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Poverty and the American Family: A Decade in Review

Because of dramatic levels of economic volatility and massive changes in welfare policies, scholars in this decade worried anew about whether our official poverty measure, adopted in the 1960s, is adequate. Poverty’s causes continued to be debated, with demographic factors often pitted against policy and maternal employment changes. Some scholars focused on events that trigger spirals into poverty or poverty exits. The literature on consequences of poverty featured new techniques for identifying underlying processes and mechanisms. Researchers also explored “neighborhood effects” and focused on poverty deconcentration efforts. Finally, scholars produced a voluminous literature on the efforts to reform welfare and their subsequent effects.

Danielle is a 29-year-old, White, single mother of two children who lives in a small brick row home located in the high-poverty, high-crime neighborhood in which she grew up. Danielle dropped out of high school in the 10th grade, which is all too common in the Philadelphia neighborhood where she resides. Pregnant with her first child, Danielle enrolled in the welfare program. Her children are her world, but she worries greatly about their safety, especially given the neighborhood. She also fears that they will follow in her footsteps by running with the wrong crowd, dropping out of school, and having a child while still young and unmarried. Her 10-year-old daughter, Audrey, has already started to “act out”; she refuses to do her schoolwork, mouths off to authority figures, is physically abusive to her 7-year-old sister, exhibits wild mood swings, and, in Danielle’s words, is just all around “bad.” What is worse, Audrey’s behavior makes it hard for Danielle to keep a job. She cannot find a babysitter willing to watch her any longer, is repeatedly called to school over Audrey’s behavioral problems, and feels she needs more time with her daughter so she can try to better monitor and correct her behavior. She sees these issues, along with her lack of education, as the main stumbling blocks to retaining employment.

Danielle has long since left welfare behind, though she still receives Medicaid and food stamps. At the moment, she is unemployed and actively looking for work. To make ends meet, she relies on the $86 a week she receives for child support from her children’s father, help from a number of social service organizations, and contributions from her “sort of” live-in boyfriend and family and friends. Surviving this spell of unemployment is hard. Danielle, however, prides herself on her resilience—she’s survived a fight with cervical cancer, the murder
of her sister, the physical abuse of a former boyfriend, and many bouts of financial hardship. Certainly, her current predicament is a setback, but one from which she will rebound.

Her optimism stems in part from her extensive, albeit erratic, work history. In the last 5 years, Danielle has held 11 jobs; she has cleaned houses, worked as a telemarketer, installed Hallmark merchandise at pharmacies, clerked at a discount clothing store, delivered pizzas, managed the carry-out counter at two different pizzerias, tended bar, and cashiered at a bakery. She landed her highest paying job back in 2000, when she was temporarily employed by the U.S Census Bureau. None of these jobs offered any benefits, and fewer than half were officially on the books. Her hourly wages varied from a high of $12 per hour to less than minimum wage (paid "under the table"). Typically, though, she has earned $6 to $7 per hour. Her accounts of why each job ended vary as much as the jobs themselves—she found a job with better pay; she was sick or could not physically handle the labor; the establishment burned down; the job was only temporary; or her hours were too inconsistent, too few and far between, or too incompatible with raising children. Despite all of this work effort, Danielle has moved between deep poverty, poverty, and near poverty over the past half decade.

Danielle’s story reflects many of the research themes of the past decade’s scholarship on poverty and family life. Her personal characteristics put her at risk—she is a single, poorly educated mother living in a high-poverty neighborhood—and she’s experienced many of the struggles common to those living in poverty. Scholars would likely debate the relative weight of a variety of factors in creating her current predicament, including the on-again off-again nature of her employment, the level of personal and public social supports available to her, her attitudes and values, her marital status, and other life choices she has made. They might also focus on the fact that she, like many others, cycles in and out of poverty and would want to explore the events that trigger poverty spells. They would worry about the deleterious consequences of her financial condition for the well-being of her children, perhaps already evident in Audrey’s behavior. And, surely, scholars would recognize her story as emblematic of what many single mothers experienced in the aftermath of welfare reform: a lot of work effort but meager and inconsistent economic rewards.

In the review that follows, we explore these themes and others that appeared in the literature on families in poverty published over the decade. To conduct the review, we searched articles and books published between 1999 and the present using multiple databases, searching for keywords such as poverty, poor, working poor, families, welfare reform, and low income. We also reviewed the tables of contents of the major sociological and family journals. To qualify for this review, studies had to incorporate poverty as the primary dependent or independent variable or use a poverty sample or subsample. We deemed the huge literature on neighborhood effects beyond the scope of this review (though we do include a brief discussion of this work). Even so, our search revealed more than 1,000 potential sources.

For context, we begin by reviewing recent poverty trends. Then, we summarize and assess the literature on measuring poverty, poverty causes, poverty entries and exits, the consequences of poverty, the geography of poverty, and poverty after welfare reform. The current recession is too new to have generated much peer-reviewed scholarship; however, we include some very recent data and projections that chart its probable impact on poverty. We conclude by summarizing the decade’s major streams of research and speculate about the next decade of poverty scholarship.

THE CONTEXT: POVERTY TRENDS OVER THE DECADE

In 2008, 13.2% of the American population and nearly one in five children (19%) were officially poor (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2009)—rates that surpass those of most Western industrialized countries (Heuveline & Weinshenker, 2008). Blacks and Hispanics were more vulnerable to poverty (with poverty rates of 24.7% and 23.2%, respectively) than non-Hispanic Whites (with 8.6% poor; DeNavas-Walt et al.), and Black and Hispanic children were especially at risk (Drake & Rank, 2009). Poverty rates for female-headed households (28.7%), noncitizens (23.3%), and rural (15.1%) and central city (17.7%) dwellers were also disproportionately high (DeNavas-Walt et al.).

These subgroups have consistently displayed elevated rates of poverty. What sets this decade’s
poverty apart from the recent past, however, is the dramatic “boom” that occurred in the late 1990s followed by a “bust” between 2000 and 2008, even before the recent recession began. Typical of this boom and bust trend, married couples with children saw an initial drop of 15% in poverty from 1997 to 2000, and poverty among unmarried mothers heading households declined by nearly a fifth. By 2008, though, more than half of these gains had been lost, and the extent of deep poverty had worsened. As we will show, much of the decade’s scholarship focused on the boom period. Because of data limitations, less attention has been paid to the bust. Of important note, it is too early for scholars to have addressed the current economic crisis.

