

# Correlates of Leaving or Staying on WorkFirst in Washington State

Executive Summary

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## Study Description

This study reports the results of a secondary data analysis performed by Dr. Joseph Scott and Travis Anderson-Bond.<sup>1</sup> We analyzed public use data from Wave I of the WorkFirst Evaluation Study, designed and administered by the Washington State Employment Security Department (Olympia, WA). This survey was administered by telephone to over 3,000 people who were receiving WorkFirst (the Washington version of TANF) as of March 1999. The interviews occurred from December 1999 to August 2000.

Our study seeks to address two questions: First, what are the differences between those who manage to stay off WorkFirst, and those who do not? Second, are there any important racial differences in the characteristics related to leaving or staying? To address these questions, we look at several attributes of the study participants: demographics (e.g. race, age); income and employment; education; health; food hardship; adult abuse; pregnancy; and their experience with the WorkFirst program.

In our analysis, we examined the characteristics of three groups of study participants: those who stayed *off* of WorkFirst for an entire year (September 1999 to August 2000);

those who were *on* WorkFirst for all months of that year; and those who were on for *some* (but not all) of those months. In our discussion, we refer to these three groups as “Leavers,” “Stayers,” and “Returners,” respectively. Because the differences are the most striking between the Leavers and the Stayers, we focus our discussion on the contrasts between these two groups.

Other agencies have performed analyses and evaluations of WorkFirst and other TANF-based programs. Many of these studies perform their analyses in terms of “leavers” and “stayers” -- those who leave Welfare, and those who remain on. We feel that our study is more rigorous than most others: our definition of “leavers” and “stayers” is more rigorous; we examine the influences of various factors on “leaving” and “staying” (rather than simply reporting averages); and we break down the effects by racial group.<sup>2</sup> *To our knowledge, ours is the only report that examines differences, by race, in characteristics of Leavers and Stayers.* Our more stringent definition of “leavers” and “stayers” also allows us to draw stronger conclusions from our study over *what characteristics allow WorkFirst clients to successfully leave.*

Because roughly 95% of the survey’s respondents were female, our statistics, discussions, and conclusions only pertain to females (males were excluded from our analyses). Additionally,

Asians and Pacific Islanders were combined into one “Asian/Pacific Islander” racial category, due to low numbers. Finally, shortcomings in the study design mean there are several limitations of the data. (These limitations are discussed in their own section.) We can not be sure that this study’s participants are truly representative of Washington State WorkFirst enrollees. The reader must bear these limitations in mind.

Finally, it is important to note that all participants in the survey *were on WorkFirst* as of March 1999. **Thus, this study can not determine what prevents people from needing Welfare, since all participants were on Welfare at some point.** In order to determine what puts people on Welfare -- and conversely, what prevents people from ever needing it -- we would need a sample that included those who had never been on Welfare. Lacking this, **this study examines what helps people leave Welfare, once they are already on it.** This point of clarification must be kept in mind when interpreting our findings.

1 Dr. Scott is a Professor of Sociology and Anderson-Bond is Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington (Seattle).

2 For a comparison of our findings with those of other studies, please see our companion reports at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

## Length of Stay, by Race:

Leavers, Returners, and Stayers

### Conclusions: racial disparities

African-American females had greater difficulty in leaving WorkFirst than did Caucasian females. In terms of the racial proportions within Leavers and Stayers, Caucasians and Latinas were under-represented among Stayers, and over-represented among Leavers. In contrast, African-Americans and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were over-represented among the Stayers, and under-represented among the Leavers. This pattern of Caucasians being a greater proportion of “leavers” than “stayers” held true across all of the reports, but to varying degrees.

## Demographics

### RACIAL DISTRIBUTION

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

The data used in our analyses slightly under-represents African-Americans, noticeably under-represents Asians/Pacific Islanders, and also over-represents Caucasians, relative to their racial proportions in the WorkFirst rolls in Washington State.

African-Americans and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were heavily over-represented on the WorkFirst rolls, relative to their proportion of the state population. It also appears that Latinas were over-represented. In contrast, Caucasians and Asian-Americans/Pacific Islanders were under-represented on the WorkFirst rolls.

### AGE

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

For most racial groups, age did not appear to be strongly related to staying on or leaving WorkFirst. In general, Leavers and Stayers were very close to the same average age -- nearly identical, or within a year or two. This implies a mild relationship of younger people finding it slightly easier to leave WorkFirst.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

Age did not seem to have a strong relationship with time on WorkFirst (leaving or staying) for Caucasians and Latinas. In contrast, Asians/Pacific Islanders and African-Americans were more likely to leave WorkFirst if they were younger; Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were more likely to leave WorkFirst if they were older.

## Income and Employment

### EARNED INCOME

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

A higher earned income in one year was strongly related to leaving WorkFirst the following year.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There were signs of racial inequity: African-Americans could earn more than Caucasians and still fail to leave WorkFirst in the subsequent year. A similar pattern held true for Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders.

### EARNED INCOME AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Consistent with our findings for earned income, being at a higher percentage of the Federal Poverty Line in the previous year appeared to be strongly related to successfully staying off WorkFirst in the subsequent year.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

Consistent with our findings for earned income, Caucasians seemed to have an advantage over all other racial categories except Native Americans. African American females, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islander females who became Stayers were at a higher percentage of the Federal Poverty Line than Caucasians, yet did not leave WorkFirst. Similarly, they had to be at a markedly higher average percentage of the poverty line than Caucasian females in order to remain off WorkFirst in the next year.

### EARNED INCOME PER HOUSEHOLD MEMBER

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

## Education

Consistent with our findings for earned income and for the percentage of the Federal Poverty Line, those who had a higher earned income per person during one year were more likely to become Leavers in the following year.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

As with earned income and with the percentage of the poverty line, there were signs of racial inequity: African-American and Asian/Pacific Islander females had to earn more than Caucasian females in the preceding year in order to leave WorkFirst the following year. The exception to this was Native Americans, who appeared to be able to become a Leaver with less per-person income than Caucasians.

### FULL-TIME EMPLOYMENT

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Recently holding a full-time job was clearly related to successfully leaving WorkFirst.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

Some racial groups benefited more (or were penalized more) than others by whether their most recent job was full-time. However, it was an important factor for all racial groups.

### EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Completing a degree (either high school, Associate's, or Bachelor's) appeared to increase one's odds of successfully leaving WorkFirst. These degrees were preferable to a partly-completed degree (i.e. "some college"). In general, a vocational degree or "some college" did not seem to significantly aid in leaving WorkFirst -- but these were better than holding no degree, or stopping at a G.E.D.

Thus, providing opportunities for increased education appears to be a long-term solution to reducing Welfare caseloads.

However, we must emphasize that our study only includes those who were already on Welfare. Thus, our findings only apply to the question of "what helps Welfare recipients leave Welfare?" Our findings can not directly address the question of "what prevents people from needing Welfare in the first place?" This sheds an important light on our findings that Master's degrees (and for some racial groups, Bachelor's degrees) do not help them to leave WorkFirst: it could be that most people with college degrees never need Welfare in the first place.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

The utility of specific degrees varied across racial groups. However, all racial groups benefited from completing degrees beyond the high school/G.E.D. level.

### DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Dropping out of high school seemed related to staying on WorkFirst. Those who stayed in school were more likely to successfully leave WorkFirst than those who dropped out.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

African-Americans were particularly impacted by dropping out of school; this doubled their chances of failing to leave WorkFirst. Conversely, there was a negligible relationship for Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives between successfully leaving WorkFirst and staying in school or dropping out. Factors other than simply staying in school or dropping out appeared to be at work.

## Health

### OVER ALL HEALTH

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

For our sample of females, we found that general or over all health was mildly related to leaving or staying on WorkFirst. (General health was not as influential as the impact of poor health's on one's ability to work; this is discussed in later sections of this report.) Based on a one-through-five self-assessment scale of general health, the average health score for Leavers was better than that for Stayers.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There was a stronger relationship between over all health and being a Leaver versus a Stayer for Caucasian females and Latinas than there was for the other racial groups.

### CAUSING WORKFIRST ENROLLMENT

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In general, more Leavers than Stayers reported that poor physical or mental health was the primary reason they went on WorkFirst. Thus, ironically, poor health was related to successfully leaving WorkFirst. One possible interpretation is that those with a serious but temporary condition became unable to work and needed WorkFirst assistance; once their illness, injury, or disability passed, they returned to the workforce. If so, this situation only applies to a small proportion (5% or less) of those surveyed.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

African-Americans and Latinas demonstrated the largest differences between Leavers and Stayers. Leav-

ers were more likely than Stayers to report "poor health" as their main reason for originally needing WorkFirst. One possible explanation is that for some of them their poor health was of a temporary nature, and when the health crisis passed, the client was able to leave WorkFirst.

Conversely, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives had more Stayers than Leavers attributing their original need for WorkFirst to poor health (mental or physical). One explanation could be that Native Americans/Alaskan Natives tended to experience health issues of a more permanent nature, which led to their more permanent stay on Workfirst.

### IMPEDING JOB SEARCH OR WORKING

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

For all three related intersections of health and working -- poor health preventing a job search, poor health limiting the ability to work, and poor health limiting the type of job that can be held -- Stayers were twice as likely to cite poor health as Leavers. Thus, poor health's impact on the ability to work or find a job appears to impede the ability to leave WorkFirst.

Earlier in this report, we suggested that employment and good wages are linked to leaving WorkFirst. Thus, it is not poor general health (discussed in an earlier section of this report) in and of itself which prevents leaving Welfare; rather, it

is poor health's impact on the ability to work.

However, despite this relationship, 12% of the sample said their poor health prevented them from working -- yet they still left WorkFirst for a full year.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There was significant racial variation for these three measures of poor health's work-related impact on leaving WorkFirst. Depending on the measure of the impact of poor health on work, the relationship seems the strongest for Caucasians, African-Americans, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. This relationship did not hold true for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, who tended to have high rates of employment-impacting health issues among both Leavers and Stayers. Native Americans/Alaskan Natives and Caucasians tended to have higher levels of employment-impacting health issues, regardless of their Leaver/Stayer status.

## Food Hardship

### ADULTS

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Despite the limitations of the “hunger” question, food hardships seemed pervasive, both among Leavers and Stayers: depending on the racial category, 28% – 64% of the Leavers and Stayers have not eaten enough due to a lack of money.

Food hardship was greater among Stayers.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

Asian/Pacific Islander females had the highest rates of food hardship out of any of the Leavers and Stayers.

### CHILDREN

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In general, there was a noticeable difference in food hardship between the children of Leavers and Stayers; a greater percentage of Stayers reported food hardship. This suggests that longer stays on WorkFirst were related to children going hungry.

Out of our sample of all females, 11%–16% said their children sometimes had insufficient food, due to a lack of money. In a modern, industrialized society such as ours, this is troubling.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There were racial differences in the food hardship of children. The general pattern of Stayers experiencing a higher rate of food hardship than

Leavers did not hold true for the children of African-Americans and Latinas.

The prevalence of food hardship also differed by race: the children of Asians/Pacific Islanders had the highest proportion of food hardship.

## Adult Abuse

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Past physical abuse by a partner appeared to be related to a longer stay on WorkFirst. The prevalence of abuse for this female sample (41% – 51%) seemed higher than for the general population.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

The prevalence of past physical abuse among our female respondents varied by race. In general, more Caucasians and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives reported past abuse. Asians/Pacific Islanders had the lowest proportion reporting past abuse.

The degree of the impact of past abuse varied by race. However, there still appeared to be an effect, for all racial groups.

## Pregnancy

### AGE AT FIRST PREGNANCY

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

The average age of one’s first pregnancy was related to the length of time on WorkFirst. For all females, this relationship was moderate. Thus, becoming pregnant at an older age is mildly beneficial to being able to leave WorkFirst. However, pregnancy’s impact on schooling was of greater importance (discussed in a later section).

The relationship between age and Leaving or Staying was stronger within specific racial categories.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

With the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders, there was a noticeable relationship between the age of first pregnancy and one’s Leaver/Stayer status: Those who delayed their first pregnancy were more able to become Leavers. This relationship was moderate for Caucasians, and strong for all other racial categories with the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders.

### “TEEN” PREGNANCY (AGE 17 OR UNDER)

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Becoming pregnant as a minor (age 17 or under) was moderately related to longer stays on WorkFirst. For the sample of all females, those who had a teen pregnancy were more likely to be a Stayer than a Leaver. Conversely, those who avoided a teen pregnancy were slightly more likely to be a Leaver. As we discuss in the next section, it is not preg-



nancy as a minor, in itself, that has a strong relationship with staying on WorkFirst; rather, it is how the pregnancy affects one's educational trajectory.

It is important to note that teen pregnancy does not guarantee success or failure in one's attempts to leave WorkFirst. Twenty two percent of the respondents who had experienced a teen pregnancy were able to successfully stay off WorkFirst for a full year, despite their teen pregnancy. Conversely, 25% of those who avoided pregnancy did not manage to become Leavers, despite their avoidance of a teen pregnancy.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

With the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders, those who had a teen pregnancy were less able to leave WorkFirst. Strangely, for Asians/Pacific Islanders, the pattern was reversed.

#### FINISHING HIGH SCHOOL AND FIRST PREGNANCY

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In contrast to our previous two analyses of pregnancy (average age; teen pregnancy), "pregnancy causing one to leave school" had a strong and consistent relationship with the length of stay on WorkFirst. This suggests that it is not the age of the first pregnancy, or even "teen pregnancy," that impedes one from leaving WorkFirst. Instead, it is the harmful impact to one's educational trajectory. This suggests that attention should be focused, not

necessarily on preventing teen pregnancies, but rather on preventing pregnant teens from leaving school. When a teen pregnancy does not cause the teen to drop out of high school, the pregnancy's influence on the length of stay on WorkFirst is minimized.

However, dropping out of high school due to a pregnancy does not guarantee a failure to leave WorkFirst. Out of the females who dropped out of high school without their diploma, 19% still became Leavers.

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

In contrast to our previous two analyses of pregnancy, "pregnancy causing one to leave school" had a strong and consistent relationship with the length of stay on WorkFirst. Unlike the previous aspects of pregnancy (average age; teen pregnancy), we found that "pregnancy causing one to drop out of high school" is damaging to all racial groups' ability to leave WorkFirst. The exception to this may be Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives.

## Client Perceptions of WorkFirst

#### OVER ALL EXPERIENCE WITH TANF/ WORKFIRST PROGRAM

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

The respondents reported an over all positive experience with WorkFirst as a whole. There was only a negligible relationship between average satisfaction with WorkFirst and one's Leaver or Stayer status.

Part of this may stem from the general nature of the question. Although the respondents may have had likes or dislikes about specific elements of the WorkFirst program, these were not addressed.<sup>3</sup> Attitudes towards specific elements of WorkFirst may have better distinguished Leavers from Stayers.

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

There was not a strong racial difference in the over all satisfaction with the WorkFirst program. Latinas were slightly more positive, while Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were slightly less satisfied (followed by Caucasians, then Asians/Pacific Islanders).

There was not a strong relationship between over all satisfaction with the WorkFirst program and one's Leaver or Stayer status.

<sup>3</sup> Klawitter (2002) indicates that Wave 2 of the WFS3000 study has asked more specific questions about the client's experience. These include experiences with actual WorkFirst program elements.

PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF WORKFIRST  
TOWARDS SELF-SUFFICIENCY

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Among the sample of females, more respondents said that WorkFirst was not particularly helpful in moving them towards self-sufficiency than those who said it was “very helpful.” Roughly equal proportions said WorkFirst was “somewhat helpful” as said it was “not very helpful.”

Among all females, there was no difference in the average perceived helpfulness between Leavers and Stayers.

Conclusions: racial disparities

There was a fair amount of variation among the racial categories in terms of the distribution of their perceptions of the WorkFirst program’s helpfulness towards self-sufficiency. Caucasians and African-Americans tended towards the negative (i.e. “not very helpful”), Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders tended towards the positive (i.e. “very helpful”), and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were evenly split in their assessment.

There was also racial variation in terms of the relationship between perceptions of the program’s helpfulness and one’s Leaver/Stayer status. However, these variations were minor, amounting at the most to only a 0.3 difference on a three-point scale.

PERCEPTIONS OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Roughly one-quarter of the females in the study thought it was likely they would be on WorkFirst in one year’s time; roughly three-quarters thought it was unlikely they would be on WorkFirst in one year.

This question showed a relationship between being a Leaver and increased optimism for remaining off WorkFirst. However, since all Leavers were already off at the time of the interview, and all Stayers were still on, it is not surprising that their current enrollment status would influence their prediction of their enrollment status for the following year.

Conclusions: racial disparities

Caucasians and African-Americans were the most likely out of all racial groups to predict being off WorkFirst in one year’s time, while Latinas (closely followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) were the least optimistic. However, the vast majority of all racial groups (61% – 75%) predicted they would be off WorkFirst one year later.

In terms of its relationship to one’s Leaver or Stayer status, Leavers of all races were more likely than their Stayer counterparts to think they would be off WorkFirst in one year’s time. The smallest difference between Leavers and Stayers was for African-American females; the largest difference was for Asian/Pacific Islander females.

## Limitations of the Data: The WorkFirst Study

There are several weaknesses in the methodology of the WorkFirst evaluation study administered by Washington State Employment Security Department. These weaknesses limit the validity of any results derived from the data. These weaknesses fall in to two categories: the design and implementation of the survey, and the wording of the survey questions.

These weaknesses in the implementation of the survey cast doubt on the representativeness of the data. The most impoverished people in Washington State may be under-represented or omitted from this study; as such, any results from this data may under-estimate the difficulties faced by WorkFirst recipients. Similarly, WorkFirst recipients not fluent in English, as well as Native Americans living on reservations, may also have been under-represented in this study. If difficulty with English relates to difficulty in leaving WorkFirst, then this is another way that this data under-estimates the difficulties felt by WorkFirst clients in Washington State.

Thus, we do *not* conclude that the WFS3000 data is flawed to the point of invalidity. Rather, we suggest that this data -- to a greater or lesser extent -- underestimates hardships among the WorkFirst population. Any estimates of hardships or difficulties we have reported are most likely under-estimates of the true situation.

## **“Successful” Leaving: Is Leaving WorkFirst Always a Good Thing?**

Throughout this report, we have referred to those who stay off WorkFirst for a full twelve months as “successful Leavers.” However, not everyone who leaves WorkFirst is doing well. Many people who have left WorkFirst still suffer food shortages and medical issues. Thus, although leaving WorkFirst is typically a desired outcome, issues such as those who leave WorkFirst due to sanctions and those who are the “working poor” should not be ignored.



## Final Conclusions

### Key influences to success on WorkFirst:

Four elements seems to be clearly related to staying on, or successfully leaving, WorkFirst:

- The amount of money earned -- both in absolute terms, and relative to the number of household members
- Full-time employment
- Education -- particularly *completing* a degree, whether high school, Associate's, or Bachelor's degree
- Teen pregnancy -- but predominantly in its relationship to dropping out of school (our current analysis only addresses dropping out of high school). (However, for African Americans, it seems that the age of first pregnancy does have an influence.)

### Policy implications:

- Education is important. Give people the resources to complete a two-year or four-year degree.
- Teen pregnancies themselves are not the problem; teen pregnancies interfering with education are the problem. Give pregnant teens the ability to finish high school. Again: education is important.
- "A job" is not the answer. Instead, a job that provides a *living wage* is required. A person must earn enough money *relative to the number of dependents* to leave WorkFirst.

### Racial differences:

- Our examination of several elements related to staying on or successfully leaving WorkFirst indicated noticeable differences between Caucasians and African Americans. Among other issues, African Americans seemed to require a larger income to successfully leave WorkFirst; education did not give them the same advantage that it did for Caucasians; and African Americans experienced larger difficulties in leaving WorkFirst relating to dropping out of high school due to pregnancy.
- Racial/ethnic group disadvantages also exist for other racial/ethnic groups, compared to Caucasians.
- The sources of these racial/ethnic disparities need to be investigated further and addressed quickly.

### A note: "preventing poverty" versus "leaving poverty":

- This data only includes people who have already fallen onto poverty. Thus, this report does not address what causes people to need WorkFirst. Instead, this report can only address what seems to be associated with people leaving WorkFirst, once they have already sought assistance of WorkFirst .



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Final Report

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## Study Description

This study reports the results of a secondary data analysis performed by Dr. Joseph Scott and Travis Anderson-Bond.<sup>1</sup> We analyzed public use data from Wave I of the WorkFirst Evaluation Study, designed and administered by the Washington State Employment Security Department (Olympia, WA). This survey was administered by telephone to over 3,000 people who were receiving WorkFirst (the Washington version of TANF) as of March 1999. The interviews occurred from December 1999 to August 2000. In this report, this data will be referred to as the “WFS3000” data,<sup>2</sup> to distinguish it from other studies examining Washington State’s WorkFirst program.

Our study seeks to address two questions: First, what are the differences between those who manage to stay off WorkFirst, and those who do not? Second, are there any important racial differences in the characteristics related to leaving or staying? To address these questions, we look at several attributes of the study participants: demographics (e.g. race, age); income and employment; education; health; food hardship; adult abuse; pregnancy; and their experience with the WorkFirst program.

In our analysis, we examined the characteristics of three groups of study participants: those who stayed *off* of WorkFirst for an entire year (September 1999 to August 2000); those who were *on* WorkFirst for all months of that year; and those who were on for *some* (but not all) of those months. In our discussion, we refer to these three groups as “Leavers,” “Stayers,” and “Returners,” respectively. Because the differences are the most striking between the Leavers and the Stayers, we focus our discussion on the contrasts between these two groups. To be complete, we also included the results of the Returners; however, we generally do not discuss them.

Other agencies have performed analyses and evaluations of WorkFirst<sup>3</sup> and other TANF-based programs.<sup>4</sup> Many of these studies perform their analyses in terms of “leavers” and “stayers” -- those who leave Welfare, and those who remain on. These other studies usually differ in their definitions of “leavers,” “returners,” and “stayers” compared to ours. For example, other studies’ “leavers” may include those who later returned to Welfare, or who kept off WorkFirst for only two months.

Due to space limitations, we do not discuss the similarities and differences of our work and others. However, within each section we include references to other studies and reports which cover the same topic (e.g. education; hunger; earned income). We also compare our findings with these studies, as well as discuss errors we discovered in other reports, in our supplementary report; this document is available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

We feel that our study is more rigorous than most of those that we found. Of the reports we found, some examine characteristics of “leavers,” some compare the characteristics of “leavers” and “stayers,” and some also include “returners.” Similarly, some reports examine differences across racial/ethnic groups.

