



# Economically Disconnected Families Involved with Child Welfare Services in Washington State

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## Background

The initial report from the Washington Statewide Survey of Child Welfare Involved Parents (hereafter referred to as the Parent Survey), documented the economic distress of primary caregivers who are involved with the child welfare system (Marcenko, Lyons, & Courtney, 2011; Marcenko, Newby, Lee, Courtney, & Brennan, 2009). This report seeks to further our understanding of the economic condition of caregivers and their engagement with the child welfare services by focusing attention on economically disconnected families. This is an important focus because evidence suggests that parents' economic connection is related to case outcomes. Families who lose welfare after the child is removed have a lower rate of reunification (Kortenkamp, Geen, & Stagner, 2004). In this report, we quantify the extent of economic disconnection among child welfare involved families, document the characteristics and needs of this group, and examine the impact of disconnection on parents' engagement with child welfare services.

There is a growing body of research studying families who are economically disconnected. That is, families who "are disconnected from the labor market and government cash assistance programs" (Acs & Loprest, 2004). Much of this research has grown out of efforts to understand the experiences of families after welfare reform in 1996. Thus, efforts to understand economic disconnection have focused on two main populations: welfare leavers and low-income single mothers (Blank & Kovak, 2007; Blank, 2007; Loprest, 2003; Ovwigho, Kolupanowich, & Born, 2009; Rangarajan & Wood, 2000; Turner, Danziger, & Seefeldt, 2006). There has been very little research on economic disconnection among child welfare involved parents (for exception, see Kortenkamp et al., 2004).

In studies of welfare leavers and low-income single mothers, estimates of disconnection range between 13 and 25% (depending on the data source, measure used, and population being studied). Economic connection is generally defined as employment or a partner's employment (employment-connected) or as receipt of cash benefits from TANF or SSI (benefit-connected) (Loprest, 2003; Ovwigho et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2006; Wood & Rangarajan, 2003). Unemployment Insurance is also considered when data are available, as well as household income and duration of unemployment (Turner et al., 2006; Wood & Rangarajan, 2003; Zedlewski, Nelson, Edin, Koball, Pomper, & Roberts, 2003).

Research on the characteristics of disconnected families and risk factors for disconnection highlight barriers to both employment and benefit receipt. Disconnected families generally have greater barriers to employment including having a learning disability, a physical or mental health limitation, an ill or disabled family member to care for, a drug or alcohol problem, no child care, no transportation, no car or drivers license, or an inability to find a job (Acs & Loprest, 2004; Blank, 2007; Turner et al., 2006; Zedlewski et al. 2003). Disconnected families also experience barriers to benefit receipt. Many are disconnected because of sanctions, because TANF is a "hassle" or because of personal pride (Acs & Loprest, 2004; Wood & Rangarajan, 2003; Zedlewski et al. 2003). Some seemingly disconnected caregivers earn income in the secondary economy, which is not captured by administrative data (Cleaveland, 2007).

Overall, these studies highlight the role that employment difficulties and welfare sanctions play in initiat-

ing spells of economic disconnection. In the case of child welfare involved families, placement of children in out-of-home care may precipitate disconnection. Unless a TANF waiver is granted and placement is expected to be less than 180 days, parents lose their eligibility for TANF.

## Methods

### Data

This report includes 806 caregivers, ages 18 to 65, who were interviewed in the Parent Survey. The Parent Survey conducted face-to-face interviews with primary caregivers who had a child welfare case opened for in-home or out-of-home services in the past 30 to 120 days (as of July 1, 2008). The child welfare agency's administrative database was used to select the sample. Interviews were conducted between July and December 2008. Full details about the study are available in previous reports (Marcenko et al., 2011; Marcenko et al., 2009). See Table 1 (page 10) for a summary of demographic characteristics of the sample.

### Measuring Economic Disconnection

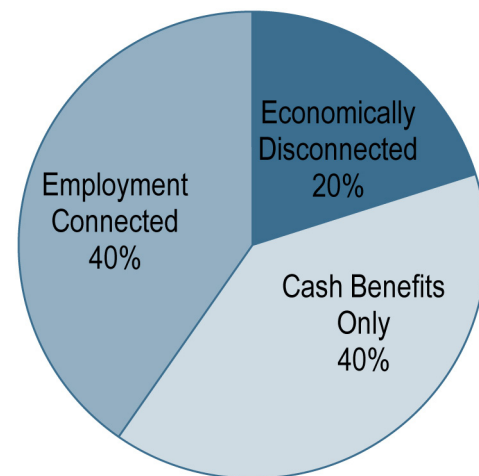
There is considerable variability in how economic disconnection is defined (Blank, 2007; Loprest 2003; Ovwigho et al., 2009; Turner et al., 2006; Wood & Rangarajan, 2003; Zedlewski et al., 2003). We attempted to follow existing convention in the welfare recipient/leavers studies as closely as possible given the limitations of our own data. Although we collected information on receipt of food stamps and housing subsidies, we did not include these in defining our groups since other studies do not consider these in-kind benefits. We do not include child support. Although an important source of income for poor families, only 35% of poor mothers receive support at an average of \$3,399 per year (Sorensen, 2010).