It is also critical to note that data on poverty rates and trends often mask the tremendous cycling in and out of poverty. Although the likelihood of becoming poor is about 4% per year, slightly more than half of all Americans will experience poverty at some point by age 65, and 9 in 10 Blacks will be poor for at least a year between the ages of 25 and 75 years (Rank, 2009). Female-headed households, members of disadvantaged minority groups, and young adults are especially likely to slip into poverty, less likely to escape, and more prone to long poverty spells (Cellini, McKernan, & Ratcliffe, 2008).

MEASURING POVERTY

As was the case in the prior decade (Seccombe, 2000), researchers continued to argue that the official measure, developed in the 1960s, failed to take into account subsequent changes in the U.S. income distribution, consumption patterns, and social safety net and thus evaluated other approaches to measuring poverty (Beverly, 2001; Blank, 2008; DeFina, 2007). One popular approach was to adopt the current measure as a base but to deduct work-related expenditures and include all cash and in-kind government benefits when calculating “income.” These adjustments produced higher estimates than the official measure when applied to working families (Iceland & Kim, 2001). Two other alternative methods—an absolute measure based on estimates of family budgets and a relative measure, as is commonly used in Europe—also resulted in higher estimates (Roosa, Deng, Nair, & Burrell, 2005). Noting the weak correlation between income-based measures and material well-being (Parish, Rose, & Andrews, 2009; J. X. Sullivan, Turner, & Danziger, 2008), others pushed for a material hardship measure (i.e., the inadequate consumption of basic goods and services; Beverly; Rector, Johnson, & Youssef, 1999). Some suggested changing the unit of analysis (currently the “family,” which focuses on marital status) to the couple (which would treat cohabiting and married couples the same) or the household (which would include all persons living in the same domicile; Iceland, 2000). Adopting these approaches resulted in modestly lower poverty rates (Iceland, 2000).

Each of these alternatives, though, has its weaknesses. Absolute “market basket” methods require many assumptions about what the basket should include. Relative measures make discerning progress against poverty over time difficult because the threshold rises as income increases. Also, material hardship and consumption-based measures typically fail to consider how people satisfy material wants (e.g., families going into foreclosure to avoid hunger may not be counted as poor) and the quality of the goods consumed (Blank, 2008).

In all, the current measure will continue to be useful in charting trends over time. Most poverty scholars, as well as federal, state, and local governments, however, now recognize the need for multiple measures that allow for other sorts of comparisons (e.g., with Europe), that capture poverty’s various dimensions, and that accurately depict how families presently live. As such, some local governments (e.g., New York City) and the U.S. Census Bureau have begun to report alternative poverty estimates (Dalaker, 2005; Kaufman, 2007).

CAUSES OF POVERTY

Some scholars focused on factors that contribute to America’s high poverty rates compared to other affluent nations (Notten & de Neubourg, 2007). International comparisons pointed to the importance of labor market characteristics and variations in state welfare policies in explaining differing poverty figures rather than family structure or female employment (Chen & Corak, 2008; Heuveline & Weinshenker, 2008; Meyers & Gornick, 2001; Misra, Moller, & Budig, 2007). Heuveline and Weinshenker, for example, showed that variations in labor markets and welfare regimes accounted for most of observed differences. Similarly, Misra et al.
found that in countries with more generous family benefits and child-care subsidies, young children—particularly those living with single mothers—were at less risk of poverty. Comparative research on disparities between U.S. states has also revealed the importance of state policies in predicting child poverty rates over time (DeFina, 2008; Morgan & Kickham, 2001).

Other studies, however, have focused on the relative importance of changes in family structure as a cause. Sawhill (2006) showed that the 5% increase in child poverty from 1970 to 1996 could nearly all be attributed to the rise in single-parent families, especially never-married mothers, and that a shift over time in the composition of the pool of single mothers from divorced to never married exacerbated child poverty during this period. McLanahan (2009) argued that unmarried childbearing played a lead role in sustaining high rates of poverty because of the strong association with relationship instability and multiple partner fertility (see also Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006).

Overall, though, studies downplayed the role of family structure in explaining trends and rates. Christopher (2005) used Current Population Survey data to analyze increases in mothers’ relative poverty (below 50% of median income) across three decades. She found only a small association between increases in single motherhood and poverty and large associations with female employment and educational attainment. Lichter and Crowley (2004) focused on the period between 1992 and 2001—the aforementioned boom period that saw a large decline in poverty for children in single-mother households. They discovered that about half of the decline was because of increases in female employment (see also Lichter, Qian, & Crowley, 2005). Family structure changes diminished in importance over the period but still accounted for a large share of the differences between racial and ethnic groups (Lichter et al.). Similarly, Iceland (2003) found that although family structure played a role in explaining poverty trends in the 1980s, especially for African Americans, this was no longer true for any group in the 1990s. Lieb and Thistle (2006) also reported that maternal employment grew in importance over time relative to family structure in predicting poverty. In all, it seems the impact of maternal employment on family poverty increased over the 1990s, but these conclusions were based on a period distinguished by its unprecedented growth in employment rates for single mothers and unparalleled new supports for unskilled workers (i.e., earned income disregards for welfare recipients, transitional benefits, and the Earned Income Tax Credit). As researchers increasingly publish work including data collected during the bust period and current economic crisis, it will be interesting to see how this debate continues to unfold.

Another suspect in the list of potential causes of poverty requires brief discussion: attitudes and behavior. Overall, research in this area contradicted common stereotypes (e.g., that the poor do not share mainstream values regarding work) and countered notions of an intergenerational culture of poverty (Hays, 2003; Newman, 2006; Shipler, 2004). Quantitative analyses on a wide variety of attitudinal and behavioral measures showed statistically and substantively insignificant differences among poor and near poor urban residents (Barnes, 2001, 2002). Other work, using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), demonstrated that the significance of social psychological variables in predicting welfare use dissipated with the introduction of control variables (Kozimor-King, 2008). Before we conclude, however, a rare voice on the other side of the attitudes and behavior debate deserves mention. Sawhill (2003) argued that we cannot ignore growing behavioral differences between the affluent and poor persons more generally (especially education, marriage, and childbearing behaviors), a position supported by the literature on family formation expertly reviewed by McLanahan and Percheski (2008). Such burgeoning differences, Sawhill posited, will increase inequality unless social policy focuses directly on changing behavior. Indeed, concerns such as this were the primary impetus for welfare reform. Hence, Sawhill pushed for the government to implement conditional cash transfers (i.e., transfers contingent on desired behavior) that have had impressive effects on a wide variety of behaviors in the third world.

