

Educational Characteristics of Prisoners: Data from the ACS

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Why Care about Prisoner Educational Attainment?

- Dramatic growth in size of prison population
 - Disproportionately male, black, poorly educated
 - Little current data on prisoner characteristics
 - Educational attainment associated with numerous sociodemographic outcomes
- Use 2009 American Community Survey (ACS) data
 - New and current data source
 - Includes individuals in households and adult correctional facilities

Wide-Ranging Research Agendas Related to Prisoners and Education

- Association between low education and incarceration (Lochner and Moretti 2004; Harlow 2003)
- Measurement of population characteristics and racial inequality (Western and Pettit 2005; Heckman and LaFontaine 2010)
- Link between enrollment in prison education programs and low recidivism rates (Klein et al. 2004; Coley and Barton 2006)

American Community Survey (ACS)

- Population Universe: U.S. domestic population with an address
- Annual Survey: Data are collected monthly, and released annually
- Large sample size (over 48,000 prisoners)
 - 27,200 state prisoners
 - 3,900 federal prisoners
- Provides detailed demographic, social, and economic estimates for household and group quarters population

Bureau of Justice Statistics Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities (SISFCF)

- Population universe: inmates in state and federal correctional facilities
- Periodic: 2004 is most recent
- Small sample size
 - 14,500 state prisoners
 - 3,700 federal prisoners
- Detailed questionnaire

Methods – Comparison Groups

- SISCf – State Correctional Population
- ACS Adult Correctional Population
 - Total (federal detention centers, federal prisons, state prisons, local jails, correctional residential facilities, military disciplinary barracks and jails)
- ACS Household Population
 - Adults (18 and over) living in households
- ACS At Risk Household Population
 - Adults who are unemployed or not in the labor force
 - Adults with a personal income less than \$14,000/year

Characteristics

- Race/ethnicity: non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, non-Hispanic Other, Hispanic
- Male/female
- Age group: 18-24, 25-44, 45+
- Educational attainment: less than high school diploma; high school diploma; GED; some college or more
- Educational enrollment: dichotomous variable for enrollment in last 3 months

Comparison of Educational Attainment Questions

ACS

- “What is the highest grade of school...has completed, or the highest degree... has received?”

SISCF

- “Before your admissions, what was the highest grade of school that you ever attended?”
- “Did you complete that year?”