We defined economically disconnected families as those who reported that they currently did not receive cash benefits (including TANF, GA, and SSI), did not receive income through employment or UI, and did not appear to be supported by a partner. Because the survey did not have a specific question about partner support, we constructed a variable based on marital status, current employment, and reported gross household income for 2007 (the prior tax year). If a respondent reported that they were married or in a committed relationship and did not receive any income through employment, but their gross household income was over \$20,000, we identified them as partner-supported. We believe that it is probable that an individual who reports no income from employment or government assistance but reports an income of \$20,000 and is married or in a committed relationship, is likely to be receiving income through their partner. These individuals were categorized as employment-connected. Using this definition, 19.6%

(n = 152) of the parents in our survey were economically disconnected.

We created two comparison groups: those who reported only receiving cash, non-employment-related benefits (TANF, GA, and/or SSI), and those who reported any employment-related income (employment, UI, and/or partner-supported). We refer to the former group as benefits-only and the latter as employment-connected. The benefits-only group comprised 39.5% (n = 306) of the parents surveyed, and the employment-connected group comprised 40.9% (n = 317) of the parents surveyed, the residual 19.6% (n = 152) are disconnected (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Economic Connectedness



Figures 2a and 2b are proportional Venn diagrams that depict income sources for our two comparison groups, benefits-only and employment-connected, respectively. Almost two-thirds (60%) of the benefits-only group receive TANF, almost half receive SSI (42%), and one-quarter receive GA (25%). Where caregivers reported receiving more than one type of cash benefit, a combination of TANF and SSI were most common (13%), followed by TANF and GA (8%), with only 2% reporting a combination of GA and SSI, and 2% reporting receipt of all three types of cash benefits.

The majority of the employment-connected group reported employment income (75%), and a little over one-fifth appear to be partner supported (22%). By definition, a respondent could not report both employment income and partner support. Only 5% of the sample reported income through UI. There were very few households (2%) that reported UI income in addition to either employment income or partner support. The employment-connected group also reported some income through government benefits: 13% reported

that they also received SSI, 10% reported that they also received TANF, and 6% reported that they also received GA.

Figure 2a: Benefits-only income sources (n=306)

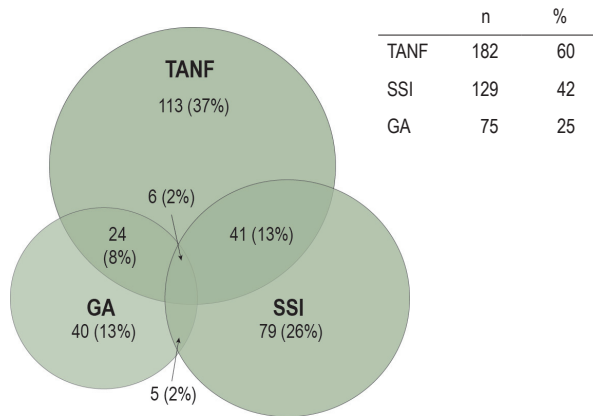
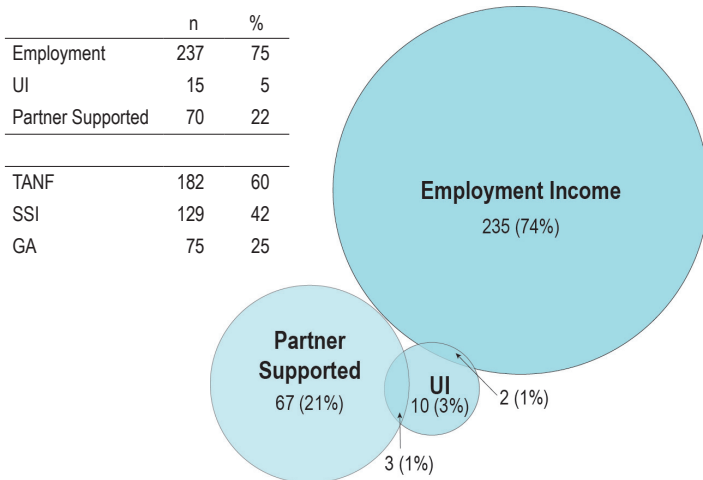


Figure 2b. Employment-connected income sources (n = 317)



## Analytic Approach

First we examined differences between groups through bivariate analyses. We used t-tests with continuous variables and chi-square tests with categorical variables to establish statistical differences between the economically disconnected group and the two comparison groups (employment-connected and benefits-only). We examined differences in: demographics, household characteristics (including children with special needs), financial hardship, non-monetary forms of financial assistance, chronic stressors (i.e., long-term risk factors for child maltreatment), service receipt and need, and parent engagement.

