

# Stress, Marital Satisfaction, and Psychological Distress Among African Americans

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# Overview

- Background
- Theoretical Framework
- Methods
- Results
- Limitations
- Study Implications

# Marriage & Mental Health

- Marriage has a protective effect on mental health.
  - A resource for social and emotional support
  - Can confer financial, legal, and material advantage.
- Poorly functioning marriages can negatively impact the emotional well-being of couples and their children.

# Marriage & African Americans

- Studies tend to focus on transitions to marriage, declining rates of marriage, or alternative forms of marriage.
- Married African Americans are a vital part of the African American community.
  - According to the 2000 Census, 40% of African Americans are married
- Married African Americans place a high value on marriage as a context for raising children, companionship, and financial security.
- Many unmarried African Americans desire to be married.

Sources: Bumpass, L. L. *The changing significance of marriage in the United States*, in *The changing family in comparative perspective: Asia and the United States*, K. O. Mason, N. Nilsuya, & M. Choe, Editors. 1998, Honolulu, HI: East-West Center. p. 63-79; Harknett, K., & McLanahan, S. S. *Racial and ethnic differences in marriage after the birth of a child*. *American Sociological Review*, 2004. **69**: p. 790-811; Seltzer, J. A. *Families formed outside of marriage*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2000. **62**: p. 1247-1268; Taylor, R. J., Tucker, M. B., Chatters, L. M., & Jayakody, R. *Recent demographic trends in African American family structure*, in *Family life in Black America*, R. J. Taylor, J. S. Jackson, & L. M. Chatters, Editors. 1997. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. p. 14-62; U.S. Census Bureau. *Census 2000 Special Report, We the people: Blacks in the United States*, 2005. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau; Lincoln, K. D., Taylor, R. J., & Jackson, J. S. *Romantic relationships among unmarried African Americans and Caribbean Blacks*. *Family Relations*, 2008. **57**: p. 254-266; Billingsley, A. *Climbing Jacob's ladder: Enduring legacy of African American families*. 1992. New York: Simon & Schuster.

# Marriage & Mental Health Among African Americans

- Findings from studies on marriage and mental health among African Americans are mixed.
  - Those who are married report more happiness, life satisfaction, and fewer emotional problems compared to their unmarried counterparts.
  - No relationship between marriage and mental health among African Americans.
  - Lower levels of marital satisfaction compared to Whites.

# Financial Strain

- Financial difficulty is among the most commonly experienced problems for African Americans.
- Economic circumstances of African Americans may affect marital quality and mental health.
- In 2007:
  - Median income for African Americans was \$33,916, compared to \$54,920 for non-Hispanic Whites.
  - Poverty rate for African Americans was 24.5%, compared to 8.2% for non-Hispanic Whites.
  - 19% of all African American married-couple families had incomes of \$25,000 or less, compared to 12% of comparable non-Hispanic White families.

# Unfair Treatment

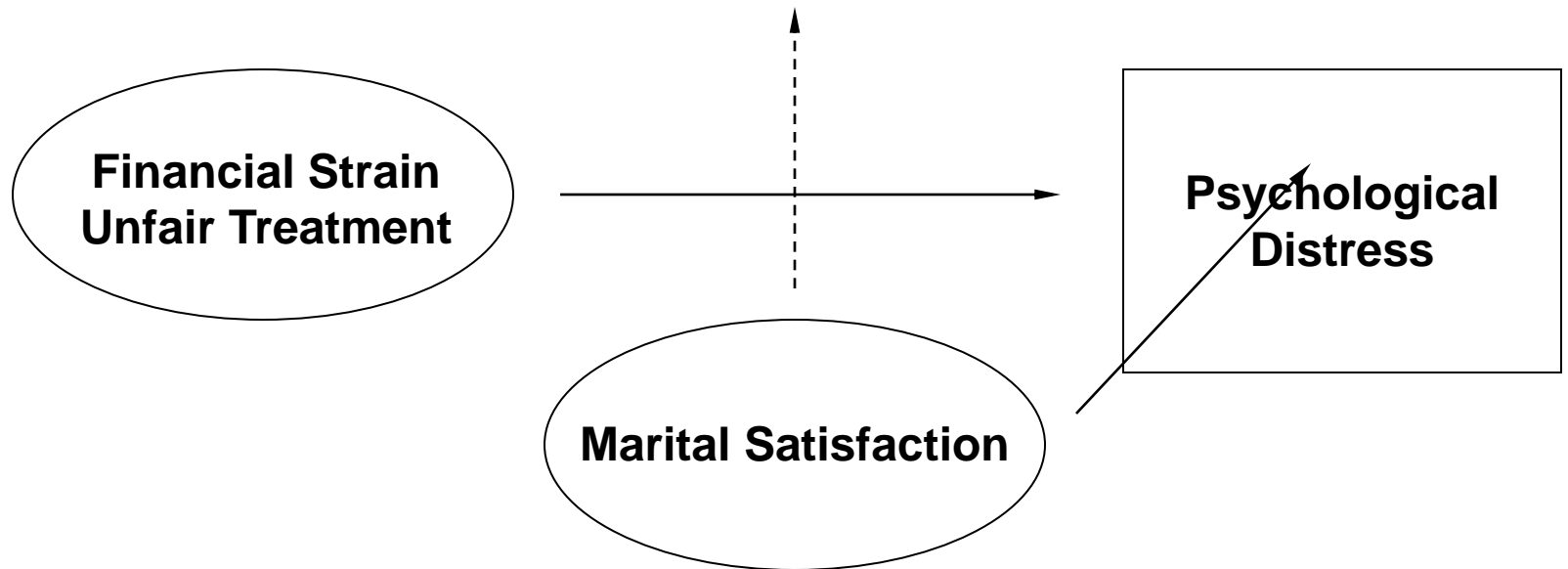
- Discrimination is one of the most endemic and enduring stressors facing African Americans.
- Experiences of discrimination can induce distress, depressive symptoms, and depression.
- Researchers suggest that effects of discrimination infiltrate the marriages of African Americans through increased tensions and psychological distress.

# Theoretical Framework

- The Process of Social Stress Theory
  - A broad array of social conditions combine over time to create a process of stress.
  - This process combines three major conceptual domains – the sources of stress, the mediators of stress, and the manifestations of stress.
- The Stress Proliferation Theory
  - The initial stressor contributes to the decline in mental health, and gives rise to secondary stressors; that is, stress proliferates across the various domains of one's life.



# Conceptual Model



# Purpose of the Study

- 1. To examine the extent to which financial strain and unfair treatment are associated with marital satisfaction.
- 2. To examine the extent to which financial strain and unfair treatment are associated with psychological distress.
- 3. To investigate whether marital satisfaction moderates the influence of stress on psychological distress.
- 4. To examine the degree to which experiences of unfair treatment exacerbate the impact of financial strain on marital satisfaction and psychological distress.

# Methods

- Data source: National Survey of American Life (PI: James S. Jackson).
- Sample:
  - Nationally representative of the Black American household population.
  - Current study restricted to married African Americans (n = 962).

# Measures

## Stress

### Unfair Treatment (“Everyday Discrimination”)

- Less courtesy
- Less respect
- Poorer service
- Less smart
- Dishonest
- Not as good
- Feared
- Insulted
- Harassed
- Followed in stores

### Financial Strain

- Difficulty paying monthly bills
- Worry about not being able to pay expenses

# Measures

## Outcomes:

### Marital Satisfaction

- “How satisfied are you with your marriage?”

### Serious Psychological Distress (K6)\*

- Sad
- Nervous
- Restless
- Hopeless
- Everything an effort
- Felt worthless
- Blue

\*Serious psychological distress (SPD) is a nonspecific indicator of past-year mental health problems, such as anxiety or mood disorders.

