



Children without parents in the TANF caseload: Thinking beyond the child-only label

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ABSTRACT

Child welfare policy has historically emphasized the positive impact relative caregivers can have on foster children. This emphasis coupled with recent changes in the composition of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) caseload has led to interest in child-only, relative caregiver cases. Child-only research, however, ignores cases in which the relative caregiver is also receiving benefits. Using the universe of welfare cases in Maryland in October 2005, this article compares and contrasts the demographic and case characteristics of parental and relative caregiver cases, also analyzing differences between cases with and without an adult receiving benefits. Findings indicate that relative caregivers have service needs that differ from those of parents and that recipient relative caregivers are more disadvantaged than child-only cases.

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1. Introduction

Drastic post-reform reductions in welfare caseloads combined with recent budget shortfalls at the state levels have inspired growing interest in the composition of the active caseload of families receiving cash assistance through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. TANF block grant amounts have not changed since their creation, resulting in an inability of state TANF programs to expand in response to the recent recession (Pavetti & Schott, 2011). An understanding of the composition of the current caseload, and of subgroups within the current caseload, is central to discussions regarding potential changes to the goals, administration, and funding of the TANF block grant in the context of upcoming reauthorization deadlines. Empirical caseload research is particularly relevant to understanding how the TANF block grant has been used to support various types of families.

Among these various types of families are two groups in which children do not live with and are not cared by their parents. One at-risk group of interest and the focus of recent studies are non-parental child-only cases (for a review, see Anthony, Vu, & Austin, 2008). These families are part of the welfare caseload, but they are often reported separately because many of the welfare-to-work goals and requirements do not apply to them. That is, since the children are the only recipients, the traditional goal of self-sufficiency is inappropriate, and thus an investigation of their needs is critically

needed. A second related group of non-traditional, non-parental TANF cases, “recipient relative caregiver” cases, have received less attention by researchers and policymakers. These are TANF cases in which the adult casehead is caring for related, but not their own, children, and unlike in child-only cases, these adults are included on the grant. They are still often excluded from work participation or time limit requirements as an incentive to keep the child(ren) in their home rather than place the child(ren) in foster care.

The option of kinship care, having a relative care for a child when the parents are unable or unwilling to do so, is considered preferable to foster care with an unrelated guardian (Main, Ehrle, & Geen, 2006). Although relative caregivers are eligible to become licensed foster care providers and be compensated through the child welfare system, many relatives opt out either because they prefer to be independent from the system or because it is often a lengthy and tedious process (Gibbs, Kasten, Bir, Duncan, & Hoover, 2006). Although grants from welfare offices are much smaller, they are easier to obtain and do not have similar oversight or requirements attached to them. The caregiver may also be included in the TANF grant if he or she is financially eligible, and although the grant is then slightly larger than a child-only grant (all else equal), it is often still less than a foster care payment. According to a recent GAO report, the national average TANF child-only grant is \$249 while the average minimum foster care payment is \$511 (USGAO, 2011).

Despite the possible similarities and overlap in many of the needs and situations between these two subgroups of the TANF caseload, the literature is disjointed. Child welfare-based research on relative caregivers includes, by definition, families in which children are with kin, regardless of whether they are receiving assistance through TANF or not. On the other hand, TANF-based research on child-only

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Table 1
TANF case categories.

	Is the casehead a parent to at least one recipient child on the TANF grant?		
	No	Yes	
Is the casehead included as a recipient on the TANF grant?	No Yes	Relative caregiver child-only cases Recipient relative caregiver cases	Parental child-only cases Traditional cases (recipient parental cases)

cases often combines non-parental child-only cases with other types of child-only cases, and ignores recipient relative caregiver cases (Anthony et al., 2008).

This article moves beyond the child-only label and compares outcomes and program utilization among children and caregivers in relative caregiver TANF cases to those in parental TANF cases. In addition, since access to some program elements is contingent on adult TANF receipt, cases are also separated based on whether the case was a child-only case or not. Table 1 describes this categorization of cases by relationship and recipient status. Using several sources of Maryland administrative data, four subgroups of the active TANF caseload are examined: (1) relative caregiver child-only cases; (2) recipient relative caregiver cases; (3) parental child-only cases; and (4) recipient parental cases. Findings contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding children in non-parental households, and provide information to policymakers and program managers serving these families.

2. Background

In contrast to the study's division of the TANF caseload into four groups, most policymakers and program administrators focus on two categories of TANF cases. The first are cases with at least one parent and at least one child on the grant, for whom most work-first policies and programs are targeted. This type of TANF case, which comprises slightly more than half of the national caseload (Office of Family Assistance, 2009), is usually referred to as a traditional welfare case and can be found in the lower right cell in Table 1. The second general category includes the balance of cases, which either include a non-recipient parent or a relative caregiver. Depending on the specific policies of the state in which they are receiving benefits, cases in this second category may or may not be required to participate in work activities. The distinction between these two categories of cases has become more palpable considering the regulations put in place under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA, P.L. 109–171), which raise the bar for performance and accountability of work-first initiatives. For instance, state TANF agencies are carefully considering how to maintain high levels of work participation among their working and otherwise work-eligible parents while also carefully assessing the needs of clients in the balance of the caseload, all with a single pot of resources (Parrott et al., 2007).

Within this latter group of cases, it may be tempting for policymakers and program administrators to overlook child-only cases because they are uniquely excluded from work participation calculations. But the research that has been done thus far on child-only cases suggests it would not be prudent to do so, not only because these cases tend to remain in the caseload longer but also because they include vulnerable children (Anthony et al., 2008; Gibbs et al., 2004). State-level research on the child-only caseload highlights the challenges these families face (Dunifon, Hamilton, Hamilton, & Taylor, 2004; Edelhoch, Liu, & Martin, 2002; Farrell, Fishman, Laud, & Allen, 2000; Speigman, Brown, Bos, Li, & Ortiz, 2011; University of Tennessee, Center for Business & Economic Research, 2006; Wood & Strong, 2002). For example, the results of a New Jersey study indicated that children were in the care of a relative due to parental substance abuse, maltreatment, legal troubles, mental health problems, and death. In addition, although relative caregiver child-only caregivers were better off financially than other types of TANF

caseheads, they were more likely to report poor physical health than caseheads of traditional TANF cases (Wood & Strong, 2002).