We then conducted multivariate analyses to identify differences in engagement between groups when controlling

for demographic and chronic risk factors. We chose relatively stable characteristics that we believed reasonably precede disconnection. We estimated ordinary least squares (OLS) models for the five parent engagement scales. Since the five parent engagement models were comparable, we only reported and discussed the Buy-In sub-scale model. Other studies provide evidence that buy-in is related to workers' recommendation for reunification (Holland, 2000).

We reported a base model with only economic connectedness as a predictor of engagement, then added a set of demographic variables and whether there is a child in out-of-home care (intermediary model), and finally added chronic factors: depression, alcohol abuse or dependency, drug abuse or dependency, childhood experience of sexual abuse, and intimate partner violence (full model).

For descriptive statistics we used all available data. In our final multivariate model for engagement we used 777 observations. We used listwise deletion to address missing data, which resulted in the deletion of 28 cases (3.5% of the total sample).

## Descriptive Results

### Demographics

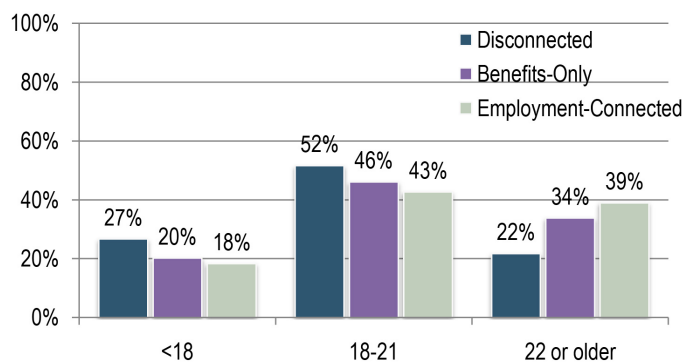
There were few demographic differences between the economically disconnected parents and the cash benefits-only parents. There were no statistical differences in terms of gender, race, marital status, educational attainment or employment status. The differences between the two groups lay primarily in age differences:

- Economically disconnected parents were younger, with a median age of 27 years compared to 31 years for the benefits-only group.
- More of the disconnected parents reported that they first became a parent before reaching the age of 22 (78% compared to 66%). See Figure 3.

There were more demographic differences between the economically disconnected parents and their employment-connected counterparts:

- Fewer economically disconnected parents were men (4% compared to 11% of employment-connected).
- Economically disconnected parents have lower educational attainment (6% have a college degree compared to 17% of employment-connected).
- Economically disconnected parents were younger than the employment-connected parents (27 compared to 32 years).

Figure 3. Age first became a parent\*



Note: \* indicates that age patterns for both groups are different from the disconnected group (statistical significance  $p < .05$ )

- More of the disconnected parents reported that they first became a parent before reaching the age of 22 (78% compared to 61%).

### Household Characteristics

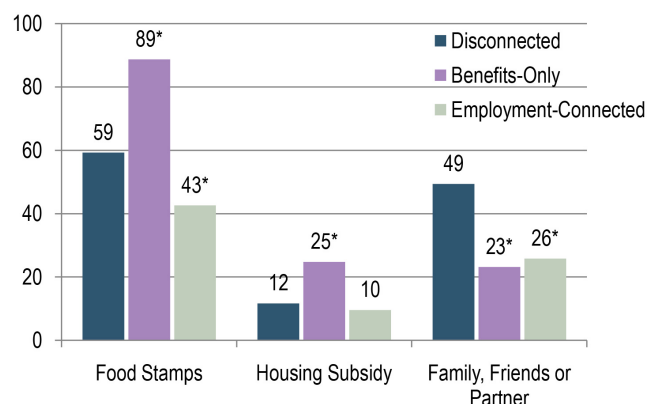
There were significant differences in household characteristics between disconnected households and both benefits-only and employment-connected households:

- Disconnected families were least likely to be living in their own house or apartment (62% compared to 66% of benefits-only and 84% of employment-connected families).
- Over one-fifth (22%) of disconnected families reported that they were staying with family or friends, compared to 14% of benefits-only and 8% of employment-connected households.
- Disconnected families were less likely (4%) to be living in a homeless shelter or had no housing than benefits-only families (8%), but more likely than employment-connected families (1%).
- A smaller percent of disconnected households reported that there was no other adult 18 or older in the household (20%), compared to benefits-only (31%) and employment-connected households (29%).
- A higher percent of disconnected households also reported that they did not have any children under the age of 18 in their household (42% compared to 26% of benefits-only and 22% of employment-connected households).
- A higher percentage of disconnected families (72%) had at least one child removed from their home (compared to 59% for benefits-only and 49% of employment-connected).