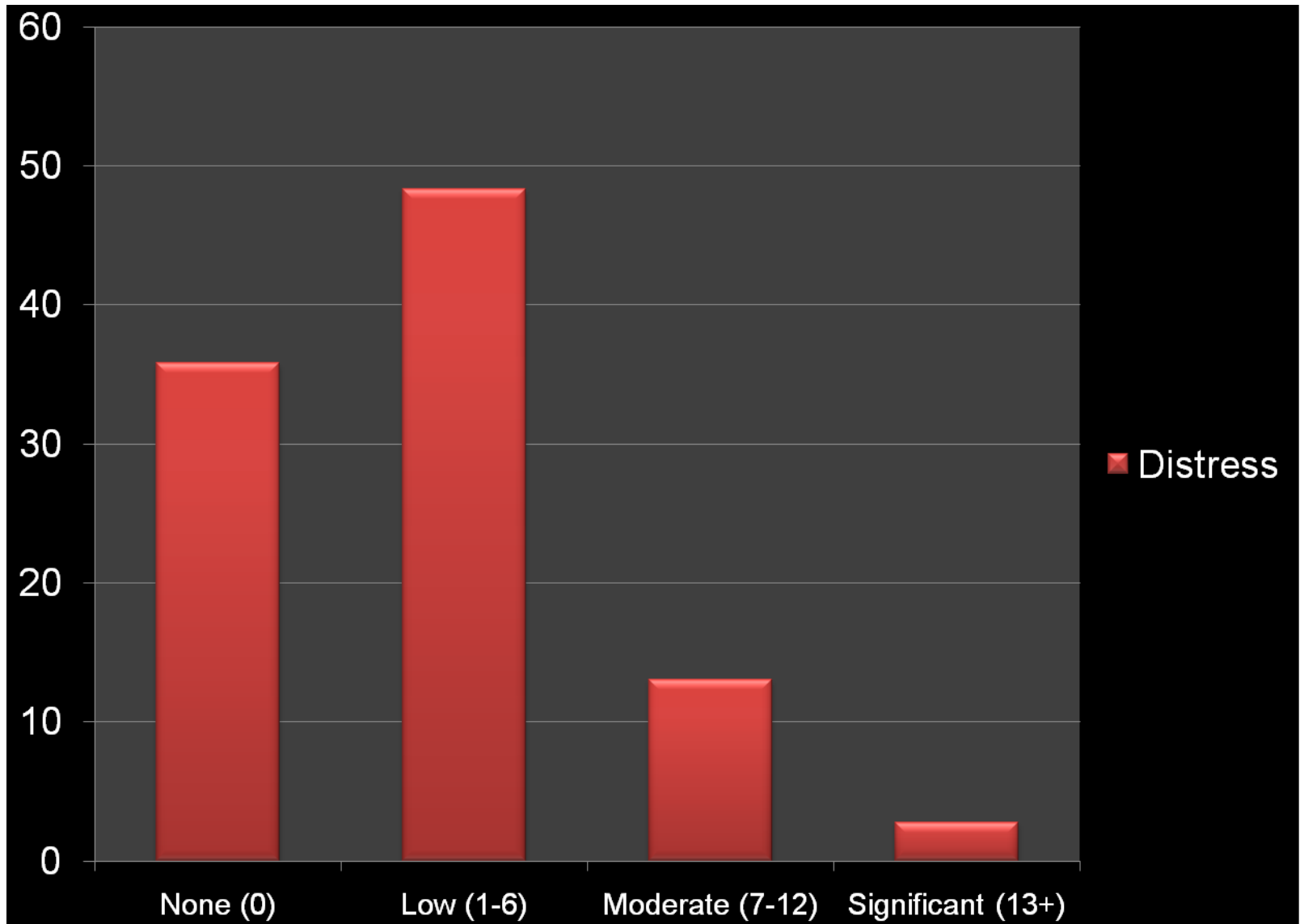
# Measures

- Demographic characteristics:
  - Gender
  - Age
  - # times married
  - Length of marriage
  - # children (R)
  - # children (P)
  - Poverty
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Health Insurance
  - Region
  - Social Desirability

# Social Desirability

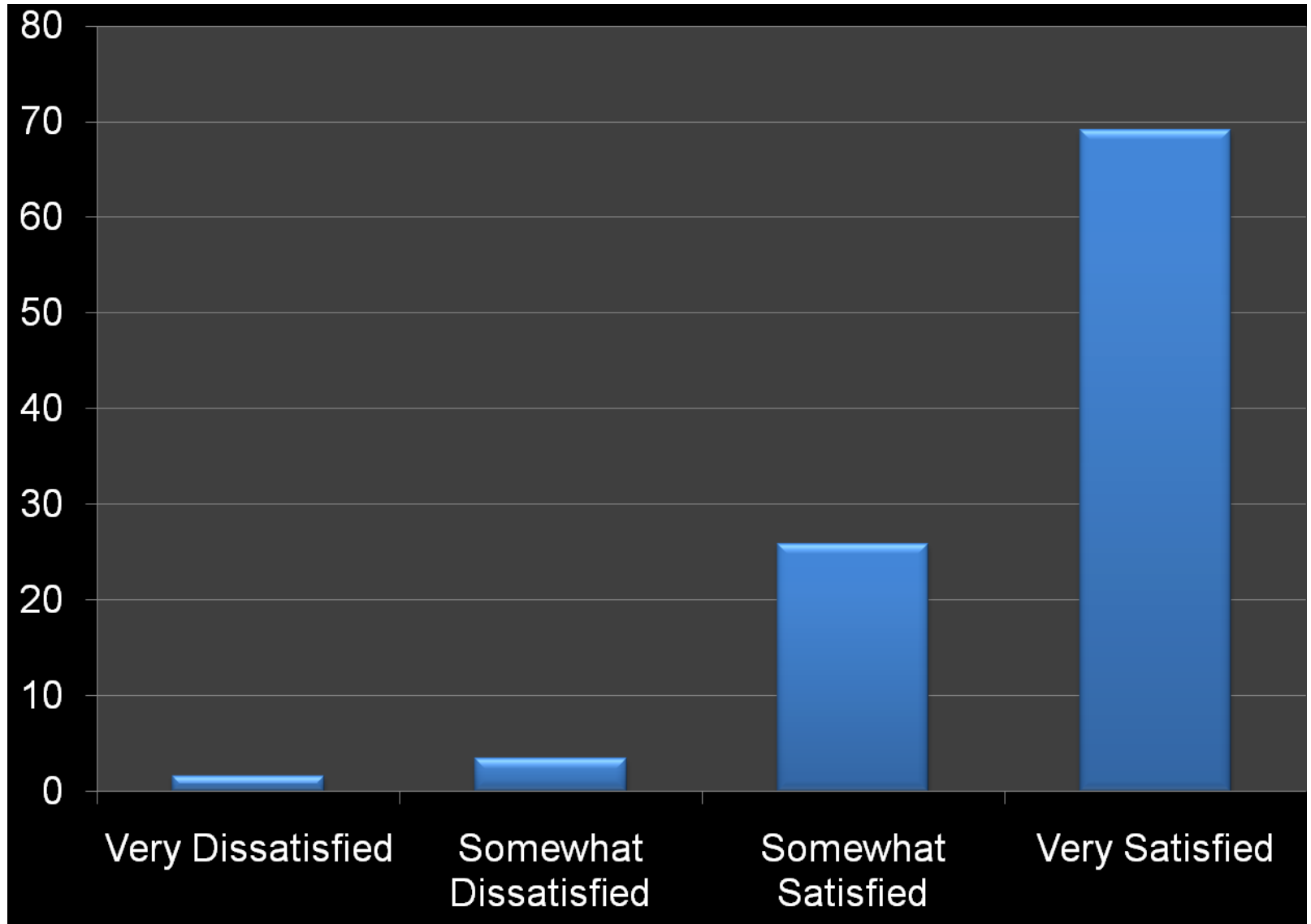
- Never met person did not like
- Always tell truth
- Always win games
- Never bored
- Never get lost
- Never annoyed when people cut in line
- Table manners-home as good as restaurant
- Never lost anything
- Always comfortable despite temperature
- Ok to be taken advantage of

