

# **Workforce development for lower-income working women in the Chicago region: the research background**

**Report to the Chicago Foundation for Women** By Malcolm Bush and Jiffy Lansing with Shannon Gultinan  
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**ChapinHall** at the University of Chicago  
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities

# The research describes:

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- ❖ Changing demography of target populations
- ❖ Array and character of post-high school resources for workforce development
- ❖ Local and national policy, practice, funding and advocacy issues
- ❖ Recommendations for future priorities

# From the chairman of the Federal Reserve Board <sup>3</sup>

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A meritocracy is a system in which people who are the luckiest in their health and genetic endowment, family support, encouragement, and income....reap the largest rewards. In an ethical democracy, those who are the luckiest, have the greatest responsibility to share their luck with others.

# And from a CFW funded client

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“Sometimes in life things happen; things don’t take the direction most people take and you need to get some help and direction”

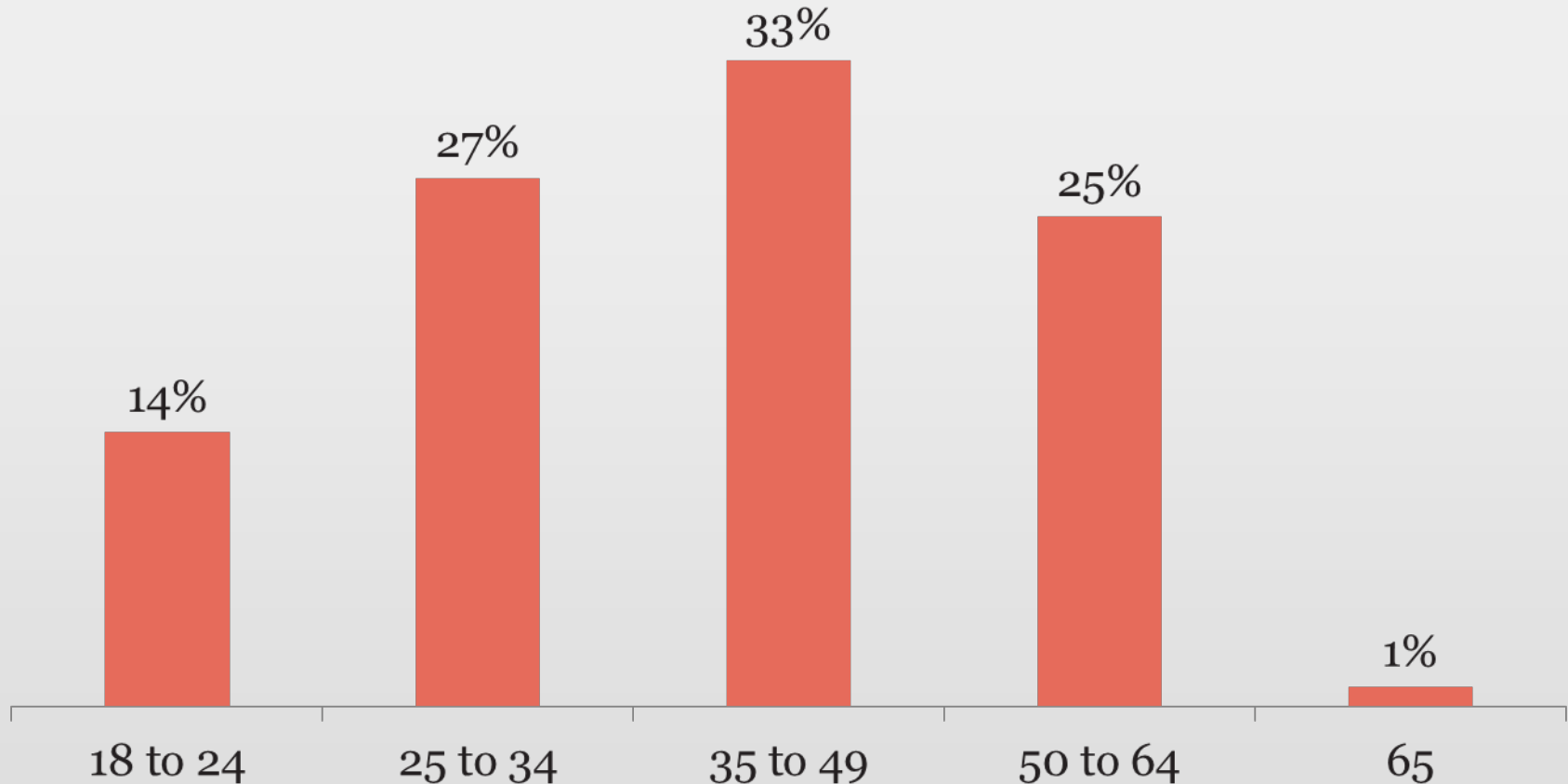
## Age distribution of women in 7 county Chicago region, 18-65 with any earnings, in households with total household income between 10K and 50K, 2011