Our previous research identified five distinct sub-groups within the child-only population in Maryland: non-parental cases (75.2%), parental SSI cases (21.9%), immigrant parent cases (2.2%), sanctioned parent cases (0.6%) and "other" parental cases (0.2%) (Hetling, Saunders, & Born, 2005). Federal level data from FY2008 show larger proportions of parental SSI (22%), parental sanction (5%), and parental immigration status cases (19%), but caregiver cases are still a large group (33% nonparent caregiver and 12% unknown caregiver) and comprise a notable portion of child-only cases in all states (USGAO, 2011). Although not all of these caregiver placements result from formal CPS findings of abuse or neglect, some portion of these children will have similar risk factors as those growing up in other family foster care arrangements (Billing, Ehrle, & Kortenkamp, 2002; Ehrle, Geen, & Clark, 2001). In Maryland, fully one-half (49.9%) of children in non-parental child-only cases had been involved with child welfare services at some point, compared with three out of ten (30.9%) children in parental child-only cases (Hetling et al., 2005). Despite the nature of their situations, the children in non-parental TANF cases will probably not have access to follow-up services from state child welfare agencies because they are assumed to be in a safe and permanent home. In fact, child welfare best practices increasingly point to relative placements as preferable to other types of out-of-home placements, which could lead to an increase in the number of relative caregiver child-only TANF cases (Main et al., 2006).

At the same time, if the concern is in regards to children living with relatives in child-only cases, then one must consider whether children living with relatives in recipient cases might be in a similar situation, even though they are not included in child-only research. A broader body of literature focused on assessing the needs and strengths of non-parental households in general, regardless of TANF receipt, sheds some light on this issue. In the past fifteen years, the number of children under 18 living with neither of their parents increased by nearly 70% from 1.3 million to 2.2 million and the majority of these children are living with a grandparent.¹ Partly in response to this growth, researchers have begun to investigate how these families are faring on a number of indicators. Their findings have been mixed, showing that single grandparent-headed households are potentially worse off economically compared with other households that include grandparents, parents, and children, but that children living with grandparents and other relatives are potentially better off in terms of permanency and well-being compared with children in nonrelative foster homes (Casper & Bryson, 1998; Ehrle et al., 2001; Rubin et al., 2008). On average, children in kinship care are more likely to be victims of child neglect and to have parents who are substance abusers than children in other types of out-of-home placement (Beeman, Kim, & Bullerdick, 2000; Grogan-Kaylor, 2000; Leslie et al., 2005; The Urban Institute, 2003). They also tend to receive fewer services than children in other types of out-of-home placements (Ehrle et al., 2001; Scannapieco, Hegar, & McAlpine, 1997), and to have longer placements overall (Scannapieco et al., 1997).

¹ Author calculations from Current Population Survey March Supplements in 1992 and 2008 using DataFerrett from the U.S. Census Bureau. The figures exclude children who were also included in subfamilies, children listed as a reference person or a spouse of a reference person, and those not in families.

Table 2
Analytical subgroups.

		Casehead is a parent to at least one recipient child in the assistance unit	
		No	Yes
		Relative caregiver case	Parental case
Casehead was included in the grant in the study month	No	Relative caregiver child-only n = 6421	Parental child-only n = 2302
	Child-only	29%	10.4%
	Yes	Recipient relative caregiver n = 599	Recipient parental n = 12,801
	Paid	2.7%	57.9%

These findings may lead some to question whether any existing social program fits the varied needs of relative caregiver families. Although some of these families are served through the TANF program, most do not fit the profile of the traditional TANF client whose goal is to move toward self-sufficiency and gainful employment. Some states are developing programs targeted towards child-only cases, but some of these programs do not serve recipient relative caregivers and many states do not have such programs (O'Dell, 2005). In addition, while some of these families are served through child welfare agencies, most do not fit the profile of the typical child welfare case where the goal is immediate safety. Neither TANF nor child welfare agencies are designed or equipped to provide long-term case management support to relative caregivers. Complicating matters further, the services that are available for non-parental households typically have low take-up rates (Ehrle et al., 2001; Gibbs et al., 2006). Thus, there is a risk that some children might be falling through the cracks of a well-intentioned but perhaps ill-suited network of services.

Finally, the current budget environment is troubling for the future of non-traditional TANF families, particularly as states look to preserve their TANF dollars to make benefit payments to traditional welfare cases. For instance, Arizona recently became the only state to subject relative caregiver child-only cases to a time limit, and applied the limit retroactively to families who were active on the welfare rolls, resulting in mass case closures (Lower-Bach, 2011; Schott & Pavetti, 2011). As other states continue to make deep cuts for traditional welfare families and still fall short on funds, they will certainly be making very difficult decisions about non-traditional families as well. More than at any other time, a more focused and complete understanding of the characteristics and circumstances of these families is critically important to inform those decisions and, to the extent possible, identify and provide for the needs of children in relative caregiver TANF cases (child-only or not).

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

The sample for this study includes the universe² of cases receiving TANF in Maryland in October 2005 (n = 22,123), including 22,123 caseheads and 40,042 children. The study month was primarily chosen because of data limitations associated with the child welfare data as described in Section 3.2 (Data sources). The article examines cases based on two distinctions. The first is whether the casehead could be considered a relative caregiver, defined as having none of their own children named as recipients in the TANF case, or a parent, defined as having at least one of their own children named as a recipient in the TANF case. The second distinction is whether or not the case was a child-only case or not, defined as having zero adult

² We excluded 1258 cases, including six with duplicate caseheads in the study month, 582 cases without any case members younger than 18 at the end of the study month, 372 embedded cases with recipient children and recipient relatives in the same case, and 298 cases without any recipient children in the study month. In addition, we exclude non-casehead adults and non-recipient children from the cases in our analyses of the sample.

recipients in the TANF case in the study month. The final groupings are displayed in Table 2.

The majority of cases (57.9%, n = 12,801) are traditional recipient parental cases, where the casehead and at least one biological or adopted child are included in the calculation of the TANF grant amount. Approximately one in ten cases (10.4%, n = 2302) were parental child-only cases where the parent (casehead) was not included in the grant due to program ineligibility including immigration status or SSI receipt, or non-cooperation with substance abuse program requirements. In addition, approximately three out of ten cases (29.0%, n = 6421) were relative caregiver child-only cases, with at least one child who is a TANF recipient and a casehead who is not the child's parent and does not apply for and/or qualify for TANF benefits themselves. Finally, a small portion of cases (2.7%, n = 599) were recipient relative caregiver cases, with at least one child who is a TANF recipient and a casehead who is not the child's parent but does apply and qualify for TANF benefits. These caseheads are generally exempt from most TANF requirements, including work participation and time limits.

3.2. Data sources

Findings are based on data gathered from several administrative data systems maintained by the State of Maryland. Specifically, demographic and program participation information were obtained from the Client Automated Resources and Eligibility System (CARES), child support characteristics and payment data from the Child Support Enforcement System (CSES), and employment and wage data from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS).