**Poverty Entries and Exits**

In the face of welfare reform, which made families increasingly dependent on work as an income source, and some evidence of rising rates of income instability (Hacker & Jacobs, 2008; see Shin & Solon, 2008, for details on the debate regarding instability trends),
especially at the tails of the income distribution (Dynan, Elmendorf, & Sichel, 2007), some poverty scholars moved beyond focusing on those demographic groups most at risk to explore the events that triggered poverty entries and exits (Cellini et al., 2008). Indeed, since Bane and Ellwood published their seminal paper, “Slipping into and out of Poverty” in 1986, a slow but steady stream of scholarship on triggering events has developed. In their review of the literature on poverty triggers, Cellini et al. concluded that findings regarding poverty entries have been remarkably consistent across studies. A change in employment was the most important factor in virtually all analyses, even those using data prior to the economic expansion of the late 1990s—a finding that does not bode well, as unemployment continues to rise even in the face of the current economic recovery. Transitions from a two-parent to a female-headed household, the birth of a child, leaving home to set up an independent household (for young adults), and incurring a disability also all played significant roles in triggering entries. Little literature examined whether the relative importance of these events changed, yet McKernan and Ratcliffe’s (2005) analysis suggested that the significance of employment relative to household composition might have grown. Findings on events that trigger exits from poverty showed similar patterns.

Literature not reviewed by Cellini et al. (2008) also deserves mention. Wagmiller, Lennon, and Kuang (2008) pointed to the importance of changes in parental health in children’s economic well-being. Avellar and Smock (2005) found that dissolution of cohabitation (typically neglected in earlier literature that focused on marriage and divorce) is often a trigger. Newman (2006), in her longitudinal qualitative study on a group of “burger flippers” over the prosperous late 1990s, found returns to school were the most common trigger for entry onto the mobility “ladder”; those in poverty “chutes” pointed to weighty family obligations and troubled partnerships, among other factors. Gardiner and Millar (2006) showed that doubling up protected low-skilled workers against poverty spirals even in the face of triggering events.

Again, we caution that findings from this literature were largely based on data collected during the boom years of the late 1990s, which were remarkable and radically different from the economic conditions families face today. In the next decade, a large body of scholarship will no doubt focus on triggering events that lead families who might otherwise have been economically stable into poverty and what factors enhance resilience in the face of such shocks.

### Consequences of Poverty

Understanding the consequences of poverty remained a key focus of the poverty literature. Here, as in the prior decade (Seccombe, 2000), scholarship centered on educational, cognitive, and behavior outcomes for children, with some additional work on poverty’s influence on mental health for adolescents and on marriage for adults. Researchers gave special attention to identifying pathways or mechanisms that underlie simple associations and often pointed to issues related to parenting as important in mediating the effects of poverty on child outcomes.

Nievar and Luster (2006), for example, found that childhood economic disadvantage had a direct effect on behavioral problems and reading recognition in middle childhood and indirect effects on these outcomes via maternal stress and parenting. Other work (Hao & Matsueda, 2006) reported that mothers’ use of physical punishment and early child poverty shaped child behavior problems. Cognitive stimulation, parenting style, children’s health status at birth, the physical environment, and childhood health mediated the influence of poverty on children’s intellectual development (Guo & Harris, 2000). In a study of the consequences of childhood poverty on parenting and child externalizing problems across three generations, Scaramella, Nepl, Ontai, and Conger (2008) documented that earlier parenting and, in turn, harsher parenting in the second generation mediated these effects. We should note, however, that parenting behavior may change because of changes in children’s behavior. Scaramella and colleagues found that child externalizing problems at age 3 years were associated with increases in harsh parenting later on in early childhood. Moreover, Epps and Huston (2007) showed that an early 1990s welfare to work experiment, which offered wage supplements and other support services to working low-income single mothers, had a significant impact on boys’ behavior via mechanisms other than parenting and found an association between changes in boys’ behaviors and mothers’ ability to parent.
Other notable research investigated how the timing of poverty and how income stability affected outcomes. Votruba-Drzal (2003) focused on the relationship between family income dynamics and cognitive stimulation in the home environment among children experiencing the transition to school and found a strong positive association between changes in income over time and changes in cognitive stimulation, especially for children in low-income households. Moore, Glei, Driscoll, Zaslow, and Redd (2002) found that children in households where income declined or fluctuated were at greater risk for behavioral problems and scored lower on reading tests than the never poor.

Though less studied than children, the recent literature on the consequences of poverty for adolescents and young adults has largely centered on mental health and on the centrality of family relationships as a mediating mechanism. Hammack, Robinson, Crawford, and Li (2004) identified several mediators in the relationship between poverty and depressed mood among urban African American teens, with family stress explaining half of the total association. Using data from 305 inner city African American families, about half of whom were poor, Gutman, McLoyd, and Tokoyawa (2005) found that income-to-needs ratios were related to financial and neighborhood stress, which were associated with psychological stress. In turn, psychological stress was tied to poorer parent-teen relationships and poor adolescent adjustment. Sobolewski and Amato (2005), exploiting data from a 17-year, two-generation study, found that economic hardship in one’s family of origin predicted psychological problems in adulthood. This relationship was mediated by the quality of the parents’ relationship, the parent-teen relationship, and the amount of education and income earned in adulthood. Mossakowski (2008) found that the duration of poverty exposure during the transition from adolescence to adulthood largely explained racial and ethnic differences in depressive symptoms in young adulthood net of current socioeconomic status and family background.