However, *to our knowledge, ours is the only report that examines differences, by race, in characteristics of Leavers and Stayers.* Because of this, we feel we are able to address not only *characteristics that distinguish Leavers and Stayers*, but also racial differences in the relationship between these characteristics and Leaving or Staying. Additionally, because we define Leavers more stringently than other studies<sup>5</sup> (requiring the respondent to remain off WorkFirst for a full year, rather than just a few months), we believe that we can draw stronger conclusions from our study over *what characteristics allow WorkFirst clients to successfully leave*.

1 Dr. Scott is a Professor of Sociology and Anderson-Bond is Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Sociology at the University of Washington (Seattle).

2 This stands for “WorkFirst Study, N ~ 3,000.”

3 Most notably, the WorkFirst Study (a joint undertaking by the Washington State Employment Security Department and the University of Washington’s Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs), to whom we are grateful for access to their data.

4 Particularly the Urban Institute (Washington, D.C.).

Because roughly 95% of the survey's respondents were female, we excluded males from our analysis. Thus, all statistics, discussions, and conclusions derived from our analyses pertain to female members of our sample. Additionally, due to low number of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the sample, these groups have been combined into one "Asian/Pacific Islander" racial category. Finally, there are several limitations of the data, due to shortcomings in the study design. These limitations are discussed in their own section near the end of this report. Because of these limitations, we can not be certain that the non-Caucasian survey participants are truly representative of those receiving WorkFirst in Washington State. This is particularly true for Latinas, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives. Thus, although we discuss the results for all racial/ethnic groups in this report, the reader must bear these limitations in mind.

Finally, it is important to note that all participants in the survey *were on WorkFirst* as of March 1999. **Thus, this study can *not* determine what prevents people from needing Welfare, since all participants were on Welfare at some point.** In order to determine what puts people on Welfare -- and

conversely, what prevents people from ever needing it -- we would need a sample that included those who had never been on Welfare. Lacking this, **this study examines what helps people leave Welfare, once they are already on it.** This point of clarification must be kept in mind when interpreting our findings.

<sup>5</sup> The exception is Ahn, Kralej, Fogarty, Lai, and Deppman (2000), who specify a sub-set of their sample (which they call "continuous leavers") as those who stayed off Welfare for twelve consecutive months. They then compare them to their study's "continuous recipients" -- those who remained on Welfare for twelve consecutive twelve months.

## Length of Stay, by Race: Leavers, Returners, and Stayers

### Our Analysis: *length of stay*

Looking at Figure 1, one can see that the proportion of Leavers and Stayers within a racial group clearly varies by race. Among all females in the sample, Caucasian females, and females whose race was “other,” the proportion of Leavers and Stayers were roughly equal.

In contrast, African - American females, Asian / Pacific Islander females, and *particularly* Native American/Alaskan Native females contain many more Stayers than Leavers. This indicates that out of the initial sample of females, African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives had larger difficulty in successfully leaving WorkFirst for a continuous year.

Latinas, on the other hand, had a larger proportion of Leavers than Stayers. The percent within that racial/ethnic group (27%) that are Leavers is also larger than any other racial/ethnic group.

However, it is important to note that the greatest proportion within any racial group (approximately half) are Returners. Thus, the most typical experience out of any racial group was to leave WorkFirst, but not stay off for the twelve consecutive months under study.

In terms of the percentage of Leavers within each racial group, Caucasians, Latinas, and “other race” have the highest proportions. African

Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives have the lowest proportions. This indicates that African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives are having a more difficult time in successfully leaving WorkFirst.

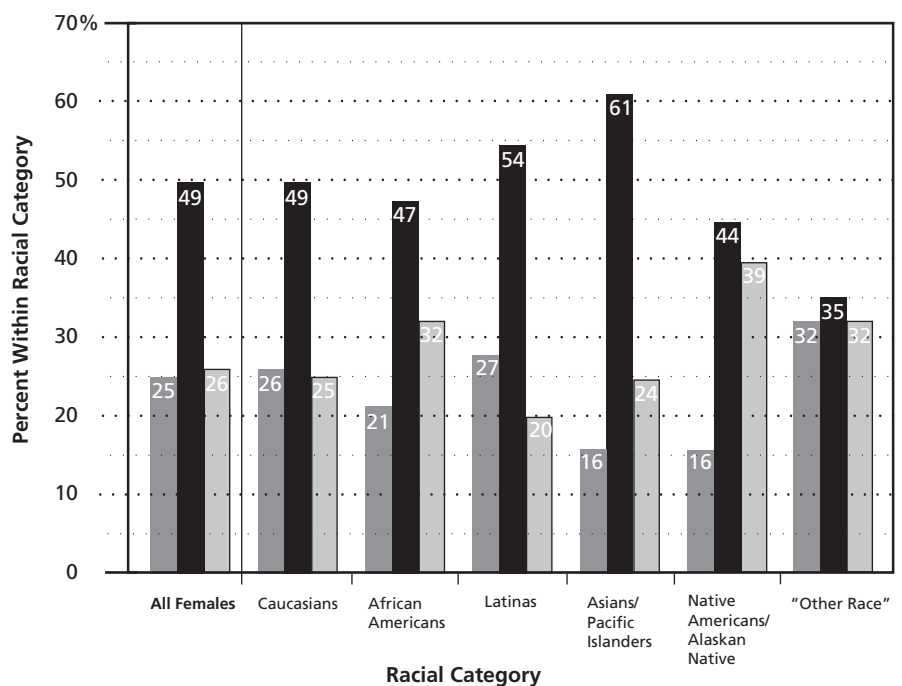
Other studies that examined racial proportions of “leavers” and “stayers” tended to examine the racial proportions within “leavers” or “stayers” (e.g. “out of all leavers, what percentage were African American...?”) While we feel the method of analysis presented in

Figure 1 tells a clearer story, we also analyzed our data in a manner comparable to the other studies. These results are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2 presents the racial proportions within Leavers, Returners, and Stayers. The results are similar to those displayed in Figure 1.

Relative to their proportion of the total sample of females (73%), Caucasians are over-represented among Leavers (76%), and under-represented among Stayers (70%). This is indicated by the descending pattern in the bar graph for Caucasians: as we move from Leavers to

**Figure 1: Percent of Leavers, Stayers, and Returners Within Racial Category (females only)**



Returners to Stayers, the proportion of Caucasians decreases.

A similar (though not identical) pattern is found for Latinas. Latinas compose a slightly larger proportion of Leavers (9.6%) than Stayers (6.7%).

The bar charts for African American and Native American/Alaskan Native females show an opposite pattern. As one moves from Leavers, to Returners, to Stayers, the proportion increases. Thus, African Americans and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives are a larger proportion of those who were Stayers.

This suggests they had a harder time leaving WorkFirst.

A similar pattern exists for Asians/Pacific Islanders: they were a smaller proportion (1.7%) of they Leavers than they were of the Stayers (2.5%). This suggests that Asian and Pacific Islander females also were disproportionately represented among the Stayers, compared to their proportions among the Leavers.

#### Other WFS3000 Studies: length of stay

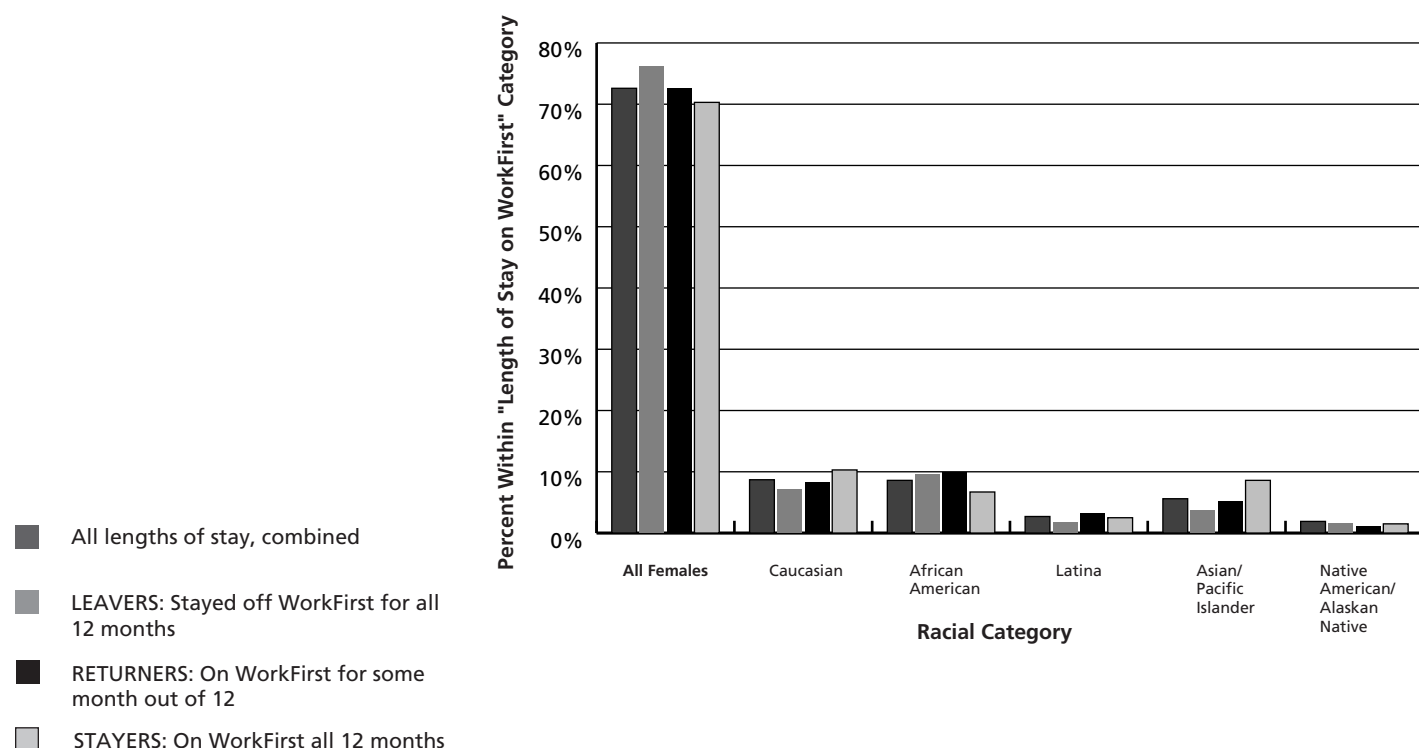
Klawitter (2001) used a version of our WFS3000 data. For a comparison of our results with

hers, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### Washington State: length of stay

Other studies which looked at Washington State are: Ahn, Krale, Fogarty, Lai, and Deppman (2000); Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000); *Major Findings from Washington's TANF Exit Surveys* (1999); and *Washington's TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.). For a comparison of our results with theirs, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Figure 2: Racial Distribution Within "Length of Stay on WorkFirst" Category (females only)**



## Demographics:

### Racial Distribution

#### Conclusions for length of stay:

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

African American females had larger difficulty in leaving WorkFirst than did Caucasian females. In terms of the racial proportions within Leavers and Stayers, Caucasians and Latinas were under-represented among Stayers, and over-represented among Leavers. In contrast, African Americans and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were over-represented among the Stayers, and under-represented among the Leavers. This pattern of Caucasians being a larger proportion of “leavers” than “stayers” held true across all of the reports, but to varying degrees.

#### Racial Distribution:

##### Our Analysis: Racial distribution in WorkFirst enrollment

The racial distribution of the WorkFirst sample is predominantly Caucasian (see Table 1). Excluding those who did not declare a racial category or whose race did not fit into the five categories listed here, the female sample is predominantly Caucasian (roughly three-quarters), followed by African Americans and Latinas (nearly ten percent each), with Native Americans/Alaskan Natives and Asians/Pacific Islanders being the smallest proportions

PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN OF SAMPLE

|                                         | Number | Percent Including<br>“Other Race” | Percent Excluding<br>“Other Race” |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Caucasian Females                       | 2,080  | 72.6%                             | 74.0%                             |
| African American Females                | 250    | 8.7%                              | 8.9%                              |
| Latina Females                          | 245    | 8.6%                              | 8.7%                              |
| Asian/ Pacific Islander Females         | 76     | 2.7%                              | 2.7%                              |
| Native American/ Alaskan Native Females | 160    | 5.6%                              | 5.7%                              |
| “Other Race” or “No Response” Females   | 53     | 1.9%                              | --                                |

##### Other WFS3000 Studies: Racial distribution in WorkFirst enrollment

Other studies which used variations of our WFS3000 data are: Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a); and the *WorkFirst Study Chart Book* (2001). For a comparison of these studies’ results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

##### Washington State: Racial distribution in WorkFirst enrollment

The 2000 U.S. Census figures<sup>6</sup> for Washington State’s racial composition (which includes males and females, all ages) indicates that non-Latino Caucasians are the largest racial group (79%), followed by Latinos (8%), Asians/Pacific Islanders (6%), African Americans (3%), and Native Americans (2%).<sup>7</sup>

6 “U.S. Census Bureau, State and County QuickFacts, Census 2000” (2001)

7 Unfortunately, “Latino” was not a mutually-exclusive category for other racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. Census document. Thus, some people in the “African American” percentage we report may be re-counted within the “Latino” percentage.

If we assume that the racial proportions in these U.S. Census figures for Washington State are similar among children and adults, we can roughly compare the racial composition with our WorkFirst sample. If we additionally assume that the WFS3000 sample is representative of Washington State residents who are on WorkFirst, then it seems that non-Caucasians are over-represented on the Welfare rolls, and Caucasians are under-represented. In other words, Caucasians are not represented in WorkFirst enrollment in the same proportions that they are in the state population; they are under-represented by approximately 89%.<sup>8</sup>

More specifically, African Americans are heavily over-represented on the WorkFirst rolls, relative to their state population -- by a factor of approximately 2.5! Native Americans are also heavily over-represented in the WorkFirst sample, by almost a factor of 4! In contrast, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders are under-represented on the WorkFirst rolls, by one-half.

Since the U.S. Census defined race differently than our WorkFirst sample, it is difficult to say with certainty whether Latinos are over-represented. However, it *appears* that Latinos are over-represented on WorkFirst by a factor of 1.2.<sup>9</sup>

#### National: Racial distribution in Welfare/TANF enrollment

Staveteig and Wigton (2000b) examine the racial proportions of those who are under the 200% Federal Poverty Level. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### **Conclusions for racial distribution in WorkFirst enrollment:**

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

The data used in our analyses slightly under-represents African Americans, noticeably under-represents Asians/Pacific Islanders, and also over-represents Caucasians, relative to their racial proportions in the WorkFirst rolls in Washington State.

African Americans and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were heavily over-represented on the WorkFirst rolls, relative to their proportion of the state population. It also appears that Latinas were over-represented. In contrast, Caucasians and Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders/Pacific Islanders were under-represented on the WorkFirst rolls.

## Demographics:

### Age

#### Our Analysis: age

We calculated the average age of respondents as of June 1999. This date corresponds to just shortly before the start of the twelve month period we use to distinguish the Stayers from the Leavers.

Looking at Figure 3, it seems that the average ages for Leavers and Stayers are generally similar among "all females," Caucasians and Latinas. Thus, for these racial/ethnic groups, age does not appear to have a strong correlation with leaving or staying on WorkFirst.

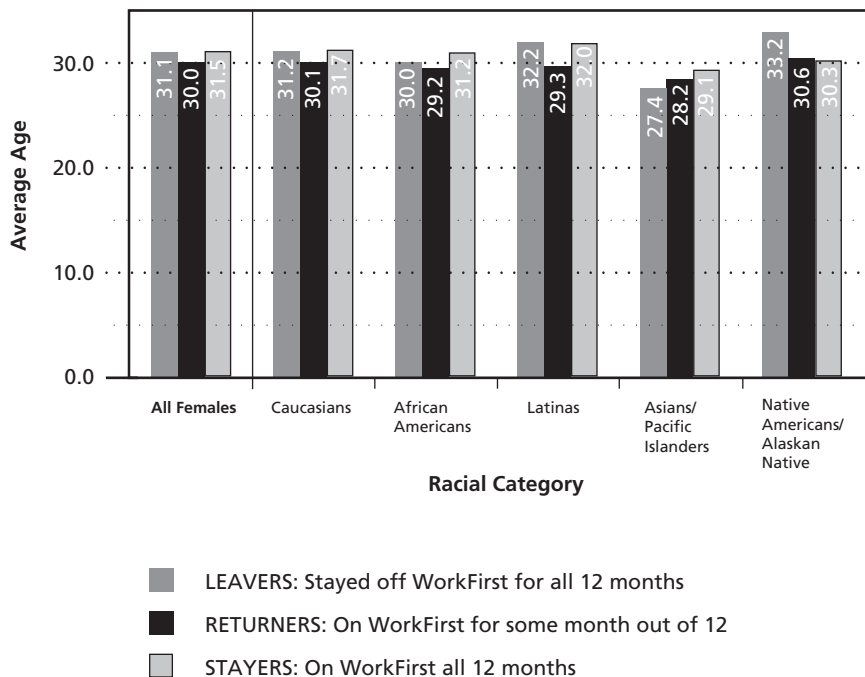
In contrast, there seems to be a relationship between average age and the length of time on WorkFirst among African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives. For Asians/Pacific Islanders, as the length of time on WorkFirst increases, the average age increases. This pattern also holds true -- although not as clearly -- for African Americans. Conversely, for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, the average age *decreases* as the length of time on WorkFirst increases. Thus, being older seems to be beneficial in some way to Native Americans/Alaskan Natives in regards to leaving WorkFirst. In contrast, being younger seems advantageous to Asians/Pacific Islanders.

<sup>8</sup> Assuming that the racial proportions are the same among children and adults, 81.8% of adults in Washington State are Caucasian, but only 72.4% of adults on WorkFirst are Caucasian; "72.4" is 89% of "81.8."

<sup>9</sup> For Latinos, the numbers in the table are 7.5% of Washington's population, versus 9.0% of the WorkFirst sample.



**Figure 3: Average Age and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



## Earned Income

### Our Analysis: *earned income*

Earned income refers to the income earned by the respondent during the year (July 1998 to June 1999) prior to the twelve months that define her Leaver, Returner, or Stayer status (September 1999 to August 2000).

For all racial/ethnic groups, there is an obvious relationship between the average annual earned income and length of time on WorkFirst (see Figure 4). Those who became Leavers had the highest average earned income in the preceding year; those who became Returners had less; and those who became Stayers had the lowest.

It is interesting to note that African American, Latina, and Asian/Pacific Islanders had a much higher average earned income than did Caucasians in the year preceding their Stayer status, yet failed to successfully leave WorkFirst in the following year. This suggests that given a similar income, it is more difficult for these racial/ethnic groups to leave WorkFirst than it is for Caucasians.

### Other WFS3000 Studies: *earned income*

Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a) also used a variation of our WFS3000 data. For a comparison of their study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### Washington State: *earned income*

### Other WFS3000 Studies: *age*

Klawitter (2001) also used a variation of our WFS3000 data. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### Washington State: *age*

Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu.(2000) also looked at Washington State. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

## Conclusions for age:

### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

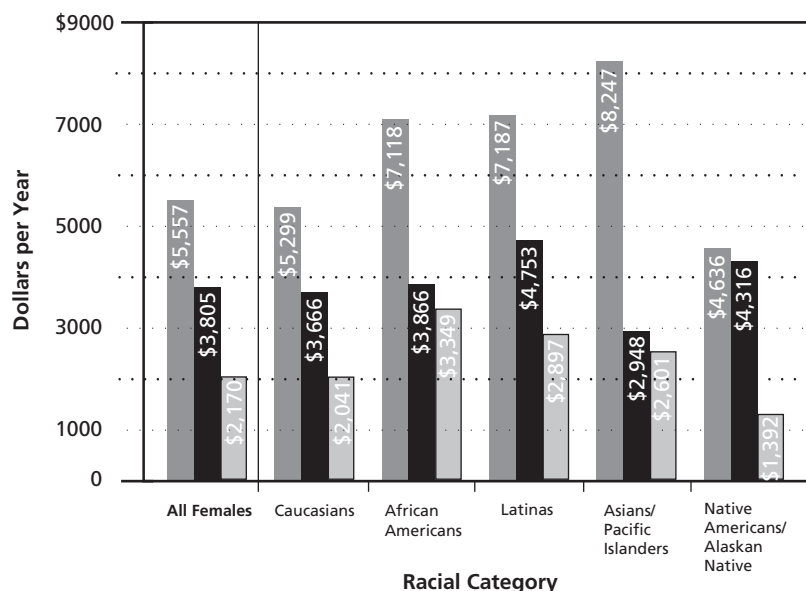
For most racial/ethnic groups, age did not appear to be strongly related to staying on or leaving WorkFirst. In general, Leavers and Stayers were very close to the same average age -- nearly identical, or within a year or two. This implies a mild relationship of younger people finding it slightly easier to leave WorkFirst.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

Age did not seem to have a strong relationship with time on WorkFirst (leaving or staying) for Caucasians and Latinas. In contrast, Asians/Pacific Islanders and African Americans were more likely to leave WorkFirst if they were younger; Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were more likely to leave WorkFirst if they were older.



**Figure 4: Average yearly earned income and length of stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



Other studies which looked at Washington State are: Ahn, Krale, Fogarty, Lai, and Deppman (2000); Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000); and *Washington's TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### National: earned income

Loprest (1999a) also examined family earnings. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### **Conclusions for earned income:**

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

A higher earned income in one year was strongly related to leaving WorkFirst the following year.

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

There were signs of racial inequity: African Americans could earn more than Caucasians and still fail to leave WorkFirst in the subsequent year. A similar pattern held true for Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders.

