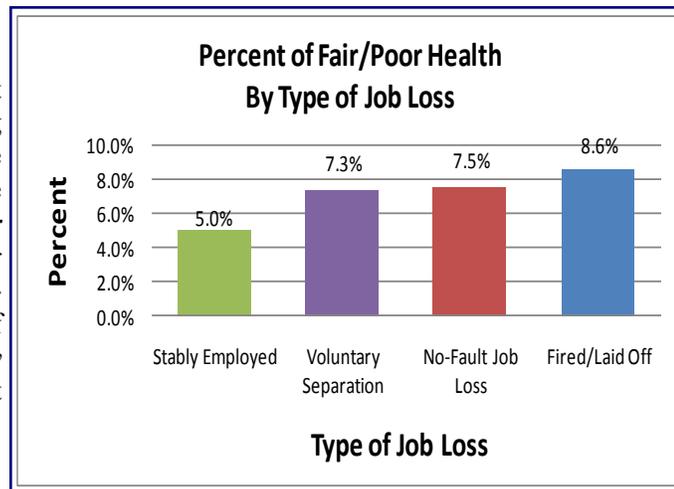
The lowest line (in red) is for families headed by an individual age 65 or older. Over time we can see a rise from under 20% with a mortgage to about 30% by 2007. Another focal point is the dip in mortgage holding by those 25-49 in the early 1990's, a period with high mortgage rates, followed by a rebound in mortgage holding as rates came down in the mid and later 1990's. As these patterns of FES mortgage holding are looked at, a goal of the work is to see which families had mortgage problems, and to be sure that future economic policy decisions do not head us down this path again. Thank you for your answers to our questions on housing over the years and in 2009.



## By The Numbers

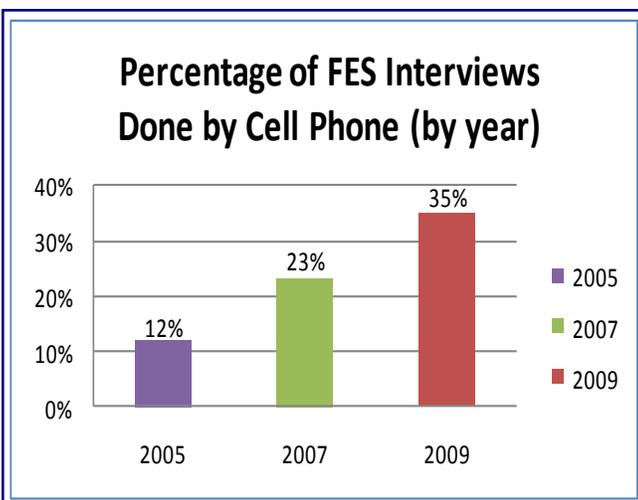
### Job Loss and Health

Losing a job has a negative effect on health as compared to being *stably employed*, regardless of type of separation. Also, as seen on the graph to the right, being *fired or laid off* from a job has a larger negative effect on health than a *no-fault job loss* (as in the closing of an office or factory), or a *voluntary job separation* (such as retirement or a job upgrade).



### Technological Changes

Results from Sandra Hofferth show that “children who spend one more hour per week playing video games or watching television indeed spend 7–10 fewer minutes playing, sleeping, reading, and studying. One additional video game hour is associated with spending as much as 25 fewer minutes in outdoor activities. Children who spend lots of time playing video games and watching television and who do not go outside are the new “couch potatoes.”” Though some new technologies are taking time from older versions, many childhood activities do remain the same. Future analysis will be done on this topic, as technology continues to become a bigger part of children’s lives.



### New Trends

Over the past 3 waves of the FES the percentage of interviews conducted over cell phone have nearly tripled, from 12% in 2005 to 35% in 2009! In addition to the FES, 66% of the Transition into Adulthood Study interviews were done by cell phone. The TA interviews are conducted for those who are between the ages of 18 and 25. In the United States, over 13% of the population are in cell phone only homes.

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