Other research on adolescents and young adults considered outcomes such as secondary school enrollment, civic engagement, and “adultification.” Crosnoe, Mistry, and Elder (2002) analyzed two waves of data on low-income youth to assess what lies behind the linkages between economic disadvantage and enrollment in secondary education. Lower rates of parental optimism about teens’ educational chances and a corresponding lack of proactive parental behavior in regard to enrollment mediated the impact. Lichter, Shanahan, and Gardner (2002) focused on the effects of childhood poverty and family instability on civic engagement among teens. Time spent in poverty depressed teen volunteerism more strongly for women than for men, and socioemotional development and life experiences during adolescence mediated the effect. Burton (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of five qualitative studies of children in low-income families and found significant evidence for “adultification”—when parents expose children to adult knowledge and/or expect them to take on responsibilities usually reserved for adults. Similarly, Dodson and Dickert (2004) reviewed a decade of qualitative research, finding that child labor (defined as “essential, complex, and time consuming family demands”) was a significant source of economic support in impoverished families but came at the cost of opportunities to engage in child-appropriate activities.

Finally, we note here a few studies on the impact of poverty for adults, many of which focused on marriage. Gibson-Davis (2009) found that among newly parenting cohabiters, becoming poor was associated with a 37% decrease in the likelihood of marriage, though the chances of additional fertility were not affected. Conversely, positive changes in income were related to increased chances of marriage. Relatedly, Lichter, Graefe, and Brown (2003) found that poor women with children were less likely to subsequently marry than their more affluent counterparts. Liu and Chen (2006) examined how the experience of marital disruption following marital conflict varied between poor and nonpoor women. For poor women, levels of depression increased, whereas the opposite held for more affluent women.

**THE GEOGRAPHY OF POVERTY**

The 1980s and 1990s produced a voluminous literature on “concentrated” poverty, “ghetto” poverty, the “underclass,” and “neighborhood effects” (Seccombe, 2000). Perhaps because of declines in concentrated poverty and underclass neighborhoods in the 1990s (Jargowsky, 2003; Jargowsky & Yang, 2006), research in these areas waned. Interest, however, in neighborhood
effects persisted (for reviews, see DeLuca & Dayton, 2009; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002; Small & Newman, 2001). Scholarship indicated that living in a high-poverty neighborhood was associated with mental and physical health problems; exposure to environmental hazards; crime victimization, violence, and arrest; substance abuse; negative child behavior; and inferior schooling (Drake & Rank, 2009).

A newer development was research on public policy aimed at deconcentrating poverty, either by replacing high-poverty public housing with mixed income developments (i.e., the Hope VI program) or providing poor families with incentives to move to low-poverty neighborhoods (i.e., the Gautreaux and Moving to Opportunity [MTO] programs). Studies assessed the impact of such initiatives (sometimes experimentally, as in MTO) on a number of dimensions, including physical and mental health; employment, earnings, and welfare receipt; neighborhood and housing conditions; education; and behavior (Clampet-Lundquist, 2007; Clampet-Lundquist & Massey, 2008; DeLuca & Dayton, 2009; Greenbaum, Hathaway, Rodriguez, Spalding, & Ward, 2008; Ludwig et al., 2008; Mendehall, DeLuca, & Duncan, 2006; Orr et al., 2003; Sampson, 2008). Analyses uncovered a mixture of positive and negative outcomes. Though hotly debated (especially methodologically), the research demonstrated that improvements in neighborhood conditions were generally related to gains in mental health and feelings of safety, little or no gains in economic well-being and employment, and, perhaps, reductions in social ties and social support. Effects on children were also mixed; researchers observed little or no improvements for educational outcomes and opposing behavioral outcomes for boys versus girls (girls seemed to benefit from moves, yet boys did not and even suffered some detrimental effects). The next decade will see additional publications coming from these major, and ongoing, research initiatives. Additionally, as Black, high-poverty neighborhoods are particularly sensitive to overall economic conditions (Massey & Denton, 1993), explorations into how different neighborhoods fare (and the people living in them) during and after the recent economic crisis might be especially important.

Families in Poverty in the Context of Welfare Reform

Massive changes to America’s safety net for poor families characterized the late 1990s. In 1996, Congress replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF)—a change explicitly designed to promote work among poor single mothers. Federal law mandated that recipients find work in 2 years and prohibited them from claiming benefits for more than 5 years over their lifetime. States could impose stricter requirements than these, as TANF, unlike AFDC, was not an entitlement. TANF also offered expanded work supports (e.g., child-care subsidies), and many states allowed low-wage and part-time workers to keep a significant portion of their cash benefits, at least for a period of time. Many could also maintain Medicaid and food stamps.

In the late 1990s, researchers detailed the trends and outcomes for families experiencing these changes as well as other aspects of their lives; this work comprised a huge proportion of all recent research on families in poverty (for reviews, see Blank, 2007; Corcoran, Danziger, Kalil, & Seefeldt, 2000; Kissane & Krebs, 2007; Lichter & Jayakody, 2002). Welfare caseloads fell markedly in the decade after welfare reform due both to increased exits and decreased enrollment (Grogger, 2004), although they have declined more slowly in recent years (Acs & Loprest, 2007). In 1996, 4.5 million families enrolled in TANF; by 2002, 2.1 million families claimed benefits and less than 1.7 million did so by the end of 2008, a year which captured the beginning of the recession (Administration for Children and Families, n.d.). Much of the change was because single mothers began working at unprecedented levels after welfare reform, and family incomes increased (Acs & Loprest; Corcoran et al.; Seefeldt, 2008; Slack et al., 2007). Of important note, the 1993 expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), a substantial refundable tax credit for low-income working families that now represents America’s largest means-tested anti-poverty program, greatly contributed to the changes in caseloads and labor force participation as well (Eissa & Hoynes, 2005; Grogger; Noonan, Smith, & Corcoran, 2007).

As the economy moved beyond the boom of the late 1990s, however, employment rates for TANF recipients, TANF leavers, and all
single mothers waned, and earnings stagnated or declined. A quarter to a third of welfare leavers reenrolled within a year, and the likelihood of reentry increased over time, as did the proportion of leavers experiencing deep poverty (Acs & Loprest, 2001, 2007; Parrott & Sherman, 2006). Moreover, new government statistics that became available at this writing showed that from October 2008 to October 2009 the economy hemorrhaged jobs for low-skilled workers. The unemployment rate for workers ages 25 and older who lacked a high school education soared from 10.4% to 15.5% and increased from 6.5% to 11.2% for those with a high school diploma but no college (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Notably, these statistics might actually underestimate the extent of the unemployment problem, as they exclude "discouraged workers." Up until now, most of these losses have been concentrated among male workers. Even so, many female-headed families bank on contributions from boyfriends, cohabitating men, or child support to make ends meet and thus will also be affected (Edin & Lein, 1997).