## **Earned Income**

as a Percentage of the Federal Poverty Line

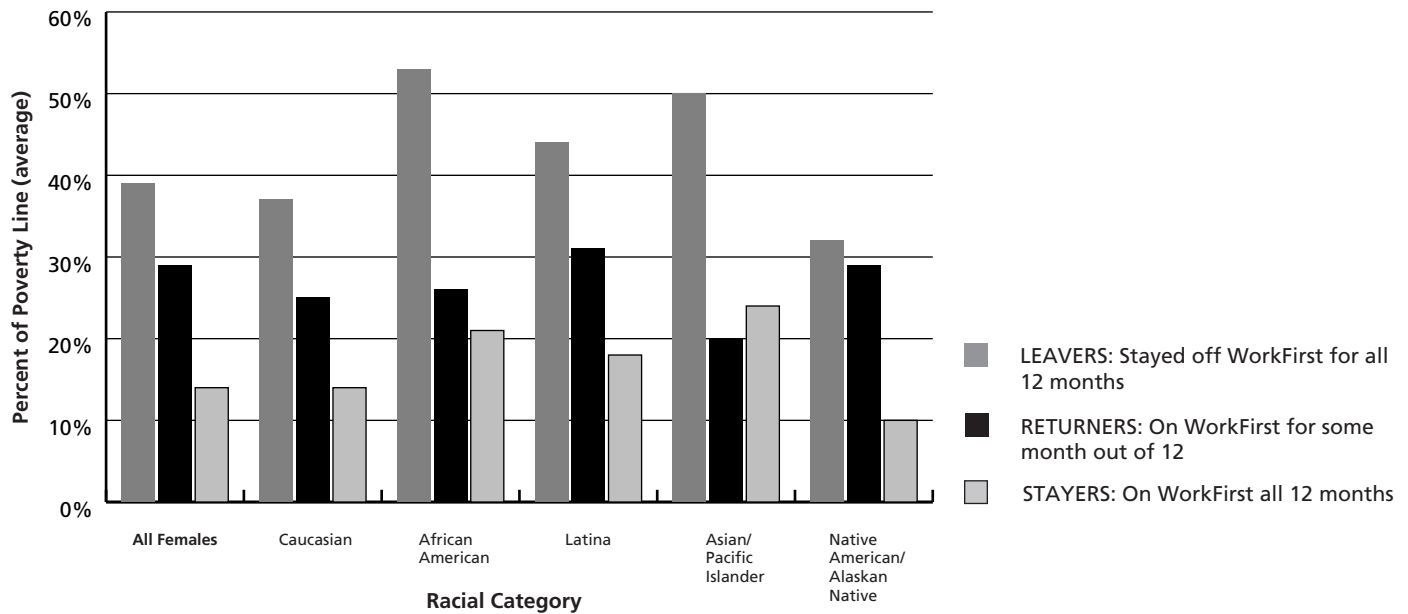
#### Our Analysis: earned income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Line

Income as a percentage of the Federal poverty line refers to the income earned by the respondent during the year (July 1998 to June 1999) prior to the twelve months that define her Leaver, Returner, or Stayer status (September 1999 to August 2000).

As shown in Figure 5, there was a noticeable difference between those who became Leavers and those who became Stayers in terms of their earlier income as a percent of the Federal poverty line. For all racial categories except Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, there is a steady decrease in the percent of the Federal Poverty Line as the length of stay on WorkFirst increases (from Leavers to Returners to Stayers). Even for Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, there is still an obvious relationship between the average percent of the Federal Poverty Line during one year, and being a Leaver or a Stayer in the following year.

Notice, also, that African Americans and Asians/Pacific Islanders had higher incomes relative to the Federal Poverty Line than their Caucasian peers. This was true for both Leavers and Stayers. However, a higher (average) income in the previous year was not sufficient for the African Americans and Asians/Pacific Islanders to leave WorkFirst in the subsequent year. In other words, it appears to take a higher

**Figure 5: Average Percent of Federal Poverty Line and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



income for these groups to “escape” WorkFirst than it does for Caucasians.

Washington State: earned income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Line

Other studies which looked at Washington State are: Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000); and Washington’s TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare (n.d.). For a comparison of these studies’ results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Conclusions for earned income as a percentage of the Federal Poverty Line:**

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Consistent with our findings for earned income, being at a higher percentage of the Federal Poverty

Line in the previous year appeared to be strongly related to successfully staying off WorkFirst in the subsequent year.

Conclusions: racial disparities

Consistent with our findings for earned income, Caucasians seemed to have an advantage over all other racial categories except Native Americans. African - American females, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islander females who became Stayers were at a higher percentage of the Federal Poverty Line than Caucasians, yet did not leave WorkFirst. Similarly, they had to be at a markedly higher average percentage of the poverty line than Caucasian females in order to remain off WorkFirst in the next year.

## Earned Income

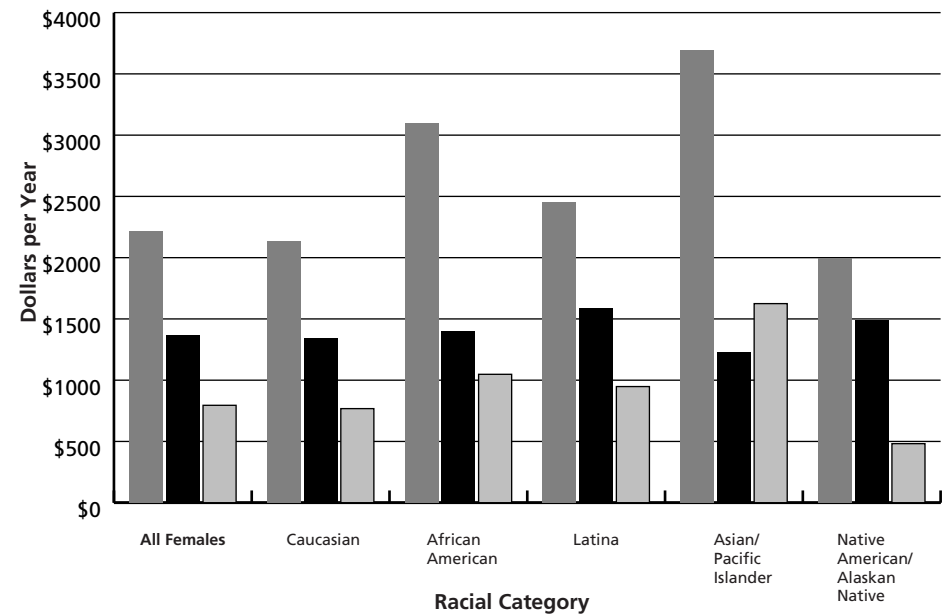
Per Household Member

### Our Analysis: earned income per household member

Earned income per person refers to the income of the primary WorkFirst recipient, divided among her and her dependent children. This income was earned by the respondent during the year (July 1998 to June 1999) prior to the twelve months that define her Leaver, Returner, or Stayer status (September 1999 to August 2000). The “per person” amount was calculated as the income earned by the respondent, divided by that person plus her dependent children. For example, a mother with two children who earned \$3,000 during that year would have an earned income per person of \$1,000 (i.e.  $\$3,000/[1+2] = \$1,000$ ).

Similar to the results for earned income, there is an obvious relationship between the average earned income per person their length of stay on WorkFirst. For all racial/ethnic groups, except for Asians/Pacific Islanders, there is a steady decrease in the income per household member as one moves from Leavers to Returners to Stayers. Even for Asians/Pacific Islanders, it is clear that those who became Leavers earned much more per household member in the prior year, compared to those who became Stayers.

Once again, African Americans and Asians/Pacific Islanders had to earn noticeably more per person, on average, than Caucasians in order to



successfully leave WorkFirst in the following year.

### **Conclusions for earned income per household member:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Consistent with our findings for earned income and for the percentage of the Federal Poverty Line, those who had a higher earned income per person during one year were more likely to become Leavers in the following year.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

As with earned income and with the percentage of the poverty line, there were signs of racial inequity: African American and Asian/Pacific Islander females had to earn more than Caucasian females in the preceding year in order to leave

WorkFirst the following year. The exception to this was Native Americans, who appeared to be able to become a Leaver with less per-person income than Caucasians.

## Employment: Full-Time

### Our Analysis: full-time employment

The original survey asked each respondent the number of hours per week she worked at her most recent job (during the July 1998 to June 1999 period). This information was not included in the publicly available data. However, the researchers who collected the WFS3000 data used this question to generate a “yes/no” variable indicating whether the respondent had worked “full-time” (defined as 35 or more hours per week). This “full-time” variable was part of our available data.<sup>10</sup> Since we did not have access to indicators of which respondents had been employed during which time period, we simply calculated what percentage out of all females had held a full-time job.<sup>11</sup> Those that did not hold a full-time job may have held a job that was *not* full-

time, or they may have been unemployed during that time period.

Figure 7 indicates that having held a recent full-time job seems to be beneficial towards leaving WorkFirst. Looking at the left side of the chart (those whose most recent job was full-time), all racial/ethnic groups (except Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) have more Leavers than Stayers. Conversely, on the right side of the chart one can see that those whose most recent job was *not* full-time have many more Stayers than Leavers. Thus, a full-time job during the year *prior* to going on WorkFirst appeared to help people successfully leave WorkFirst later.

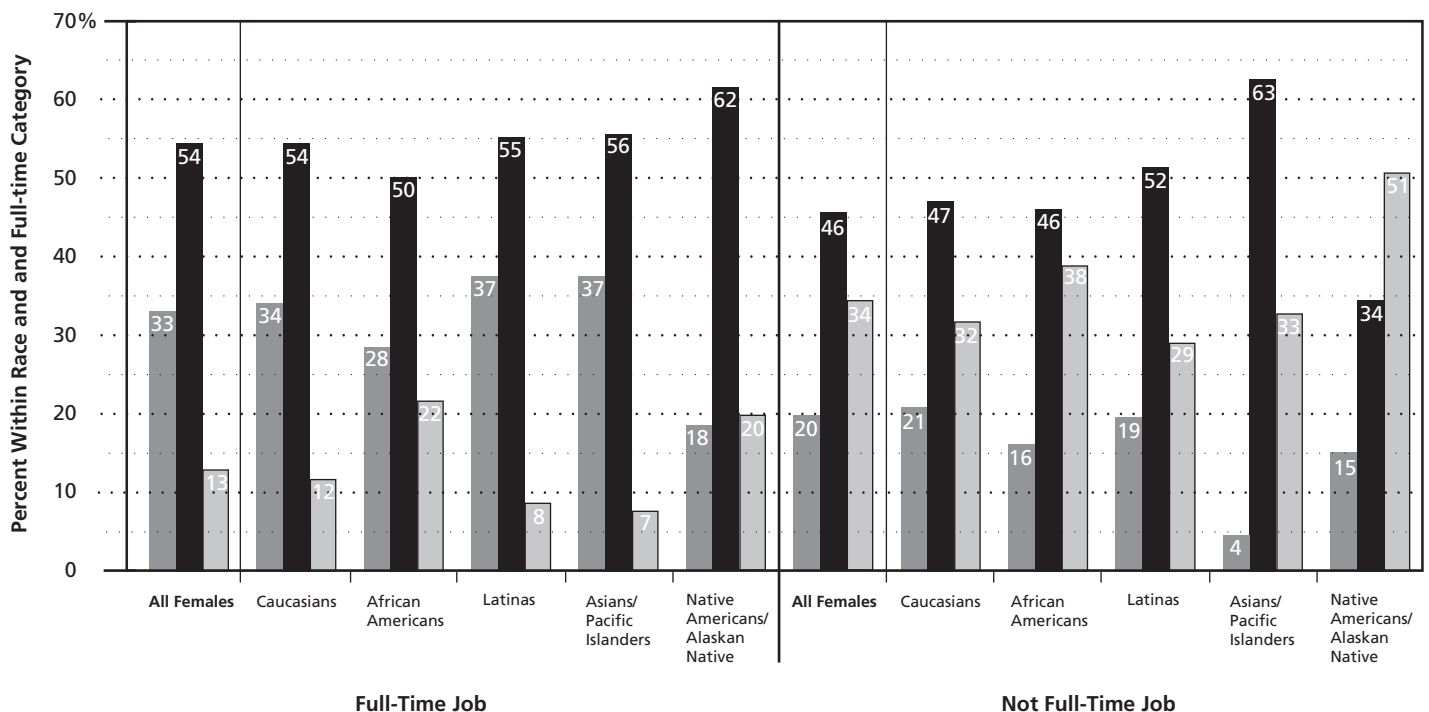
Such full-time jobs also seem to benefit some racial/ethnic groups more

than others. Among those with full-time jobs, Caucasians, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islanders seemed to enjoy the greatest benefit (as indicated by the large difference between Leavers and Stayers). Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, by contrast, did not seem to gain any advantage. More over, African Americans, Asians / Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives seem to suffer the greatest penalty for their most recent prior job not being full-time.

<sup>10</sup> According to our data, out of the 1,291 females who earned \$0 during July 1998 - June 1999, 281 (21.7%) of them held full-time jobs during that same period. This logical impossibility in the data is troubling, and casts doubt on the validity of either the “earned income” or the “full-time employment” data.

<sup>11</sup> Out of our complete sample (males and females of all races), 36.6% were employed “full-time” (35 or more hours per week), and 63.4% were either employed for less than 35 hours/week, or not employed.

**Figure 7: Full-time Status of Most Recent Job and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



## Educational Attainment

### Washington State: full-time employment

Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000) also looked at full-time employment and Welfare recipients. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusions for full-time employment:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Recently holding a full-time job was clearly related to successfully leaving WorkFirst.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

Some racial/ethnic groups benefited more (or were penalized more) than others by whether their most recent job was full-time. However, it was an important factor for all racial/ethnic groups.

### Our Analysis: highest degree earned

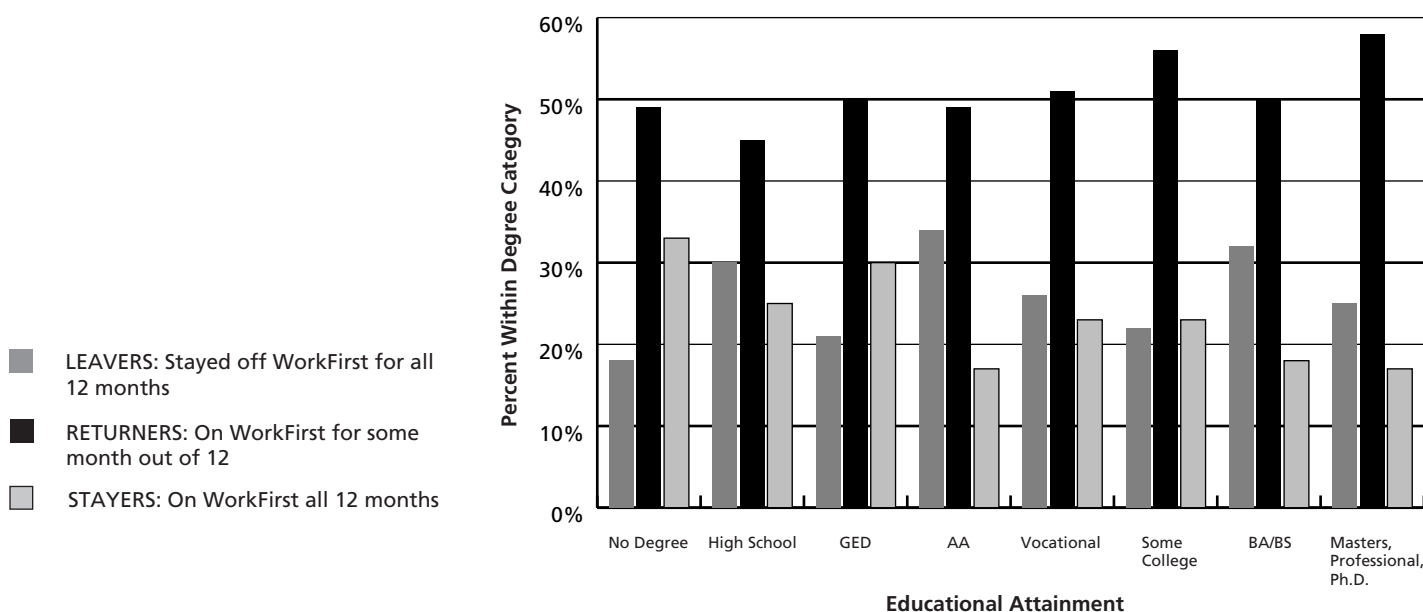
We determined the percentage of Leavers, Returners, and Stayers within each educational category (see Figures 8 - 13); each educational category represents the highest level of education.<sup>12</sup> Calculating the percentages in this manner allowed us to better examine the causal relationship between educational attainment and one's time on WorkFirst (i.e. Leaver, Returner, or Stayer). The results demonstrate, given a certain level of education, the proportion of the respondents that end up successfully leaving WorkFirst.

<sup>12</sup> Thus, only the highest degree held was recorded. For example, if someone held a high school degree and a B.A., they would not be included in the count for high school degrees.

We also calculated the educational distribution within Leavers, within Returners, and within Stayers. Although this does not tell as compelling a "causal" story, most other studies we examined analyzed their figures in this manner. Thus, our generating these figures allowed us to compare our data with other studies' results. These additional figures are not reported here; however, they are available in our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

Looking at Figure 8, we found that for all females (i.e. all races combined) a high school degree, Associate's degree, Bachelor's, or professional degree appeared to lead to a larger number of Leavers than Stayers. Conversely, "no degree" and a GED (instead of a high school

**Figure 8: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (All females)**

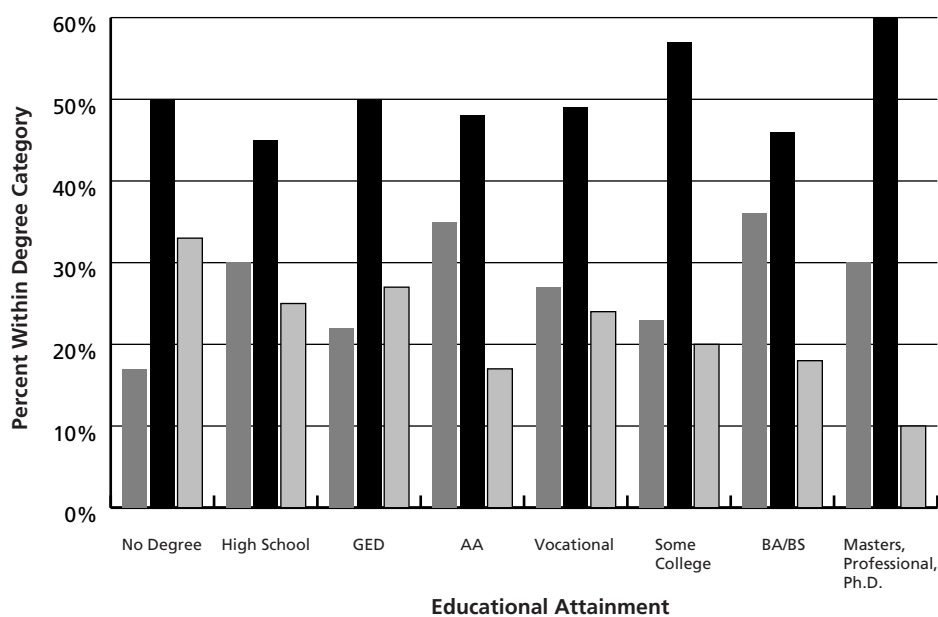


degree or a post-high school degree) was related to more Stayers than Leavers. Finally, a vocational degree or “some college” did not seem to have a strong relationship to Leaving or Staying on WorkFirst -- the proportions were about equal. Thus, for the females in our sample, we propose that “finishing a degree” -- whether high school, an Associate’s degree, a Bachelor’s, or a professional degree (e.g. M.A., M.S.) helps people successfully leave WorkFirst.

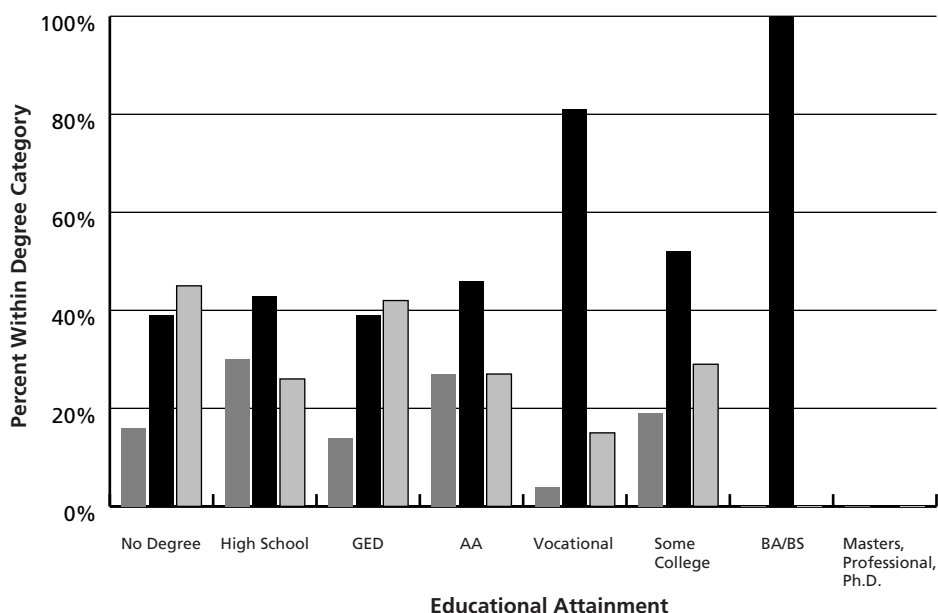
This pattern varied by race. Unlike most of the other racial/ethnic groups, vocational degrees and “some college” were somewhat helpful for Caucasian females (i.e. there were slightly more Stayers than Leavers) within those educational categories.