3.2.1. CARES

The Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES) is the current statewide data system for programs under the purview of the Maryland Department of Human Resources. For each person who applies for cash assistance (AFDC or TANF), Food Stamps/Food Supplement Program, or Medical Assistance, CARES contains a participation history. In addition to providing basic demographic data (name, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, etc.), the history includes the type of program, application date and disposition date (denial or closure date) for each service episode, and a relationship code indicating the relationship of the individual to the head of the assistance unit. Also, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) data is received by Maryland Department of Human Resources from the Social Security Administration, and is accessed through the State Data Exchange. For the purposes of this article, information was obtained about sample members' application and payment histories. CARES replaced a previous data system in Maryland in March 1998, thus historical program participation before this date is not included. Additionally, until December 2005 CARES included program participation for individuals receiving Social Services, including child welfare services such as maltreatment investigations or out-of-home care. Since this information is a critical component of the research project, October 2005 was chosen as the study month.

3.2.2. CSES

The Child Support Enforcement System (CSES) contains child support data for the state. Maryland counties converted to this system

beginning in August 1993 with Baltimore City completing the state-wide conversion in March 1998. The system includes identifying information and demographic data on children, noncustodial parents and custodial parents receiving services from the IV-D (state child support) agency. Data on the child support cases and court orders including paternity status and payment receipt are also available. CSES supports the intake, establishment, location, and enforcement functions of the Child Support Enforcement Administration.

3.2.3. MABS

In order to investigate the employment patterns of caseheads in the sample, quarterly employment and earnings data were obtained from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS). MABS includes data from all employers covered by the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) law (approximately 91% of Maryland civilian jobs). Independent contractors, sales people on commission only, some farm workers, members of the military, some student interns, most religious organization employees and self-employed persons who do not employ any paid individuals are not covered. "Off the books" or "under the table" employment is not included, nor are jobs located in other states.

3.3. Analyses

Data from the above sources were used to examine the characteristics and experiences of caseheads and children receiving TANF in Maryland. Chi-square and ANOVA testing was used to evaluate differences among the case subgroups and among the child subgroups.

4. Findings and discussion: case characteristics

4.1. Case and casehead demographics

Table 3 presents findings on the characteristics and experiences of caseheads in TANF for the caseload as a whole, as well as for four subgroups of cases: relative caregiver child-only cases; recipient relative caregiver cases; parental child-only cases; and traditional recipient parental cases. The two relative caregiver groups look most alike in terms of casehead age, with caseheads approximately 50 years of age in the study month (mean = 51.9 for relative caregiver child-only cases and 49.6 for recipient relative caregiver cases). In contrast,

caseheads in both the parental child-only group (mean = 37.7) and the recipient parental group (mean = 30.6) are typically in their thirties. These findings are consistent with previous findings that relative caregiver caseheads tend to be substantially older than parental caseheads, and quite often they are the child(ren)'s grandparent.

Differences in racial distribution are small. Among all case subtypes, the majority of caseheads are African American. In both the relative caregiver child-only and recipient parental subgroups, approximately four out of five caseheads are African American (79.1% and 80.7%, respectively) and the remaining one-fifth is Caucasian (19.7% and 17.4%, respectively). Recipient relative caregivers are slightly more likely to be African American (85.2%). Parental child-only caseheads are three times more likely to be of non-Caucasian and non-African-American ethnicity (6.8%). This last finding is expected, as one of the reasons for parents to be excluded from the TANF grant is their immigration status.

Relative caregiver cases (both recipient and child-only) tend to have fewer children in the assistance unit (mean = 1.5 and 1.6, respectively), compared with either parental child-only or recipient parental cases (mean = 1.8 and 2.0, respectively). Likewise, between one in ten and one in seven cases with a relative caregiver casehead have three or more children in the assistance unit (11.8% for relative caregiver child-only cases and 15.0% for recipient relative caregiver cases). In contrast, approximately one in five (19.2%) parental child-only cases include three or more children and one in four (25.0%) recipient parental cases include three or more children.

In addition to the number of children included in the grant, there are notable differences across subgroups in the age of children within the household. In short, children are generally older in relative caregiver cases than in parental cases. Among relative caregiver cases, about one in ten (10.5% of child-only cases and 11.7% of recipient cases) had a child under three years of age, and the youngest child was, on average, nearly ten years old (mean = 9.8 and 9.4 years respectively). In contrast, more than one-fifth (22.0%) of the parental child-only cases had at least one child under three, and the average age of the youngest child was about a year younger (mean = 8.7) than the youngest child in either type of relative caregiver case. Traditional recipient parental cases have the youngest children with nearly one-half (46.9%) including at least one child under three, and the average age of the youngest child was five years old (mean = 5.1).

Table 3
Characteristics of caseheads and cases.

	Relative caregiver cases		Parental cases		Total (n = 22,123)
	Relative caregiver child-only (n = 6421)	Recipient relative caregiver (n = 599)	Parental child-only (n = 2302)	Recipient parental (n = 12,801)	
Age of casehead					
Mean***	51.9	49.6	37.7	30.6	38.1
Standard deviation	12.5	9.6	9.9	8.6	13.9
Range	18–95	20–84	18–78	18–77	18–95
Race of casehead***					
Caucasian	19.7%	14.2%	20.7%	17.4%	18.3%
African American	79.1%	85.2%	72.5%	80.7%	79.5%
Other	1.2%	.5%	6.8%	1.9%	2.2%
Number of children included in the TCA grant					
Mean***	1.5	1.6	1.8	2.0	1.8
Standard deviation	0.9	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.1
Range ⁺	1–9	0–9	0–9	0–14	0–14
% With 3 or more children***	11.8%	15.0%	19.2%	25.0%	20.3%
Age of youngest child in the household					
Mean***	9.8	9.4	8.7	5.1	7.0
Standard deviation	4.8	4.9	5.4	4.8	5.4
Range	0–18	0–17.9	0–18	0–18	0–18
% With a child under 3***	10.5%	11.7%	22.0%	46.9%	32.8%

⁺Some AUs appear to have no children on the grant. This is a reflection of data anomalies. For instance, the data reflect at least one recipient child on the case in the study month but the variable from CARES indicating the number of children included in the assistance unit is zero. Valid percents are reported. **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 4
Historical and present sources of other income.