There are also differences in additional sources of support reported by the three groups (see Figure 4):

- Disconnected and employment-connected families reported lower levels of food stamp and housing subsidy compared to benefits-only families.
- Disconnected parents reported higher levels of food stamps (59%) than the employment-connected (43%).
- Disconnected parents reported the highest levels of receiving cash from family, friends or partner, at 49% compared to about one-quarter for the other two groups. It is unclear whether this is due to their inability to connect to government programs or due to an informal support network that reduces their need for government support.

Figure 4. Benefit receipt



Note: \* indicates different from disconnected group (statistical significance  $p < .05$ )

### Children with Special Needs

There were no significant differences between disconnected families and employment-connected families in terms of the number of children with a learning disability, speech, hearing or vision disability, and physical disability. However, more employment-connected families reported having at least one child with a mental health condition (35% compared to 22%).

More benefits-only families reported at least one child with a learning disability, speech, hearing or vision disability, and mental health condition than disconnected families. However, these disabilities may qualify a family to receive SSI, which was a criteria for creating the benefits-only group.

### Financial Hardships

Disconnected and benefits-only families reported high levels of financial hardship. Between one-third

and two-thirds of both groups reported lacking money to: buy clothing or shoes, pay rent or mortgage, cover an important bill, or buy enough food. They were also more likely to use a food pantry or community meal program, and to experience homelessness and moving in with family or friends. Disconnected families reported similar levels of financial hardship to benefits-only families on all types of financial hardship except for two: benefits-only families reported higher rates of lacking the money to buy clothing or shoes (65% vs. 54%), and higher rates of going to a food pantry or community meal program (66% vs. 52%).

Economically disconnected families reported financial hardships at a higher rate than employment-connected families, with the exception of having no money to pay rent or mortgage and having furniture, a car, or other belongings repossessed. The largest differences lie in:

- Experiencing homelessness (37% of disconnected vs. 17% of employment-connected).
- Moving in with family or friends (46% of disconnected vs. 24% of employment-connected).
- Going to a food pantry/community meal program (52% of disconnected vs. 39% of employment-connected).

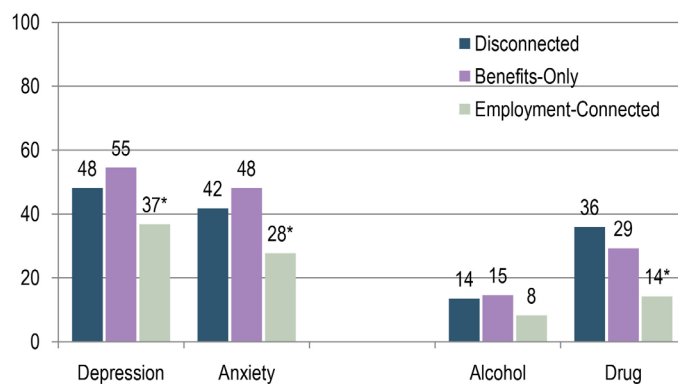
## Mental Health

The Mini International Neuropsychiatric Interview (MINI) was administered to parents to assess their mental health. The MINI is a widely used psychiatric structured diagnostic instrument that indicates the presence of mood and anxiety disorders, and alcohol and drug abuse/dependence.

Depression and anxiety disorders were the most common disorders identified by the MINI, with 46% of parents meeting criteria for current or lifetime depression, and 39% meeting criteria for an anxiety disorder. The differences between economically disconnected and benefits-only families in reported depression and anxiety were not statistically significant. However, the differences between economically disconnected families and employment-connected families were statistically significant, with employment-connected caregivers reporting lower rates of depression, anxiety disorders, and any mental health concern (see Figure 5).

Rates of alcohol abuse or dependency and substance abuse or dependency were lower than the rates of mental health disorders in the full parent sample. However, the patterns across groups were similar to those in the mental health disorder: there were no statistical differences between economically disconnected and benefits-only caregivers, but there were differences between economically disconnected and employment-connected caregivers. Again, the economically disconnected caregivers reported higher rates of alcohol or substance abuse/dependency.