Age category	Weighted Frequency	Weighted Percent	Margin of Error 90% +/-
18 to 24	72,792	14%	0.89
25 to 34	145,175	27%	1.16
35 to 49	176,006	33%	1.22
50 to 64	134,968	25%	1.13
65	4,900	1%	0.25
Total	533,841		

Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) 2011 one-year estimates

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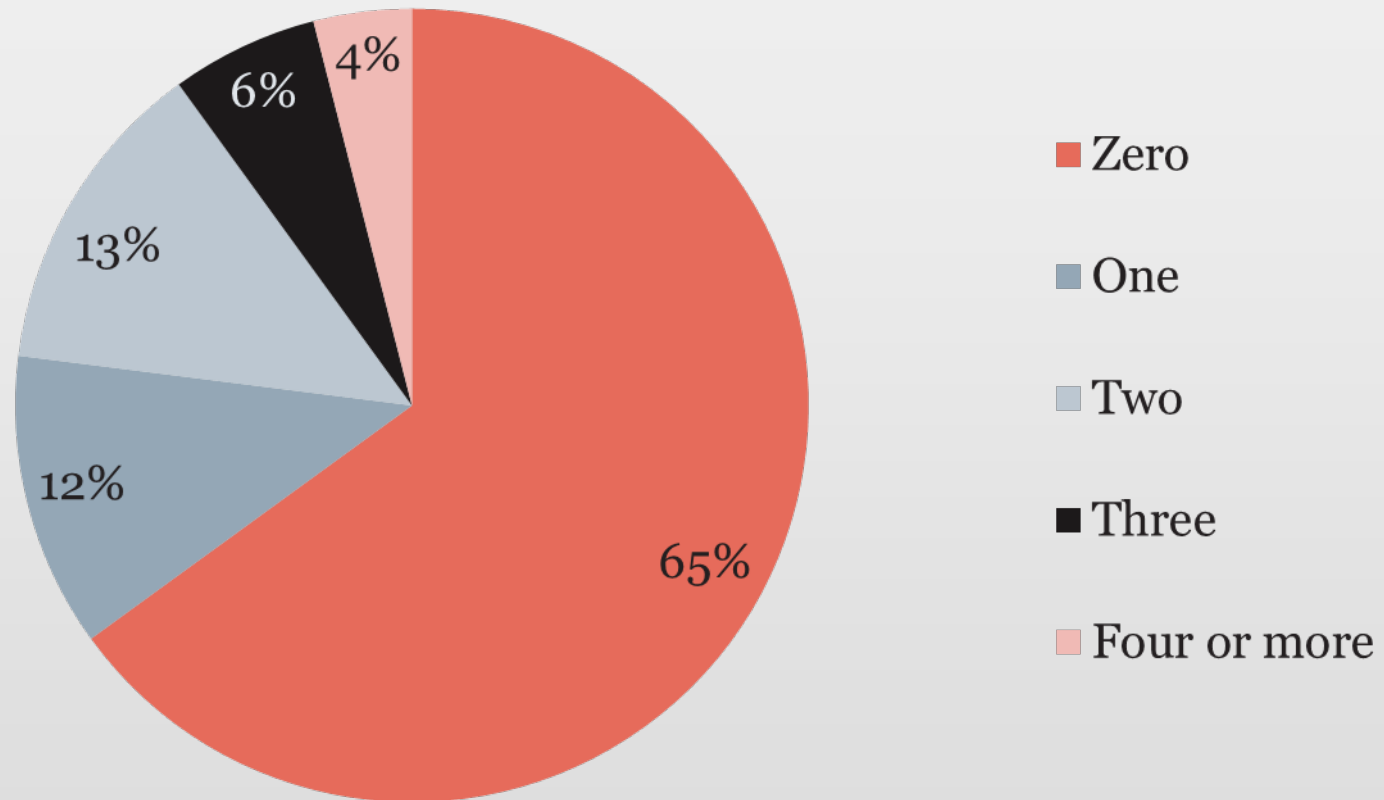
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Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 533,841