Comparison of Enrollment Questions

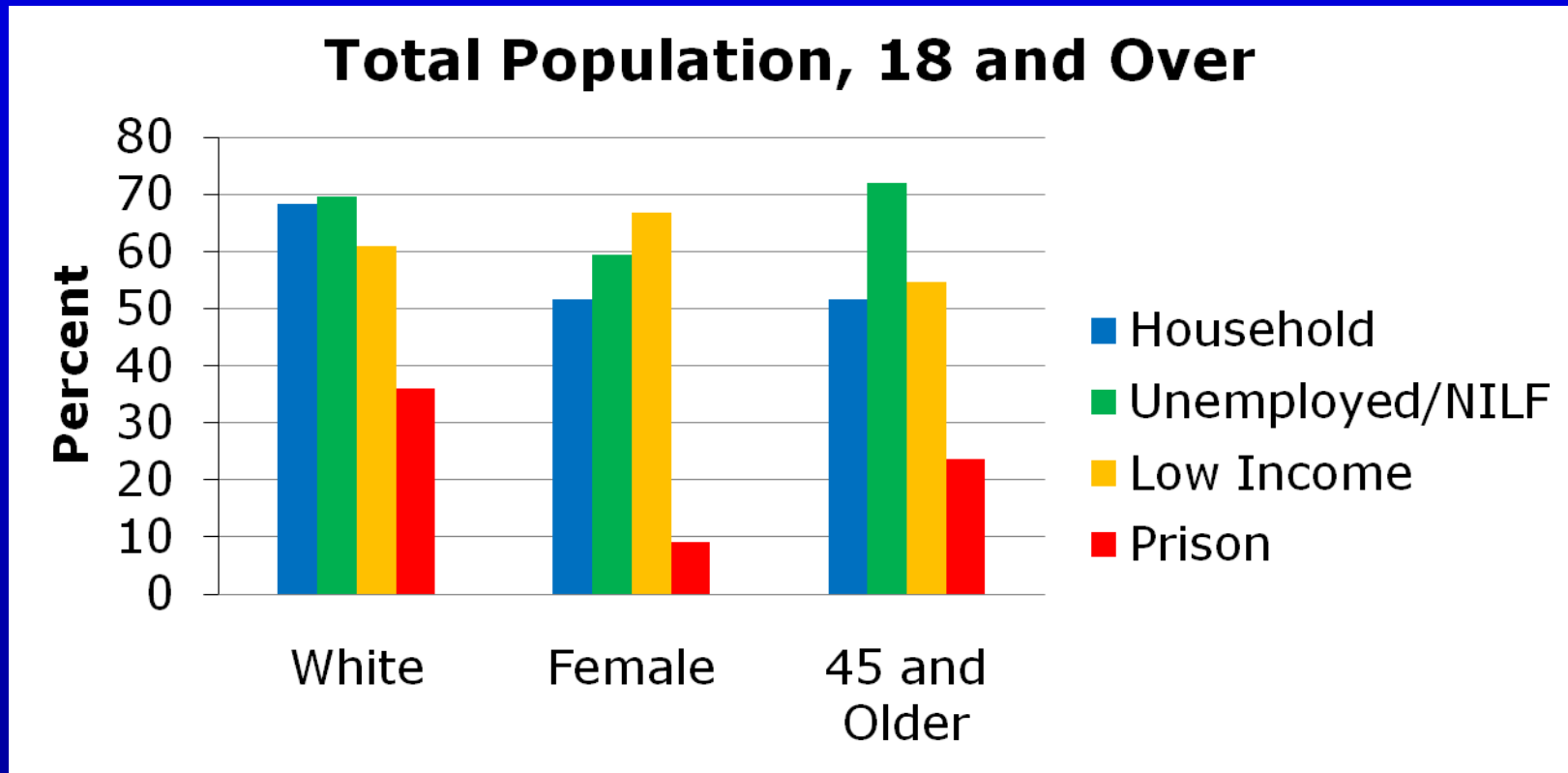
ACS

- “At any time in the last 3 months, has...attended school or college? Include ... [that] which leads to a high school diploma or a college degree.”
- “What grade or level was...attending?”

SISCF

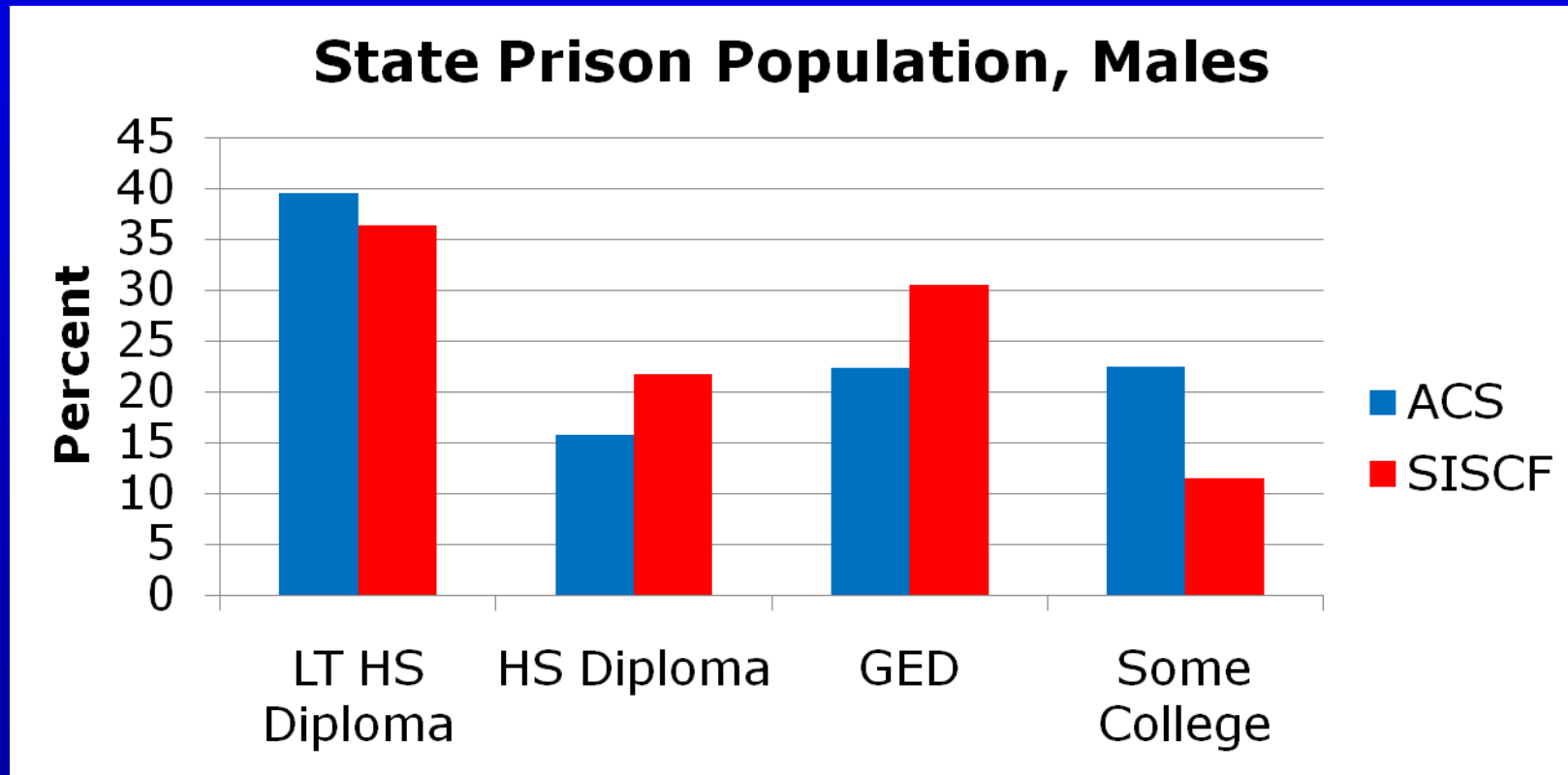
- “Since your admission, have you ever been in any other education program? Exclude vocational training.”
- “What kind of program was that...?”