Figure 5. Mental health and substance abuse



Note: \* indicates different from disconnected group (statistical significance  $p < .05$ )

## Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse

Caregivers were asked a series of six questions about conflict with their current or most recent partner, as well as a series three of questions about any sexual abuse they may have experienced before they turned 18. These items were then consolidated into two measures, indicating the presence or absence of domestic violence and childhood sexual abuse. There were no statistically observable differences for domestic violence (ranging from 32% among the employment-connected to 38% among the benefits-only group). Rather, the benefits-only caregivers reported higher rates of sexual abuse (65%) than disconnected (52%) or employment-connected (42%) caregivers.

## Service Receipt and Unmet Needs

The respondents were asked about their needs and receipt in three service areas: children's needs, basic needs, and physical/mental health. Caregivers were asked whether or not they were receiving a service. If they were not receiving the service, they were asked if they needed the service. Overall, there were high levels of service receipt and unmet needs. There were also some group differences.

**Children's Needs.** Caregivers were asked about six service needs for their children: finding community activities, developmental disabilities services, educational plan, school attendance, day care/pre-school, and respite care/paid babysitting. Overall, benefits-only caregivers reported higher levels of service receipt and unmet service needs for their children than did economically disconnected families. Benefits-only caregivers were twice as likely to receive help finding community activities, help with school attendance, and respite care/paid babysitting ( $p < .05$ ), yet economically disconnected caregivers did not report higher unmet

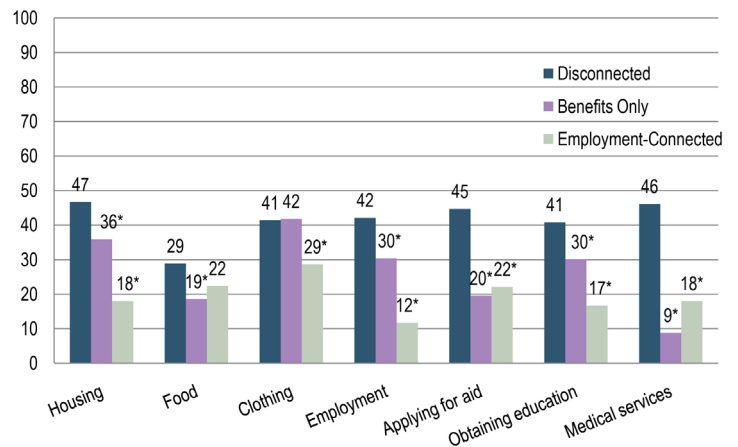
needs. This may be related to the higher percentage of disconnected families with at least one child in out-of-home care. Forty-two percent of economically disconnected caregivers had no children under age 19 in home at the time of the survey, compared to only 26% of benefits-only caregivers and 22% of employment-connected caregivers.

In comparison to the employment-connected families, disconnected caregivers reported comparable or lower levels of service receipt and higher levels of unmet service needs, as expected. Employment connected caregivers were nearly twice as likely to receive help finding community activities and respite care/paid babysitting ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, disconnected families reported lower levels of service receipt and higher levels of unmet service need compared to the employment-connected families. This difference may be related to the higher number of disconnected caregivers who had at least one child removed from their home.

**Basic Needs.** Caregivers were asked about their receipt and need for nine basic living tasks: (1) basic home management, (2) finding a place to live, (3) home repair/maintenance, (4) finding/keeping a job, (5) getting enough food, (6) clothing for themselves/family, (7) transportation, (8) applying for financial aid and (9) obtaining education/GED. Compared to the benefits-only caregivers, disconnected caregivers reported lower levels of service receipt in all areas except in finding/keeping a job, where similar percentages reported service receipt. Disconnected families generally reported higher levels of unmet service needs in comparison to the benefits-only group, except for home repair/maintenance and clothing for family, in which both groups reported comparable unmet needs. Both groups appear to be struggling (see Figure 6):

- Overall, 84% of disconnected families and 76% of benefits-only families report at least one unmet basic need.
- 47% of disconnected and 36% of benefits-only caregivers report that they were not receiving needed help finding a place to live.
- 45% of disconnected and 20% of benefits-only caregivers report that they were not receiving needed help applying for financial assistance.
- 42% of disconnected and 30% of benefits-only caregivers report that they were not receiving needed help finding employment.
- Over 40% of both groups report that they had unmet needs around clothing.
- 28% of disconnected caregivers and 18% of benefits-only families reporting that they were not receiving needed services getting enough food.