African American females also differed from the general pattern of completed degrees corresponding with successfully leaving WorkFirst (Figure 10). Associate’s degrees did not seem to pay the dividend that they did for other racial/ethnic groups: an equal number of AA degree holders were Leavers as Stayers. Similarly, a Bachelor’s degree did not appear to help African American females. However, we emphasize that very few of the African American females in the sample held Bachelor’s degrees; thus, one can not safely conclude that Bachelor’s degrees are not helpful to African Americans. Instead, one could easily argue that holding a B.A. prevents most African Ameri-

**Figure 9: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (Caucasian females)**



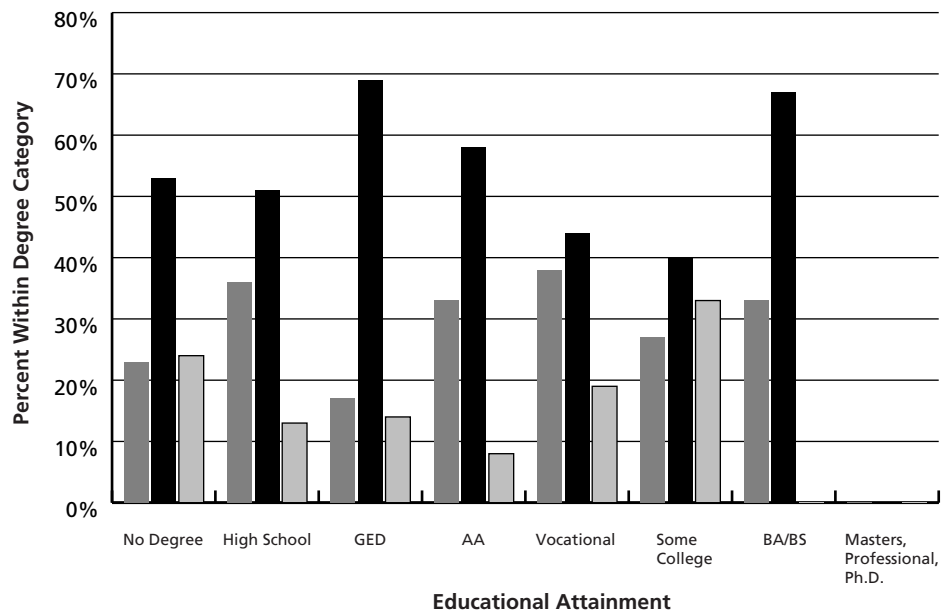
**Figure 10: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (African American females)**



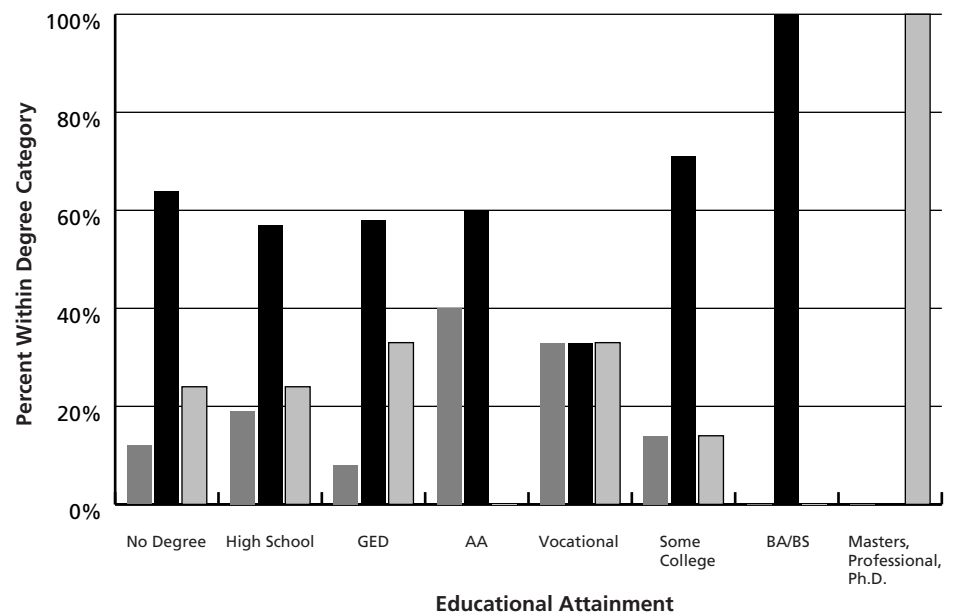
can females from ever needing Welfare in the first place! However, one could also interpret Figure 10 to mean that Bachelor’s degrees do not help African American females to the same extent that they help

Caucasians or other racial/ethnic groups.

**Figure 11: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (Latina females)**



**Figure 12: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (Asian females)**



Latinas also differed from the general pattern (see Figure 11). Unlike most of the other racial/ethnic groups, not having any degree did not seem to have a strongly positive or negative effect: an almost equal proportion of those with “no degree” were Leavers and Stayers. Also unlike the other racial/ethnic groups, a GED appeared to be somewhat helpful to Latinas in leaving WorkFirst -- and unlike other groups, a vocational degree appeared to be very helpful (there were twice as many Leavers as Stayers within this educational category). A high school degree also seemed to be particularly helpful to Latinas, compared to its utility for other racial categories: while most racial/ethnic groups only demonstrated a moderate difference between their proportion of Leavers and Stayers among their high school diploma holders, Latinas showed an extreme difference -- nearly three times as many Leavers as Stayers. Also, one should note that Bachelor’s degrees seem remarkably beneficial to Latinas: there were no Stayers within this educational category, but a large number of Leavers (i.e. those who remained off WorkFirst for a full year) and Returners (those who left WorkFirst for one to eleven months).

Asian/Pacific Islanders also differed from the general trend (see Figure 12). Unlike other racial/ethnic groups on Welfare, high school diplomas did not seem particularly beneficial -- there were more Stayers than Leavers. Additionally, Bachelor’s degrees and professional

degrees did not appear to be beneficial; however, there were very few Asian/Pacific Islander respondents with these degrees, so one should not draw strong conclusions about the utility of these degrees.

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months



Native American/Alaskan Native females clearly deviated from the general trends (see Figure 13). Unlike the other racial/ethnic groups, none of the educational categories appeared to be helpful -- in all categories there were more Stayers than Leavers. The only exception was Associate's degrees: for other racial/ethnic groups, an AA degree was beneficial; for Native American/Alaskan Native females on Welfare, they were indifferent (i.e. there were identical numbers of Leavers and Stayers). As with Asians/Pacific Islanders, there were too few Native American/Alaskan Native females with Bachelor's degrees or higher, so one should not draw any firm conclusions about the utility of those degrees.

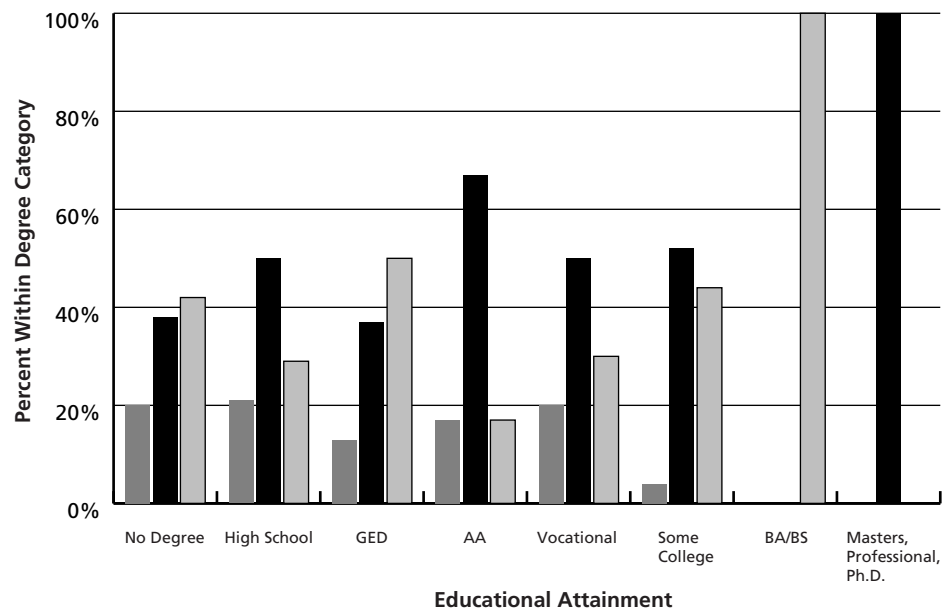
#### Other WFS3000 Studies: highest degree earned

Other studies which used variations of our WFS3000 data are: Klawitter (2000); Klawitter (2001); Klawitter (n.d.); Major Findings from Washington's TANF Exit Surveys (1999); and WorkFirst Study Chart Book (2001). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### Washington State: highest degree earned

Other studies which looked at Washington State in terms of education and Welfare are: Burley, Lerch, and Mayfield (2001); Du, Fogarty,

**Figure 13: Highest Degree Earned and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (Native American/Alaskan Native females)**



Hopps, and Hu (2000); Fogarty and Kralej (2000); Lerch, Mayfield, and Burley (2000); *Major Findings from Washington's TANF Exit Surveys* (1999); *Washington's TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.); and *WorkFirst Evaluation Summary: How Successful Has WorkFirst Been? What Happens Next?* (2001). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### National: highest degree earned

Other studies which examined this issue at a national level are: Loprest (1999a); Mayfield (2001); and Zedlewski (1999a). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### **Conclusions for the highest degree earned:**

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Completing a degree (either high school, Associate's, or Bachelor's) appeared to increase one's odds of successfully leaving WorkFirst. These degrees were preferable to a partly-completed degree (i.e. "some college"). In general, a vocational degree or "some college" did not seem to significantly aid in leaving WorkFirst -- but these were better than holding no degree, or stopping at a G.E.D.

Thus, providing opportunities for increased education appears to be a long-term solution to reducing Welfare caseloads. Some studies (Du, et al, 2000; LaFrance, 2002) indicate that WorkFirst clients realize this, and desire access to education.<sup>13</sup>



## Dropping Out of High School

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

However, we must emphasize that our study only includes those who were *already* on Welfare. Thus, our findings only apply to the question of “what helps Welfare recipients leave Welfare?” Our findings can *not* directly address the question of “what prevents people from needing Welfare in the first place?” This sheds an important light on our findings that Master’s degrees (and for some racial/ethnic groups, Bachelor’s degrees) do not help them to leave WorkFirst: it could be that most people with college degrees *never need Welfare in the first place*.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

The utility of specific degrees varied across racial/ethnic groups. However, all racial/ethnic groups benefited from completing degrees beyond the high school/G.E.D. level.

13 Washington State is making some efforts to include opportunities for education within the WorkFirst program. Mayfield (2001:25) discusses Washington’s New High-Wage/High Demand Education Program (HWHDP). This is a trial program, initiated in July 2001. Mayfield (2001) also provides an excellent review on the effectiveness of Welfare programs’ attempts to incorporate educational opportunities. We also address Mayfield’s discussion in our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/sreports.html>.

### Our Analysis: dropping out of high school

Our data for this issue was poorly worded in the original survey. Although it was intended to determine high school dropouts, the wording did not make clear to the respondent that dropping out of college does not apply. Additionally, it does not specify whether “permanent” dropping out is meant (i.e. leaving high school and not returning), or whether “temporary” dropping out is included (e.g. leaving high school, then finishing at an alternative school). Perhaps because of this, the survey data includes some “impossible” results. For example, out of the full sample (including males), 78 people said they did not drop out of high school -- yet they somehow failed to receive a high school diploma. Similarly, 115 people say they dropped out, yet somehow received a high school diploma. (It is possible that they dropped out, then returned; however, this illustrates the difficulties with this measure.) Similarly, 49 people say they did not drop out of HS, yet earned a G.E.D. instead of a high school diploma. Why would they do this? All together, 242 out of 3,019 cases (8% of the sample) are either unlikely or impossible; we do not know how many more are incorrect but undetectable.

Dropping out of high school seems to be related to staying on WorkFirst. Looking at the left side of

Figure 14 all racial/ethnic groups (except Latinas) have more Stayers than Leavers among their high school dropouts. Similarly, the right side of Figure 14 shows that for most of the racial/ethnic groups, there are more Leavers than Stayers among those who did not drop out.

The exceptions to this pattern are African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives. African Americans had approximately equal proportions of Leavers and Stayers out of those who stayed in school. On the surface, this may suggest that African Americans are not as affected by dropping out of school. However, if one compares the percent of Leavers among those who dropped out (13%) to the proportion of those who stayed in school (28%), it appears that African American females pay heavily for dropping out of school: it cuts their rate of Leavers in half! Thus, African Americans are harmed more by dropping out of high school, in terms of their ability to successfully leave WorkFirst.

Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives have more Stayers than Leavers among those who stayed in school. However, Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives tended to have more Stayers than Leavers, regardless of their dropout status. This indicates that dropping

out of high school was not a strong factor in their ability to successfully leave WorkFirst for these two racial/ethnic groups: regardless of whether they stayed in school or not, the Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives in our sample were simply more likely to be Stayers.

#### Other WFS3000 Studies: dropping out of high school

Klawitter (2000) used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine the relationship between dropping out of school and leavers/stayers. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusions for dropping out of high school:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Dropping out of high school seemed related to staying on WorkFirst. Those who stayed in school were more likely to successfully leave WorkFirst than those who dropped out.

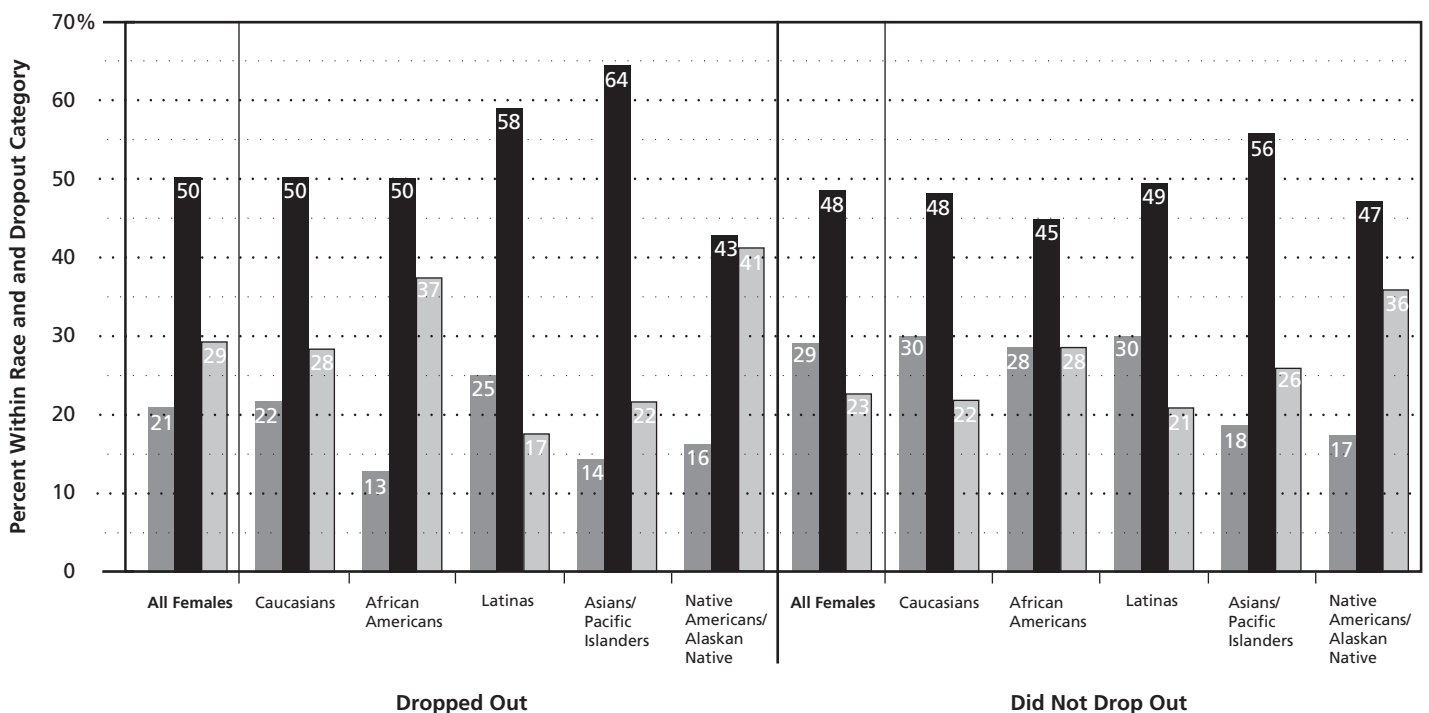
#### Conclusions: racial disparities

African Americans were particularly impacted by dropping out of school; this doubled their chances of failing to leave WorkFirst. Conversely, there was a negligible relationship for Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives between successfully leav-

ing WorkFirst and staying in school or dropping out. Factors other than simply staying in school or dropping out appeared to be at work.

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

**Figure 14: Dropping Out of High School and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



## Health:

Over All Health

### Our Analysis: over all health

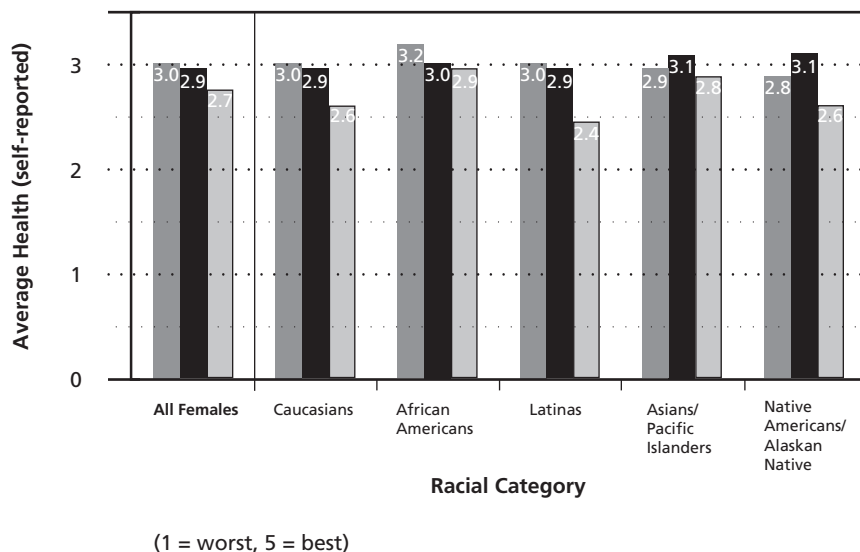
Based on the one to five scale used in the WFS3000 survey, there was only a slight health difference between Leavers and Stayers (see Figure 15). Leavers, on average, reported their over all health to be slightly better than the average figure for Stayers. For the sample of all females, this difference was only 0.3 on the five-point scale.

There were racial differences in over all health as it related to leaving WorkFirst. The average health difference between Leavers and Stayers was slightly larger for Caucasians and Latinas than for the other groups. This suggests that general health may be more strongly related to the ability to successfully leave WorkFirst for these racial/ethnic groups than for the others. However, even the most extreme average difference between Leavers and Stayers (for Latinas) was 0.6 on a five-point scale.

### Other WFS3000 Studies: over all health

Other studies which used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue are: Burchfield and Klawitter (2000); Klawitter (2001); and WorkFirst Study Chart Book (2001). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Figure 15: General Health and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



### Washington State: over all health

Other studies which looked at this issue for Washington State are: Burley, Lerch, and Mayfield (2001); Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000); and Fogarty and Kralely (2000). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### National: over all health

Other studies which examined this issue at a national level are Zedlewski (1999a), and Zedlewski (1999b). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusions for over all health:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

For our sample of females, we found that general or over all health was mildly related to leaving or staying on WorkFirst. (General health was not as influential as the impact of poor health's on one's ability to work; this is discussed in later sections of this report.) Based on a one-through-five self-assessment scale of general health, the average health score for Leavers was better than that for Stayers.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There was a stronger relationship between over all health and being a Leaver versus a Stayer for Caucasian females and Latinas than there was for the other racial/ethnic groups.

## Health:

### Causing WorkFirst Enrollment

#### Our Analysis: poor health caused WorkFirst enrollment

For all females, there was only a slight difference (1%) between Leavers and Stayers in the role of poor physical or mental health being the primary cause of needing WorkFirst (see Figure 16).

The difference between Leavers and Stayers was larger for African Americans and Latinas (a 3% difference), with Leavers more likely to report “poor health” as their main reason for being on WorkFirst than Stayers. Since Leavers were more likely to have come onto WorkFirst due to poor health, one could infer that this poor health was of a temporary nature; when the health crisis passed, the client was able to leave WorkFirst.

Native Americans/Alaskan Natives displayed the opposite pattern. More Stayers (6%) than Leavers (4%) said poor health was the main reason they came onto WorkFirst. In contrast to the African Americans and Latinas, it could be that the poor health experienced by the Native Americans/Alaskan Natives tended to be of a more permanent nature, which led to their more permanent stay on WorkFirst (i.e. they became Stayers).

#### **Conclusions for poor health caused WorkFirst enrollment:**

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In general, more Leavers than Stayers reported that poor physical or mental health was the primary reason they went on WorkFirst. Thus, ironically, poor health was

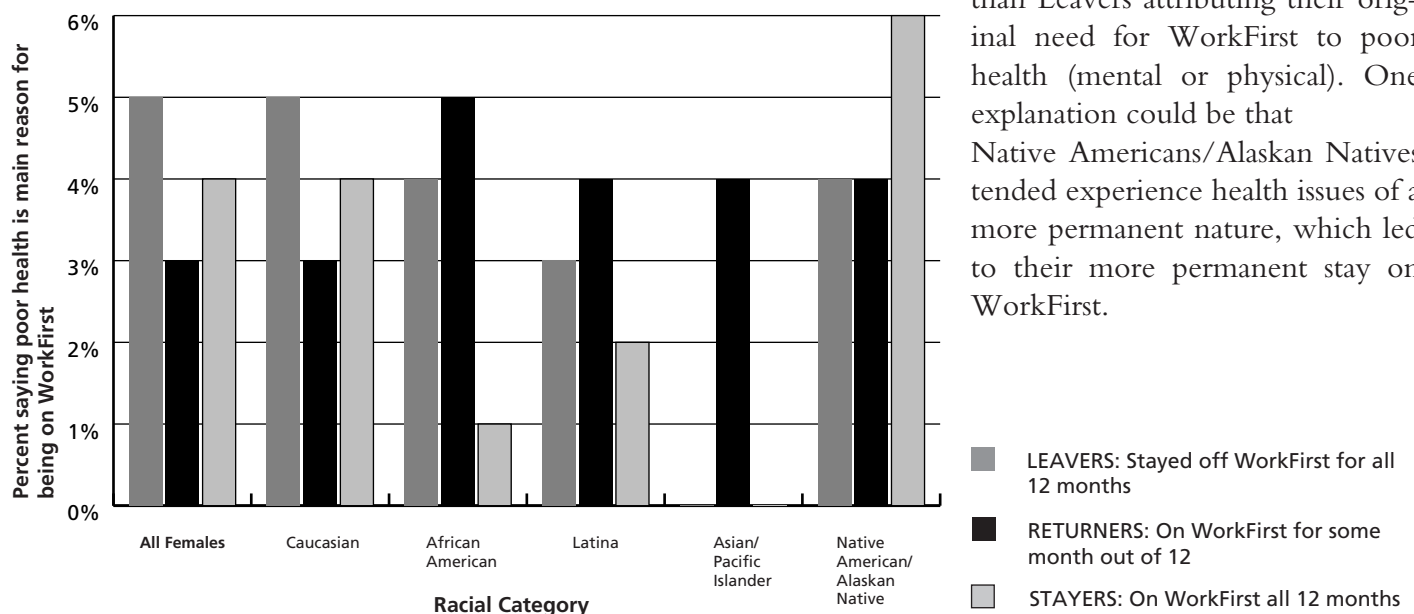
related to successfully leaving WorkFirst. One possible interpretation was that those with a serious but temporary condition became unable to work and needed WorkFirst assistance; once their illness, injury, or disability passed, they returned to the workforce. If so, this situation only applies to a small proportion (5% or less) of those surveyed.

##### Conclusions: racial disparities

African Americans and Latinas demonstrated the largest differences between Leavers and Stayers. Leavers were more likely than Stayers to report “poor health” as their main reason for originally needing WorkFirst. One possible explanation is that for some of them their poor health was of a temporary nature, and when the health crisis passed, the client was able to leave WorkFirst.