Whites, Females, and Older Adults Underrepresented in Prisons



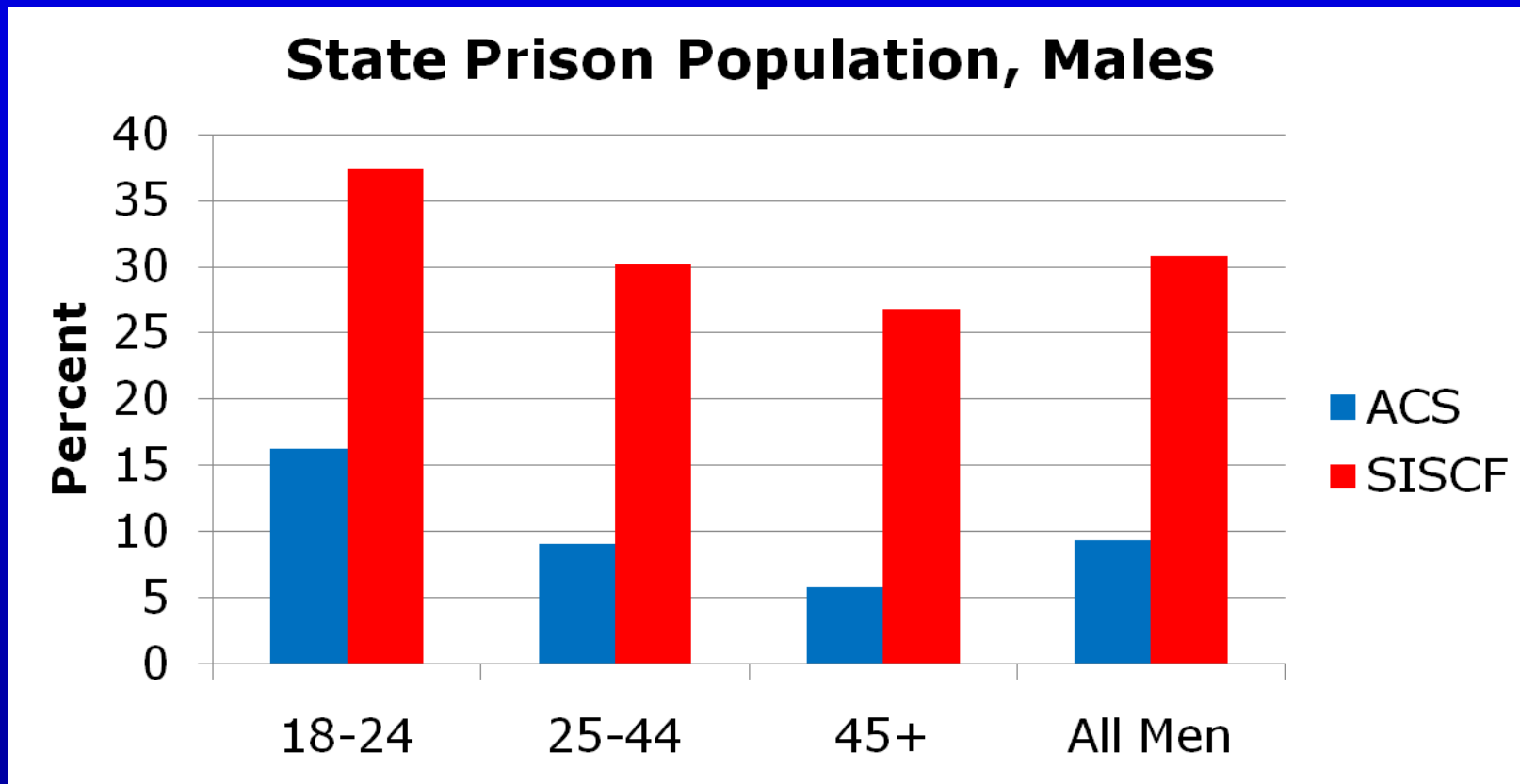
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