Figure 6. Percent reporting selected unmet needs



Note: \* indicates different from disconnected group (statistical significance  $p < .05$ )

In comparison to the employment-connected families, disconnected caregivers reported higher levels of service receipt for most of the basic needs, including food, clothing, and shelter, as well in obtaining a GED and applying for financial aid. Disconnected caregivers reported lower service receipt in two areas: basic home management and home repair/maintenance. This could be related to their lower rates of living in a house or apartment, and/or may indicate more need in other basic areas. In fact, disconnected families report higher rates of unmet service needs across all services, in comparison to employment-connected caregivers. The largest differences were in finding/keeping a job, finding a place to live, and obtaining education/GED. The differences between these two groups were statistically significant for all service areas except home repair/maintenance. Although employment-connected families report fewer unmet basic needs, 64% of employment-connected families report at least one unmet basic need.

**Physical and Mental Health Needs.** Caregivers were asked about their receipt and need of services in nine areas related to physical and emotional well-being: basic parenting, help with child's challenging behaviors, social or emotional support, substance abuse services, family counseling, mental health services, medical services, domestic violence services, and anger management services. Similar to the other service areas, benefits-only families reported higher levels of service receipt in most areas. The three exceptions were substance abuse services, domestic violence services, and anger management services, where disconnected families and benefits-only families reported comparable levels of service receipt. Disconnected families reported higher levels of unmet service needs in most

areas except help with a child's challenging behavior, social or emotional support, and family counseling, where disconnected and benefits-only caregivers reported similar levels of unmet service needs. Most striking is the unmet needs in medical services, where 46% of disconnected caregivers reported that they were not receiving the services but needed them, in comparison to only 9% of benefits-only families (see Figure 6).

Disconnected families tended to report lower service receipt and higher unmet service needs than employment-connected caregivers. This was the case for family counseling and medical services. However, more disconnected families reported receiving substance abuse services than employment-connected families, which was statistically significant. Twenty-five percent of disconnected families reported that mental health services were an unmet need, compared to 15% of employment-connected families. The difference in unmet service needs, however, was greatest for medical services: 46% of disconnected families reported that they were not receiving needed medical services compared to 18% of the employment-connected families.

### Parent Engagement

Parent engagement was measured with the Yatchmenoff Engagement scale, which includes four sub-scales: Buy-In, Mistrust, Receptivity and Working Relationship. The Yatchmenoff Engagement Scale was developed to measure non-voluntary clients' experience of engagement within a child protective service context. Each of the scales was coded so that higher scores indicated more engagement; negative scales (e.g., mistrust) were flipped for consistency.

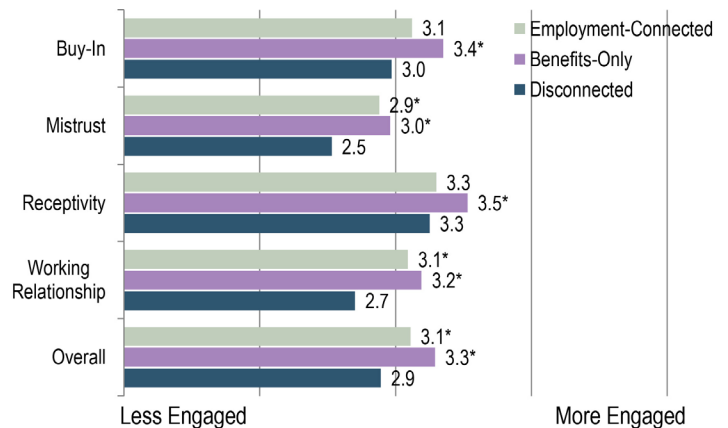
In multivariate analysis we focus on buy-in because it is related to workers' recommendation for reunification (Holland, 2000). The Buy-In sub-scale measures parents' investment in working with Child Protective Services (CPS) and their expected benefits from their investment. The sub-scale is based how much caregivers agree with seven statements: (1) I believe my family will get the help we really need from CPS; (2) I really want to make use of the service (help) CPS is providing me; (3) Working with CPS has given me more hope about how my life is going to go in the future; (4) I'm not just going through the motions. I'm really involved in working with CPS; (5) I think things will get better for my children because CPS is involved; (6) What CPS wants me to do is the same as what I want; and (7) CPS is helping my family get stronger.

There were significant differences between disconnected families and the other two groups in the degree to which they were engaged with the child welfare system. In comparison to benefits-only parents, disconnected families reported lower levels of engagement on the four Yatchmenoff sub-scales as well as the overall Yatchmenoff scale. The differences, however, were not statistically significant

for the Buy-In and Receptivity sub-scales. Disconnected families also reported lower levels of engagement on the overall scale than employment-connected families (see Figure 7).