Conversely, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives had more Stayers than Leavers attributing their original need for WorkFirst to poor health (mental or physical). One explanation could be that Native Americans/Alaskan Natives tended experience health issues of a more permanent nature, which led to their more permanent stay on WorkFirst.

**Figure 16: Poor Mental or Physical Health is the Main Reason on WorkFirst and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



## Health:

Impending Job Search or Working

### Our Analysis: poor health impedes job search/working

Based on Burchfield and Klawitter (2000:2), only those “respondents who were not working in July of 1998 were asked about health conditions that limited their ability to work.” Thus, this survey item was not asked of the entire sample. However, because we did not have access to indicators of which respondents were or were not working, we calculated our percentages in terms of the entire sample.<sup>14</sup>

14 For a discussion on the implications of this decision, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

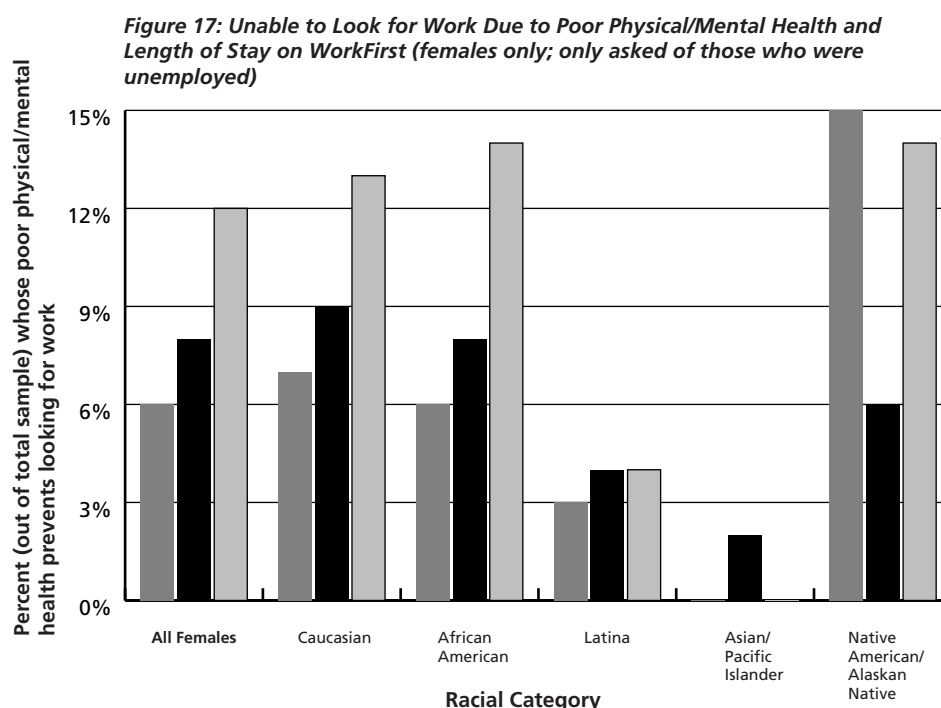
We examined three measures of the impact of poor health on working: its impact on not looking for work (Figure 17), its impact on the ability to hold a job (Figure 18), and its impact on limiting the type of job one is able to hold (Figure 19). For all of these, poor health had a noticeable effect on Leaving versus Staying.

For all three of these measures of poor health’s impact on working, female Stayers tended to be twice as likely as female Leavers to say that their physical or mental health was an issue. In other words, those who ended up staying on WorkFirst for a full year were far more likely to say that they had a health condition which in some way limited their ability to work or find a job.

In the chart of poor health prevent-

ing the respondent from looking for work (Figure 17), the impact on Leaving and Staying is strong for Caucasians and African Americans. However, very few Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders reported poor health impeding their job search; poor health impeding their ability to look for a job is not a prevalent among these racial/ethnic groups, regardless of their Leaver or Stayer status.

Native Americans/Alaskan Natives also deviate from the norm: both Leavers *and* Stayers exhibited a large number of respondents whose poor health prevented them from looking for work. Also, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives also evidenced the largest proportion of respondents whose health impeded their job hunting.



Turning to the issue of poor health preventing employment (Figure 18), it seems that although many of the Leavers (12% of the female sample) said they had health conditions that prevented their employment, they still left WorkFirst for a full year. Since the administration of the interviews (including the questions about the respondent's current health) were within the twelve month period that defined Leavers, Returners, and Stayers, we can only conclude that people are leaving WorkFirst *despite* their health-related inability to hold a job.

Caucasians, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islanders demonstrated a strong relationship between this and being a Leaver or a Stayer. Among Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders, Leavers had few, if any, respon-

dents who said their poor health prevented them from working; in contrast, a fairly large number of Stayers said their health kept them from working. Caucasians demonstrated a similar pattern: twice as many Stayers than Leavers said their poor physical or mental health prevented their employment.

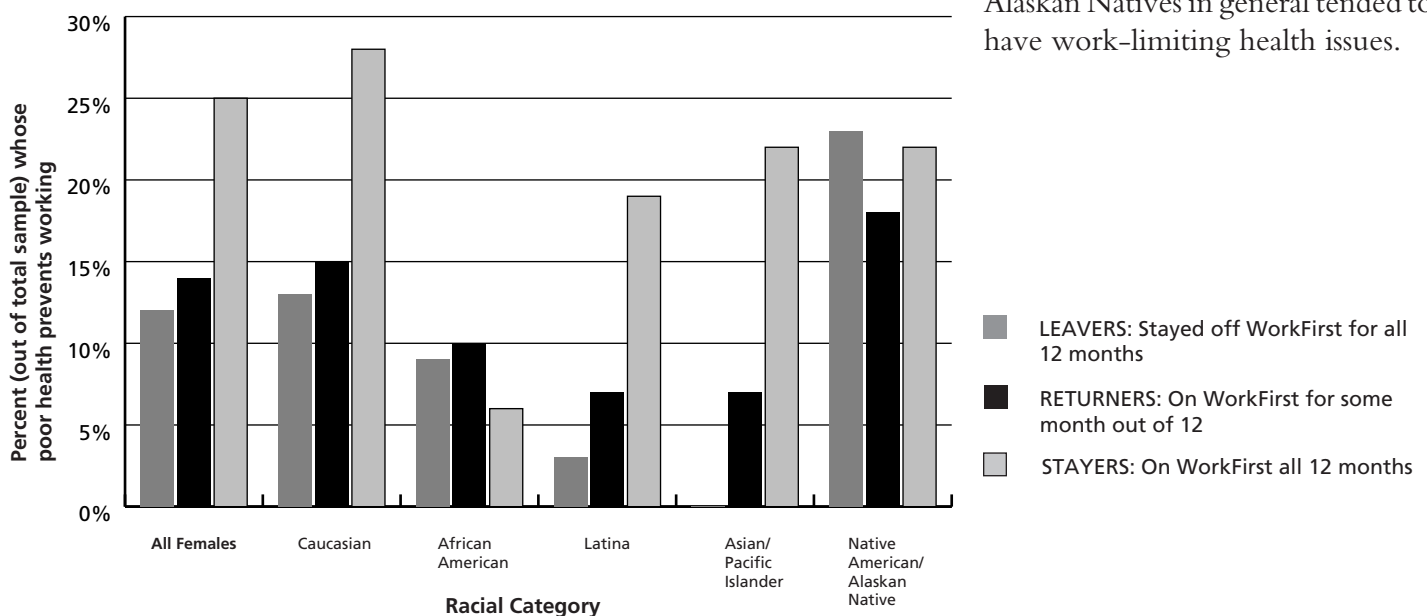
African Americans presented an opposite pattern: more Leavers had employment-preventing health conditions than did Stayers.

Finally, there was not a strong relationship between poor health preventing working and Leaving or Staying for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives: Leavers and Stayers had equally high proportions of poor health that prevented employment. In general, Caucasians and

Native Americans/Alaskan Natives appeared to have the highest over all proportion who reported health issues that prevented their employment.

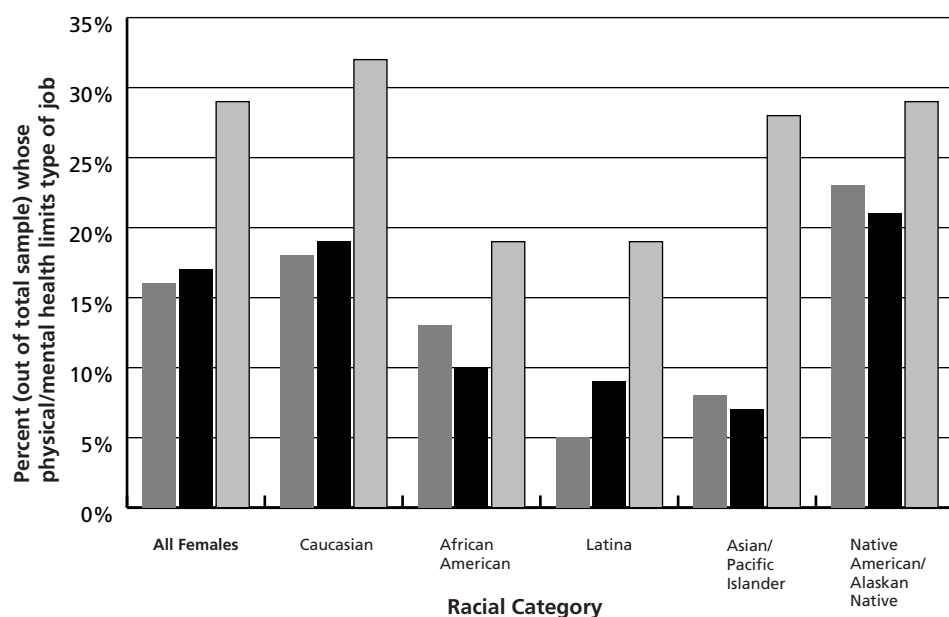
In terms of poor health limiting the type of job one can hold (Figure 19), the pattern appears to be fairly consistent across all racial categories: fewer Leavers reported work-limiting health conditions than did Stayers. Again, the pattern appears to be the weakest for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, who had extremely high proportions of both Leavers and Stayers who reported health which limited the type of job they could hold. Thus, although there was a large proportion of Native American/Alaskan Native Leavers who reported that poor health limited the type of job they could hold, there was almost the same proportion of Stayers who reported the same thing. Thus, it seems that Native Americans/Alaskan Natives in general tended to have work-limiting health issues.

**Figure 18: Poor Physical/Mental Health Prevents Working and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only; only asked of those who were unemployed)**





**Figure 19: Poor Physical/Mental Health Limits the Type of Job Can Hold and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only; only asked of those who were unemployed)**



Other WFS3000 Studies: poor health impedes job search/working

Other studies which used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue are: Burchfield and Klawitter (2000); Klawitter (2001); Klawitter (n.d.); and *WorkFirst Study Chart Book* (2001). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

Washington State: poor health impedes job search/working

Other studies which looked at this issue for Washington State are: Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000); *Major Findings from Washington's TANF Exit Surveys* (1999); and *Washington's TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at

<http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

National: poor health impedes job search/working

Other studies which examined this issue at a national level are: Loprest (1999a); Zedlewski (1999a); and Zedlewski (1999b). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Conclusions for poor health impedes job search/working:**

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

For all three related intersections of health and working -- poor health preventing a job search, poor health limiting the ability to work, and poor health limiting the type of job that can be held -- Stayers were

twice as likely to cite poor health as Leavers. Thus, poor health's impact on the ability to work or find a job appears to impede the ability to leave WorkFirst.

Earlier in this report, we suggested that employment and good wages are linked to leaving WorkFirst. Thus, it is not poor general health (discussed in an earlier section of this report) in and of itself which prevents leaving Welfare; rather, it is poor health's impact on the ability to work.

However, despite this relationship, 12% of the sample said their poor health prevented them from working -- yet they still left WorkFirst for a full year.

Conclusions: racial disparities

There was significant racial variation for these three measures of poor health's work-related impact on leaving WorkFirst. Depending on the measure of the impact of poor health on work, the relationship seems the strongest for Caucasians, African Americans, Latinas, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. This relationship did not hold true for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, who tended to have high rates of employment-impacting health issues among both Leavers and Stayers. Native Americans/Alaskan Natives and Caucasians tended to have higher levels of employment-impacting health issues, regardless of their Leaver/Stayer status.

## Food Harsh: Adults

### Our Analysis: adult food hardship

The original survey phrased the question as “Do you ever eat less than you feel you should because there is not enough money to buy food?” Since the question was phrased as “Do you ever...?” the period of time this question refers to is ambiguous. Some respondents may have answered the question in terms of their current condition, while others may have responded in terms of “recent” or “in the last few months,” or even the literal “ever” (as in, “in your whole life”). Additionally, depending on how literally a respondent interpreted this question (e.g. forgetting to hit the ATM; having insufficient cash for the vending machine), this may overestimate the prevalence of hunger in the sample. These two weaknesses weaken the power of this measure of food hardship.

In general, food hardship in the past is related to being a Stayer. Those who were unable to leave WorkFirst were more likely to have experienced a lack of food in the past than those who were Leavers. The exception to this pattern is for Asian/Pacific Islander females, who not only had a larger proportion of Leavers than Stayers who have lacked food, but who also had higher over all levels of food shortage than the other racial/ethnic groups.

Keeping the limitations of the survey question in mind, the large percentage of respondents who have eaten

less than they should due to a lack of money is disturbing. Depending on the racial group and Leavers/Returner/Stayer category, 28% – 64% of the respondents have experienced food hardships.

### Other WFS3000 Studies: adult food hardship

The *WorkFirst Study Chart Book* (2001) also used a variation of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of this study’s results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### Washington State: adult food hardship

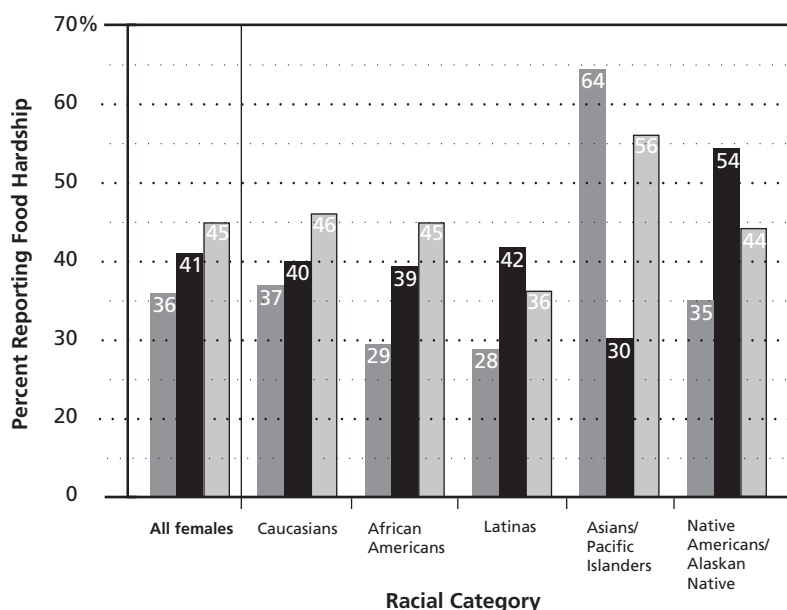
Other studies which looked at this issue for Washington State are: Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000);

Fogarty and Krale (2000); *Major Findings from Washington’s TANF Exit Surveys* (1999); *Washington’s TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.); and Zedlewski (2000). For a comparison of these studies’ results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### National: adult food hardship

Other studies which examined this issue at a national level are: Brauner and Loprest (1999); Loprest (1999a); Loprest (1999b); and Staveteig and Wigton (2000b). For a comparison of these studies’ results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Figure 20: Adult food hardship and length of stay on WorkFirst (females only)**





## Conclusions on adult food hardship:

### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Despite the limitations of the “hunger” question, food hardships seemed pervasive, both among Leavers and Stayers: depending on the racial category, 28% – 64% of the Leavers and Stayers have not eaten enough due to a lack of money.

Food hardship was larger among Stayers.

### Conclusions: racial disparities

Asian/Pacific Islander females had the highest rates of food hardship out of any of the Leavers and Stayers.

## Food Harship: Children

### Our Analysis: children’s food hardship

The survey question addressing the issue of hunger among children was phrased similarly to the question addressing adult hunger (please see the preceding section). The question was answered by the respondent on behalf of her child or children. Again, due to the phrasing of the question, the information gained from this question is ambiguous, both in terms of the vagueness of the time period addressed and the definition of “hunger.”

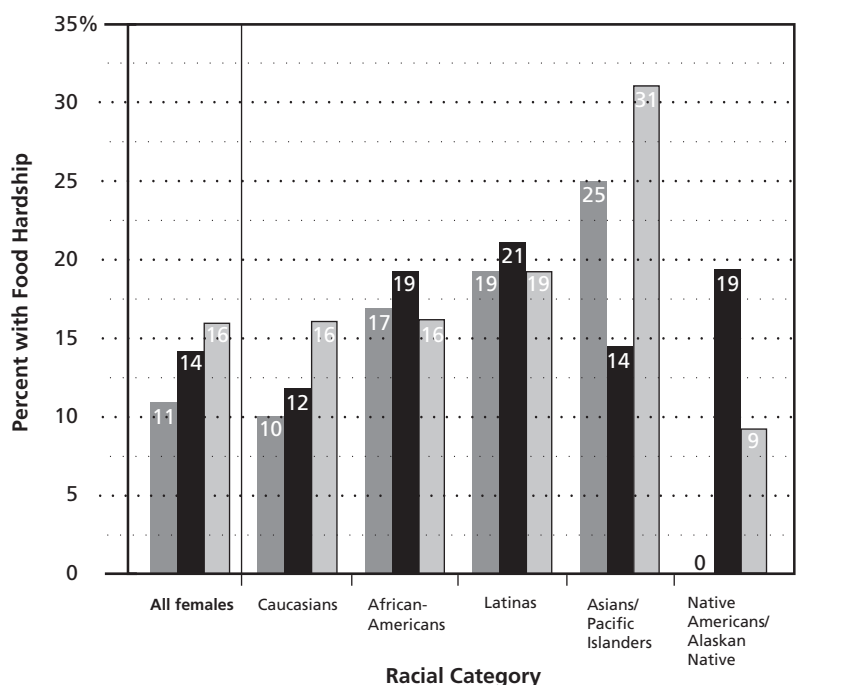
Given these limitations, it is disturbing that such a large proportion

of children of WorkFirst recipients have lacked food due to a shortage of money. Among all females, 11% – 16% of the respondents said their children have eaten less than they should (Figure 21). Depending on the Leaver/Stayer status and the racial category, up to 31% of the respondents reported their children “ever eat less than you feel you should because there is not enough money to buy food.”

In general, food hardship was related to staying on WorkFirst: for most racial categories, more Stayers than Leavers reported food hardship among their children.

There were racial differences for the food hardship of children. The general pattern of Stayers experiencing a higher rate of food hardship than

**Figure 21: Parental Report of Children’s Food Hardship and Parent’s Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months  
RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12  
STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

Leavers did not hold true for African Americans and Latinas. Instead, for the children of the respondents, there appeared to be little relationship between the Leaver/Stayer status of the parents and the food hardship of their children.

Also, similar to our findings for adult food hardship, the children of Asians/Pacific Islanders had the highest proportion of food hardship.

### Other WFS3000 Studies: children's food hardship

The *WorkFirst Study Chart Book* (2001) also used a variation of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusions on children's food hardship:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In general, there was a noticeable difference in food hardship between the children of Leavers and Stayers; a larger percentage of Stayers reported food hardship. This suggests that longer stays on WorkFirst were related to children going hungry.

Out of our sample of all females, 11%–16% said their children sometimes had insufficient food, due to a lack of money. In a modern, industrialized society such as ours, this is troubling.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There were racial differences in the food hardship of children. The general pattern of Stayers experiencing a higher rate of food hardship than Leavers did not hold true for the children of African Americans and Latinas.

The prevalence of food hardship also differed by race: the children of Asians/Pacific Islanders had the highest proportion of food hardship.

### **Adult Abuse**

#### Our Analysis: adult abuse

The survey question on adult abuse asks, "As an adult, have you been physically abused by a spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend?" Since the phrasing of this question is imprecise in specifying the time frame of the abuse, we have no way of knowing whether the abuse was recent, or in the distant past. Thus, we can not determine whether this abuse was related to the current stay on WorkFirst.

The first bar graph on adult abuse (Figure 22), indicates that out of all the females, nearly half reported abuse by a partner in the past, regardless of whether they were Leavers, Stayers, or Returners. There also appears to be a relationship between past abuse and the length of time on WorkFirst: in general, more Stayers reported past abuse from a partner than did Leavers.

In general, more Caucasians and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives reported past abuse than did African Americans and Latinas; Asians/Pacific Islanders had the lowest prevalence of abuse.

The bar graph on adult abuse (Figure 23) divides the sample into

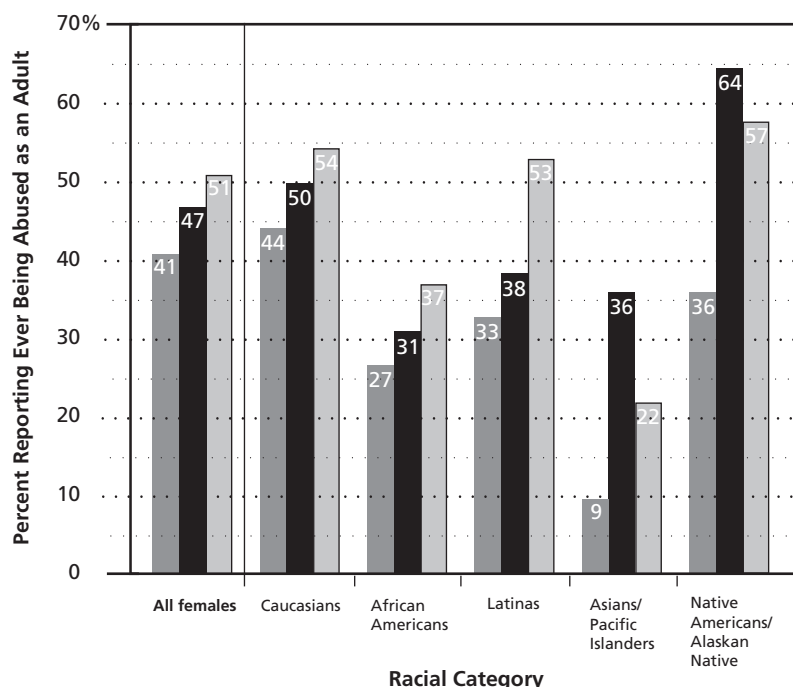
those who reported abuse (on the left), and those who did not (on the right). In general, there seem to be more Stayers than Leavers among those who reported abuse, while the reverse holds true among those who did not report experiencing abuse. Again, this suggests a link between past abuse from a partner and a difficulty in leaving WorkFirst.