	Relative caregiver child-only (n = 6421)	Recipient relative caregiver (n = 599)	Parental child-only (n = 2302)	Recipient parental (n = 12,801)	Total (n = 22,123)
UI wages in previous year					
% Employed***	51.6%	25.5%	17.0%	51.7%	47.5%
Total annual earnings					
Mean***	\$23,394.27	\$6441.49	\$6387.23	\$4931.93	\$10,845.65
Standard deviation	\$17,309.58	\$10,077.37	\$11,070.78	\$6406.68	\$14,126.19
Average quarterly earnings					
Mean***	\$6148.52	\$2203.96	\$2148.46	\$1800.51	\$3194.12
Median	\$5601.38	\$1360.77	\$1056.19	\$1254.33	\$1926.50
Standard deviation	\$4222.42	\$2554.02	\$2890.02	\$1846.62	\$3497.86
UI wages in the study quarter					
% Employed***	45.3%	17.2%	9.8%	34.6%	34.8%
Total quarterly earnings					
Mean***	\$7030.49	\$2443.56	\$3099.36	\$2351.89	\$4145.78
Standard deviation	\$4725.24	\$2965.06	\$3426.44	\$2329.15	\$4138.96
UI wages in follow-up year					
% Employed***	49.3%	26.4%	18.0%	60.3%	51.9%
Total annual earnings					
Mean***	\$24,162.68	\$9142.45	\$7457.87	\$8231.81	\$12,618.65
Standard deviation	\$17,437.47	\$11,613.06	\$11,747.65	\$8390.78	\$13,749.61
Average quarterly earnings					
Mean***	\$6364.88	\$2728.72	\$2306.92	\$2554.91	\$3601.26
Standard deviation	\$4371.84	\$2973.72	\$2942.23	\$2124.52	\$3415.50
SSI application and Receipt					
% Applied before study month***	22.8%	38.2%	86.8%	22.9%	29.9%
% Received in study month***	10.7%	0.3%	81.0%	0.4%	11.7%
Child support receipt in the study month					
% With current support due***	31.7%	27.0%	34.6%	36.8%	34.8%
% With current support distributed**	13.8%	10.5%	14.6%	15.1%	14.6%
Cases with distributions as a % of those with support due	43.5%	38.9%	42.3%	41.1%	41.8%
Current support distributed					
Mean***	\$235.30	\$177.64	\$193.26	\$217.60	\$219.15
Standard deviation	\$194.35	\$97.66	\$137.28	\$134.48	\$153.53
Mean amount distributed as a percent of support due	79.3%	85.5%	81.3%	81.9%	81.2%
Child support receipt in previous year					
% With child support due***	32.8%	29.4%	35.8%	37.2%	35.5%
% With current support distributed***	21.4%	16.5%	22.3%	23.8%	22.8%
Cases with distributions as a % of those with support due	65.3%	56.3%	62.2%	64.0%	64.0%
Current support distributed					
Mean***	\$1546.36	\$1081.35	\$1350.53	\$1315.33	\$1377.42
Standard deviation	\$1864.20	\$947.72	\$1126.20	\$1196.73	\$1404.97
Mean amount distributed as a percent of support due*	51.4%	45.7%	52.7%	47.7%	49.2%

Note: Earnings were standardized to 2007 dollars, and only include those who were working. In addition, 121 caseheads were excluded from the analyses because unique identifiers were missing. Current support distributed amounts exclude \$0 values. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .00$.

4.2. Other sources of income

Low-income families often combine income from different sources and rely on resources in addition to their TANF grants (for a summary of literature on income packaging, see Wu & Eamon, 2007). Table 4 presents data on families' historical and present use of earned employment income, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and child support.

4.2.1. Employment

One of the primary differences between traditional recipient parental cases and other types of TANF cases is the requirement to participate in work or work-related activities as a condition for receiving benefits. In general, adults in child-only cases are not required to participate in work and so their employment experiences are not typically documented or monitored. However, the findings presented in Table 4 show that many of these cases include a casehead who is employed in Maryland. For instance, half of caseheads in relative caregiver child-only TANF cases (51.6%) and recipient parental TANF cases (51.7%) were employed at some point in the past year, compared with much lower employment rates among the smaller subgroups of recipient relative caregiver (25.5%) and parental child-only cases (17.0%). Among those who worked, earnings in relative caregiver child-only cases were about five times higher than the

typical earnings of a recipient parental TANF recipient (mean = \$23,394.27 per year vs. \$4931.93 per year). The second category of relative caregiver cases, recipient relative caregiver cases, differs from those in the child-only category. Only about one-fifth to one-quarter included a working casehead in the past year (25.5%), in the study quarter (17.2%), or in the year following the study quarter (26.4%). Among those who did work, earnings remained consistently low (i.e., less than \$10,000 per year). Parental child-only cases also had low employment rates over time (less than one in five) and low earnings overall (less than \$10,000 per year).

Finally, traditional recipient parental cases seem to be more typical of current descriptions of the working poor. The majority of these cases included a casehead who worked in the year leading up to the study quarter (51.7%) and in the year following the study quarter (60.3%). Earnings among those who worked were always less than \$3000 per quarter, on average, though there is a marked increase in total annual earnings between the years before and after the study month, from less than \$5000 per year to over \$8000 per year, on average.

4.2.2. SSI participation of caseheads

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a common income source for low-income families in general and for the TANF population in particular, especially among child-only subgroups (Wamhoff &

Table 5
Characteristics of Children.

	Relative caregiver child-only (n = 9882)	Recipient relative caregiver (n = 966)	Parental child-only (n = 4055)	Recipient parental (n = 25,139)	Total (n = 40,042)
Gender					
Female	51.9%	50.3%	52.5%	50.9%	51.3%
Male	48.1%	49.7%	47.5%	49.1%	48.7%
Race***					
African American	81.5%	87.2%	74.8%	84.7%	83.0%
Caucasian	17.5%	12.5%	16.6%	13.4%	14.7%
Other	1.1%	.3%	8.6%	1.8%	2.3%
Age of child in study month***					
Less than 1 year	1.4%	2.0%	3.6%	11.3%	7.8%
1–5 years	18.2%	21.0%	24.7%	37.4%	31.0%
6–12 years	41.7%	43.9%	37.9%	34.1%	36.6%
13–18 years	38.7%	33.1%	33.9%	17.3%	24.6%
Mean***	10.72	10.17	9.75	7.12	8.35
Standard deviation	4.67	4.65	5.13	5.07	5.22
Range	<1–18	<1–18	<1–18	<1–18	<1–18
Relationship to casehead***					
Child (natural, adopted, or step)	–	–	100.0%	100.0%	72.9%
Grandchild/great-grandchild	64.3%	71.7%	–	–	17.6%
Niece/nephew	28.7%	23.2%	–	–	7.6%
Cousin	4.5%	3.4%	–	–	1.2%
Sibling	2.5%	1.7%	–	–	0.7%

Notes: Valid percents are reported. Statistical significance on "Relationship to casehead" is between the two non-parental groups. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Wiseman, 2005/2006). In general, SSI is considered a preferable income source to TANF for qualifying individuals with disabilities because it is not time-limited, and it is indexed for inflation over time. However, SSI benefits are generally not sufficient to sustain a family above national poverty thresholds.