## Number of own children in household in 2011 for same group of women

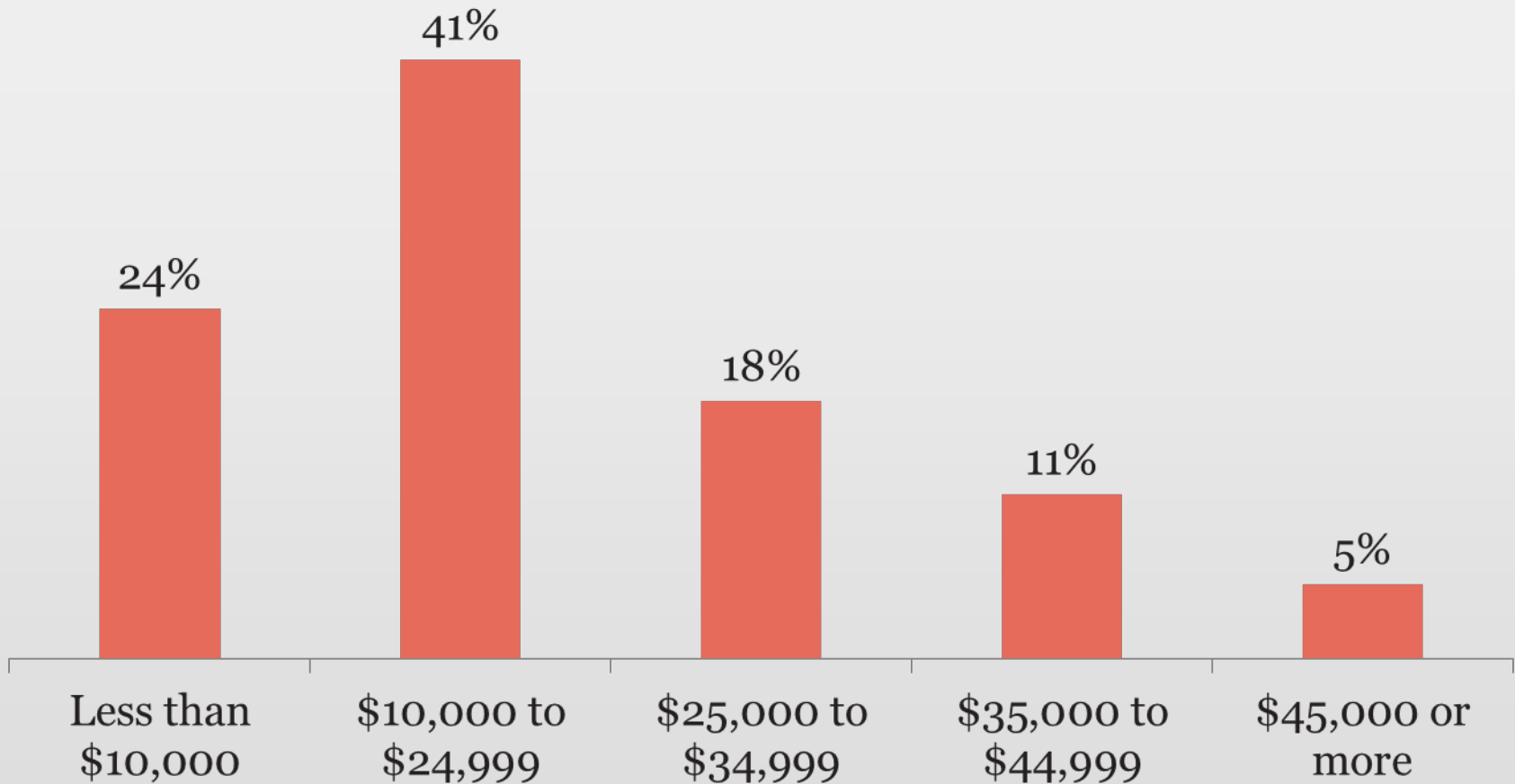
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Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 533,841