However, there were racial differences in this pattern. African Americans, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives tended to have more Stayers than Leavers, regardless of whether they had reported abuse in the past. This suggests that these racial/ethnic groups were generally more likely to be Stayers, and less likely to successfully leave WorkFirst for a full year.

Additionally, the lack of past abuse was still related to successfully leaving WorkFirst for all of the racial groups. Comparing the percent of Leavers within those who had experienced abuse and within those who had not, we can see that there is a larger proportion of Leavers within

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

**Figure 22: Abuse by Partner as an Adult and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**

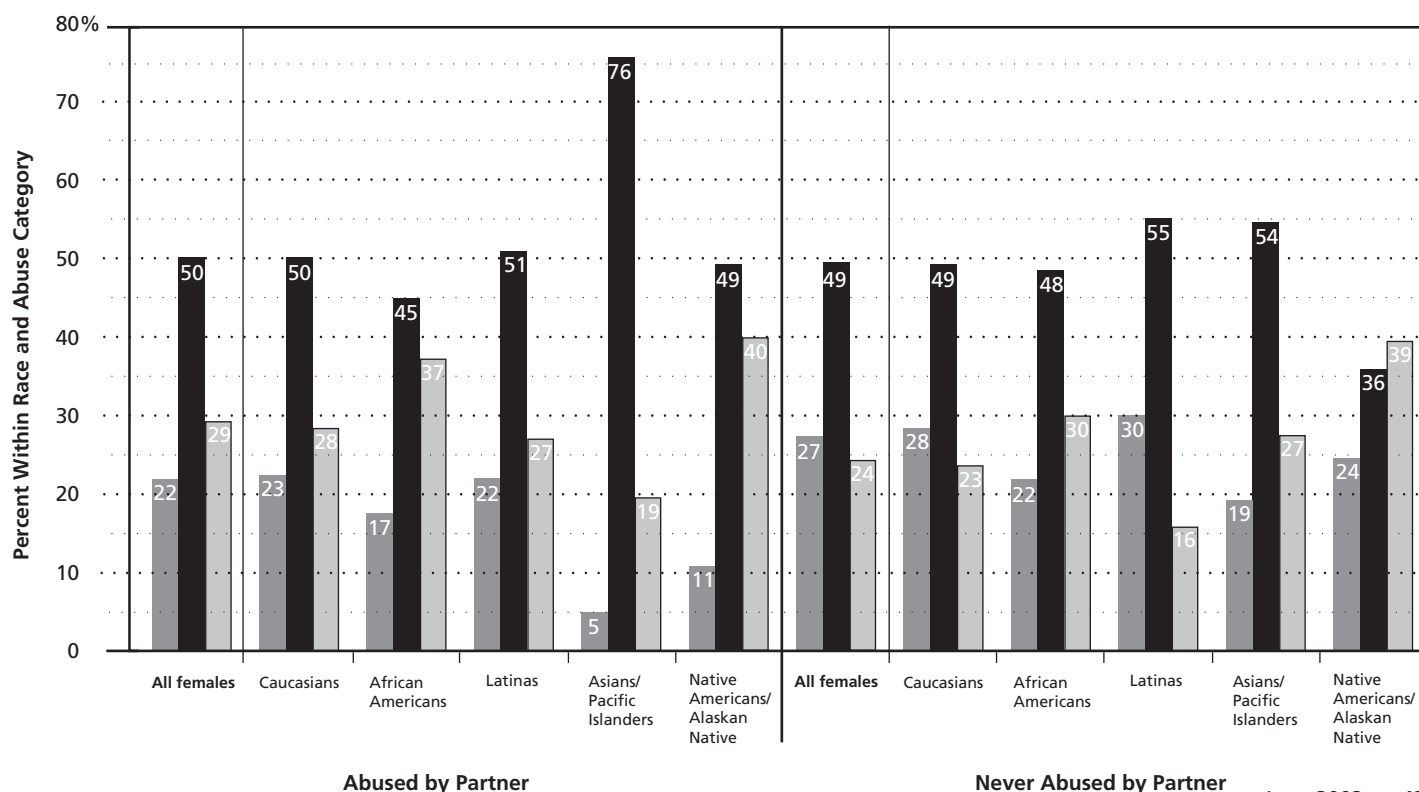


these racial/ethnic groups among those who did not experience abuse. Thus, among those who did not experience abuse in the past, there were more Leavers.

#### Other WFS3000 Studies: *adult abuse*

Other studies which used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue are: Burchfield and Klawitter (2000); Klawitter (2001); and WorkFirst Study Chart Book, 2001. For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Figure 23: Partner Abuse and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



Washington State: adult abuse

Burley, Lerch, and Mayfield (2001) looked at this issue for Washington State. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Conclusions on adult abuse:**

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Past physical abuse by a partner appeared to be related to a longer stay on WorkFirst. Additionally, the prevalence of abuse for this female sample (41% – 51%) seemed higher than for the general population.

Conclusions: racial disparities

The prevalence of past physical abuse among our female respondents varied by race. In general, more Caucasians and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives reported past abuse. Asians/Pacific Islanders had the lowest proportion reporting past abuse.

The degree the impact of past abuse varied by race. However, there still appeared to be an effect, for all racial/ethnic groups.

**Pregnancy:**

Age at First Pregnancy

Our Analysis: age at first pregnancy

For all of the females combined, the differences in the average age of first pregnancy between Stayers and Leavers is minor -- half of a year (see Figure 24). Leavers tended to have their first pregnancy an average of six months year later than Stayers. However, given the relative youth of that these average ages represent (19.1 versus 19.6 years old), one could argue that this *average* difference of half a year is very important to those who were at the lower end of the range -- for example, those who were still in high school.

The difference between Leavers and Stayers in the average age of the first pregnancy is the lowest for Caucasians (0.3 year). In contrast, the difference for all other racial/ethnic groups was a full year or a year and a half. This difference is large considering that the "teenage" years are 13-19.

The direction of the difference -- later pregnancies correlating with Leaving, and earlier pregnancies correlating with Staying -- held true for all racial/ethnic groups except Asians/Pacific Islanders. For them, the average age of those who left WorkFirst was much *younger* (1.7 years) than those who didn't leave WorkFirst.

**Conclusions on age at first pregnancy:**

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

The average age of one's first pregnancy was related to the length of time on WorkFirst. For all females, this relationship was moderate. Thus, becoming pregnant at an older age is mildly beneficial to being able to leave WorkFirst. However, pregnancy's impact on schooling was of larger importance (discussed in a later section).

The relationship between age and Leaving or Staying was stronger within specific racial categories.

Conclusions: racial disparities

With the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders, there was a noticeable relationship between the age of first pregnancy and one's Leaver/Stayer status: Those who delayed their first pregnancy were more able to become Leavers. This relationship was moderate for Caucasians, and strong for all other racial categories with the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders.

## Pregnancy:

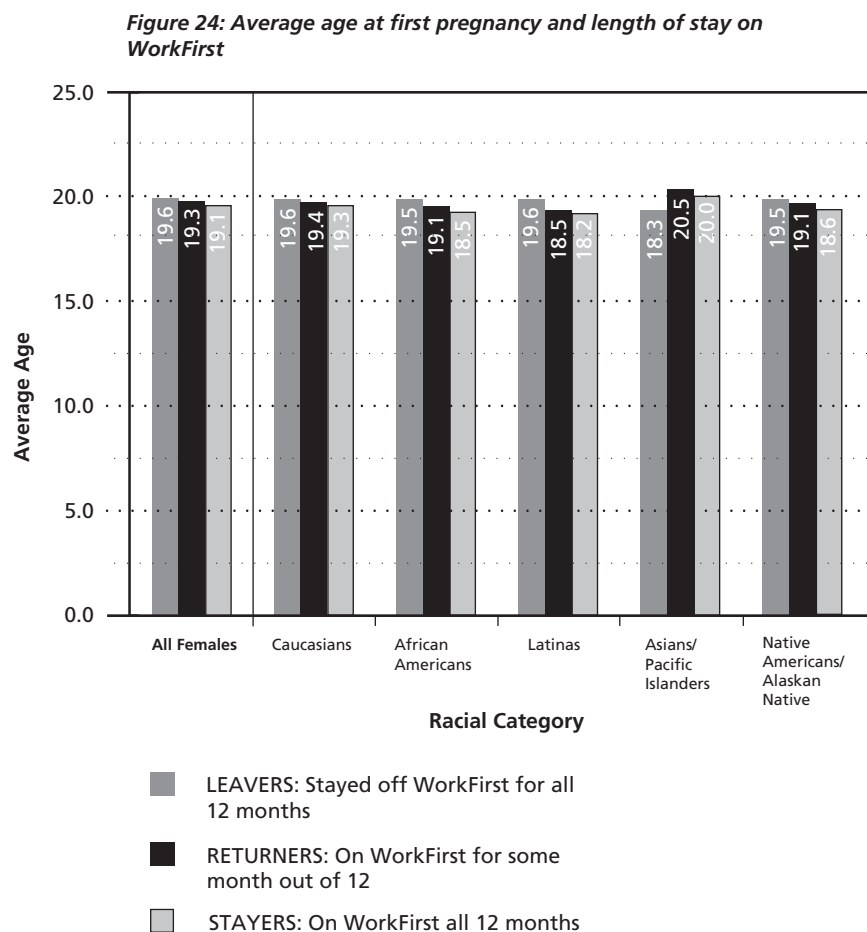
"Teen" Pregnancy (age 17 or younger)

### Our Analysis: teen pregnancy

"Pregnancy as a minor" seems to be mildly related to staying on WorkFirst (Figure 25). For all females, Caucasian females, and African American females, having one's first pregnancy at the age of 17 or under decreases one's chances of successfully leaving WorkFirst. One's chances are improved by not having a pregnancy under the age of 17.

One way to evaluate the impact of teen pregnancy is to compare the proportion of Leavers and Stayers among those who had a teen pregnancy, and those who did not. In general, those who had a teen pregnancy (the left side of Figure 25) had more Stayers than Leavers, whereas for those who avoided a teen pregnancy (the right side of Figure 25), the opposite tended to be true. However, the pattern among those who avoided a teen pregnancy was not as consistent as the pattern for those who had teen pregnancies. Thus, while teen pregnancies appear to have been detrimental to later attempts to leave WorkFirst, it is not as clear that a postponement of pregnancy was advantageous.

Among African American females, there were a larger proportion of Stayers among both those who had avoided teen pregnancy and those who had a teen pregnancy. This simply reflected the situation that there were more African Americans in our study who were Stayers than Leavers.



Thus, another way to examine the situation is to compare the proportion of Leavers within a racial category, by comparing the percent of Leavers among those who had a teen pregnancy and those who did not. For Caucasians and Latinas, the proportion of Leavers is much larger among those who did not have a teen pregnancy, compared to those who did. For African Americans, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native American/Alaskan Natives, the proportion of Stayers is larger than Leavers among those who did not have a pregnancy at this age. Contrary to expectations, the proportion of Leavers for Asians/Pacific Islanders is actually larger among those who had a teen

pregnancy (22%) than among those who had not (11%).

### Other WFS3000 Studies: teen pregnancy

Klawitter (2001) used a variation of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### Washington State: teen pregnancy

Wertheimer, Jager, and Moore (2000) looked at this issue for Washington State. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary

report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### National: teen pregnancy

Other studies which examined this issue at a national level are: Adams and Williams (1990); Wertheimer, Jager, and Moore (2000); and Wertheimer and Moore (1998). For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusions on teen pregnancy:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Overall, becoming pregnant as a minor (age 17 or under) was moderately related to longer stays on WorkFirst. For the sample of all females, those who had a teen pregnancy were more likely to be a Stayer than a Leaver. And, those who avoided a teen pregnancy were slightly more likely to be Leavers.

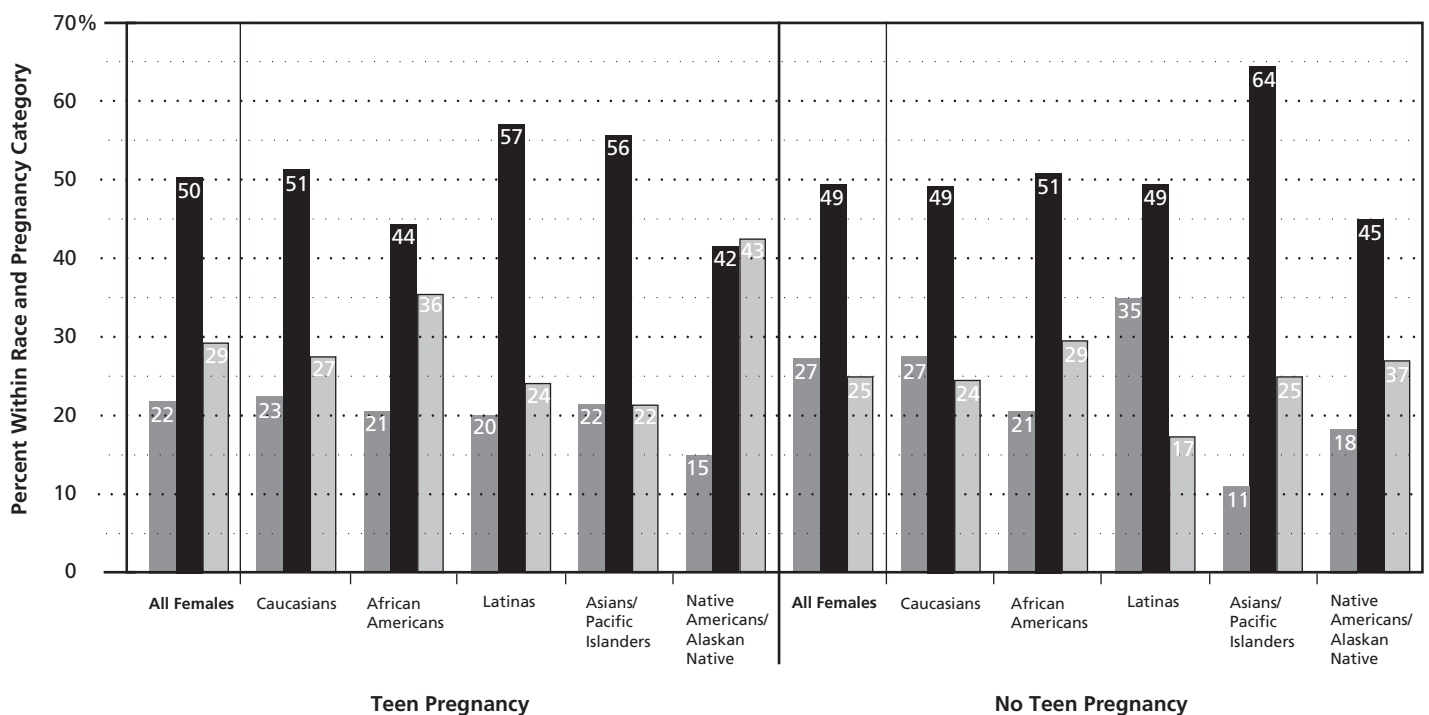
As we discuss in the next section, it is not pregnancy as a minor, in itself, that has a strong relationship with staying on WorkFirst; rather, it is how the pregnancy affects one's educational trajectory.

It is important to note that teen pregnancy does not guarantee success or failure in one's attempts to leave WorkFirst. Twenty two percent of the respondents who had experienced a teen pregnancy were able to successfully stay off WorkFirst for a full year, despite their teen pregnancy. Conversely, 25% of those who avoided pregnancy did not manage to become Leavers, despite their avoidance of a teen pregnancy.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

Those who had a teen pregnancy were less able to leave WorkFirst, with the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders. Those who had a pregnancy were equally likely to be Leavers and Stayers. Among African Americans who had teen preg-

**Figure 25: Teen pregnancy (age 17 or under) and time on WorkFirst**





## Pregnancy:

Finishing High School and First Pregnancy

nancies at 17 and under, there is a considerably higher proportion of Stayers than Leavers on WorkFirst. Strangely, for Asians/Pacific Islanders, the pattern was reversed for those who did not get pregnant: a considerably higher proportion of the latter were Stayers and opposed to being Leavers.

### Our Analysis: finishing high school and teen pregnancy

We report the results of two different measures of the relationship between pregnancy and finishing high school. The first measure (see Figure 26) was based directly on a survey question, which asked whether the respondent finished high school before the start of her first pregnancy. However, if the question of interest is whether the pregnancy prevented graduation from high school, then this question is poorly phrased. (For example, one could become pregnant before graduation, yet still finish high school while pregnant.)<sup>15</sup> To address this shortcoming, we constructed the second measure -- did a pregnancy cause the respondent to drop out of high school (see Figure 27) -- based on the inverse of the first question, plus a logical interrelation with other survey responses such as the highest degree earned. For example, if a respondent had a high school degree, clearly her pregnancy did not prevent her graduation from high school. Similarly, if a respondent's first pregnancy was at

the age of 21 or older, this occurred too late for it to impede graduation from high school. (In Washington State, citizens are eligible for public schooling until the age of 21.) Please note that this second measure is constructed, and thus, is imperfect. However, we feel that it addresses the causal relationship between teen pregnancy and dropping out of high school more strongly than did the original question.

In contrast to the earlier "teen pregnancy" question, these two measures yielded much stronger results. For the sample of all females, finishing high school prior to pregnancy (Figure 26) increased the odds of successfully leaving WorkFirst; not finishing school prior to pregnancy increased the odds of staying on WorkFirst for the full year under study.

This relationship was clearer among all racial/ethnic groups than it was for the previous analyses of pregnancy and Leaving or Staying. With the exception of Asians/Pacific Islanders, all racial/ethnic groups had noticeably more Leavers than Stayers among those who finished high school before their first pregnancy, and except for Latinas more Stayers than Leavers among those who did not finish high school prior to pregnancy.

Similarly, having a teen pregnancy that forced one to leave high school was also strongly related to difficulty in leaving WorkFirst (see Figure

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

15 When we contacted the lead investigator collecting the WFS3000 data regarding this shortcoming, she replied, "We ask directly about why people dropped out of school. We found that the most common reason is parenthood. [See report "Education and Training-Preliminary Report 2000" on web site listed above.]" (Klawitter, 2002) Unfortunately, this element of the data was not contained in the version of the data posted on their website. However, it may be available to other researchers upon request.



27). If one compares the proportion of Leavers among both pregnancy categories, it is apparent that there are a larger proportion of Leavers among those whose pregnancy did not cause them to drop out of high school.

The exception to this pattern is Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives. For both these racial categories, the proportion of Leavers among those who did not drop out due to a pregnancy were similar to, and slightly lower than, among those who dropped out of school.

#### Other WFS3000 Studies: *finishing high school and teen pregnancy*

The WorkFirst Study Chart Book (2001) used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### National: *finishing high school and teen pregnancy*

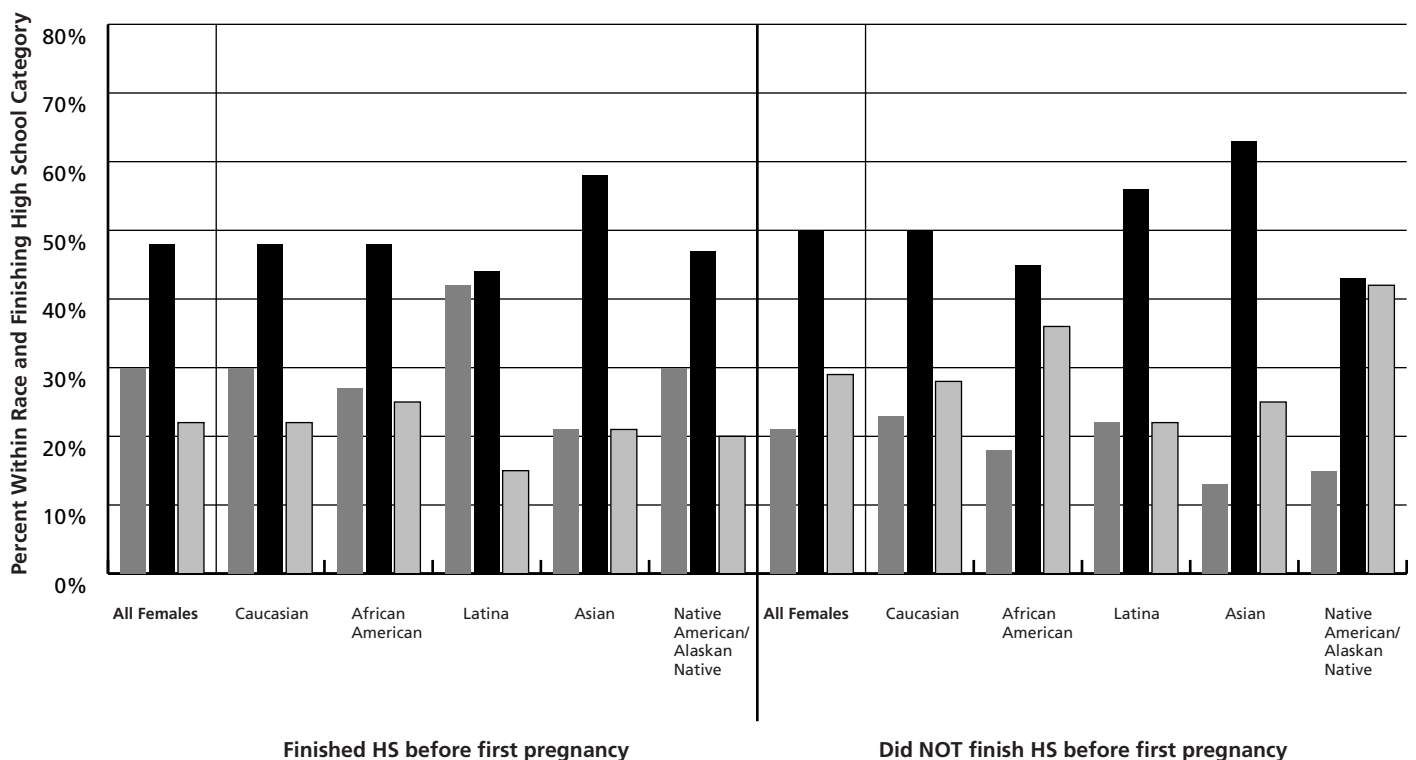
Wertheimer and Moore (1998) examined this issue at a national level. For a comparison of this study's results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### **Conclusions for finishing high school and teen pregnancy:**

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

In contrast to our previous two analyses of pregnancy (average age; teen pregnancy), "pregnancy causing one to leave school" had a strong and consistent relationship with the length of stay on WorkFirst. This suggests that it is not the age of the first pregnancy, or even "teen pregnancy," that impedes one from leaving WorkFirst. Instead, it is the harmful impact to one's educational trajectory. This suggests that attention should be focused on preventing teen pregnancies and on preventing pregnant teens from leaving school. *When a teen preg-*

**Figure 26: Finishing High School Before the Start of First Pregnancy and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



*nancy does not cause the teen to drop out of high school, the pregnancy's influence on the length of stay on WorkFirst is minimized.*

However, dropping out of high school due to a pregnancy does not condemn one to staying on WorkFirst. Out of the females who dropped out of high school without their diploma, 19% still became Leavers.