ACS and SISCf: Prisoners have high rates of HS non-completion



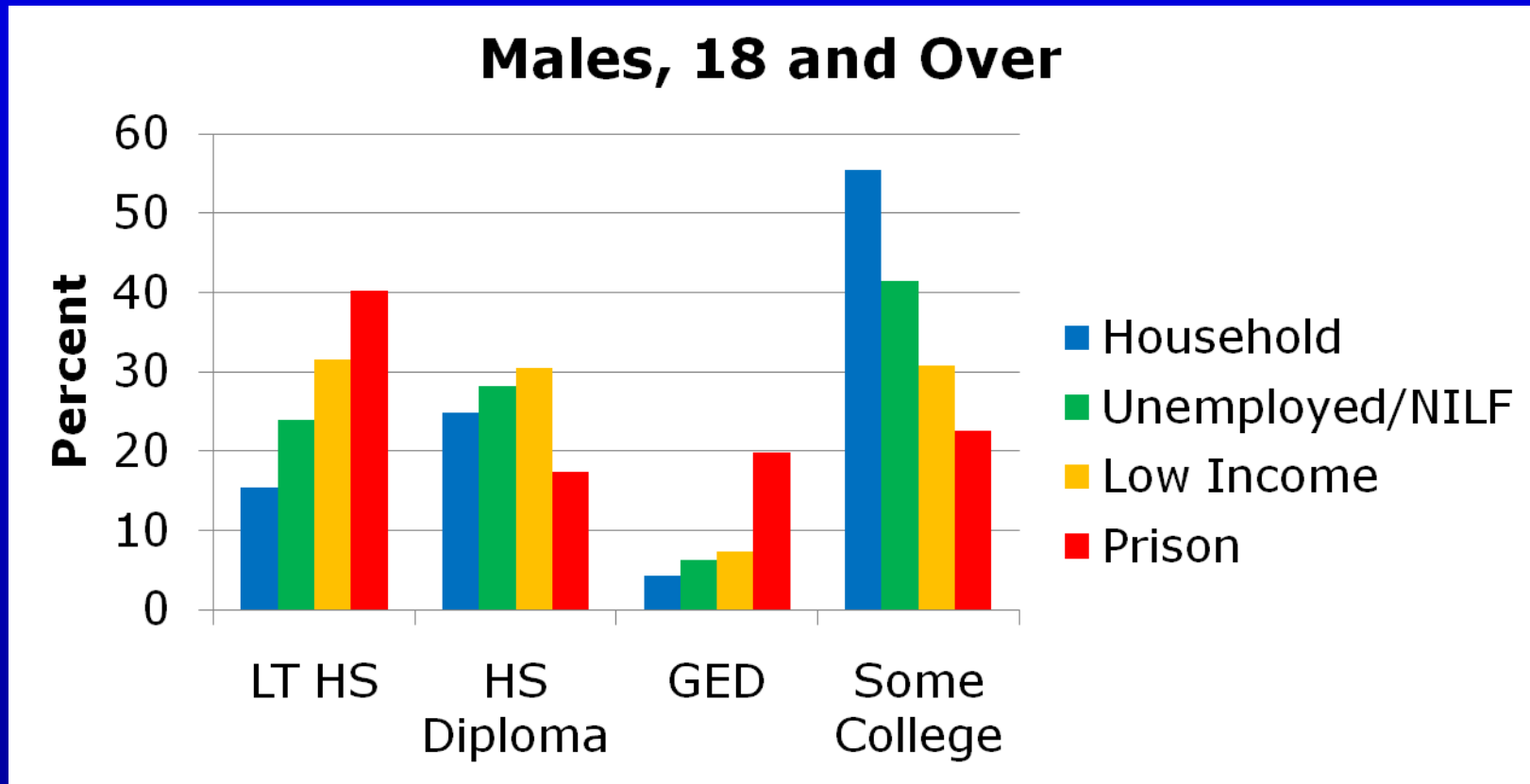
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009; Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 2004