The middle section of Table 4 highlights the variation in rates of SSI receipt and application rates among the TANF subgroups in our sample. As anticipated, SSI receipt is highest among child-only subgroups, though substantially higher among parental child-only cases than relative caregiver child-only cases. These patterns make sense, because in Maryland SSI is the most common reason why a parent would not be included in a TANF grant with their child(ren). Overall, more than four out of five (86.8%) caseheads of parental child-only cases had applied for SSI at some point prior to the study month and about four out of five (81.0%) received SSI benefits in the study month. In contrast, although nearly two-fifths (38.2%) of the recipient relative caregiver caseheads had applied for SSI at least once before, very few (less than 1%) received an SSI payment in the study month. It could be that these individuals are early on in the SSI process and are using TANF as a support until they are awarded benefits, or it could be that their disabilities are severe enough to keep them from working but not severe enough to qualify them for benefits.

These analyses suggest that caseheads of parental child-only TANF cases are most likely to have one or more long-term disabilities that could present unique service needs for the children in their care. However, there is also some indication of relatively high rates of disability among caseheads in the other subgroups as well. For instance, nearly two-fifths (38.2%) of the caseheads in recipient relative caregiver cases had applied for SSI at least once before or during the study month, as did nearly one-quarter of caseheads in recipient parental and relative caregiver child-only cases (22.9% and 22.8%, respectively). Although the SSI application process is generally long and involves one or more denials before benefits are approved, there is a chance that some of the caseheads who are currently included in the TANF benefit calculation will be approved for SSI in the future, and at that point convert to child-only cases.

4.2.3. Child support distributions

Child support can be an important source of income for poor families and increase a family's chances of exiting welfare (Cancian, Meyer, & Park, 2003; Grall, 2006; Sorensen & Zibman, 2000; Srivastava, Ovwigho, & Born, 2001). And, cooperation with child

support enforcement is a requirement for all TANF cases, whether or not the adult is included in the TANF grant. Child support typically entails three main phases. The first is the location of non-custodial parents and the establishment of paternity, if needed. The next phase includes order establishment, during which the custodial and non-custodial parents provide income and expense information that is used as a basis for determining an appropriate child support order amount. Once the order is set, the final but ongoing phase is enforcement.

As shown in last section of Table 4, approximately one out of three (34.8%) TANF caseheads was owed child support in the study month, meaning that at least one non-custodial parent had already been located, paternity was established if needed, and a child support order was set. These rates are somewhat lower than the national rate of child support order establishment among active TANF cases, which is approximately 50% (Office of Child Support Enforcement [OCSE], 2007). However, some variation exists among subgroups of TANF cases.

Relative caregiver caseheads were less likely to be owed support in the study month (31.7% and 27.0% for child-only and recipient relative caregiver cases, respectively) compared with parental caseheads (34.6% and 36.8% for child-only and recipient parental cases respectively). As a result, these caseheads were also less likely to have support distributed on behalf of their case. Overall, only two out of five caseheads who were owed support had any distributions³ (approximately 40% across all four subgroups), and among those the average amount distributed was approximately \$200. This amount represents approximately 80% of the total amount due. During the year leading up to the study month, relative caregiver caseheads were slightly less likely to have child support due for the child(ren) in their care (32.8% and 29.4% for relative caregiver child-only and recipient cases, respectively, vs. 35.8% and 37.2% for parental child-only and recipient cases, respectively). In the past year, among those with child support cases that did have distributions (approximately 60% across all four subgroups), the amount distributed represented about one-half of what was due (49.2% overall).

³ A distribution is the amount of money allocated to a particular child support case. In situations where an obligor has multiple cases, he or she would make a single payment to the agency that would then be distributed among the various cases. Distributions are then disbursed to either the family or the state, depending on whether the child is currently receiving cash assistance from the state.

Together these findings indicate that it may be particularly challenging for relative caregiver caseheads to receive support for the children in their care. While more research is warranted on this topic, there are several scenarios which may be worth considering. On one hand, although relative caregiver caseheads can typically pursue child support against two parents per child in their care, it is likely the child came into the relative's care because one or both parents are incapacitated, incarcerated, or deceased. In these situations, it would obviously be less likely for the casehead to be awarded child support. On the other hand, it is also important to point out that in general child support is a largely untapped potential income source for many TANF children, and perhaps particularly for children in the care of a relative. Certainly, not all non-custodial parents are incarcerated or deceased. However, more research is needed on how often these situations occur among parents of children in relative care, and whether there might be a stronger role for the TANF agency in either helping relatives understand the importance of cooperating with child support enforcement in order to benefit of the children in their care, or finding creative ways to locate the non-custodial parent.

5. Findings and discussion: characteristics of children

5.1. Demographic characteristics of children

Within the 22,123 cases in our study are over 40,000 children who were served through Maryland's TANF agency in the study month. The characteristics of children in our sample are presented in Table 5. Figures in the far right column describe the entire sample of children, showing that there were slightly more girls (51.3%) than boys (48.7%). About four out of five (83.0%) children were African American, and over one-third were under six years of age (i.e., 7.8% under one and 31.0% aged one to five). Approximately three-quarters (72.9%) of children were in a TANF case with their parent, but nearly one in five (17.6%) were in the care of a grandparent, and the remaining one in ten (9.5%) were in the care of another relative such as an aunt or uncle (7.6%), cousin (1.2%), or sibling (0.7%).

The findings displayed in the middle columns of Table 5 suggest that there are differences among children depending on their relationship to the casehead. Compared with children in traditional recipient parental cases, more children in relative caregiver child-only cases

were Caucasian (17.5% vs. 13.4%). Children in recipient relative caregiver cases are more likely to be African-American (87.2% vs. 84.7% among recipient parental cases), and a larger proportion of children in parental child-only cases were of a minority race other than African American (8.6% vs. 1.8% among recipient parental cases). Consistent with the differences in the age of the youngest child per case shown in Table 3, the child-level findings in Table 5 show that younger children are more common in recipient parental cases than either parental child-only cases or either of the relative caregiver case subgroups. Specifically, one-fifth (19.6%) of the children in relative caregiver child-only cases were under the age of six, compared with approximately one-quarter of the children in recipient relative caregiver or parental child-only cases (23.0% and 28.3%, respectively), and nearly one-half (48.7%) of all children in recipient parental cases. The differences are also evident at the other end of the age spectrum, as nearly two-fifths (38.7%) of the children in relative caregiver child-only cases were teenagers between 13 and 18 compared with less than one in five (17.3%) children in recipient parental cases.

These findings are particularly relevant in childcare discussions and also important when considering child well-being. For instance, the teens and young adults in relative caregiver child-only cases are certain to have a different set of needs from the young children in recipient parental cases. In fact, the transition from youth to adulthood has become accepted as a separate developmental stage (Arnett, 2000; Tyre et al., 2002). In addition, this transition is considered to be more complex than it once was, with youth relying more heavily on family, social, and financial supports to help them achieve independence (Schoeni & Ross, 2004).