# Psychological Distress

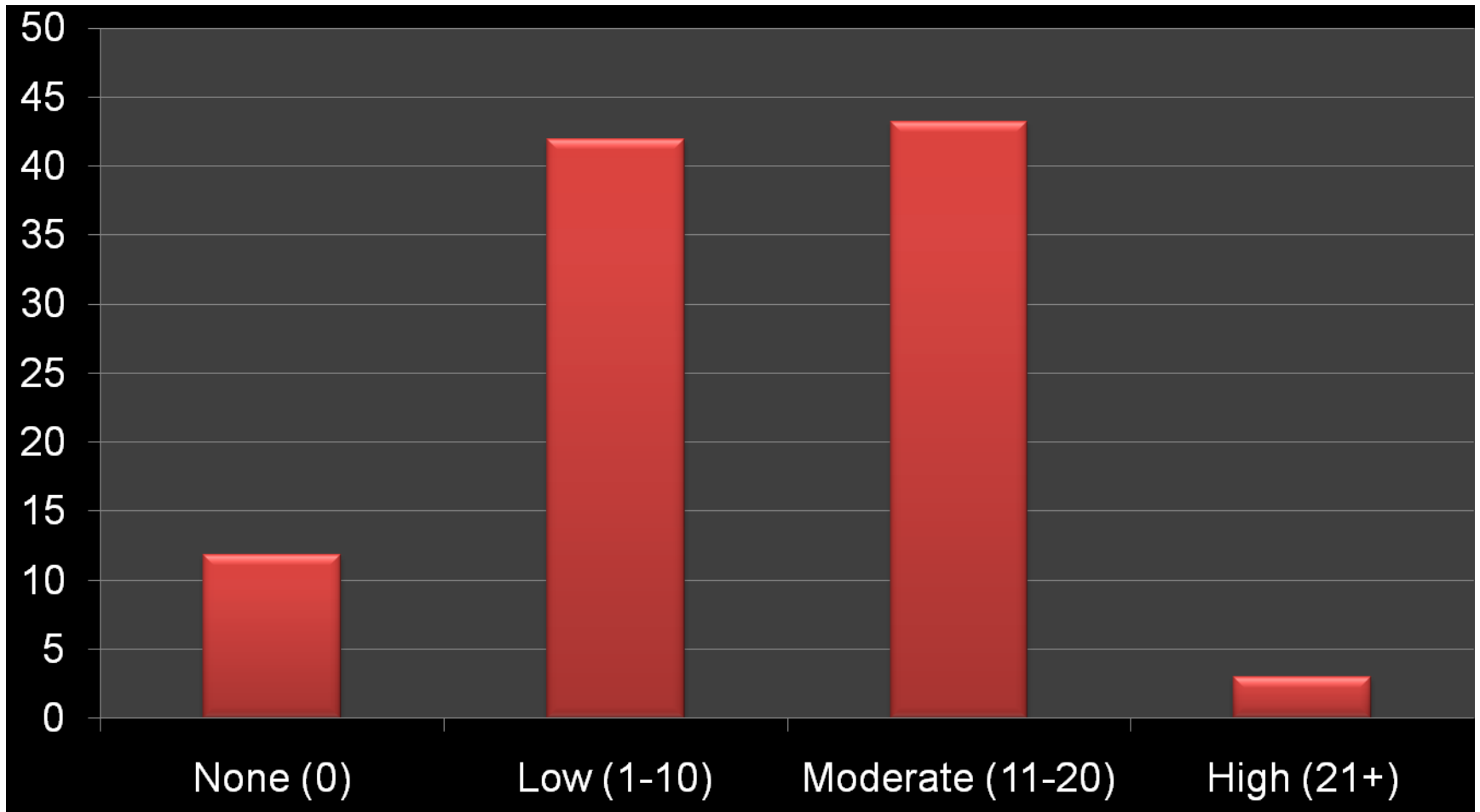




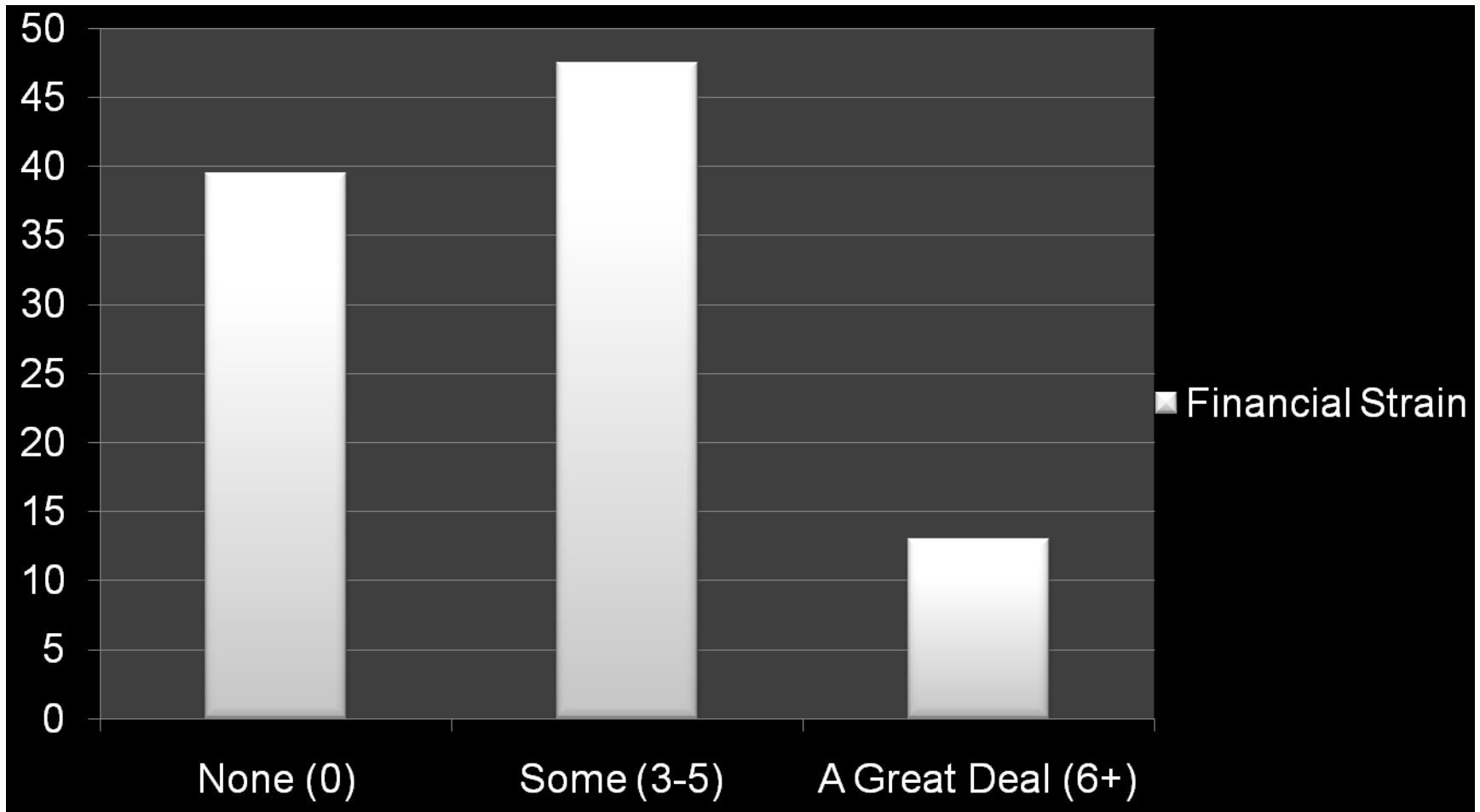
# Marital Satisfaction



# Unfair Treatment



# Financial Strain



# Analyses

- Multivariable linear regression analyses predicting:
  - Marital Satisfaction
  - Psychological Distress
- All analyses weighted and took into account complex survey design characteristics
  - SAS-callable SUDAAN

# Results

- 1. To examine the extent to which financial strain and unfair treatment are associated with marital satisfaction.
- 2. To examine the extent to which financial strain and unfair treatment are associated with psychological distress.
- 3. To investigate whether marital satisfaction moderates the influence of stress on psychological distress.
- 4. To examine the degree to which experiences of unfair treatment exacerbate the impact of financial strain on marital satisfaction and psychological distress.