SISCF shows higher rates of enrollment



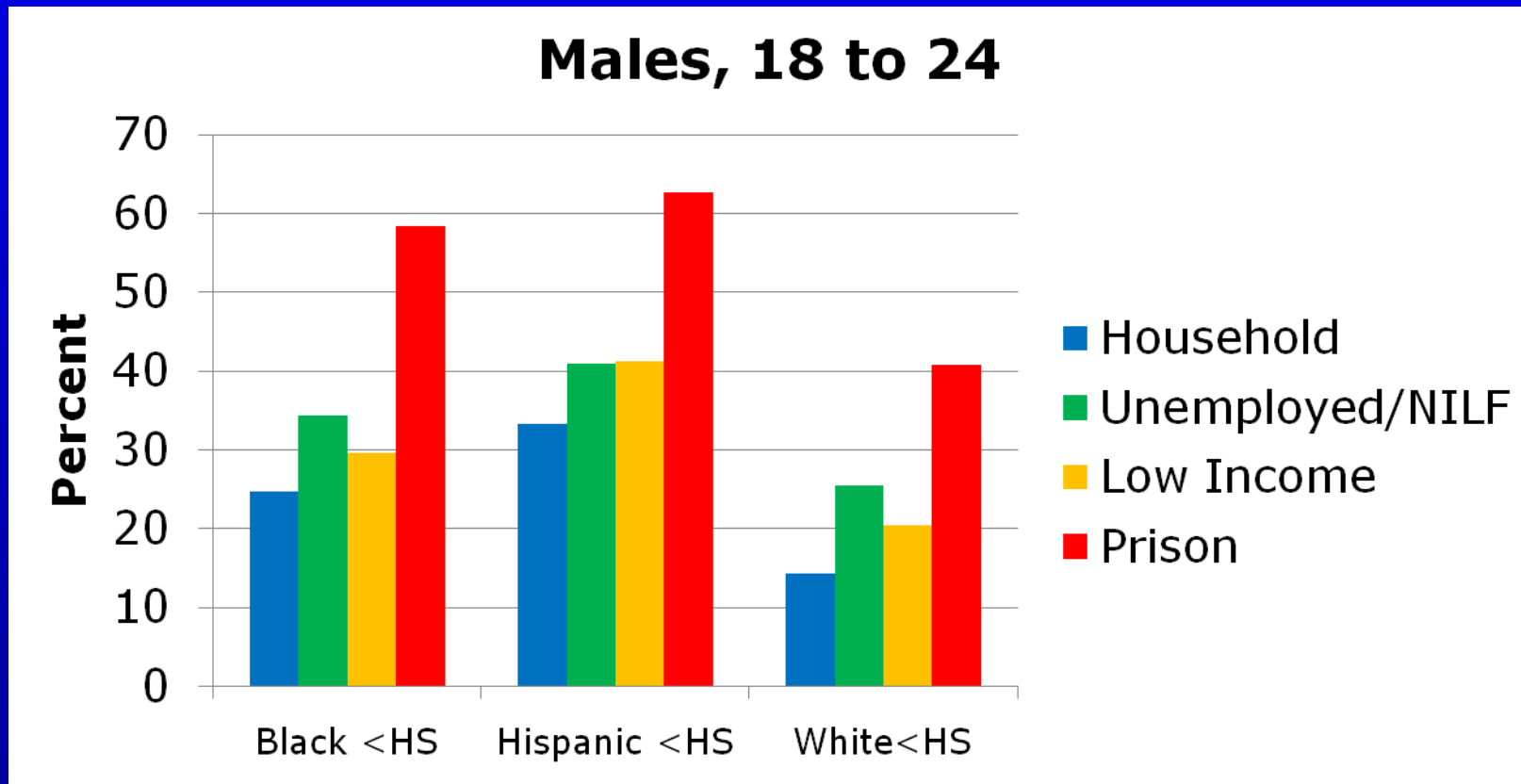
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009; Bureau of Justice Statistics, Survey of Inmates in State Correctional Facilities, 2004