Given the immensity of the shift in welfare policy and the daunting economic trends of the post-2000 bust period, it is no surprise that researchers increasingly turned their attention to understanding the challenges and opportunities facing welfare recipients, welfare leavers, and the "working poor" more generally. They explored how individuals experienced the transition from welfare to employment, including their knowledge and managing of the welfare rules (e.g., Harris & Parisi, 2008) and their experiences with job training and work readiness programs (e.g., Kissane, 2008). Scholars detailed the implementation of the reforms on the state level, in local welfare offices, and in nonprofit organizations, including the attitudes and behavior of directors and frontline workers (Hays, 2003; Kissane, 2010; Schram, Soss, Fording, & Houser, 2009; Watkins-Hayes, 2009). Various adult outcomes, including the rate of nonmarital fertility and marriage, were considered, as one goal of the reforms was to strengthen two-parent families (for review, see Kissane & Krebs, 2007). Most of the decade’s research, though, focused on two related areas: (1) the employment and economic well-being of poor families and the employment barriers they faced and (2) whether and how children benefited from changes associated with welfare reform (especially increased maternal employment).

**Barriers, Employment, and Economic Well-Being**

Substantial numbers of current and former welfare recipients continued to struggle with multiple obstacles to employment after welfare reform (Acs & Loprest, 2007; Corcoran et al., 2000; Seefeldt, 2008; Slack et al., 2007). As an indication of this fact, a sizable portion of welfare leavers (about one fifth) at any given time had no identifiable means of support (i.e., they did not work, receive welfare, or live with a working partner), and this group was growing even prior to the recession (Acs & Loprest; Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006; Turner, Danziger, & Seefeldt, 2006). These "disconnected" leavers faced more barriers to work, had lower average household incomes, and suffered more material hardship than other leavers (Loprest & Zedlewski; Turner et al.).

More than half of current recipients and about one third of leavers have two or more barriers to employment (Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006). Over time, work-limiting health problems have become somewhat more common for both leavers and recipients and education barriers more common for recipients, but, in general, the number of barriers changed little since the start of welfare reform (Acs & Loprest, 2007). Unsurprisingly, the number of barriers was significantly associated with employment and earnings outcomes (Corcoran, Danziger, & Tolman, 2004; Loprest & Zedlewski). Those with multiple barriers were also more likely to be sanctioned for noncompliance with welfare rules and hit time limits than those with few or no barriers (Cherlin, Bogen, Quane, & Burton, 2002; Kalil, Seefeldt, & Wang, 2002). Severe and lengthy sanctions and previous sanction experience were linked to leaving welfare without a job or with a lower earnings job (Wu, 2008).

Certain barriers—low education or work experience, limited English fluency, and few job skills—were particularly salient; they decreased the likelihood of leaving TANF, increased the probability of returning, and were linked to less work and lower incomes (Cancian, Haveman, Meyer, & Wolfe, 2002; Corcoran et al., 2000; Nam, 2005; Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, & Taquino, 2006). Mental and physical health problems also were critical barriers and more
prevalent among current and former recipients, the working poor, and children raised in welfare or working poor families than in the general population (Corcoran et al., 2004; Meyers & Lee, 2003; Seccombe et al., 2007). Health problems (both maternal and child) predicted the likelihood and rapidity of TANF exits and return, employment and income levels, and odds of sustaining economic progress over time (Brandon, Hofferth, & Hogan, 2008; Corcoran et al., 2004; Nam; Wood, Moore, & Rangarajan, 2008). Positive maternal psychological traits, such as self-efficacy and personal mastery, were associated with reduced welfare reliance and improved employment outcomes (Danziger, Carlson, & Henly, 2001; M. Sullivan, 2005).

Those seeking to leave welfare or stay off the rolls regularly struggled with child care (Danziger, Ananat, & Browning, 2004; Dodson, 2007). Child-care subsidies increased substantially in the 1990s, and their use was positively associated with employment and earnings (Press, Fagan, & Laughlin, 2006), yet take-up rates have been unexpectedly low (Danziger et al.; Hays, 2003; Pearlmutter & Bartle, 2003). A lack of awareness of the subsidies, difficulties navigating the complex subsidy system, and, at times, long wait lists have contributed to the low take-up rates (Clampet-Lundquist, Edin, London, Scott, & Hunter, 2004; Hays; Pearlmutter & Bartle). In addition, low-income mothers often chose to rely on informal care arrangements that subsidies may fail to cover. In part, such decisions rested on the perception that informal care is safer than formal care, but many mothers also had problems finding formal care that matched their nonstandard work hours (Presser, 2003). Critically, informal care was frequently difficult to arrange and unreliable, leaving many dependent on unstable patchworks of care that hindered their ability to remain consistently employed (Press, Johnson-Dias, & Fagan, 2005; E. K. Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005; Usdansky & Wolf, 2008).

Providing increased subsidies may pose a potential solution. Gennetian, Crosby, Huston, and Lowe (2004), in an analysis of nine experimental evaluations of pre-TANF welfare-to-work programs, found that higher subsidy programs had greater rates of participation. In addition, participants in these “expanded subsidy” programs used center-based care (as opposed to subsidized in-home or relative care) in higher proportions and reported fewer child-care problems. Crosby, Gennetian, and Huston (2005) also demonstrated that generous subsidies increased the likelihood of using center-based care, care that was often more stable and cognitively enriching than other types.

As documented under the prereform welfare program, AFDC (Edin & Lein, 1997), the strength of private safety nets continued to be vital for poor women’s employment after welfare reform (S. Anderson, Halter, & Gryzlak, 2004; Harknett, 2006; Lein, Benjamin, McManus, & Roy, 2005; Rogers-Dillon & Haney, 2005). Studies pointed to the (perceived and actual) availability of personal loans, child-care help, transportation assistance, informal job referrals, and other forms of assistance as critical ingredients to remaining consistently employed and off welfare (S. Anderson et al.; Lein et al.). E. K. Scott, Edin, London, and Kissane (2004), in a qualitative, longitudinal welfare study, for example, found that those leavers with the most work activity and highest wages were those receiving the most cash and in-kind network support. Meyers and Lee (2003) found that working poor families participating in the New York Social Indicators Survey (NYSIS) were significantly more likely to have had access to loans than non-working-poor families, again suggesting a link between private safety nets and employment.