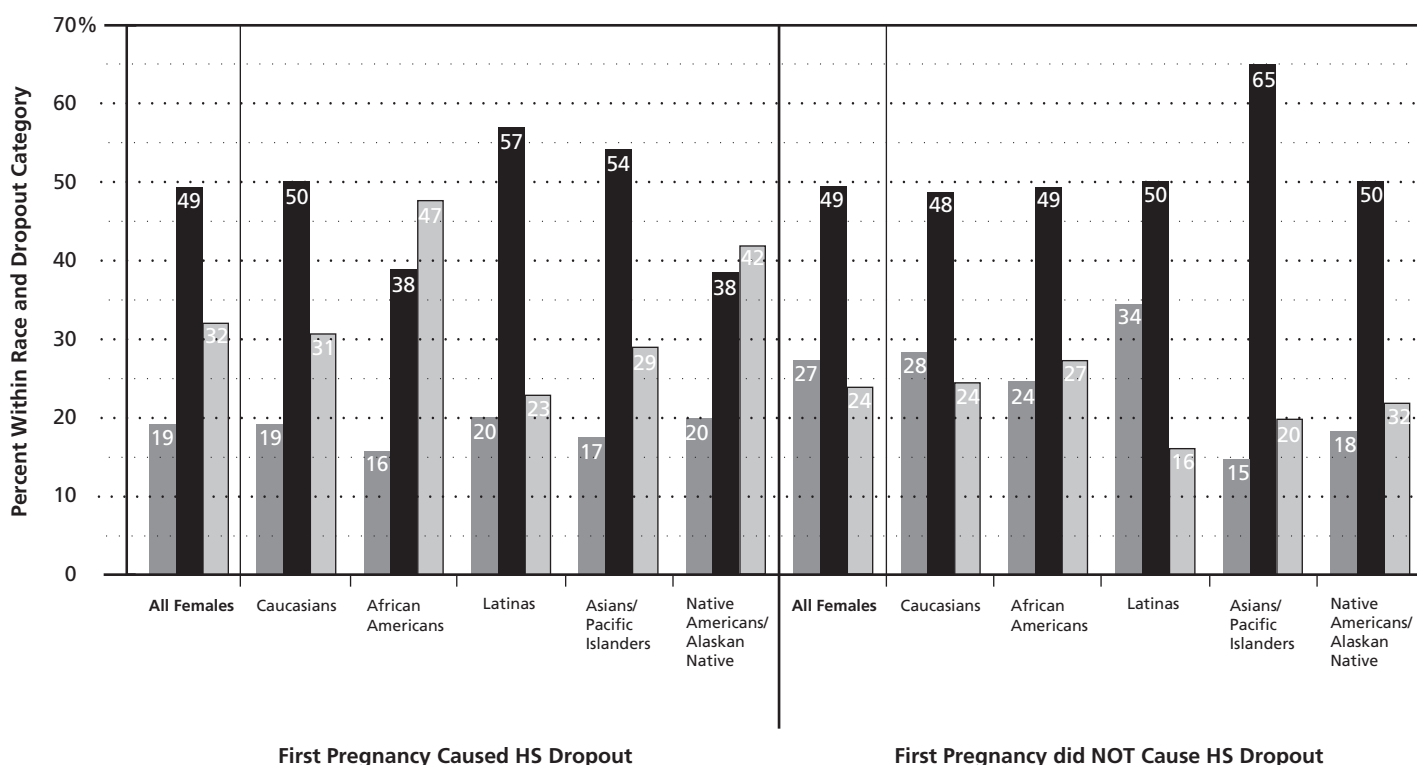
of pregnancy (average age; teen pregnancy), we found that “pregnancy causing one to drop out of high school” is damaging to all racial/ethnic groups’ ability to leave WorkFirst. The exception to this may be Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives: One is more likely to be a Stayer with or without a pregnancy that causes the dropping out of school.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

In contrast to our previous two analyses of pregnancy, “pregnancy causing one to leave school” had a strong and consistent relationship with the length of stay on WorkFirst. Unlike the previous aspects

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

**Figure 27: First Teen Pregnancy Caused Dropping Out of High School and Length of Stay on WorkFirst**



## Over All Experience

With TANF/WorkFirst Program

### Our Analysis: over all experience

All groups tended to report a generally positive experience with the WorkFirst program (Figures 28, 29).

Across all racial/ethnic groups, Latinas appeared to have the most positive general experiences (Figure 28): They had the highest percentage (41%) with a “very positive” assessment, and 81% with a “very positive” or “somewhat positive” experience. Conversely (see Figure 29), Native Americans/Alaskan Natives (30%), followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders (27%) and African Americans (25%), had the most negative experiences.

In terms of the relationship between leaving or staying on WorkFirst and one’s overall experience with the program, there did not seem to be a substantial difference between Leavers and Stayers (Figure 30). The greatest difference between Leavers and Stayers (Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) was only a 0.3 difference on a four-point scale. One possible explanation for this lack of a relationship is that the question was too general to tap in to specific issues with the WorkFirst program.

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months

Figure 28: Overall Experience with WorkFirst Program (females only)

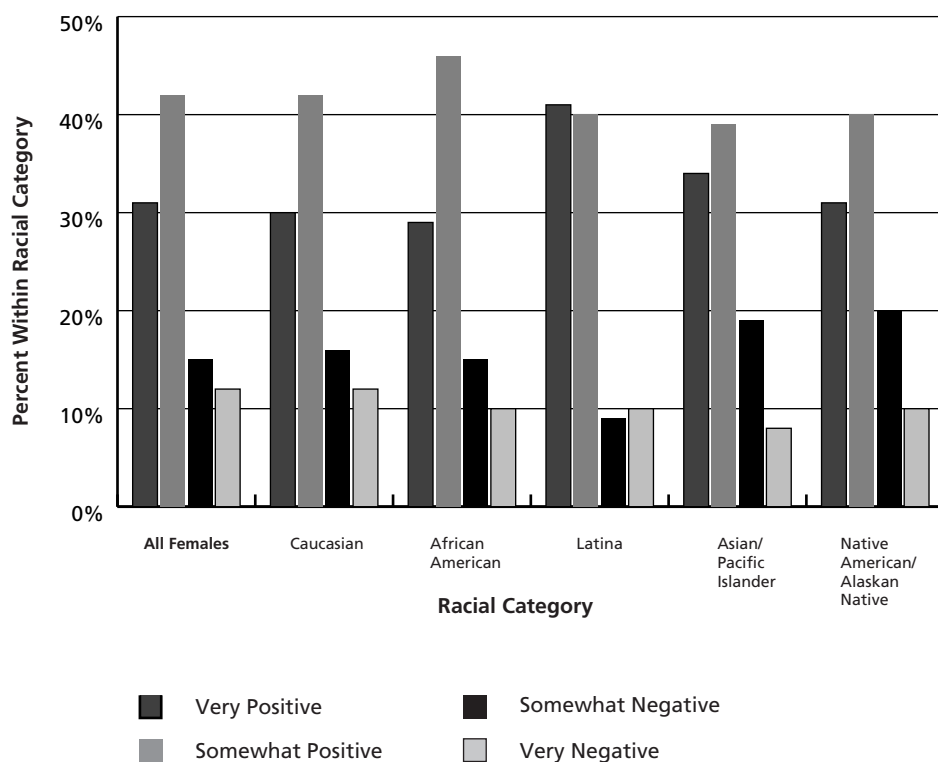


Figure 30: Over All Experience with WorkFirst (1 = very negative; 4 = very positive) and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)

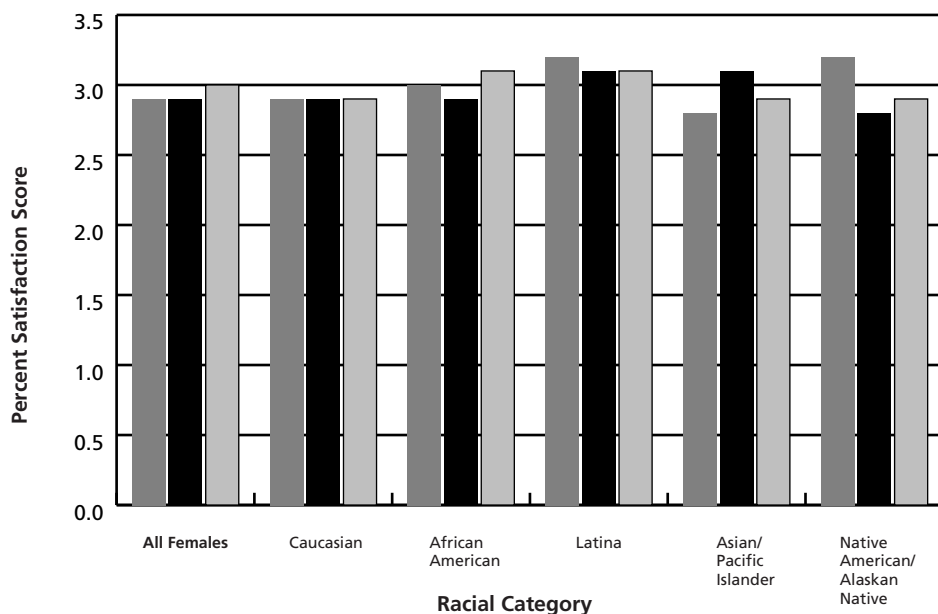
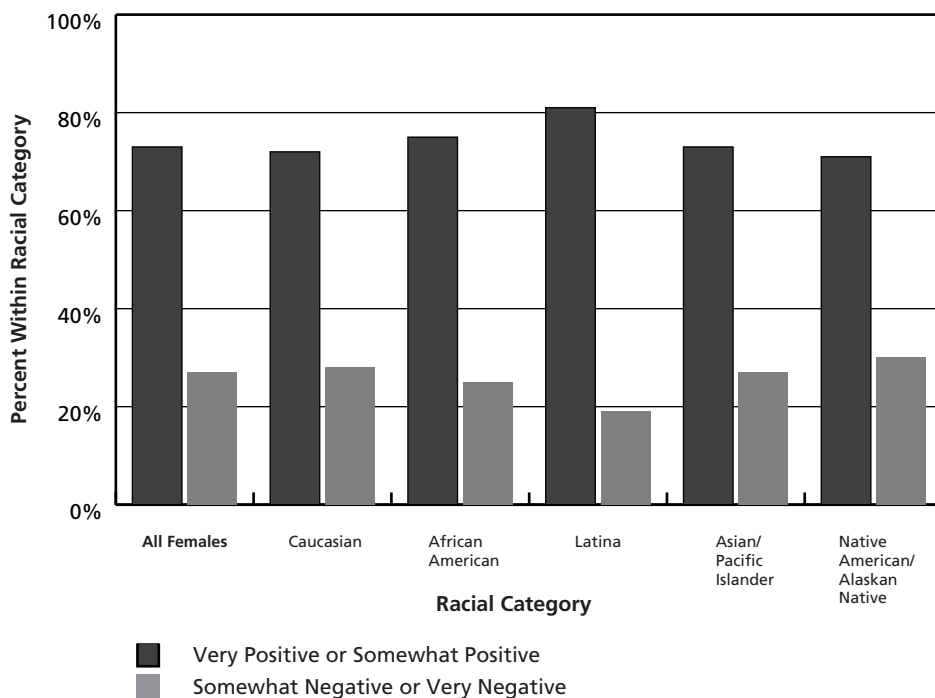


Figure 29: Overall Experience with WorkFirst (combined categories; females only)



## Perceived Helpfulness of WorkFirst Towards Self-Sufficiency

### Our Analysis: WorkFirst's helpfulness towards self-sufficiency

It is difficult to interpret the responses to this survey item, as two of the response options -- "somewhat helpful" and "not very helpful" -- are very close in meaning. Both are similar to "a little" in their measure of helpfulness.

Keeping this ambiguity in mind, there seemed to be a fairly even split among the entire sample of females (Figure 31). Instead of an even 33%-33%-33% split, the opinions were divided 30%-35%-36%, with the trend running towards the negative (i.e. "not very helpful").

There was also a fair amount of variation among the racial categories. While Caucasians' and African Americans' opinions tended towards the negative (i.e. "not very helpful"), Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders tended towards the positive (i.e. "very helpful"). Finally, Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were very split in their assessment of the helpfulness of the WorkFirst program, with a 33%-34%-33% split.

In terms of the relationship between leaving or staying on WorkFirst and WorkFirst's helpfulness in helping one's self-sufficiency, there was a substantial difference between Leavers and Stayers within the sample of all females (Figure 32): Leavers, Returners, and Stayers all gave the

### Other WFS3000 Studies: over all experience

Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001b) and The WorkFirst Study Chart Book (2001) both used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

### **Conclusion for over all experience with the WorkFirst program:**

#### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

The respondents reported an over all positive experience with WorkFirst as a whole. There was only a negligible relationship between average satisfaction with WorkFirst and one's Leaver or Stayer status.

Part of this may stem from the general nature of the question. Although the respondents may have had likes or dislikes about specific elements of the WorkFirst program, these were not addressed. Attitudes towards specific elements of WorkFirst may have better distinguished Leavers from Stayers.

#### Conclusions: racial disparities

There was not a strong racial difference in the over all satisfaction with the WorkFirst program. Latinas were slightly more positive, while Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were slightly less satisfied (followed by Caucasians, then Asians/Pacific Islanders).

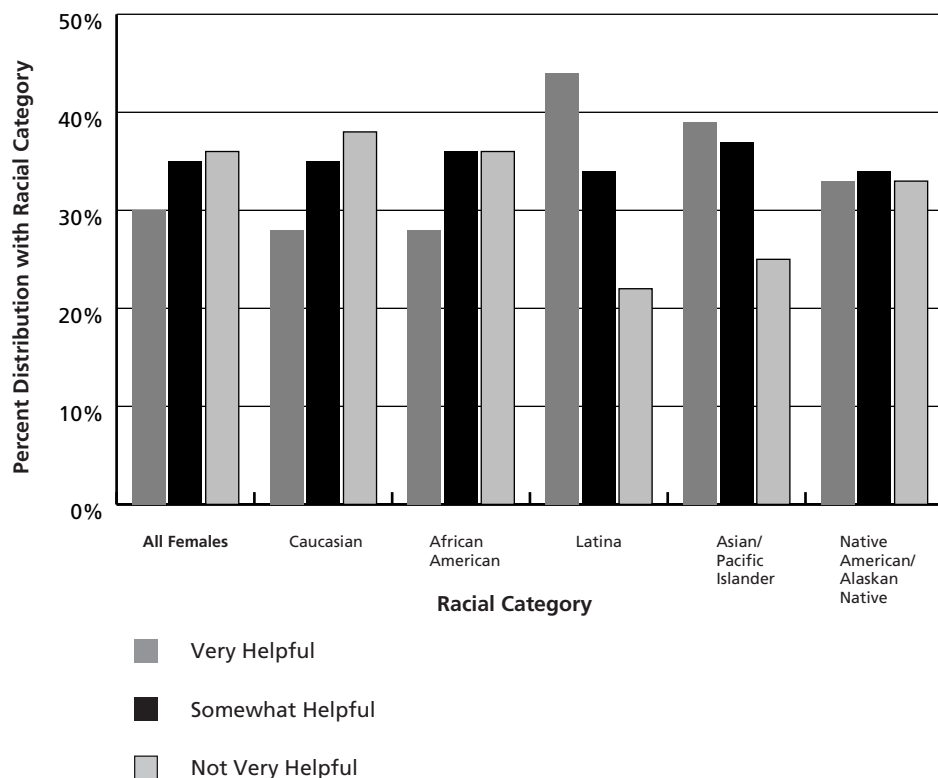
There was not a strong relationship between over all satisfaction with the WorkFirst program and one's Leaver or Stayer status.

WorkFirst program a 1.9 on a three-point scale.

There was a noticeable, but generally mild, difference among the racial categories. Latinas, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives who were Leavers tended to find WorkFirst more helpful than those who were Stayers. However, the greatest difference among these were only 0.3 of a point difference on a three-point scale, which is not a large difference.

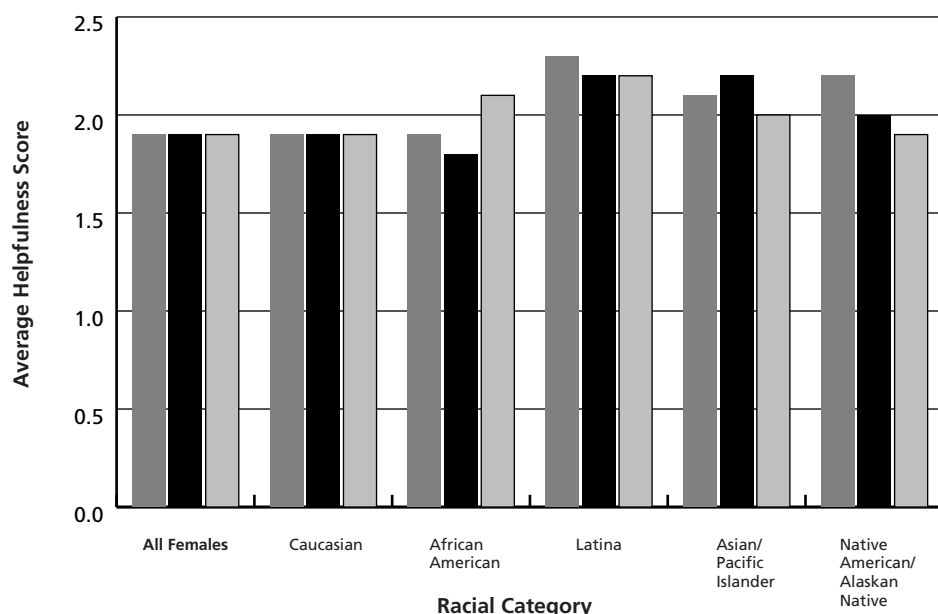
In contrast, African Americans who were Stayers were (ironically!) more likely to find WorkFirst more helpful than those who were Leavers. Again, the difference was minor -- 0.2 of a point. There was no relationship between the perceived helpfulness and being a Leaver or a Stayer for Caucasians.

**Figure 31: Helpfulness of WorkFirst Toward Self-Sufficiency (females only)**



**Figure 32: Average Helpfulness (1 = not very helpful; 3 = very helpful) of WorkFirst in Helping to Achieve Self-Sufficiency and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**

- LEAVERS: Stayed off WorkFirst for all 12 months
- RETURNERS: On WorkFirst for some month out of 12
- STAYERS: On WorkFirst all 12 months



Other WFS3000 Studies: *WorkFirst's helpfulness towards self-sufficiency*

Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001b) and *The WorkFirst Study Chart Book* (2001) both used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

**Conclusion for WorkFirst's helpfulness towards self-sufficiency:**

Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Among the sample of females, more respondents said that WorkFirst was not particularly helpful in moving them towards self-sufficiency than those who said it was "very helpful." Roughly equal proportions said WorkFirst was "somewhat helpful" as said it was "not very helpful."

Among all females, there was no difference in the average perceived helpfulness between Leavers and Stayers.

Conclusions: racial disparities

There was a fair amount of variation among the racial categories in terms of the distribution of their perceptions of the WorkFirst program's helpfulness towards self-sufficiency. Caucasians and African Americans tended towards the negative (i.e. "not very helpful"), Latinas and Asians/Pacific Islanders tended

towards the positive (i.e. "very helpful"), and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were evenly split in their assessment.

There was also racial variation in terms of the relationship between perceptions of the program's helpfulness and one's Leaver/Stayer status. However, these variations were minor, amounting at the most to only to 0.3 on a three-point scale.

## Perceptions of Hope

For the Future

Our Analysis: *hope for the future*

Females of all racial/ethnic groups seemed optimistic towards their future success (Figure 33, 34). Roughly three-fourths of all females said it was "somewhat unlikely" or "very unlikely" that they would still be on WorkFirst in twelve months' time (Figure 34).

There were variations by race in the degree of optimism that one would be off WorkFirst one year later. Looking at Figure 34, it appears that Caucasians were the most optimistic about staying off WorkFirst, while Latinas (closely followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) were the least optimistic.

In terms of the relationship between the respondents' Leaver/Stayer status and their perceived likelihood of being off WorkFirst in twelve months, the timing of the survey presents problems. Specifically, the interviews took place during the last half of the twelve month period that we use to define "Stayers" and "Leavers." Thus, "Leavers" had already been off WorkFirst for anywhere from three to eleven months when they were asked to predict their enrollment on WorkFirst one year later, and "Stayers" had been consistently on WorkFirst for the same three to eleven months.

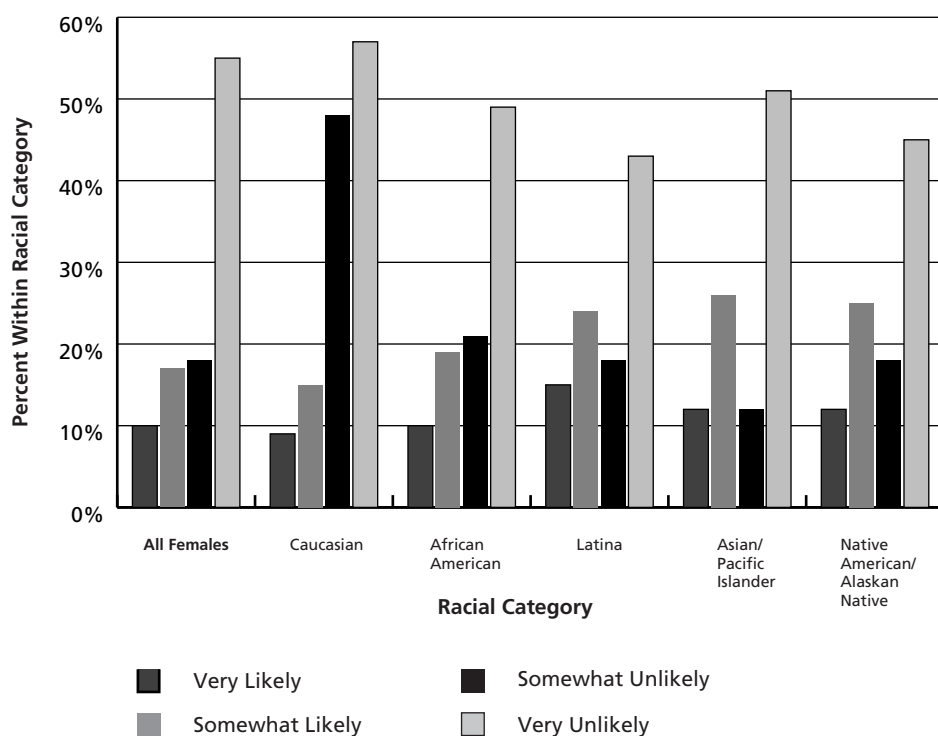
With this in mind, it is not surprising that Leavers were slightly more optimistic in their outlook than Stayers.