Prisoners: More likely to drop out of high school/get GED



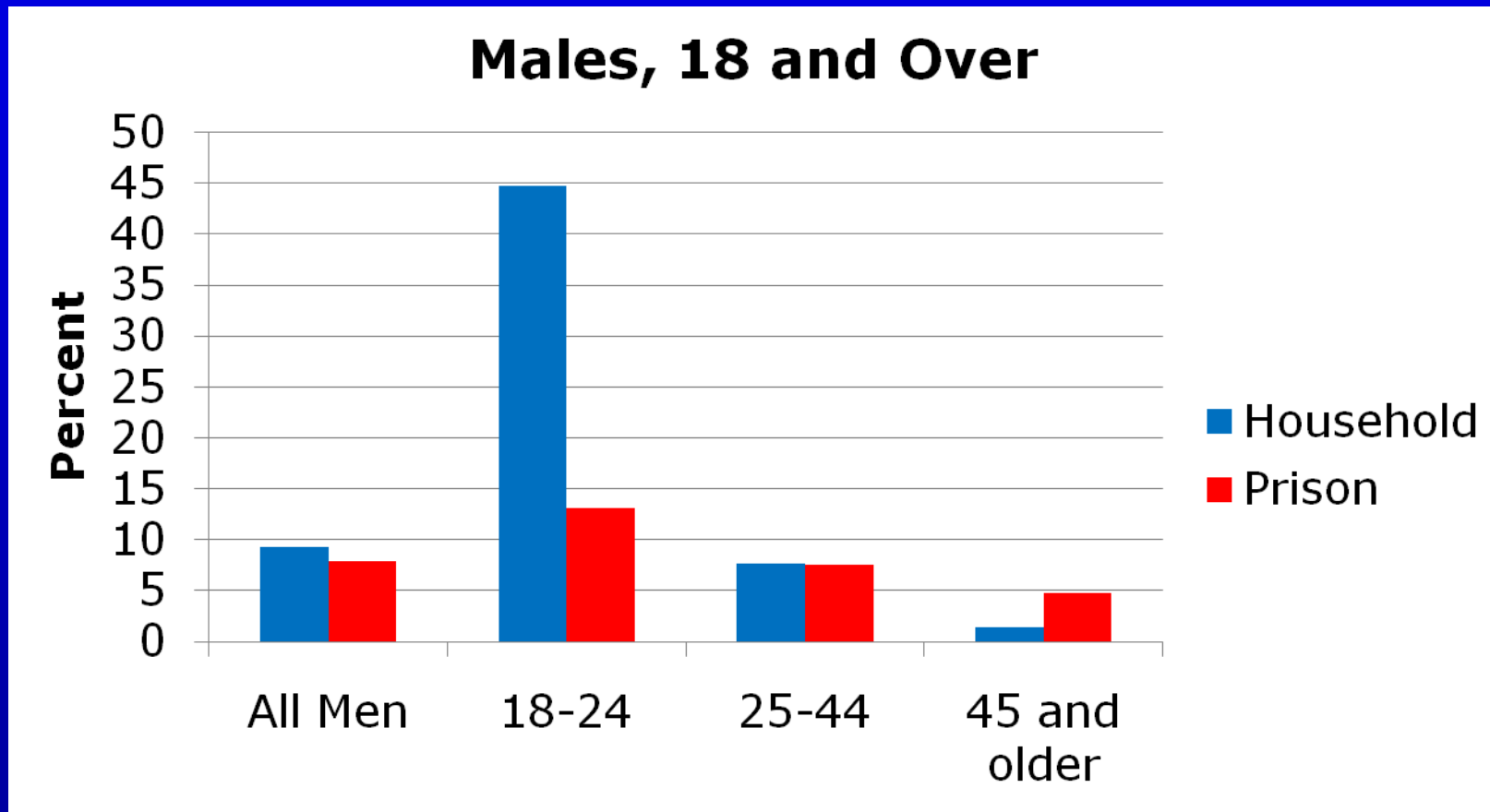
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Across races, prisoners more likely to drop out of high school