Though recent scholarship showed that a sizable minority of those in low-wage work eventually transitioned to somewhat higher-paying jobs (F. Anderson, Holzer, & Lane, 2006; Newman, 2006), for most ex-recipients, work did not, by itself, result in economic self-sufficiency, and setbacks were common (Cancian et al., 2002; Slack et al., 2007; Wood et al., 2008). One problem is that the majority of former recipients only commanded entry-level jobs in the service and retail sector (Corcoran et al., 2000; Lein et al., 2005; Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006). Such jobs were frequently part-time, poorly paying ($7 to $8 an hour on average), and without benefits (Altman & Goldberg, 2008; Danziger, Heflin, Corcoran, Oltmans, & Wang, 2002; Johnson & Corcoran, 2003; Loprest & Zedlewski). Exacerbating matters, welfare recipients and leavers often were unstably employed after welfare reform (Johnson & Corcoran; Lein et al., 2005; Wood et al.). In fact, the majority of leavers (about two thirds) did not work steadily in the year
after they exited TANF (Pavetti & Acs, 2001), and many held multiple jobs (E. K. Scott et al., 2004). Sometimes, personal or familial difficulties represented the problem, but other times, the nature of the work (e.g., its short term or seasonal structure) caused the instability (Johnson & Corcoran). Sporadic employment then limited moves into better jobs (Johnson & Corcoran; Newman).

Another indication that those who went to work in the aftermath of welfare reform were not doing as well as policymakers hoped is that they, just as they did under AFDC (Edin & Lein, 1997), continued to work informally, sell personal belongings for needed cash, and garner in-kind and cash assistance from friends, family, and charities (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2004; Fletcher, Winter, & Shih, 2008). Some research suggested that those who left welfare for work engaged in fewer of these activities than they did while on welfare, but their ongoing reliance on government benefits (e.g., child-care subsidies, Medicare, and the EITC) belies the idea that they became economically self-sufficient (Danziger et al., 2002; Slack et al., 2007). There are also now indications that hardships associated with the economic crisis may be prompting increased use of food banks (Feeding America, 2009) and shelters (Markee, 2009). Additionally, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseloads (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) are at record high levels because of income loss and rising take-up rates—the latter of which is likely related, at least in part, to the relaxed eligibility requirements and increased benefits instituted through the 2008 Farm Bill and the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Loveless, 2009; Zedlewski & Mon, 2009). Accordingly, many former welfare recipients may be struggling to make ends meet, remain in the labor market, and keep off the welfare rolls in ways not reflected in the research conducted prior to the economic crisis.

Critically, though, the decade’s scholarship did document that even before the recent recession, former recipients suffered from material hardships at significant rates, though estimates of the level of hardship experienced varied substantially across studies (Acs & Loprest, 2001; Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2004; Slack et al., 2007). In fact, those who left welfare for work, and the working poor in general, were either no better off or only slightly better off than those who stayed on the rolls or combined welfare and employment (Danziger et al., 2002; Heffin, Corcoran, & Siefert, 2007; Loprest & Zedlewski, 2006; Meyers & Lee, 2003). Meyers and Lee, for example, found that working poor families in New York were as likely to reside in overcrowded housing and live in unsafe neighborhoods as nonworking families who relied on public benefits. Moreover, the working poor families were not significantly better off in terms of hunger and their ability to pay utility bills.

Research also revealed that working welfare leavers and the working poor as a whole were actually worse off in health-related hardships than those on welfare (Acs & Loprest, 2001; Danziger et al., 2002; Meyers & Lee, 2003). Working poor families were 2 to 3 times more likely than families dependent on public benefits to report that a family member lacked health insurance in the past year (Meyers & Lee). In part, this may be because of difficulties eligible families not on welfare have had in navigating Medicare and the State Child Health Care Program (Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2004; Seccombe et al., 2007). What is more, families ineligible for Medicaid often could not afford employee portions of employer-based health care premiums or held jobs without health insurance options (Seccombe et al., 2007; Seccombe, Newsom, & Hoffman, 2006). In turn, lack of health benefits contributed to job volatility and prompted returns to welfare (Johnson & Corcoran, 2003; Nam, 2005).

Despite these struggles, however, evidence overwhelmingly indicated that welfare recipients, leavers, and working poor generally still believed in the importance and value of work, perceived improved quality of life when they worked, and expressed much optimism about future upward mobility though employment (Altman & Goldberg, 2008; Newman, 2006). Even when faced with erratic, part-time, or “dead end” jobs with few benefits, they often reported satisfaction in their jobs, derived dignity and self-worth from being employed, had a greater sense of efficacy, and believed they were better role models for their children (S. Anderson et al., 2004; London, Scott, Edin, & Hunter, 2004; Newman; J. Scott, 2006; Seefeldt, 2008). Accordingly, one analysis found that movements into work and into stable employment were associated with improved psychological functioning (Coley, Lohman, Votruba-Drzal, Pittman, & Chase-Lansdale, 2007). As job losses continue
to mount in the face of the current recession, this research suggests that former TANF recipients who find themselves once again unemployed will suffer from far more than mere income loss.

*Children’s Well-Being*

Though most TANF-related research focused on barriers to work, employment, and economic well-being, the decade also produced many studies on the well-being of children. The prereform welfare experiments of the early to mid-1990s revealed that how children fared when their mothers went to work largely rested on whether work mandates were paired with wage subsidies (Morris & Gennetian, 2003; Zaslow et al., 2002). Welfare regimes that facilitated maternal employment and offered earnings supplements benefited school-age children in terms of their school achievement, behavior, and health (Zaslow et al.). Without improving family economic status, maternal employment usually had no effect on children’s behavior and school readiness (McGroder, Zaslow, Papillo, Ahluwalia, & Brooks, 2005; Zaslow et al.).

Prior level of disadvantage was also consequential. Pooling data from several of the state experiments mentioned above, Alderson, Gennetian, Dowsett, Imes, and Huston (2008) found that employment-based programs had no significant effects on children’s achievement and behavior for the most disadvantaged subgroup of respondents (measured in terms of prior earnings, education, and AFDC receipt), despite the fact that their mothers saw gains in employment, earnings, and household income. Children in the moderately disadvantaged groups, whose mothers enjoyed similar gains, however, achieved more in school. No effects were found for the least disadvantaged group.