# Individual income earned in 2011 for same group of women

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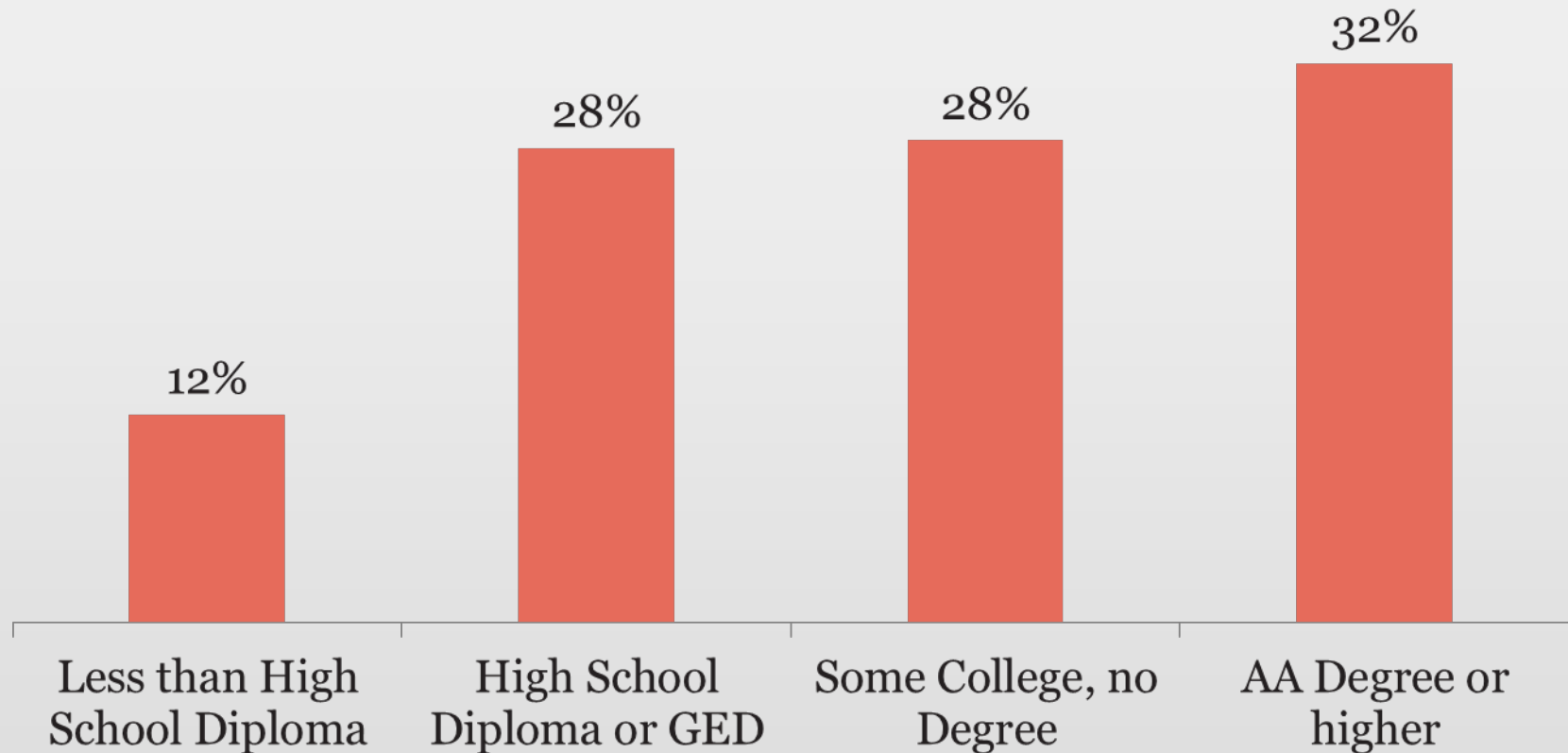


Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 533,841



# Educational attainment, 2011

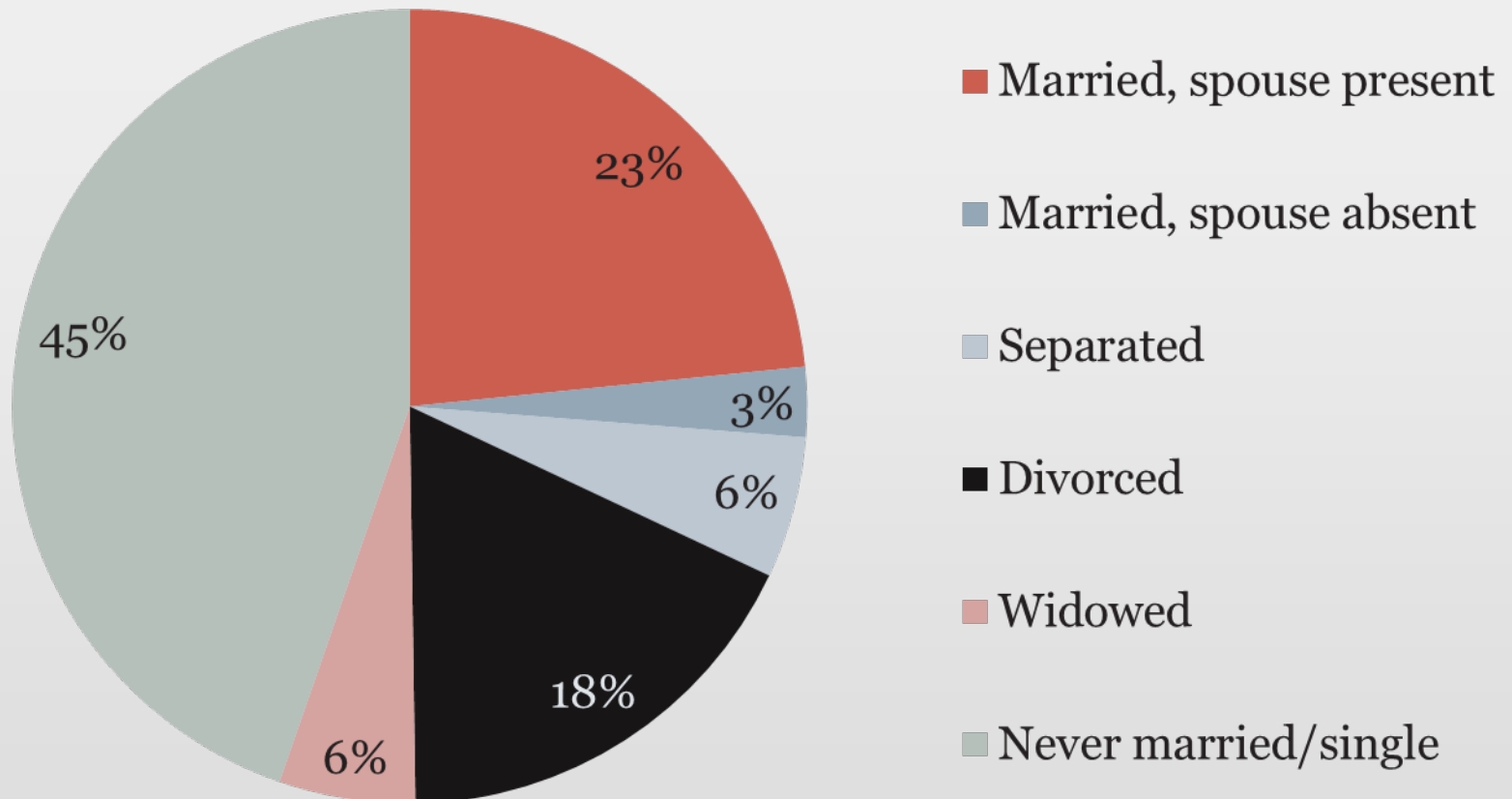
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Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 551,519