# Linear Regressions Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Independent Variables	Marital Satisfaction
	<u>b (SE)</u>
Unfair Treatment	-0.01 (0.00)*
Financial Strain	-0.05 (0.02)**
R-Square	0.13

# Results

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# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Independent Variables	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Marital Satisfaction	-0.76 (0.20)***		
Unfair Treatment	0.10 (0.02)***		
Financial Strain	0.64 (0.14)***		
R-Square	0.26		



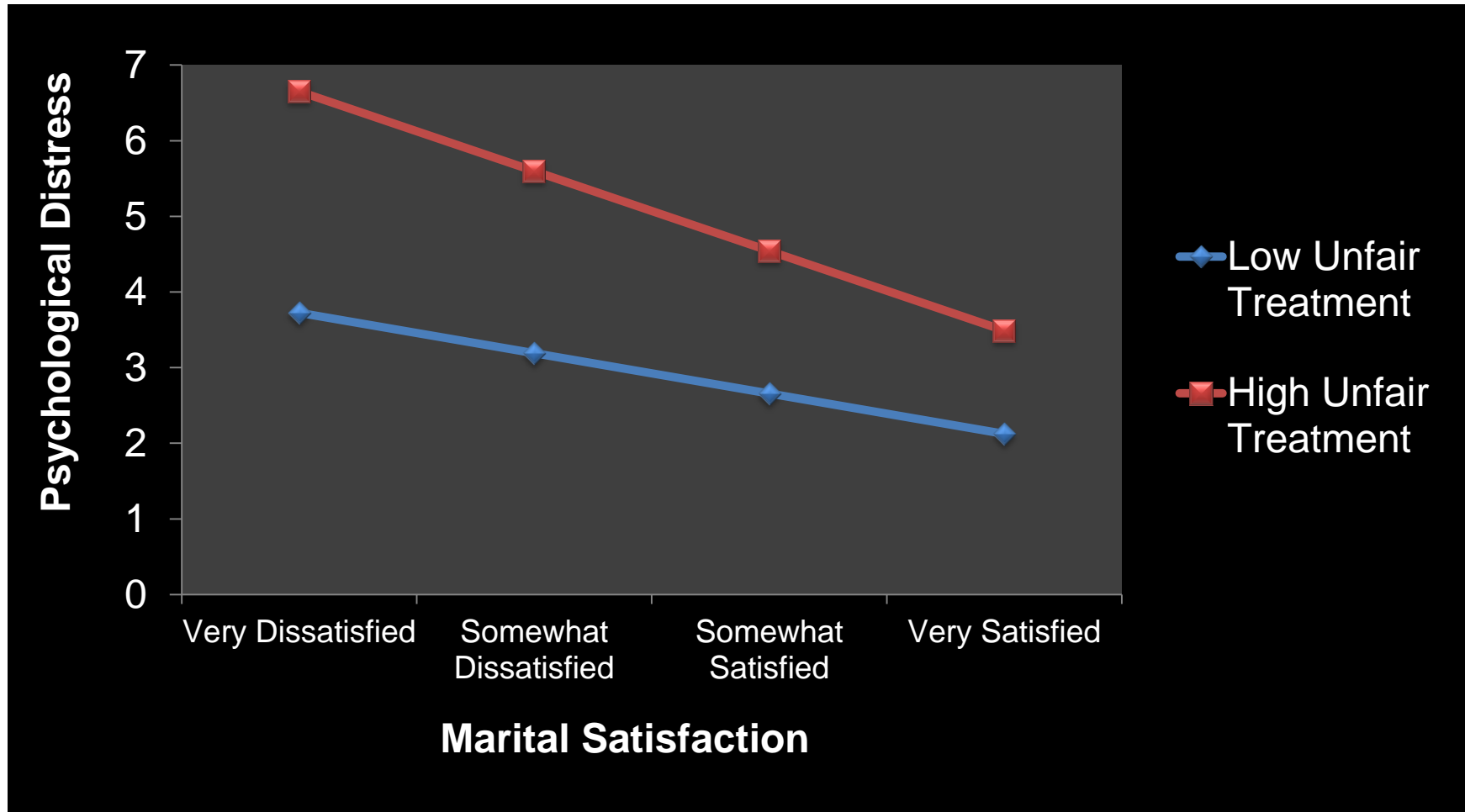
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# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Independent Variables	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Marital Satisfaction	-0.76 (0.20)***	-0.77 (0.19)***	
Unfair Treatment	0.10 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.02)***	
Financial Strain	0.64 (0.14)***	0.65 (0.14)***	
Unfair Treatment x Marital Satisfaction		-0.05 (0.03) <sup>†</sup>	
Financial Strain x Marital Satisfaction		0.22 (0.11)*	
R-Square	0.26	0.26	

# Marital Satisfaction, Unfair Treatment and Psychological Distress



# Marital Satisfaction, Financial Strain and Psychological Distress



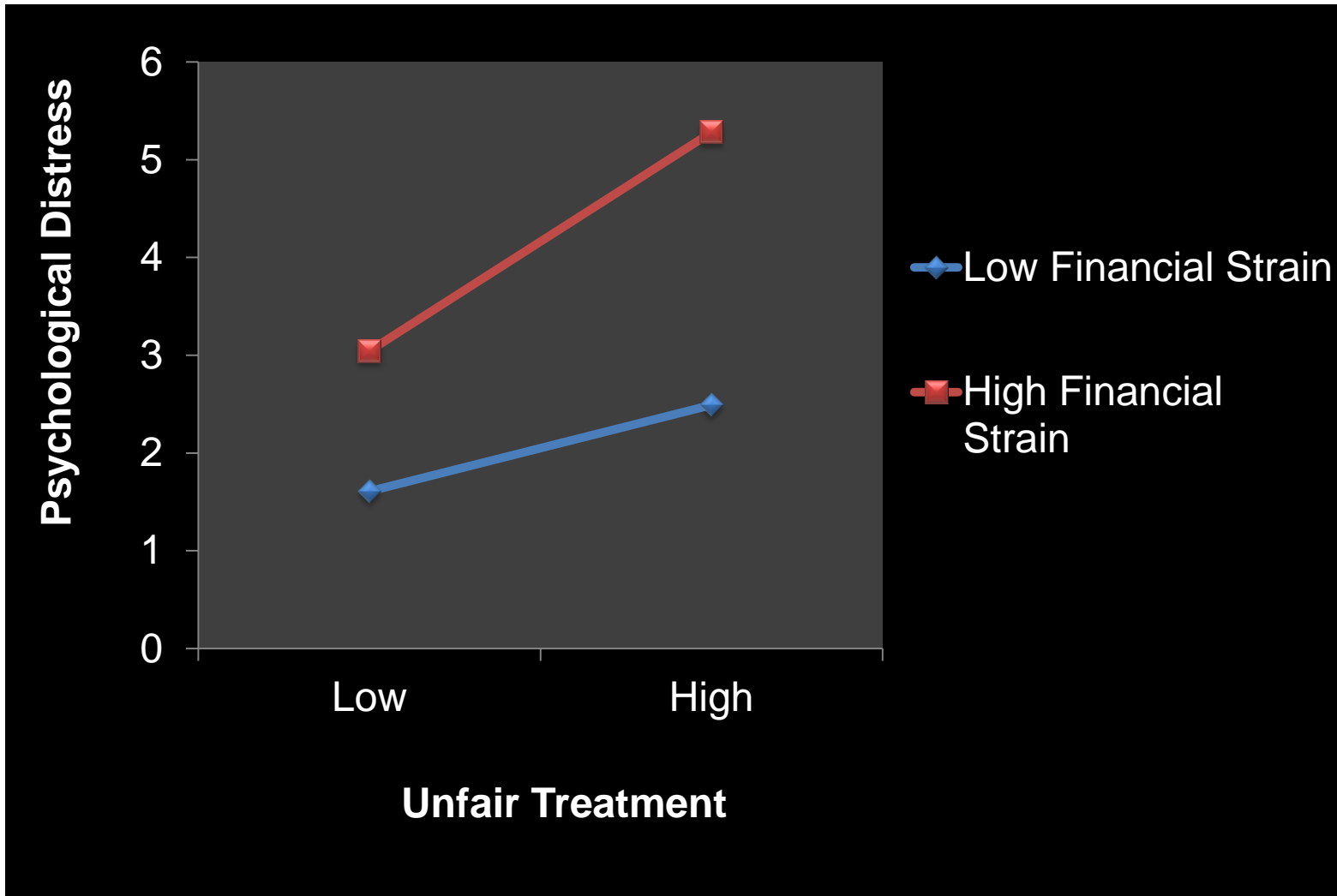
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# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress

Independent Variables	Psychological Distress	Psychological Distress	Psychological Distress
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Marital Satisfaction	-0.76 (0.20)***	-0.77 (0.19)***	-0.79 (0.19)***
Unfair Treatment	0.10 (0.02)***	0.10 (0.02)***	0.09 (0.02)***
Financial Strain	0.64 (0.14)***	0.65 (0.14)***	-0.62 (0.13)***
Unfair Treatment x Marital Satisfaction		-0.05 (0.03)†	-0.03 (0.03)
Financial Strain x Marital Satisfaction		0.22 (0.11)*	
Unfair Treatment x Financial Strain			0.02 (0.01)*
R-Square	0.26	0.26	0.27

# Unfair Treatment, Financial Strain and Psychological Distress



# Study Limitations

- The cross-sectional nature of the data limits our ability to make inferences regarding the causal direction of our associations.
- Findings may not be generalizable to all Black Americans.



# Implications for Policy

- Current policy responses to marriage issues coalesce around the marital dyad and psychological and emotional factors related to the marital relationship.
- Our findings suggest that the broader social context impinges upon the marital relationships and mental health of African Americans.
- High quality marriages have a protective effect but, marriage alone is insufficient for ensuring and maintaining well-being among African American couples.

# Implications for Policy

- African American couples can benefit from initiatives that focus on developing financial literacy and management skills.
- Marital counseling services aimed at increasing the financial knowledge and skills of couples may be helpful in addressing the various financial demands experienced by couples.

# Implications for Policy

- It is important to examine how current labor market trends and employment issues influence the context in which marriages occur.
- Greater enforcement of existing anti-discrimination policies to improve the quality of relationships among African Americans and to ameliorate poor mental health outcomes is needed.

Thank You

# Linear Regression Predicting Marital Satisfaction: Significant Covariates

Independent Variables	Marital Satisfaction
	<u>b (SE)</u>
Gender Women vs. Men	-0.25 (0.05) ***
Education 12 years vs.<12 years	0.00 (0.06)
13-15 years vs. < 12 years	-0.01 (0.06)
16+ years vs. < 12 years	-0.20 (0.09)*

# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress: Significant Covariates

Independent Variables	Model 1
	b (SE)
Education	
12 years vs. <12 years	-0.66 (0.31)*
13-15 years vs. < 12 years	-0.54 (0.42)
16+ years vs. < 12 years	-1.15 (0.39) **

# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress

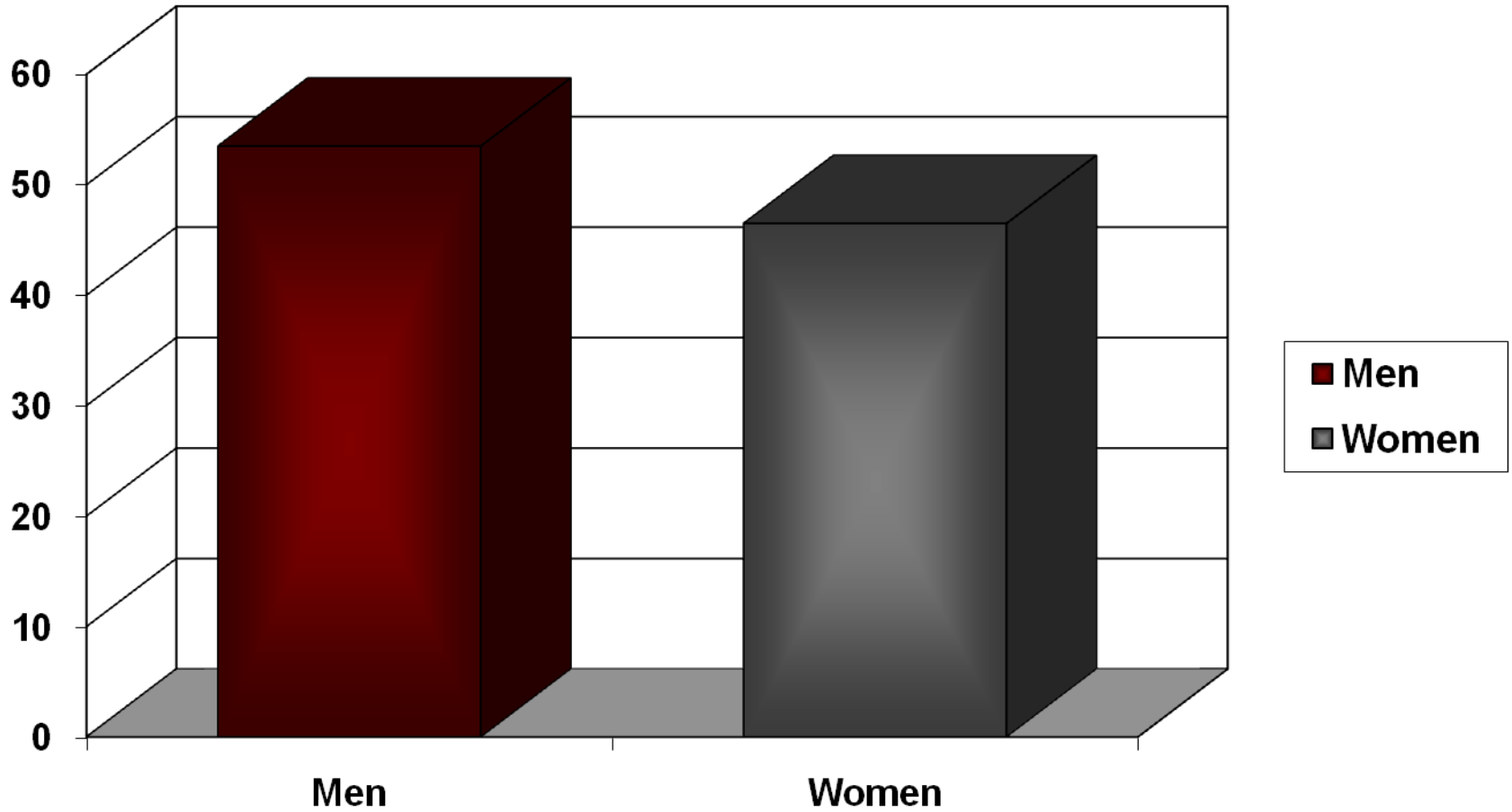
		Model 2
Independent Variables		b (SE)
Education		
12 years vs. <12 years		-0.62 (0.32)
13-15 years vs. < 12 years		-0.51 (0.43)
16+ years vs. < 12 years		-1.15 (0.40) **