Mothers in some postreform qualitative studies, though, reported seeing increased behavioral problems and growing mental health issues among their children (London et al., 2004; E. K. Scott et al., 2004). Notably, these mothers often moved from job to job, and this likely contributed to the problems observed; the number of transitions between work and nonwork are positively linked to children’s depressed and anxious behavior (Kali, Dunifon, & Danziger, 2002). Many also worked nonstandard hours and had shifting schedules, like other low-income mothers (Presser, 2003). Joshi and Bogen (2007), using data from a survey of low-income households in three cities, found that working nonstandard hours was associated with negative behavioral outcomes for 2- to 4-year-olds, with some evidence that the effects operated indirectly through parenting stress. Likewise, Han’s (2008) work, using NLSY Child Supplement data, showed that maternal shift work was related to increased behavioral problems for children ages 4 to 10 years, particularly for children in families that were female headed or low income, where the mother worked in cashier or service occupations, or where she worked evening or night shifts full-time. Other research, however, failed to detect significant negative effects of nonstandard work on school-age children’s behavior (see, e.g., Dunifon, Kali, & Bajracharya, 2005).

As for adolescent outcomes, a nonexperimental study of low-income single mothers postreform discovered slight improvements (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2003), but, generally, studies reported negative impacts of welfare reform policies on adolescents’ school achievement and behavior (Gennetian, Duncan, et al., 2004; Zaslow et al., 2002). Gennetian, Lopoo, and London (2008), in another nonexperimental study conducted after TANF implementation, documented negative impacts on adolescent behavior when current and former welfare recipients’ work hours increased; boys seemed especially sensitive to such changes. With maternal employment, adolescents may have been left unsupervised or in charge of younger siblings (adultification), thus contributing to the adverse outcomes found (Gennetian, Duncan, et al.).

**The Economic Crisis**

In 2008, Americans experienced the biggest contraction in economic well-being in a generation. At this writing, newly released census data for that year revealed a 1.2 percentage point jump in unemployment in 2008. Additionally, the number of Americans working full-time, full-year fell by 4.6 million—a loss heavily concentrated among male workers but which has significant ramifications for those women and children who depend on these men’s contributions. Real median household income decreased by 3.6 percentage points, the largest single drop on record, and the proportion of Americans in poverty rose from 12.5% to 13.2%. Median income declined for all racial and ethnic groups in 2008, but
especially for Hispanics, which is likely because the recession hit the construction industry hard. The number of poor Americans stood at nearly 40 million by the end of 2008, the highest level in almost half a century (Sherman, Greenstein, Trisi, & Van de Water, 2009).

As described in this review, this dramatic 2008 spike in poverty followed a bust period for economically vulnerable Americans—one in which much of the gains experienced in the late 1990s had already eroded. The so-called recovery from the recession of 2001 earned one of the worse records for poverty reduction of any in decades (Sherman et al., 2009). Meanwhile, the top 1% of American households captured fully two thirds of the increase in national income that occurred between 2001 and 2007, a larger proportion than in any other period since the 1920s (Saez, 2009). These factors, taken together, were what drove poverty and median income to their worst levels in years in 2008 (Sherman et al.).

As striking as these numbers are, they represent only the initial effects—the tip of the iceberg—of the recession. By the end of October 2009, unemployment had increased another 4.4 percentage points, indicating that the 2008 numbers reflected only about a fifth of the job losses that the recession has produced thus far (Shierholz, 2009). In the first 8 months of 2009, a whopping 5 million jobs disappeared, and, in January 2009, job losses alone were 741,000—the highest monthly amount in almost 60 years. These losses began to ebb once the stimulus measures were enacted in February yet remain extraordinary high (Sherman et al., 2009).

Monea and Sawhill (2009) have projected that, absent other changes, the poverty rate will rapidly increase through 2011 or 2012. At that point, approximately 45 million Americans will be poor or 14.4% of the population. This represents an increase of nearly 22% from 2007, when 37 million lived in poverty. The rise in poverty for children will be even more dramatic—5 million more poor children, 38% more than in 2007, will be poor. Poverty rates for Black Americans and families headed by single mothers will also skyrocket relative to the rest of the population, rising to about 30% and 45%, respectively. After that point, poverty will decline steadily over the next decade or so but will not quite return to its 2007 level. By Monea and Sawhill’s projections, by 2019, about 13% of all Americans will be poor and between 21% and 22% of children.

Projections for household incomes follow a similar trajectory. Heidi Shierholz (2009) of the Economic Policy Institute forecasted trends through 2010; her projections showed declines in median household income totaling $2,456 in 2009 and an additional $601 in 2010. Adding these drops to the decline observed between 2007 and 2008 ($1,756), the typical American household can expect a total drop of $4,813, or 9.3%, in just 3 years.

The nation’s preparedness for this sustained period of economic hardship is woefully inadequate. As already mentioned, food banks and shelters may already be strained beyond capacity (Feeding America, 2009; Markee, 2009), and the stimulus package includes extra funding for SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid only in the short term (through 2011; Congressional Budget Office, 2009). The Work Pay Tax Credit and other tax provisions that benefit low wage earners are set to expire in 2010. Thus, these provisions will end before poverty will likely peak, leaving a large portion of American families extremely vulnerable. Furthermore, as our poverty alleviation mechanisms are now largely tied to employment, we have less capacity and few policy options for how to respond to the unemployment crisis. No doubt, the next decade in review will be devoted to documenting the extraordinary hardships that will surely ensue unless there are significant, longer lasting changes to the safety net and how these drastic spikes in unemployment have both direct and indirect effects on families in poverty.

DISCUSSION

In many ways, the findings of the research literature on families in poverty published over the decade reinforced much of what the previous decade’s scholarship had discovered, although researchers did begin to focus increasingly on policies (such as welfare reform and housing mobility programs) that were implemented in the late 1990s. Scholars worried anew about whether the rather arbitrary measure of poverty adopted in the 1960s was adequate. Research signaled that the official measure is useful for historical comparisons, yet adjustments that incorporate the full range of transfers, certain expenses, and the changing demography of American families (e.g., the rise in cohabitation) may allow for a
more fine-grained assessment of progress and identification of the poor. Relative measures, widely acknowledged as useful for international comparisons, offer a way to consider the income distribution as a whole and the potential impact of growing income inequality on a society’s level of social inclusion. Absolute measures address the question of the proportion of families with insufficient income to purchase a basic market basket of necessary goods, and material hardship measures capture a dimension of poverty that income measures may neglect.