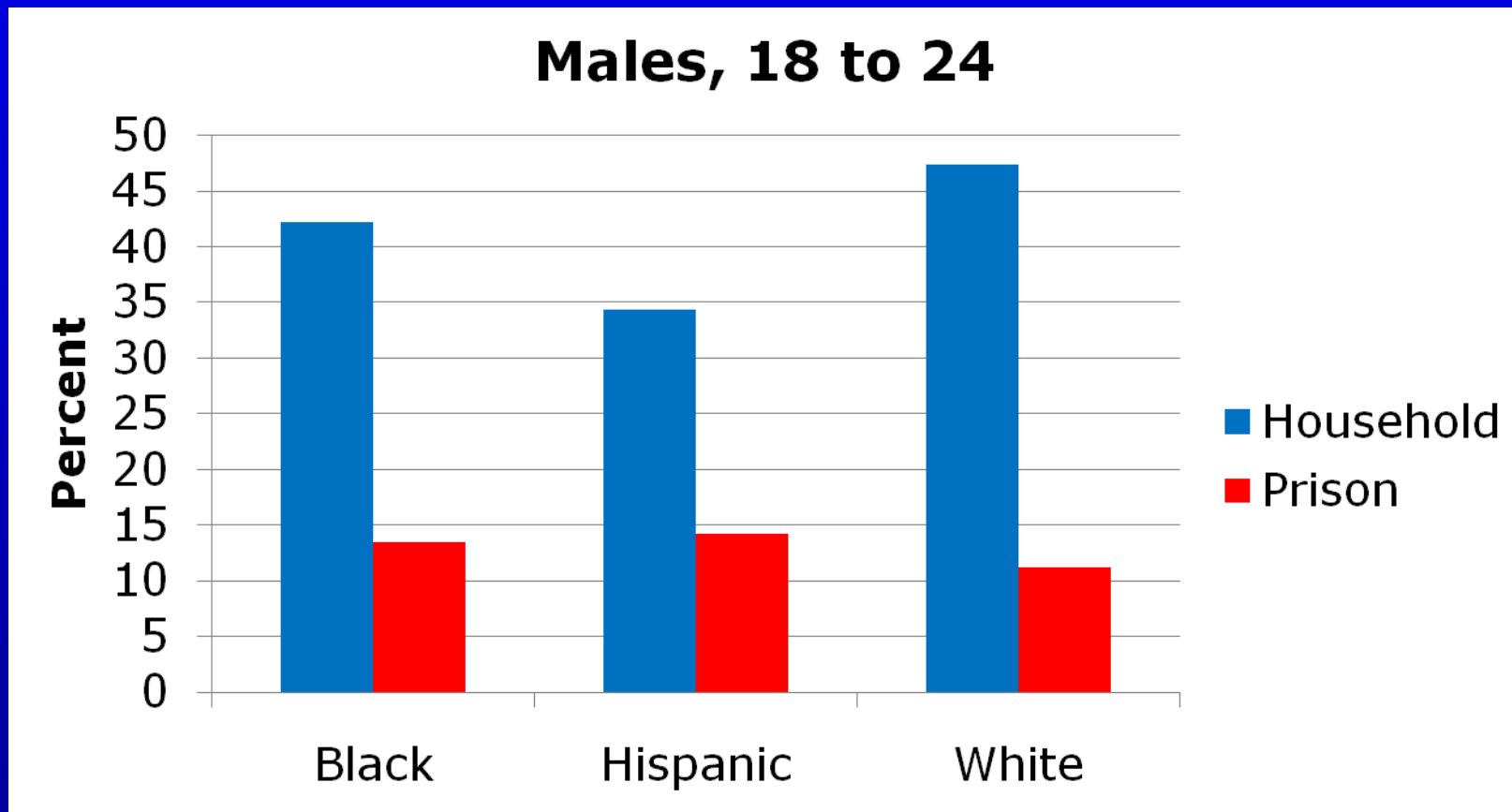
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Differences in enrollment vary by age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Among prisoners, whites least likely to be enrolled



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

Educational characteristics of female prisoners similar to patterns for males

- Compared to women living in households:
 - Female prisoners have lower levels of attainment
 - Young women in prison are less likely to be enrolled; women aged 45+ are more likely to be enrolled
- Compared to male prisoners:
 - Female prisoners have higher levels of educational attainment

Educational characteristics differ by prison status

- Prisoners, on average, have lower levels of educational attainment
 - More likely to drop out of HS, and more likely to have GED as highest level of attainment
- Overall, prisoners are less likely to be enrolled in a program leading to a degree than their counterparts in households
 - Relationship varies by age; among persons 45 and older, prisoners are more likely to be enrolled in school

Prisoners' educational characteristics vary by race

- Among all race groups, prisoners drop out of high school at a faster rate than persons living in households
 - Whites experience the largest percent increase in HS dropout rate
- Difference in enrollment rates is smallest for Hispanics
- Among prisoners, whites are least likely to be enrolled

Using the ACS to examine the characteristics of the prison population

- The ACS is uniquely suited for analyzing the characteristics of the population living in group quarters
 - Data provided annually, so characteristics can be tracked regularly
 - Large sample size allows for analyses of subgroups within prison population
 - Inclusion of household and group quarters populations in the same survey enables comparisons

What's available to the Public

- American Fact Finder Tables
 - National Level: Social/Economic/Demographic characteristics for adult correctional population
 - Sub-national Level: Social/Economic/Demographic characteristics for institutional population
- PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample)
 - Smaller sample than internal microdata sample (approximately 66% of the total sample included in PUMS)
 - Only GQ variable available collapses GQ types into two broad categories: Institutionalized and Noninstitutionalized

Options for accessing internal data

- U.S. Census Bureau's Research Data Centers (RDCs)
 - External users can apply to gain access to restricted data through an RDC
 - <http://www.ces.census.gov/index.php/ces/researchprogram>
- Collaborate with Census Bureau employees