# Linear Regressions Predicting Psychological Distress

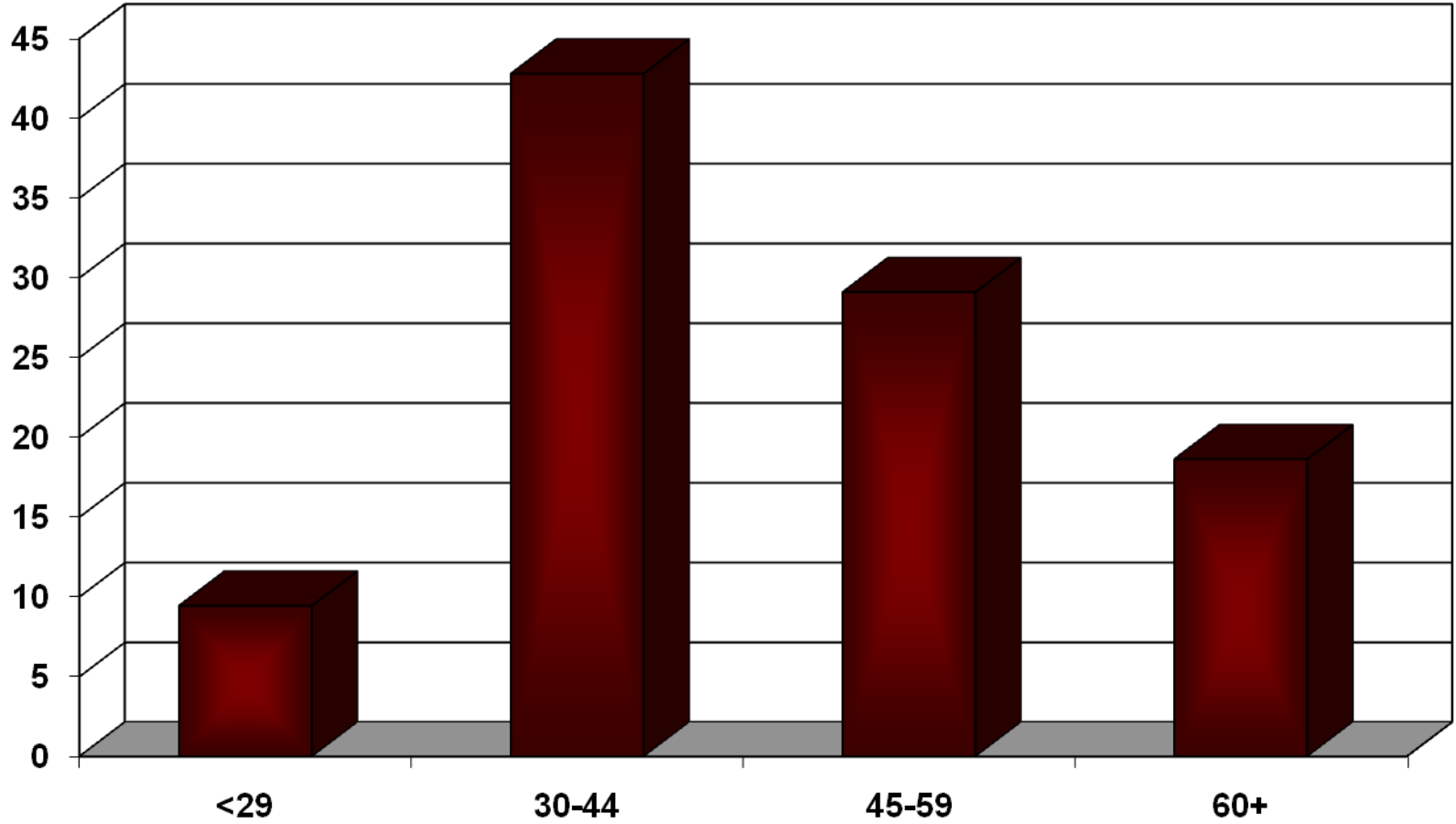
Model 3	
Independent Variables	b (SE)
Education	
12 years vs. <12 years	-0.71 (0.32) *
13-15 years vs. < 12 years	-0.55 (0.42)
16+ years vs. < 12 years	-1.20 (0.42) **
Work Status	
Not Working vs. Working	0.69 (0.45)
Our of Labor Force vs. Working	0.93 (0.46) *