Poverty’s causes also continued to be hotly debated. Over the decade, demographic factors, such as family structure, were often pitted against policy and labor force participation factors. Overall, the latter usually won out over the former; however, this literature suffers from the fact that scholarship has not yet had a chance to advance much beyond the boom period in the U.S. economy. Others reassessed the age-old question of whether individuals like Danielle, the single mother we introduced earlier, were poor because they were different—in terms of attitudes and behaviors—than other Americans. Here, the answer seems to be both no (no documented differences in attitudes) and yes (growing differences in “behaviors,” such as education, marriage, and childbearing). Notably, the research on attitudes seems to be dwindling, yet studies on behavioral differences will likely spark continued debate, particularly as new data emerge that allow scholars to study in more depth the consequences of these growing behavior gaps for children (e.g., newer waves of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study).

Danielle’s income over the last decade has been anything but predictable, and some of the decade’s research (Hacker & Jacobs, 2008) documented that increases in income instability were a major feature of the economic lives of families in general for the last three decades, with instability declining in the boom times of the late 1990s and then rising again in recent years. The family poverty literature has been only somewhat responsive to exploring the volatility of families’ economic lives, though a small body of scholarship on poverty triggers that began in the 1980s has expanded modestly. As was true for Danielle, this research highlighted how changes in employment often act as a triggering event. We note that, to date, not much peer-reviewed literature has emerged that focuses on the post-2000 bust period in the American economy, much less the recession. The next decade’s research, which will draw on the 2001–2007 bust and economic crisis, may either reinforce or challenge the conclusions of the extant scholarship in this area. Research in this vein will almost certainly increase dramatically in both volume and prominence in the next decade, as scholars assess how American families weathered the recent recession and its aftermath.

The literature on the consequences of poverty moved beyond demonstrating mere correlations to exploring the processes and mechanisms that underlie many of the negative outcomes associated with poverty. The research showed that children growing up in poor families, like Danielle’s Audrey, are not only at greater risk of behavioral and educational problems but that maternal stress and parenting styles may mediate and contribute to deleterious effects. To date, only a few large, nationally representative data sets have rich measures of these mechanisms and processes, necessitating that studies in this area often rely on smaller, local studies. Additionally, researchers in this area have typically collected somewhat different measures, making comparisons across studies and building a sound knowledge base quite difficult. Notably, a large share of the consequences of poverty research of the decade focused on factors associated with children’s educational success and mental health outcomes across the age span, with the latter possibly reflecting an increase in interest among social scientists. Also noteworthy, we chose only to review briefly the literature on the geography of poverty—a research area that has come to focus largely on the consequences of growing up or living in poor neighborhoods and increasingly moved beyond associations to mechanisms (but with the same data limitations noted above). This literature continued to demonstrate that poor families like Danielle’s will suffer notable disadvantages because they reside in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Finally, we have devoted about a third of this review to the voluminous literature on the welfare reforms implemented during the 1990s. Here, the literature provides a mixed view. Many poor families have benefited from the shift from a nonwork-based safety net to one predicated on supporting employment. Those able to maintain full-time, year-round work are much better off than before, at least in terms of reported income (see Edin & Lein, 1997, for a discussion of losses
in unreported income when mothers move from welfare to employment); yet many remain poor or near poor. Moreover, many former or would-be welfare recipients, like Danielle, do not work full-time, full-year, or at all. Indeed, in a significant fraction of cases, households have no discernable source of income. Pundits are often eager to laud welfare reform as an unqualified success because of the large declines in the rolls that have continued into the latter part of this decade. The research reviewed here, however, provides a strong cautionary note—some families are no doubt better off, but some are probably much worse off than before. These families are some of America’s most disadvantaged and needy households and are likely to be those that the current economic climate affects not only to a large extent but also first. Hence, we strongly advocate for more research into these poor families, especially those who are now without any visible means of support.

What can we expect in the next decade? Rather than the focus on the large, but relatively short-lived, boom that characterized much of the research reviewed in this essay, the 2020 issue of the JMF Decade in Review will likely focus on the bust that began in the early 2000s and the economic meltdown that was so richly evident by 2008. Wilson (2008/2009, p. 570) argued that the declines in concentrated poverty and the decrease in the number of people residing in high-poverty neighborhoods may, in fact, be “blips of economic booms rather than permanent trends” and that “there is every reason to assume that concentrated poverty rates are on the rise again.” If he is correct, we expect that researchers will return to studying this topic more extensively in the next decade. Moreover, given the recently reported dramatic increases in suburban poverty (Kneebone & Garr, 2010), we anticipate a rich area of research on the changing geography of poverty, unpacking the experience of poor families living in suburban contexts and the implications for state and local institutions to new spatial patterns of inequality.

As the social safety net continues to evolve and as American families continue to change, calls to revise the way we measure poverty will likely continue as well. The debate over causes—which to date has charted the increased importance of policy factors and maternal employment over demographic characteristics (especially family formation)—might well shift dramatically as more recent data become available. Furthermore, with potential increases in economic instability, scholarship might come to focus more on poverty dynamics in exploring the consequences of poverty and on the events that trigger poverty entries or exits. Research that maps how entries and exits relate to life course transitions seems an especially fruitful area for future study. Scholarly verdicts on the success of the movement towards time-limited welfare will continue to develop and likely focus increasingly on long-range impacts that most of the current literature cannot address. We also suspect that work-based supports and, particularly, the EITC will become a central feature of poverty research in the coming decade. It is important to note that, current safety-net policy, which rewards work through sizable wage subsidies but offers only paltry, time-limited benefits to nonworking families, might prove hard to sustain if unemployment and poverty reach the very high level that economists project and take years to return to their 2007 levels. Finally, new avenues of policy-relevant research may be opened if the Obama administration succeeds in reforming the U.S. health care system and other government programs that have relevance for vulnerable families and children.

NOTE

The names of the authors are listed alphabetically; each author contributed equally to this article.

The authors would like to thank Susan Clampet-Lundquist, Stefanie DeLuca, Christine Percheski, Zachary Romano, and Laura Tach for their assistance and suggestions on previous drafts of this article.

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