In the final portion of Table 5, the data show that the majority of children in relative caregiver cases were grandchildren and/or great grandchildren (64.3% of those in relative caregiver child-only cases and 71.7% of those in recipient relative caregiver cases), and most of the remaining children were nieces and nephews (28.7% of those in relative caregiver child-only cases and 23.2% in recipient relative caregiver cases).

5.2. TANF participation of children

Table 6 describes the TANF experiences of children in active TANF assistance units in the study month. Between April 1998 and October

Table 6
TANF receipt and child support status: children.

	Relative caregiver child-only (n = 9882)	Recipient relative caregiver (n = 966)	Parental child-only (n = 4055)	Recipient parental (n = 25,139)	Total (n = 40,042)
Total months of TANF since 4/98 (regardless of recipient status)					
Mean***	54.5	54.1	51.3	28.2	37.7
Standard deviation	30.5	30.0	30.2	24.6	29.6
Previous TANF spell with current guardian since 4/98***	19.2%	27.3%	39.3%	50.8%	41.3%
Previous TANF Spell with any Non-parental guardian since 4/98***	27.7%	33.3%	6.8%	6.2%	12.2%
Previous TANF spell with a parent since 4/98***	39.4%	37.2%	42.9%	53.0%	48.2%
Length of current TANF spell with current guardian since 4/98 (regardless of recipient status)					
Mean***	39.1	37.8	38.9	14.2	23.4
Standard deviation	32.1	31.0	30.8	17.4	26.6
Involvement with child support***					
Not known to child support	0.8%	2.1%	2.5%	4.7%	3.4%
Known but inactive in the study month	19.7%	16.6%	31.2%	20.6%	21.3%
Known and active in the study month	79.5%	81.4%	66.3%	74.8%	75.2%
Mother as non-custodial parent on at least one case***	82.3%	83.1%	13.6%	8.1%	28.8%
Paternity status***					
Unknown/not applicable	9.4%	10.6%	10.3%	9.8%	9.8%
Required but not established	44.3%	50.4%	35.6%	37.0%	39.0%
Required and established by affidavit or court	37.6%	35.4%	44.3%	46.2%	43.6%
Not required (established by marriage)	8.7%	3.6%	9.8%	7.0%	7.6%

Notes: Paternity status includes all child support cases, regardless of active/inactive status in the critical month. 'Unknown/not applicable' includes children with unknown paternity status in all child support cases, children with paternity which was excluded or unknown in all cases, children who were not participating on a child support case with their father as the NCP, children not participating on any child support case, and children who were not found at all in the child support administrative database. Valid percents are reported. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

2005 (a total of 91 months), the data show that children in recipient parental cases received TANF for the shortest amount of time, with just over two years worth of assistance (mean = 28.78 months). In comparison, children in the other three case subgroups received assistance for an average of more than four years (mean = 54.52 months among relative caregiver child-only cases, 54.09 months among recipient relative caregiver cases, and 51.30 among parental child-only cases).

Findings presented in Table 6 show that the TANF spell active in the study month was not the first for many children. Furthermore, previous TANF assistance was often received with a different casehead than the one the child was with in the study month, particularly for children in relative caregiver cases. For instance, one out of five (19.2%) children in relative caregiver child-only cases had a previous spell with their current caregiver, but nearly three out of ten (27.7%) had a previous spell either with their current caregiver or another non-parental guardian. Thus, it appears that nearly one in ten (the difference between 19.2% and 27.7%) children in relative caregiver child-only cases have received cash assistance with at least two relative caregivers. A similar but less accentuated trend emerges among children in recipient relative caregiver cases. One out of four (27.3%) children in this group had a previous TANF spell with their current guardian and approximately one in three (33.3%) children had a previous TANF spell with either their current caregiver or another relative caregiver. Again, these findings suggest that almost one in ten (the difference between 27.3% and 33.3%) received cash assistance with at least two different relative caregivers.

Additionally, approximately two out of five children in relative caregiver TANF cases were also in a previous TANF spell with one of their parents (39.4% among children in relative caregiver child-only cases and 37.2% among children in recipient relative caregiver cases). In contrast to children in relative caregiver cases, less than one in ten children in parental cases had been in a previous TANF case with a relative caregiver (6.8% among children in parental child-only cases and 6.2% of children in recipient parental cases). This finding could be related to the higher proportion of very young children in parental cases compared with relative caregiver cases, and likewise the shorter welfare histories of children in parental cases, particularly recipient parental cases. However, despite these factors, children in parental cases do have at least one previous TANF spell of some length; but the previous TANF receipt was also with their parent rather than a relative caregiver. Overall, just over two-fifths (42.9%) of children in parental child-only cases and more than one-half (53.0%) of children in recipient parental cases had at least one previous parental TANF spell.

Thus, on the one hand, a substantial number of children in relative caregiver cases today are likely to have been on TANF with a parent in the past, and at least one other relative. On the other, very few children in parental cases today have been on TANF with a relative in the past and this is not explained by a lack of TANF history. These findings suggest less stable living arrangements among children in relative caregiver TANF cases than those in parental TANF cases.

5.3. Child support status of children

Findings related to child support distributions and presented in Table 4 indicated that relative caregiver TANF caseheads were less often than parental caseheads to be owed child support for the children in their care. It is also important to understand where these families are in the child support enforcement process, such as whether paternity has been established for the children or not.

The bottom portion of Table 6 shows that children in relative caregiver TANF cases were more likely to be known to the child support system and to have an active case in the study month than their counterparts in parental TANF cases. For instance, approximately eight out of ten children in relative caregiver child-only (79.5%) and recipient

relative caregiver cases (81.4%) had an active child support case in Maryland in the study month. In contrast, approximately three-quarters (74.8%) of children in recipient parental cases had an active child support case in Maryland in the study month and two-thirds (66.3%) of children in parental child-only cases had an active child support case.

Children in relative caregiver TANF cases have two non-custodial parents from whom child support may be collected. This is clearly supported by the findings depicted in Table 6 which show that eight out of ten (82.3%) children in relative caregiver child-only cases and three-fourths of children in recipient relative caregiver cases (83.1%) had at least one child support case where the mother was named as the non-custodial parent. Very few children in parental child-only and recipient parental cases (13.6% and 8.1%, respectively) had a child support case where the mother was named as the non-custodial parent.

Finally, findings indicate that paternity is in fact less likely to be established for children in relative caregiver TANF cases, and especially recipient relative caregiver cases. Specifically, approximately one-half of the children in relative caregiver child-only (44.3%) and recipient relative caregiver (50.4%) cases still required paternity establishment in the study month. In contrast, approximately one-third of children in parental child-only cases (35.6%) and recipient parental cases (37.0%) were still waiting for paternity establishment. This means that children in relative caregiver TANF cases, and specifically children in recipient relative caregiver cases, are less likely to have child support collected on their behalf in the near future even though they are more likely to have child support cases open (one for each parent). Another complicating factor is that children in relative caregiver TANF cases tend to be older than those in parental cases, so paternity establishment may be even more difficult to accomplish.