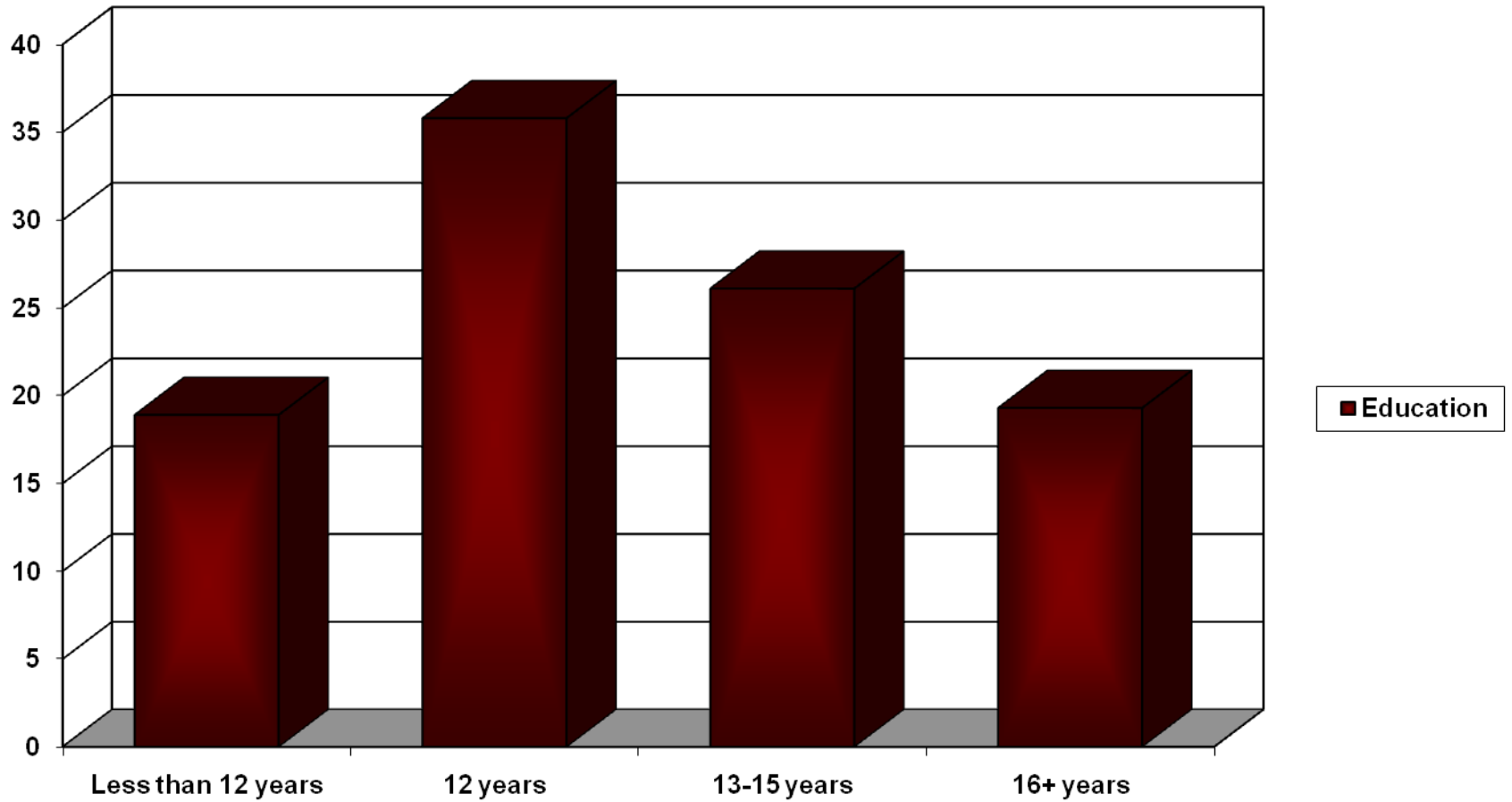
# Gender



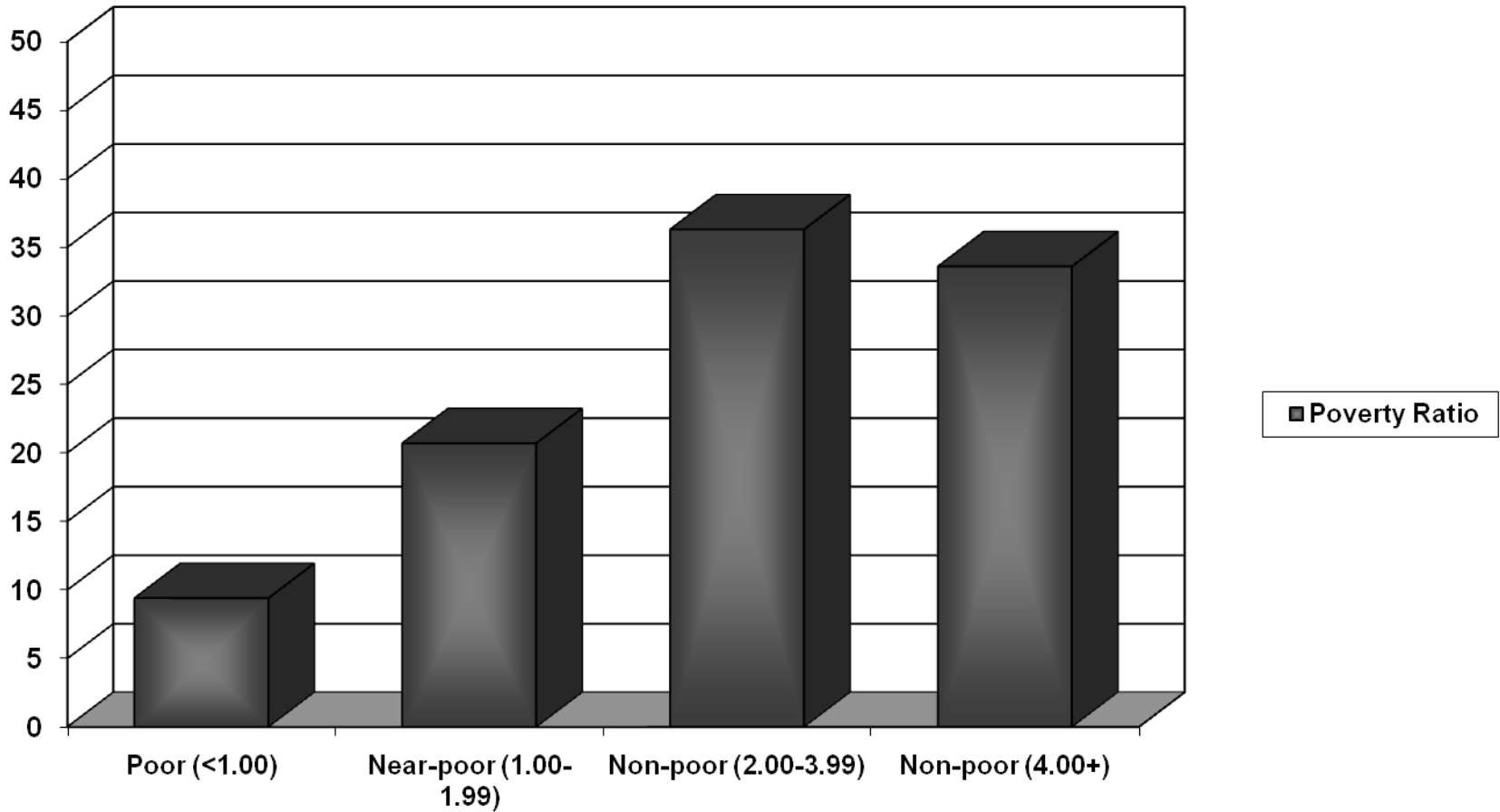
# Age



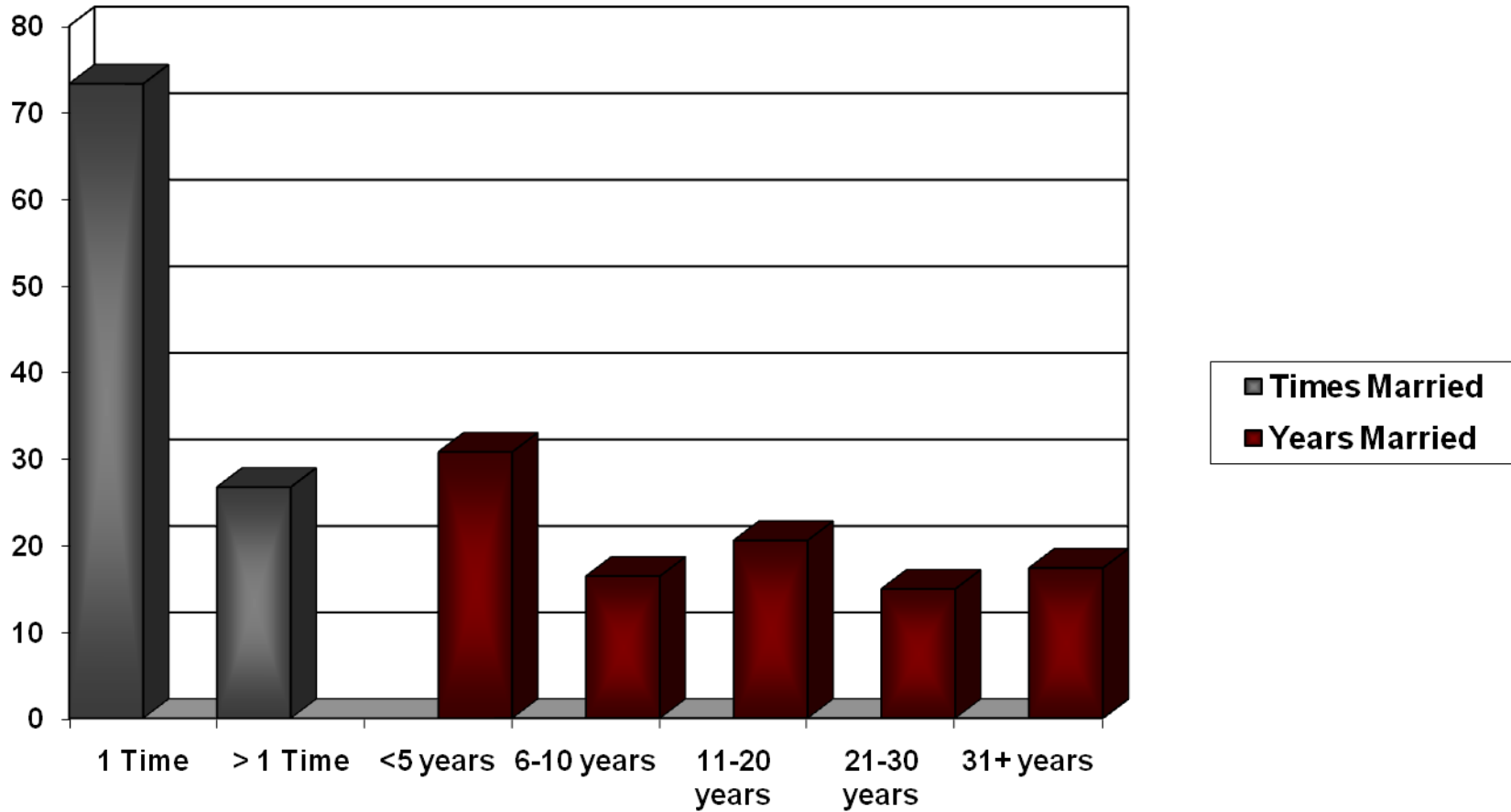
# Education



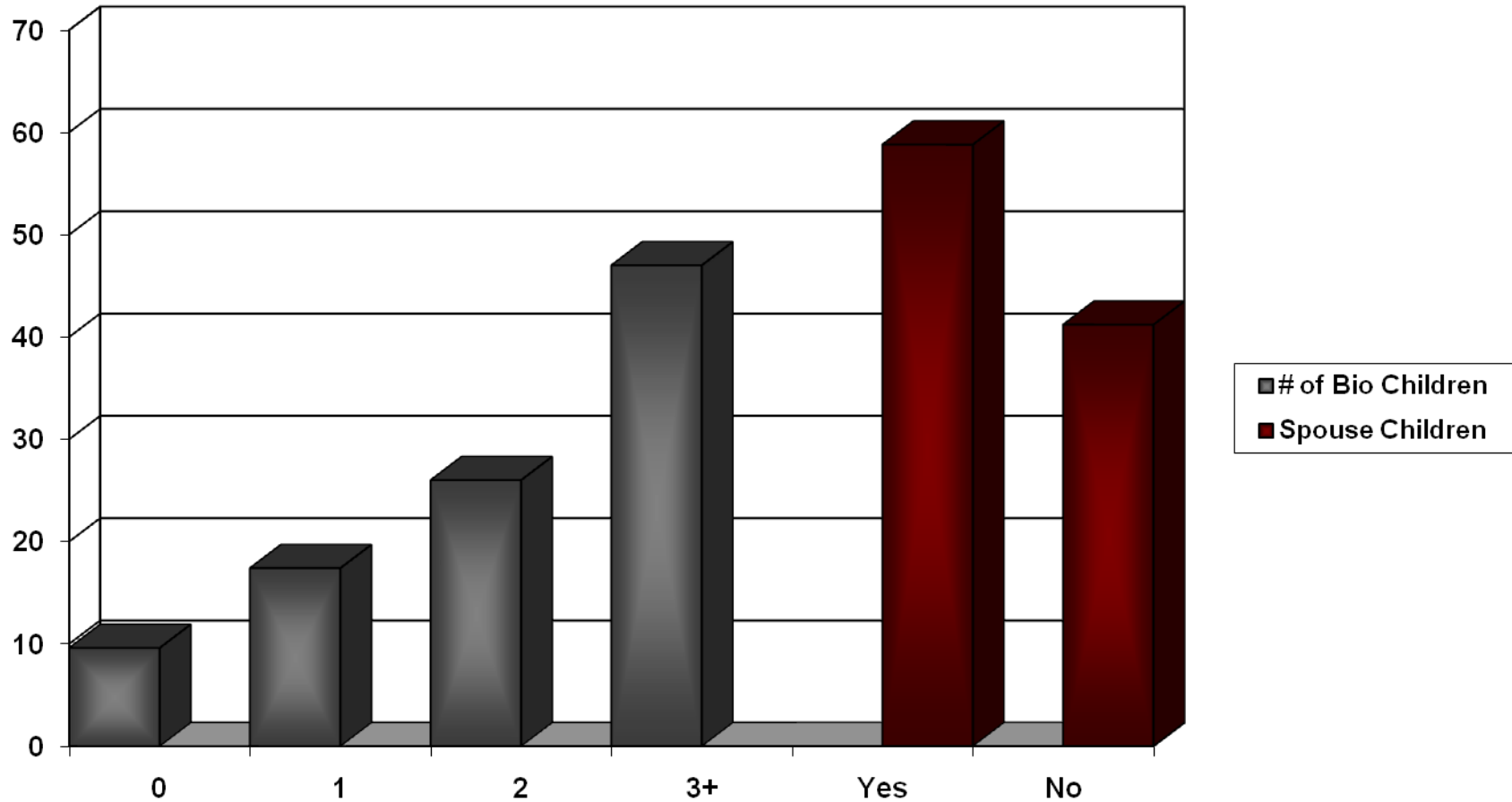