Within the sample of all females, Leavers were 0.7 of a point more optimistic (on a four-point scale) than Stayers in their assessment of their chances of being off WorkFirst in one year's time (see Figure 35).

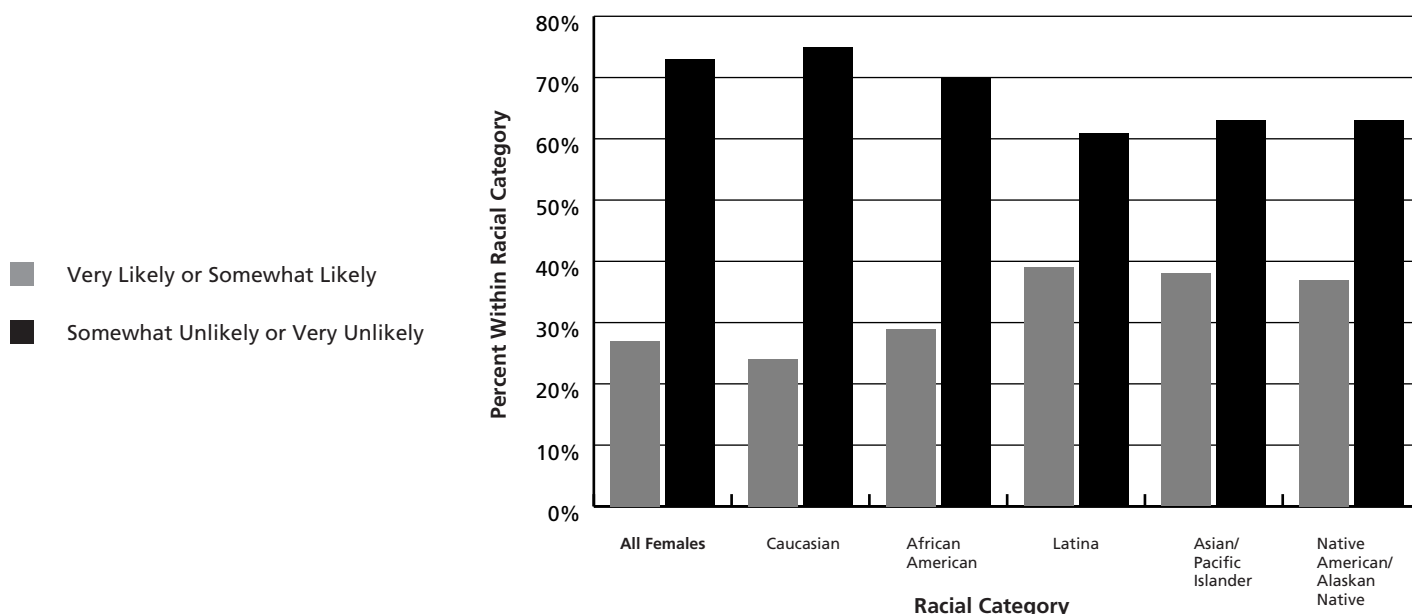
This relationship between the degree of optimism and being a Leaver rather than a Stayer held true for all racial/ethnic groups. Asian/Pacific Islander Leavers were the most optimistic, averaging a 4.0 on a four-point scale.<sup>17</sup> Latina Stayers were the least optimistic, averaging 2.4 points on a four-point scale. Asians/Pacific Islanders also demonstrated the greatest difference between Leavers and Stayers (1.3 points), while African Americans showed the least difference (0.3 of a point).

17 We verified these figures; they are correct.

**Figure 33: Perceived Likelihood of Receiving WorkFirst Twelve Months from Now (females only)**

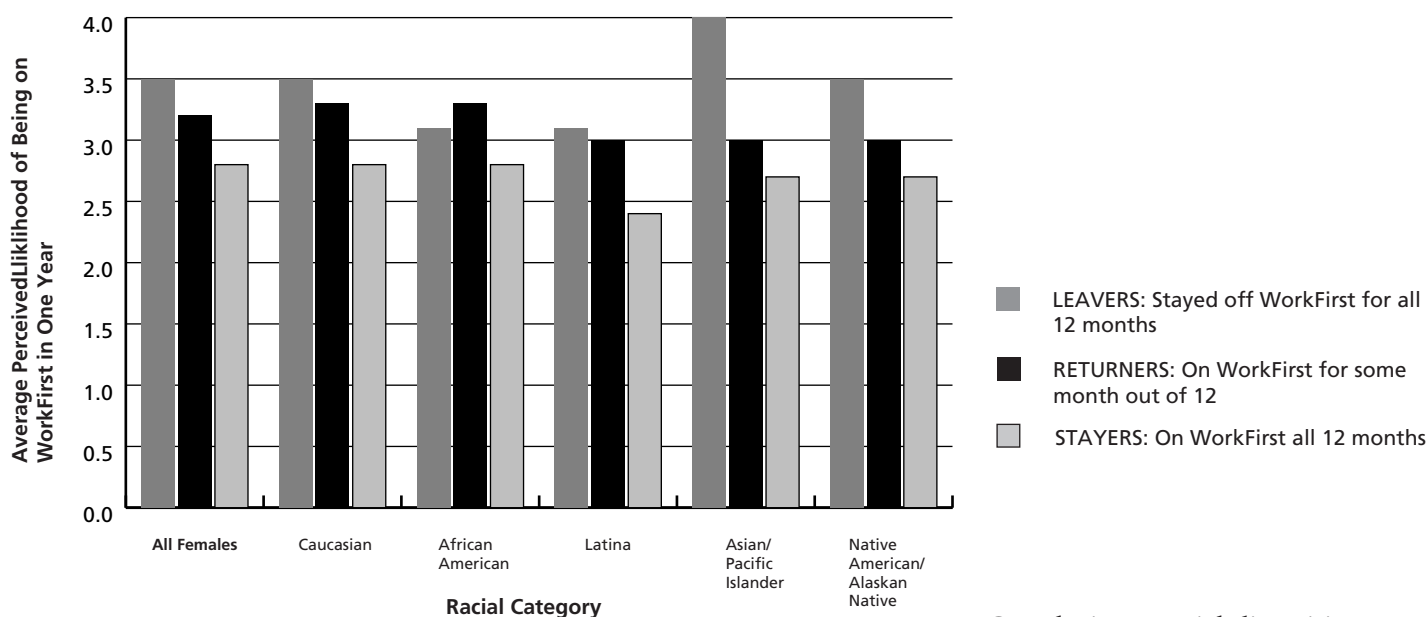


**Figure 34: Perceived Likelihood of Receiving WorkFirst Twelve Months from Now (females only)**





**Figure 35: Perceived Likelihood (1 = very likely; 4 = very unlikely) of Receiving WorkFirst Twelve Months from Now and Length of Stay on WorkFirst (females only)**



### Conclusions: racial disparities

#### Other WFS3000 Studies: hope for the future

Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001b) and The WorkFirst Study Chart Book (2001) used variations of our WFS3000 data to examine this issue. For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### Washington State: hope for the future

Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000) and Fogarty and Krale (2000) looked at this issue for Washington State. For a comparison of these studies' results to our own, please see our supplementary report, available for download at <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwscott/spreports.html>.

#### **Conclusion for hope for the future:**

##### Conclusions: leaving WorkFirst

Roughly one-quarter of the females in the study thought it was likely they would be on WorkFirst in one year's time; roughly three-quarters thought it was unlikely they would be on WorkFirst in one year.

This question showed a relationship between being a Leaver and increased optimism for remaining off WorkFirst. However, since all Leavers were already off at the time of the interview, and all Stayers were still on, it is not surprising that their current enrollment status would influence their prediction of their enrollment status for the following year.

Caucasians and African Americans were the most likely out of all racial/ethnic groups to predict being off WorkFirst in one year's time, while Latinas (closely followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives) were the least optimistic. However, the vast majority of all racial/ethnic groups (61% - 75%) predicted they would be off WorkFirst one year later.

In terms of its relationship to one's Leaver or Stayer status, Leavers of all races were more likely than their Stayer counterparts to think they would be off WorkFirst in one year's time. The smallest difference between Leavers and Stayers was for African American females; the largest difference was for Asian/Pacific Islander females.

## Limitations of the Data: The WorkFirst Study

There are several weaknesses in the methodology of the WorkFirst evaluation study administered by Washington State Employment Security Department. These weaknesses limit the validity of any results derived from the data. These weaknesses fall in to two categories: the design and implementation of the survey, and the wording of the survey questions.

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### The survey design and implementation:

1. The survey was *administered by telephone*. While this is generally an accepted procedure for administering surveys, this may be problematic when studying those in poverty. Correlates of lacking a telephone may also be correlates of poverty.<sup>18</sup> For example:

- “Over half of American Indian households on reservations had no telephone in 1990.”<sup>19</sup>
- “Nearly half all householders without a telephone were under age 35.”<sup>20</sup>
- “Nearly 3 in 4 phoneless households lived in rental units.”<sup>21</sup>
- Nationally (in 1990), 5% of all household lacked telephones. However, 13% of all African Americans, 23% of Native Americans/Alaskan Natives, and 12% households of Hispanic origin lacked telephones.<sup>22</sup>

Telephone-based surveys would also systematically exclude anyone who was homeless, lived in a shelter, or lacked a stable address. Thus, to the extent that poverty is related to a lack of phone ownership, administering a survey by telephone systematically omits the “poorest of the poor” -- thus painting an overly-optimistic picture of the situation.<sup>23</sup>

2. As mentioned above, *Native Americans living on reservations often do not have a telephone*. Thus, Native Americans living on reservations will have been systematically under-sampled, due to the design of the study; those who were included may systematically differ from those who lack telephones.<sup>24</sup>

3. Due to an *absence of interpreters* when administering the survey, people not fluent in English were excluded from this sample. To the extent that difficulty with English is related to difficulties with employment (and thus, reliance on TANF), this study artificially excluded immigrant Asians, Latinas, and Africans from the sample, thus minimizing, if not excluding altogether, the apparent economic difficul-

18 On a national level, an estimated 20% of families in poverty lack a telephone Giesbrecht, Kulp, and Starer, 1996:2-2).

19 “Historical Census of Housing Tables - Telephones” (2000)

20 Phoneless in America. (1994)

21 Phoneless in America. (1994)

22 Phoneless in America. (1994)

23 For example, Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a:2) compared the WorkFirst Study (WFS3000) respondents with the total WorkFirst caseload in March 1999, and found that survey respondents had a slightly higher earned income than the general caseload. The average Wave I WFS3000 participants had higher monthly earned incomes than the average WorkFirst client (\$175/month versus \$157/month). Similarly, the average level of education for Wave 1 survey respondents was slightly higher than the general WorkFirst caseload (11.5 years versus 11.1 years of education) (page 2). However, the study sample is not any better off in terms of “disability” or “mental or physical incapacity” (page 2).

ties experienced by these groups.<sup>25</sup>

4. *Males and non-Caucasians were not oversampled.* This resulted in too few of certain racial/ethnic groups (e.g. only 76 Asian/Pacific Islander females; only 160 Native American females) to adequately evaluate the situation in all of Washington State.<sup>26</sup>

5. *The time period under study (July 1998 – June 1999) is too long before the implementation of the survey (December 1999 – August 2000).* The gap between the period under study and the implementation of the survey means that respondents had to accurately remember events and dates from six months to *twenty-four* months earlier. To minimize “recall error,” most surveys ask for the twelve months preceding the *date that the survey was administered*. At the very least, when delays in administering the survey were realized, the time period under study should have been adjusted to about the survey period (i.e. December 1998 – January 1999). Because the survey was software-driven (as opposed to thousands of printed forms), this would have been a relatively easy change to make.<sup>27</sup>

24 Native Americans are 5% of the WorkFirst caseload, but only 4% of the study sample (Klawitter and VanNynatten, 2001a:2).

25 Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a:1) agree that some racial and ethnic groups, including those who speak English as a second language, were under-represented in the study. For example, although Latinos/Latinas were represented in the sample at the same rate as their proportion of the WorkFirst caseload (9%), Asians/Pacific Islanders were under-represented (6% of the WorkFirst caseload, versus 3% of the study sample). (page 2, figure 2). However, they also note that the survey was available in Russian and Spanish, and an Asian-language interpreter assisted some Asians in the English-language surveys.

26 Males comprise 7% of the WorkFirst caseload, but only 5% of the study sample (Klawitter and VanNynatten, 2001a:2). Non-Caucasians make up 32% of the WorkFirst caseload, but only 25% of the study sample (page 2).

27 Klawitter (2002a) responds that this first wave was intended as the first of many. As such, Wave I predominantly sets a baseline, to which later waves will be compared.

6. *Because the percentage of “failed” contacts were not included with the data,* there is no indicator of the bias in the sampling. For example, did 98% of those contacted participate in the survey -- or was it only 30%? A larger proportion of “failed” interviews would indicate increased chances of an un-representative sample. Not knowing the response rate prevents us from gauging the representativeness of the sample.<sup>28</sup>

### The wording of the survey questions:

1. *The time period under examination varied by question.* With many, the time period was ambiguous. Some questions specifically asked about the July 1998 to June 1999 period; others referred to the respondent’s situation at the time of the survey (which ranged from December 1999 to August 2000); still others were ambiguous in their time frame, using phrases like “Have you ever...” or “For your most recent...” This variation in the time period under study makes it difficult to draw “cause and effect” relationships, since the temporal order is hard to establish. However, Klawitter (2002a) says that these issues have been addressed in the Wave II questionnaire.<sup>29</sup>

2. *The stated purpose of this survey was to determine the effectiveness of the WorkFirst program.* However, *none of the questions sufficiently addressed this issue.* There were no questions in the survey asking about the interactions with caseworkers, how well one’s caseworker aided in finding employment opportunities, the helpfulness of the caseworker, or the respondent’s awareness of WorkFirst policies. There also were not

28 Klawitter (2002a) says that plans are in place to provide a report of the interview response rate. “The sample deposition report and response rate will be made available to you and to others. I absolutely agree that this is key information that everyone should have.”

29 In our e-mail exchange, Klawitter (2002a), said that “Your point about the difficulties of recall is an important one, and is the reason other questions were asked for shorter periods of time. As you’ll see, we changed some of the fixed period questions in the wave 2 survey to address some of these concerns.”

questions in the survey about education, training, or assistance with job search obtained through the state WorkFirst program. The only three questions that addressed the effectiveness of the program were:

*“Would you say that your overall experience of being in the WorkFirst Program was: very positive; somewhat positive; somewhat negative; or very negative?”*

*“How helpful has the WorkFirst Program been towards you becoming self-sufficient? Would you say: very helpful; somewhat helpful; or not very helpful?”*

*“How likely is it that you will be receiving WorkFirst benefits 12 months from now? Would you say... very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?”*

These questions are inadequate for evaluating clients' experiences with the WorkFirst program.

However, this issue has been addressed in the second wave of the study (Klawitter, 2002a).<sup>30</sup> Better questions about experiences with actual WorkFirst programs were included. Additional information on client participation in specific WorkFirst programs was derived from administrative data. Additionally, the second wave also asked respondents for suggestions for improving WorkFirst programs (Klawitter and Van-Nynatten, 2001b:5-6).

3. Other questions were poorly phrased, such that they did not adequately address the subject of interest. For example, the question

*“Did you graduate from high school before you became pregnant for the first time?” (Yes/No)*

appears to address whether pregnancy caused the respondent to drop out of school. As it is currently worded, the question does not give much information. For example, the respondent could answer “no,” indicating that she got pregnant before graduating. However, this still does not determine whether she dropped out of school due to the pregnancy, or whether she became pregnant, yet finished high school. A more direct question of “Did your first pregnancy cause you to drop out of high school without graduating?” would have yielded stronger results.<sup>31</sup>

### Conclusions for weaknesses of the data:

Although the data can suggest patterns and relationships between time on WorkFirst and other characteristics, weaknesses in the implementation of the survey cast doubt on the representativeness of the data. The most impoverished people in Washington State may be under-represented or omitted from this study; as such, any results from this data may under-estimate the difficulties faced by WorkFirst recipients.

30 “The wave 2 survey also included more questions to address clients' experiences with WorkFirst. We added questions specifically asking about how helpful job search, caseworkers, WPLEX, Limited English Pathways, and individual responsibility plans were. We also asked opened ended questions about what else was helpful and about what could be more helpful. [Please see the report ‘Use of TANF Activities and Opinions About WorkFirst’ [...]] We use the administrative data to monitor which activities people have participated in and which months people spend on TANF, so we have not asked this in the survey.” (Klawitter, 2002a)

31 When we asked about this issue, Klawitter (2002a) said that her reports used the survey question “Did you drop out of school because you... Became a parent?” to address this question. This variable is not currently part of the publicly available data posted on the web; however, it may be available by request.

For example, Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a) examined the representativeness of the WFS3000 study's sample (Wave I; drawn in March 1999) with the total WorkFirst caseload for that same month. They found that the people in the WFS3000 data were marginally better off, in terms of education, than those on WorkFirst as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

WorkFirst recipients not fluent in English, as well as Native Americans living on reservations, may also have been under-represented in this study. This is supported by Klawitter and VanNynatten (2001a:2), who report that Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders and Pacific Islanders are strongly under-represented in the sample (3%), relative to their proportion of the WorkFirst caseload (6%), and that Native Americans are somewhat under-represented (5% of WorkFirst clients, but 4% of the sample).

To the degree that difficulty with English relates to difficulty in leaving WorkFirst, this also may indicate that this data *under-estimates* the difficulties felt by WorkFirst clients in Washington State.

Thus, we do *not* conclude that the WFS3000 data is flawed to the point of invalidity. Rather, we suggest that this data -- to a greater or lesser extent -- *under-estimates* hardships among the WorkFirst population. Any estimates of hardships or difficulties we have reported are most likely *under-estimates* of the true situation.

<sup>32</sup> Specifically, the study participants had an average of 11.5 years of school, rather than 11.1 years. Similarly, 13%, rather than 12%, had earned a GED.

## “Successful” Leaving: is Leaving Work-First Always a Good Thing?

Throughout this report, we have referred to those who stay off WorkFirst for a full twelve months as “successful Leavers.” However, not everyone who leaves WorkFirst is doing well.

Du, Fogarty, Hopps, and Hu (2000:35) found that 60% of their leavers<sup>33</sup> believed they were “better off since leaving welfare; 19% felt their condition was about the same, and 21% felt worse off (Chart 14).” Fogarty and Kralej (2000) found that 60% of those who leave WorkFirst (some of which later return) felt they were better off after leaving; again, this means that some disagreed. The *Washington’s TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.:3) study asked their first group of “exiters”<sup>34</sup> how they perceived their family well-being since leaving Welfare. Sixty percent felt they were better off after leaving, 22% felt they were about the same, and 18% felt worse off. Similarly, 54% of their second group of “exiters”<sup>35</sup> felt they were better off after leaving Welfare, 25% felt they were about the same, and 21% felt they were worse off (page 3). Thus, roughly one-fifth of “leavers” (broadly defined) felt they were worse off, despite their “successful” leaving of WorkFirst.

Elsewhere in our report, we have shown that even those left WorkFirst may be having difficulties. For example, 36% of Leavers appear to still experience some form of hunger, as well as 11% of their children. Other studies report similar food hardships. For example, *Washington’s TANF Single Parent Families After [Post] Welfare* (n.d.:26) reports that 8% of their leavers have gone without food for an entire day at least once.

Thus, although leaving WorkFirst is typically a desired outcome, issues such as those who leave WorkFirst due to sanctions and those who are the “working poor” should not be ignored.

33 They defined a “leavers” as being off WorkFirst for two or more consecutive months.

34 Their first group of “exiters” stayed off WorkFirst for 1.5 - 6 continuous months.

35 Their second group of “exiters” stayed off WorkFirst for 2.5 - 5 continuous months.



## Final Conclusions

### Key influences to success on WorkFirst:

Four elements seem to be clearly related to staying on, or successfully leaving, WorkFirst:

- The amount of money earned -- both in absolute terms, and relative to the number of household members
- Full-time employment
- Education -- particularly *completing* a degree, whether high school, Associate's, or Bachelor's degree
- Teen pregnancy -- but predominantly in its relationship to dropping out of school (our current analysis only addresses dropping out of high school). (However, for African Americans, it seems that the age of first pregnancy has an influence.)

### Policy implications:

- Education is important. Give people the resources to complete a two-year or four-year degree.
- Teen pregnancies themselves are not the problem; teen pregnancies interfering with education are the problem. Give pregnant teens the ability to finish high school. Again: education is important.
- "A job" is not the answer. Instead, a job that provides a *living wage* is required. A person must earn enough money *relative to the number of dependents* to leave WorkFirst.

### Racial differences:

- Our examination of several elements related to staying on or successfully leaving WorkFirst indicated noticeable differences between Cau-

casians and African Americans. Among other issues, African Americans seemed to require a larger income to successfully leave WorkFirst; education did not give them the same advantage that it did for Caucasians; and African Americans experienced larger difficulties in leaving WorkFirst relating to dropping out of high school due to pregnancy.

- Racial/ethnic group disadvantages also exist for other racial/ethnic groups, compared to Caucasians.
- The sources of these racial/ethnic disparities need to be investigated further and addressed quickly.

### A note: "preventing poverty" versus "leaving poverty":

- This data only includes people who have *already fallen* into poverty. Thus, this report does **not** address what *causes* people to need WorkFirst. Instead, this report can only address what seems to be associated with people leaving WorkFirst, *once they have already sought WorkFirst assistance*.





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