Please contact us with additional comments or questions

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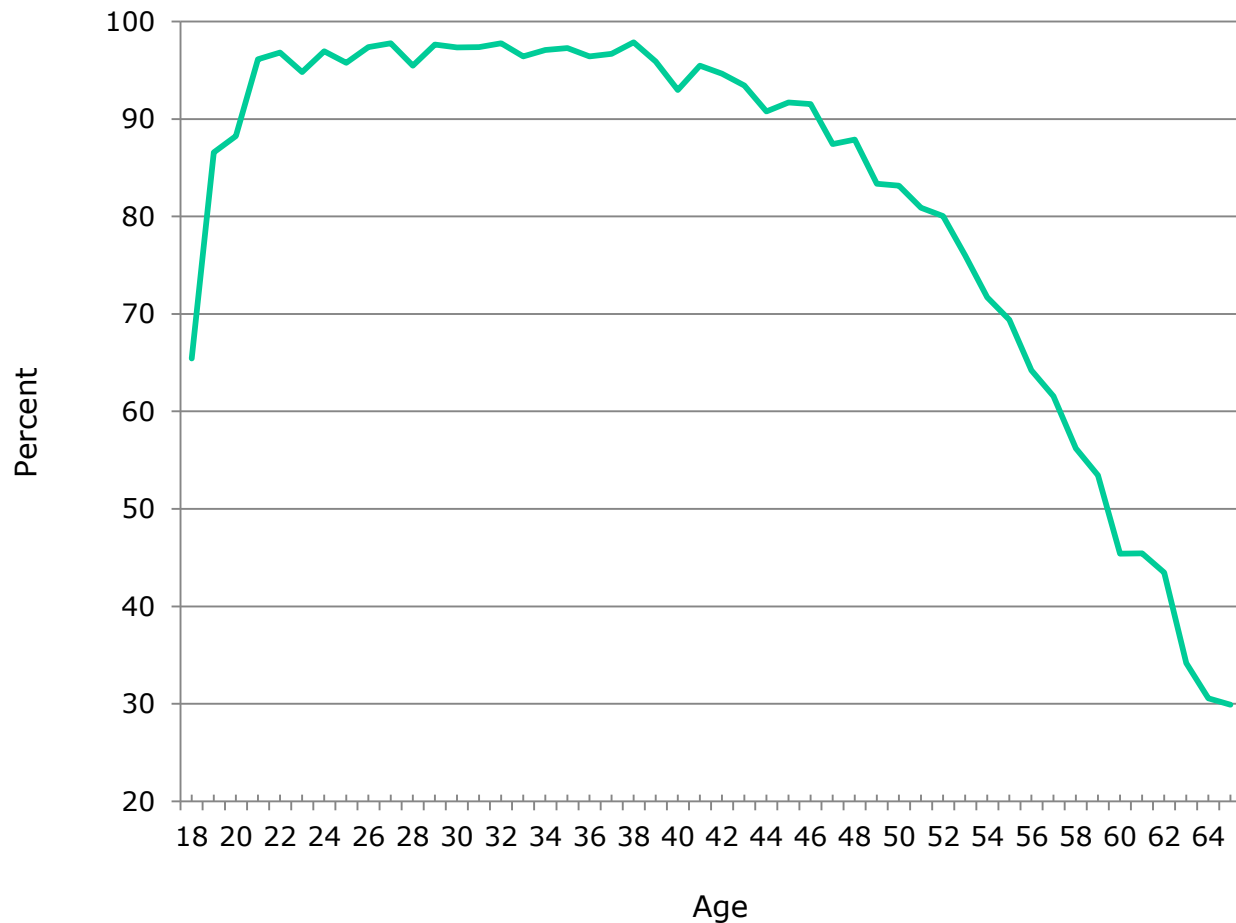
Appendices

Percent institutionalized by facility type

Institutionalized Adult Men Age 18-55: 2009 ACS

	N	%
Adult correctional facilities	1,839,312	92.45
Juvenile facilities	17,737	0.89
Nursing facilities	81,163	4.08
Other health care facilities	51,239	2.58

Percent Institutionalized Men in Adult Correctional Facilities by Age: ACS 2009



Comparison of analyses for men in institutions and correctional facilities, age 21 to 45

	Correctional Facilities		Institutionalized		Difference	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Age 21 to 45						
Attainment						
Less than high school	570,866	40.52	593,028	40.43	22,162	-0.09
High school diploma	241,963	17.17	258,893	17.65	16,930	0.48
GED	297,864	21.14	301,729	20.57	3,865	-0.57
Some college or higher	298,155	21.16	313,190	21.35	15,035	0.19
Enrollment						
Not enrolled	1,295,403	91.95	1,350,470	92.07	55,067	0.12
Enrolled	113,445	8.05	116,370	7.93	2,925	-0.12