# Poverty



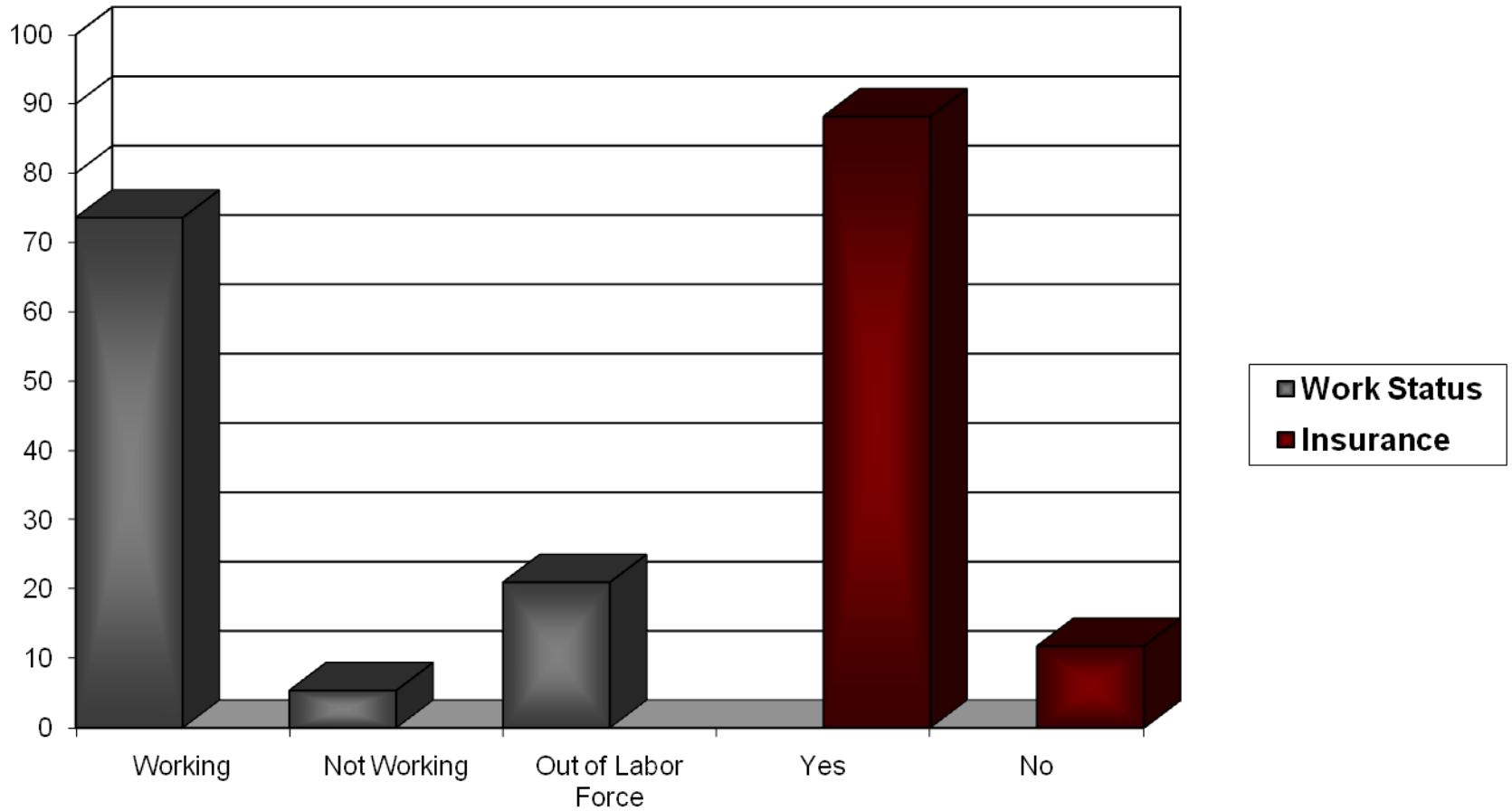
# # of Times Married & # of Years Married



# # of Bio Children & # of Spouse Children



# Work & Insurance Status



# Region