# Marital status, 2011

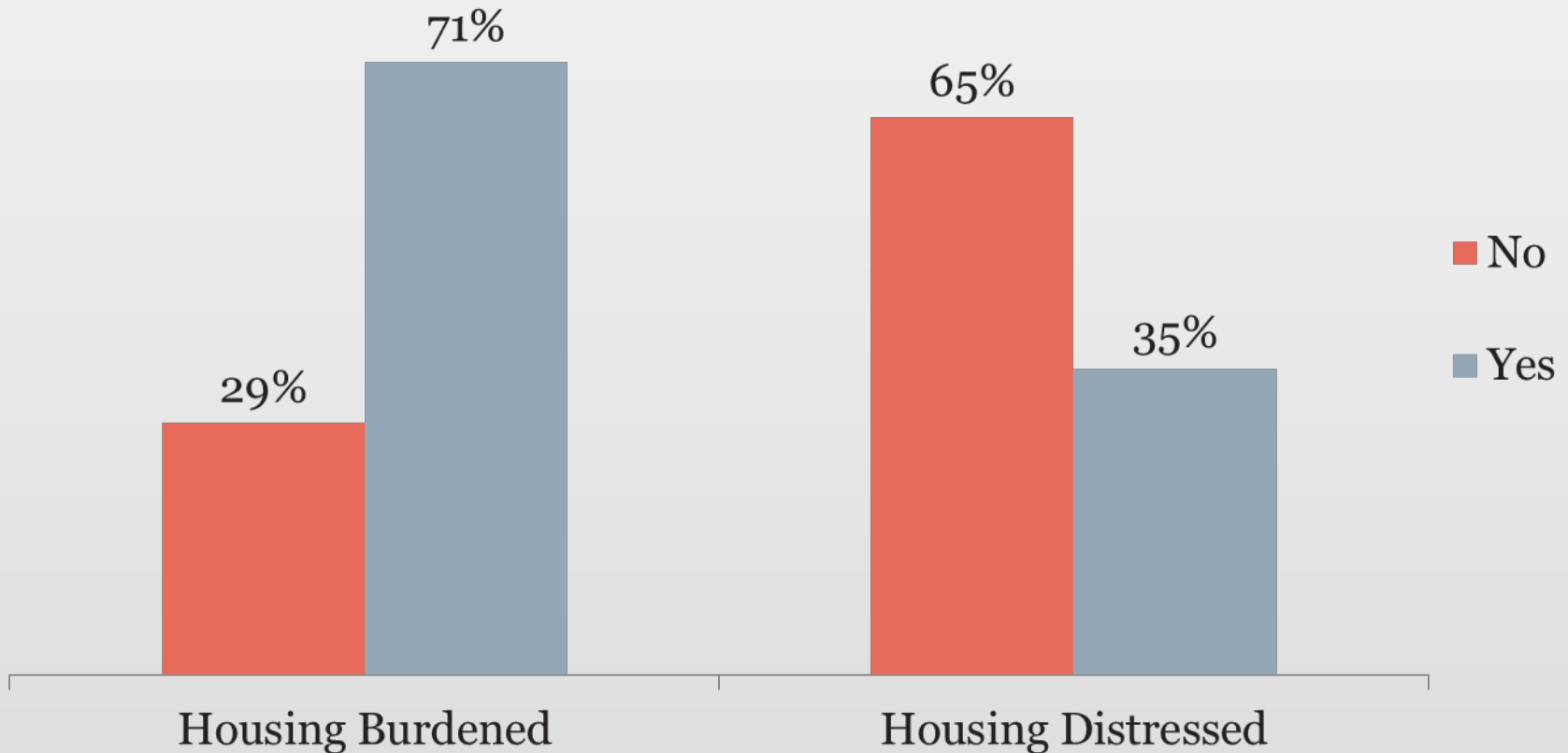
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Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 561,171