Lower engagement levels for disconnected families might reflect higher levels of households with at least one child removed from the home. To investigate this possibility we used multivariate models to examine differences in engagement between our three groups controlling for demographics, chronic risk factors, and having at least one child removed from the home.

Figure 7. Engagement



Note: \* indicates different from disconnected group (statistical significance  $p < .05$ )

### Multivariate Results for Parent Engagement

Table 2 (page 11) shows the results of the multivariate model predicting caregivers' buy-in. In all three stages of our final model, the benefits-only group consistently reports higher levels of buy-in than the economic disconnected group, even after demographic and chronic stressors are added to the models. On average, holding all other variables constant, a caregiver in the benefits-only group scored .37 points higher on the buy-in scale (on a 5-point scale) than a caregiver in the disconnected group ( $p < .001$ ). There were no significant differences between the disconnected and employment-connected caregivers in our base and intermediary models. However, in our full model, the coefficient for employment-connected becomes significant ( $p < .05$ ). Thus, on average, a caregiver in the employment-connected group scored .21 points higher on the buy-in scale than a caregiver in the disconnected group, when holding demographic characteristics and chronic stress factors constant.

Looking at the demographic and household characteristics, age, race, educational attainment, and out-of-home placement each appear to have a significant relationship with buy-in. Older parents scored lower on the buy-in scale ( $B = -.01, p < .05$ ). In comparison to those with some college or more, those with a high school diploma or equivalency reported higher levels of buy-in ( $B = .24, p < .01$ ). However, those without a high school diploma or equivalency did not report differences in buy-in from those with some college or more. Caregivers who reported their race/ethnicity as Native American ( $B = .28, p < .05$ ) or Hispanic/Latino ( $B = .28, p < .05$ ) also scored higher on the buy-in scale than their Caucasian peers. Although the coefficient for the African American indicator was not significant, it was in the negative direction. Finally, caregivers who reported that at least one child had been removed from the home were estimated to score .33 points lower on the buy-in scale than parents who did not have any children removed from their home ( $p < .001$ ).

Of the four chronic stress factors included in the models, only the drug abuse indicator was statistically significant. On average, a caregiver who met criteria for current or lifetime drug abuse or dependency scored .46 points higher ( $p < .001$ ) on the buy-in scale than a caregiver who did not meet criteria.

## Summary and Discussion

We found that 20% of the families were economically disconnected, reporting no employment or cash assistance. Our analysis reveals several patterns that differentiate economically disconnected caregivers from those who receive benefits or are connected to employment. Disconnected caregivers are younger and had children at younger ages than more connected households. Most are under age 30. They are more likely to have children in out-of-home placements as opposed to receiving in-home services. The disconnected caregivers are more likely to say they get aid from their social networks. Close to half report financial help from friends or family and more than one out of five currently lives with friends or family.

In terms of economic and physical well-being, disconnected caregivers are worse off than employment-connected caregivers. Compared to those with paying jobs, the economically disconnected report greater material hardship, more unmet needs, and higher levels of drug and alcohol use.

Disconnected caregivers and benefits recipients report similar levels of hardship, but the disconnected caregivers report higher levels of unmet needs regarding assistance on basic economic and medical needs. Eighty-four percent of economically disconnected caregivers report an unmet basic need, including over 40% reporting an unmet need for help finding a place to live, obtaining medical ser-

vices, finding and keeping a job, applying for aid, and obtaining a GED or other credentials. In each of these categories disconnected caregivers report more unmet needs than benefits-only or employment-connected caregivers.

Disconnected caregivers report lower parental engagement than other caregivers. We tested the relationship between economic disconnection and caregiver engagement while controlling for basic demographic characteristics (such as age, race, and education), chronic risk factors (such as drug abuse and depression), and whether a child was placed in out-of-home care. Even when controlling for these factors, economically disconnected caregivers report lower engagement.

In relying on data collected at one point in time, we cannot distinguish whether these patterns describe caregivers more likely to be economically disconnected regardless of child welfare involvement or whether the process of child welfare involvement leads to particular types of disconnection. On one hand, caregivers who can neither sustain employment nor successfully claim benefits may have difficulties providing adequate environments for their children. On the other hand, we may be observing caregivers who were economically connected through their children but lost connection when their children were removed from the household because cash assistance from TANF and child SSI is contingent on having children in the household (or expecting reunification within 180 days).

Similarly, the levels of reported assistance from friends and family may mean that private, not public, assistance is sustaining these apparently disconnected caregivers. Perhaps these younger caregivers have not yet exhausted their support networks. On the other hand, facing barriers to seeking or losing public assistance may increase efforts to seek private support. We are unable to distinguish whether the informal economic support means that these seemingly disconnected caregivers are also supporting themselves through illegal activities.