5.4. Social service involvement and child protective services

Table 7 contains findings on the recent social services involvement of children receiving TANF. Overall, children in relative caregiver cases were twice as likely as children in parental cases to receive services in the study month, regardless of the recipient status of the casehead (18.3% and 15.0% of children in relative caregiver child-only and recipient relative caregiver cases, respectively, vs. 10.1% of children in parental child-only cases and 10.2% of children in recipient parental cases). Prior to the study month, more than two-thirds (68.7%) of children in recipient parental cases had no record in the Social Services Administration (SSA) administrative system, compared with two-fifths to one-half of children in the other three subgroups (42.6% of children in relative caregiver child-only cases, 45.7% of children in recipient relative caregiver cases, and 54.3% of children in parental child-only cases).

Among those who received services in the study month, there were some clear differences between children in parental cases versus relative caregiver cases. A larger proportion of children in parental cases received in-home services to families (57.1% among parental child-only cases and 64.0% among recipient parental cases, vs. 30.6% among relative caregiver child-only cases and 40.0% among recipient relative caregiver cases). In contrast, children in relative caregiver cases were significantly more likely to receive Kinship Care services. Specifically, of children who received services in the study month, more than half (52.8%) of those in relative caregiver child-only cases and approximately two out of five (39.3%) of those in recipient relative caregiver cases received Kinship Care services.

Perhaps children in non-traditional TANF cases have more service needs than children in traditional recipient parental cases. However, children in traditional cases are more likely to be young children less than five years old compared with children in any of the other subgroups so it may be that they have not yet come to the attention of the child welfare agency (many child welfare referrals come from

Table 7
Social services involvement and child protective services.

	Relative caregiver child-only (n = 9882)	Recipient relative caregiver (n = 966)	Parental child-only (n = 4055)	Recipient parental (n = 25,139)	Total (n = 40,042)
Number of months since last application with Social Services***					
Received services in 10/05	18.3%	15.0%	10.1%	10.2%	12.3%
1–12 months ago	6.7%	6.7%	9.3%	7.1%	7.2%
More than 12 Months ago	32.5%	32.6%	26.3%	14.1%	20.3%
No social services record [†]	42.6%	45.7%	54.3%	68.7%	60.2%
Type of social services provided in 10/05 (not mutually exclusive) ^{††}					
Adoptive***	4.3%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	1.6%
Foster care***	13.5%	11.7%	9.5%	4.2%	8.3%
Child protective services	22.4%	21.4%	40.0%	38.7%	32.3%
Services to Families (excluding kinship care)**	30.6%	40.0%	57.1%	64.0%	50.4%
Kinship care***	52.8%	39.3%	2.2%	2.4%	22.0%
Child protective services					
Involved in at least 1 indicated or unsubstantiated investigation***	47.9%	49.2%	28.9%	17.9%	27.2%
Involved in at least 1 investigation still open in the study month	2.9%	2.6%	2.9%	2.9%	2.9%
% of Children born 1/99 and later****	23.8%	27.2%	32.2%	53.6%	43.4%
Involved in at least 1 indicated or unsubstantiated investigation***	39.1%	35.7%	12.2%	8.1%	13.0%
Reported as a victim in at least 1 indicated or unsubstantiated investigation***	22.8%	16.0%	6.5%	4.2%	7.1%

Notes: We do not present Day Care Services or other services in which less than 2.0% of the children in the caseload participated, including the following: In-Home Aid, Adult Protective Services, local services, Social Services to Adults, Judicare, Refugee Services, Project Home, Information & Referral, Environmental Emergencies, and TEMHA.

[†] Certain records, such as “ruled out” or “unsubstantiated” child protective services investigations, are expunged over time and the extent to which social services non-participation is overstated because of missing/expunged records is unknown.

Valid percents are presented, and “Type of Social Services Provided in 10/05” is presented as a percent of those who received any services in the study month.

Under most circumstances, unsubstantiated CPS records are expunged from the system after five years so incidence rates should be viewed as a lower bound. Also, it is unknown how many investigations open in October 2005 were later ruled out, as opposed to having a finding of indicated or unsubstantiated abuse or neglect.

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

school professionals). Another important point is that the discrepancy in social service receipt could be an indication of the entry point a particular case entered “the system.” For instance, non-traditional cases may have been more likely to be referred to TANF from case-workers in SSA or child support, compared with traditional recipient parental cases whose primary need was income support so they self-referred to the TANF program without encountering SSA at all.

The bottom half of Table 7 presents data on children's current and past experiences with child protective services, including rates of indicated and unsubstantiated findings and whether or not they were named as a victim in the investigation. Overall, the incidence rates for children involved (regardless of victim status) in an abuse or neglect investigation that was not ruled out are considerably higher for children in relative caregiver TANF cases than for children in parental TANF cases. Nearly one-half of children in relative caregiver child-only cases (47.9%) and recipient relative caregiver cases (49.2%) were included in an investigation compared with a little over one-quarter (28.9%) of children in parental child-only cases and one-fifth of children in recipient parental cases (17.9%). Given that a child protective services investigation may have prompted the placement with a relative in the first place, these findings may not be surprising. At the same time, however, children in non-traditional TANF cases appear to be less likely to receive situation-specific case management. Although these children are not likely to be at imminent risk for maltreatment (only 3% in any subgroup were involved in an ongoing investigation in the study month), it is probable that they have critical service needs beyond basic financial assistance as a result of previous maltreatment. Prior research has shown that children in relative care, especially those with previous encounters with the child welfare system, are at increased risk for medical, behavioral and educational problems (for a summary of relevant studies, see Gibbs et al., 2006).

Due to data limitations, lifetime history of child protective services involvement was evaluated only for children born January 1999 or later who would have been younger than seven years old in the study month. This group of young children accounts for about one-quarter (23.8%) of all children in relative caregiver child-only cases, about three out of ten children in recipient relative caregiver and

parental child-only cases (27.2% and 32.2%, respectively), and more than half (53.6%) of all children in recipient parental cases. Among them, nearly two-fifths (39.1%) of those in relative caregiver child-only cases had been involved in an investigation of abuse or neglect that was indicated or unsubstantiated. The incidence rate was slightly lower for children in recipient relative caregiver cases, though it still represented more than one out of three (35.7%) children. In comparison, about one in ten young children in parental TANF cases had been involved in an indicated or unsubstantiated investigation (12.2% of children in parental child-only cases and 8.1% of children in recipient parental cases).