## Housing burdened or distressed, 2011

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Source: Chapin Hall analysis of American Community Survey (ACS)  
2011 one-year estimates  
Weighted Frequency = 561,171

## Contextual changes and issues

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- ❖ Structural reform of the city and county WFD programs
- ❖ Opportunities for reform in community college system and greater cooperation between it and community groups
- ❖ Complexity and diminution of federal funding
- ❖ Threadbare community development organizations' income
- ❖ Decline in soft skills and demands for increasing hard skills

## Challenges as perceived by “Eleanor” women

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- ❖ Discrimination by gender, race, and age
- ❖ Mixed record of parental support, or lack thereof, and parental “old country” control of younger women
- ❖ Challenges of behavioral change
- ❖ Constant juggling of work, family responsibilities, child care and training
- ❖ Immigrants’ challenges with language, and “traditional” (and sometimes abusive ) husbands
- ❖ Very little slack for young women who don’t color between the lines
- ❖ The need for one person who cares
- ❖ The need for credentials

## The role of Eleanor Network organizations

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- ❖ Encouragement, and advice from staff and peers
- ❖ Assistance in navigating the scary and “de-risking” it
- ❖ Workforce discipline
- ❖ Flexible and broad assistance
- ❖ Continued support on the first and subsequent jobs
- ❖ Financial assistance through the Emergency Fund

## Practice opportunities

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- ❖ More of the same programs but with more effective and useful data
- ❖ More resources for organizations to improve e.g. marketing and staffing
- ❖ Similar supports given to CFW clients for students in community college
- ❖ Special emphasis on transitional job programs, bridge program literacy, and programs for clients with low skill levels

# Policy and advocacy opportunities

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- ❖ Advocacy to exploit and implement current opportunities for public funding of WFD
- ❖ Increased efforts to reduce discrimination
- ❖ Better working conditions for working women especially child care and flexibility on hours, and better supports for all low-income workers
- ❖ Increased WIA funding and rationalization of program criteria
- ❖ Convening of local workforce development group representing all sectors to discuss better practices



# Opportunities for change-oriented research

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- ❖ Closer look at needs of key groups e.g. younger women, older women, immigrants
- ❖ Examination of Federal WIA reporting costs and recommendation for better metrics
- ❖ Use current job categories of target women to break down by key demographics to inform policies and practice
- ❖ Best practices and improved policies for transitional job programs and bridge programs and supporting community college students
- ❖ State of the art and sustainable financial asset building programs for high school girls