Clearly, economically disconnected caregivers are less engaged than either those receiving benefits or those who are employed. They are also more likely to have children out-of-home, which is in itself, related to lower parental engagement. Additionally, disconnected caregivers report substantial unmet basic needs, which suggests that social workers encounter unique barriers when working with this group.

Poverty is an enduring characteristic of parents involved with the child welfare system. Assisting parents in obtaining any benefits they might be eligible for

could improve their ability to provide for themselves and their children and may increase their level of engagement with child welfare services. During the period of data collection policy changed in Washington State to extend from 90 to 180 days the time a parent can continue to receive TANF if children are absent from home and expected to return within 180 days (WAC 388-454-0015, August 2008). Additional investigation is needed to see how the waiver process is being used across the state.

Meeting the complex needs of child welfare involved families is best achieved through close collaboration among an array of service providers. Our findings suggest that coordination between economic services and child welfare presents an important opportunity to meet the most pressing needs of families. Additional work is needed to examine the most promising avenues for strengthened coordination.

The West Coast Poverty Center and Partners for Our Children are currently undertaking additional research using administrative data on caregivers involved with child welfare to examine economic connections before, during, and after involvement with child welfare. Multiple years of administrative data will allow us to examine the fluidity between these groups and the ordering of events. This research should shed additional light on to what extent disconnection is a chronic problem that predates child welfare involvement, and to what extent involvement precipitates disconnection. Answering these questions will provide a more complete base of knowledge for intervention.

## Acknowledgements

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The West Coast Poverty Center at the University of Washington serves as a hub for research, education, and policy analysis leading to greater understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and effective approaches to reducing it in the West Coast states. Founded in 2005 with core funding by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (OASPE), the Center draws affiliates from the UW Schools of Social Work, Public Affairs, and Arts and Sciences.

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Table 1. Sample demographics

	N	#	Total %
	806		
<b>Demographics</b>			
Female	806	744	92.3
Male		62	7.7
<b>Age</b>	805		
Median Age			
18-29		371	46.1
30-39		258	32
40-49		124	15.4
50-59		46	5.7
60+		6	0.7
<b>Race</b>	804		
Caucasian Only		500	62.2
Any Native American		97	12.1
African American		52	6.5
Hispanic, Latino		61	7.6
Mixed Race		70	8.7
Other		24	3
<b>Highest Level of Schooling</b>	805		
Less than or some High School		238	29.6
High School Diploma or Equivalency		223	27.7
Some college or tech		274	34
College Degree		70	8.7
<b>Marital Status</b>	806		
Single, Never Married		328	40.7
Married or in Committed Relationship		256	31.8
Separated, Divorced, Widowed		222	27.5
<b>Employment Status</b>	806		
Not Currently Employed		545	67.6
Employed Full-Time		159	19.7
Employed Part-Time or Seasonally		102	12.7

Table 2. Results for OLS regression on Yatchmenoff buy-in sub-scale

	Base model		Intermediary Model		Full Model	
	B	(SE)	B	(SE)	B	(SE)
Disconnected (ref)						
Benefits-Only	0.37	-0.1 ***	0.35	-0.1 ***	0.37	-0.1 ***
Employment Connected	0.14	-0.1	0.12	-0.11	0.21	-0.11 *
Female			0.03	-0.14	-0.01	-0.14
Age			-0.01	0 **	-0.01	0 *
White (ref)						
Native American			0.25	-0.12 *	0.28	-0.11 *
African American			-0.18	-0.15	-0.14	-0.15
Latin			0.25	-0.14	0.28	-0.14 *
Mixed/Other			0.02	-0.12	0.03	-0.12
Less than High School			0.09	-0.1	0.09	-0.09
HS Diploma or Equivalency			0.26	-0.09 **	0.24	-0.09 **
Some college or more (ref)						
Out-of-Home Placement			-0.28	-0.08 ***	-0.33	-0.08 ***
Depression					0.12	-0.08
Alcohol Abuse					-0.08	-0.12
Drug Abuse					0.46	-0.09 ***
Any Interpartner Violence					0.02	-0.08
Any Sexual Abuse					-0.06	-0.08
Constant	2.98	-0.08 ***	3.36	-0.24 ***	3.19	-0.24 ***
N	775		775		775	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02		0.07		0.11	
LL	-1132		-1112		-1095	
p	0		0		0	
BIC	2284		2303		2303	
BIC (empty)	2286					
AIC	2270		2247		2224	
AIC (empty)	2281					

Note: \* p <= .001, \*\* p <= .01, \*p < .05.