The last row of Table 7 is also limited to children born January in 1999 or later and presents victim rates as opposed to rates of overall involvement in maltreatment investigations. Young children in relative caregiver child-only cases are substantially more likely to have been victims of maltreatment (22.8%) compared with children in recipient relative caregiver cases (16.0%), children in parental child-only cases (6.5%) and children in recipient parental cases (4.2%).⁴

Children in relative caregiver cases are more likely to have been involved in some way in a child protective services investigation compared with their peers in parental TANF cases. Furthermore, children in relative caregiver child-only cases are most likely to have been victims of abuse or neglect. Although there is no evidence to suggest that children in relative caregiver cases are any more likely to be in immediate danger than children in other types of TANF cases, their history of maltreatment may be enough to raise concerns about whether they may be in need of more situation-specific case management or follow-up. Findings suggest that TANF agencies should acknowledge that these children are in their caseload and be aware of red flags that might indicate a need for prevention, intervention or support.

⁴ Although not shown, we also analyzed child protective services data for children born in specific years in order to test whether the higher maltreatment rate among children in relative caregiver TANF cases was merely a reflection of the higher proportion of older children in these cases. However, the overall trend of the results was consistent at each comparable age level. That is, among children of similar age, those in relative caregiver child-only cases were always most likely to have been a victim of maltreatment and children in recipient parental cases always were the least likely.

6. Conclusions

Child-only and recipient relative caregiver TANF cases merit attention as they continue to make up a substantial portion of today's TANF caseload (Office of Family Assistance, 2009). Few states have specific efforts targeted for these non-traditional cases beyond basic cash assistance and need more information to guide the development of programs and services (O'Dell, 2005). Moreover, as many states are struggling financially and falling short on funds for social services, they will certainly be making very difficult decisions about the large portion of non-traditional families on the TANF caseload. More than at any other time, a focused and complete understanding of these families is crucial in informing those decisions and, to the extent possible, identifying and providing for the needs of children in relative caregiver TANF cases, be they child-only cases or not. This study's findings show that programs targeted at child-only cases in general may miss variations in children's needs which appear to correlate more strongly with their relationship to the casehead, regardless of whether the adult is included in the grant or not.

Overall, child characteristics are correlated with whether or not a parent is in the household, and differences among caseheads are correlated more with whether or not they receive assistance for themselves along with the child. Regarding children, compared with their counterparts in parental TANF cases, children in relative caregiver TANF cases, both child-only and recipient cases, are less likely to have paternity established for the purposes of determining child support, more likely to have been determined to be a victim of child maltreatment, and tend to have longer welfare histories. The caseheads of relative caregiver TANF cases differ depending on whether they are in a child-only TANF case or a recipient relative caregiver case. Relative caregiver child-only caseheads seem to rely mostly on moderate earnings and some SSI receipt combined with a smaller TANF grant. Recipient relative caregivers have very low earnings, low SSI receipt, and long welfare histories. Collectively, relative caregiver child-only and recipient relative caregiver cases have lower child support distribution rates and slightly higher social service participation rates than their parental case counterparts.

6.1. Limitations and further research

The findings of this research project are tempered by three limitations. First, data limitations encompass cautions regarding the Unemployment Insurance (UI) data. UI data are limited to Maryland employers and thus do not cover all jobs held by Maryland residents. In a small state such as Maryland which borders four states (Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia) and the District of Columbia, cross-border employment by Maryland residents is quite common. Fully half of all counties in Maryland border at least one other state. Also, there are more than 125,000 federal jobs in the State (Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation, 2003) and many Maryland residents live within easy commuting distance of Washington, D.C. Although these limitations suppress our numbers of employed recipients, the limitation likely affects all analytical groups equally and thus should not alter our findings regarding relative rates. Furthermore, UI earnings are reported on an aggregated quarterly basis. The computation of hourly wage figures or a weekly or monthly salary from these data is impossible. It is important to bear these data limitations in mind when examining employment patterns among our sample members.

Second, the study month of October 2005 is dated. Limitations in the availability of the child welfare data, a critical component of the research project, drove the decision to use 2005 data. A more recent examination of the non-parental caseload admittedly might better describe the current situation. However, although both economic conditions and welfare policy have changed since 2005 with a nationwide recession and the implementation of the Deficit Reduction Act,

the TANF caseload has remained quite similar to that of 2005. Moreover, programs and rules targeted towards child-only and non-parental cases have changed little if at all in most states. Thus, we assert that the research findings likely hold true for the current era.

Third, the results of this study are based on the administrative data from one state. Given the flexibility afforded to states regarding TANF program details and variations in caseload subgroups (Office of Family Assistance, 2009), it is possible that the experiences and outcomes of TANF recipients, including child-only and relative caregiver cases, differ by state of residence. Further research, using data from other states and other sources, including qualitative interviews or case reviews, would serve to support or possibly refute certain findings. Along these lines, further research in this area should focus on the overlap between child welfare and non-parental households and possible best practices in collaboration and outreach.

6.2. Policy and practice implications

Despite these limitations, the present research uniquely adds to the literature on the needs of children in non-parental households on the TANF caseload and in a sense offers a new direction for both research and policy. The findings clearly demonstrate the importance of focusing on the needs of children in relative caregiver cases broadly speaking, not just those that fall into the child-only category. Although the data limitations and state policy experience of Maryland limit our ability to generalize our findings across the nation, the data do offer some empirical evidence to guide policy and practice discussions. Findings reveal clear differences in the resources and potential needs of parental vs. relative caregiver TANF cases, and child-only vs. non-child-only cases, with the recipient relative caregiver cases consistently faring the worst. Overall, recipient relative caregiver cases are more likely to remain on TANF for long periods of time, least likely to be receiving SSI or working, and least likely to be owed any child support for the children in their care. Policymakers and state program administrators may want to consider the extensive needs of relative caregivers, both recipient and child-only cases, when allocating limited resources among TANF subgroups. Caseworkers should also be aware of the higher proportion of child welfare involvement among children in relative caregiver cases and be watchful of situations that may warrant prevention, intervention or support services.

Our findings demonstrated a substantial degree of overlap among the three major human services administrations in the state, particularly for non-parental cases. Despite this overlap, it is not clear that relative caregiver TANF families are receiving the full array of services that might benefit them. Neither the TANF agency nor the child welfare agency is designed to provide long-term support or case management to relative caregivers. It is likely that targeted collaborations among the TANF, child support, and child welfare agencies would result in better outcomes for these vulnerable families. For instance, the child support agency may be able to identify non-custodial parents and/or relatives that may be a valuable resource for Social Services in searching for a suitable placement for a child in foster care. Or, the welfare agency may be able to collaborate with Social Services to identify community resources for ongoing relative caregiver arrangements where there is no immediate threat of harm. There are certainly many other areas where these types of cross-program collaboration could be an effective way to identify and meet the needs of children in relative caregiver cases.

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