



FAMILIES **and SOCIAL POLICY**

National and International Perspectives



Linda Haas • Steven K. Wisensale
Editors

Families and Social Policy: National and International Perspectives

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has been co-published simultaneously as *Marriage & Family Review*,
Volume 39, Numbers 1/2 and 3/4 2006.

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Introduction

Steven K. Wisensale

Linda Haas

The year 2005 marked the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Social Security Act and the 40th anniversary of the enactment of both Medicare and Medicaid. Not forgotten entirely, but barely remembered, was another milestone in the history of American social policy that can be associated with the anniversary year 2005. Twenty-five years before, in 1980, the nation held its first and only White House Conference on Families (WHCF).

Held just months before President Jimmy Carter's loss to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 election, the WHCF is still viewed by many as one of the major watersheds in the developmental history of family policy (Cherlin, 1996; Dempsey, 1981; Steiner, 1981). More than a thousand delegates met in three separate cities (Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles) during the summer and early fall of 1980 to address a variety of family-oriented issues and, ultimately, to present to the President a checklist of policy recommendations and legislative proposals designed to strengthen and support the nation's families. While some consensus was reached on proposed solutions to problems confronting the aged and handicapped, there was little agreement on other family-oriented issues, such as the prevention of teen pregnancy, gay rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and abortion. All told, thirty-four of sixty-two proposals were eventually adopted, but only seven were supported by more than 90 percent of the conference delegates (Dempsey, 1981).

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In the end, the contentious conference gatherings produced little in terms of significant policy initiatives that were eventually enacted into law. However, in addition to providing a glimpse into the future of the “family values debate,” the conference did produce at least two other important outcomes. First, for the first time in history, the family had been placed on the national agenda and a new policy question was posed: Where should the line be drawn between what the family is expected to do and what government has been created to do? And second, perhaps equally significant, the WHCF raised the consciousness of America, forcing many people to think beyond policy proposals geared primarily to individuals, and to consider instead the general health and well-being of families. Almost immediately after the closing session of the conference, an onslaught of books and articles on family policy began and has continued for a quarter of a century since. So too has there been a growth industry in research centers, think tanks, and advocacy organizations devoted to family issues. And not to be forgotten, interest in families has gone global, with the United Nations convening the first International Year of the Family conference in 1994 and then again in 2004.

As the editors of this collection of sixteen excellent articles on family issues, we recognize the importance of benchmarks in providing some degree of historical perspective as we attempt to understand the complexity of the social, economic, and political forces that affect families. In some cases the issues raised 25 years ago during the White House Conference of Families remain near the top of current political agendas. These include gender equity, gay rights, abortion laws, and the prevention of teen pregnancy. Less visible in 1980, however, but front and center today, are such topics as work and family balance, parenting, fatherhood, and the pressures associated with intergenerational caregiving.

In organizing the collection of articles for presentation in this volume, we recognize at least three large and distinct divisions, within which are several smaller subdivisions. First, one can view family issues from both a micro and macro level. That is, in some cases problems that beset particular families are homegrown, meaning that private decisions can create public burdens. This is certainly true with respect to teen pregnancy, for example. But families are also affected by broader, macro forces, such as economic fluctuations and shifts in political power, that may make them more or less vulnerable to policy initiatives put forth by one political party instead of the other.

Similarly, the articles can also be divided by another category: state vs. family responsibility for solutions to family problems. That is,

where, and under what circumstances, should the line be drawn that clearly divides the role of the family from that of the state in providing care to the old and vulnerable? This is particularly true with respect to the care of pre-school children (home vs. child care center) as well as the care of the frail elderly (in-home care vs. the nursing home). Costs are shifted to or from families and taxpayers depending on how the question concerning caregiving responsibilities is answered.

And a third way the articles can be organized is to divide them into U.S. family policy vs. international policy. In a postmodern world in which a dominant force is globalization, it is not surprising that both the challenges and the solutions affecting families know no borders. Although the first group of articles in this collection concerns family issues in the United States, the same or similar issues have surfaced in other nations and some are covered here by international scholars. We learn that family problems are not confined by borders and neither are their solutions.

The first four articles provide a macro perspective on family issues. Ken Root's "Job Loss, the Family, and Public Policy" focuses on the impact job loss has on families and refers to both past and current policies that are designed to address this often unpredictable challenge. Yet, despite a fairly large menu of policies designed to assist dislocated workers, needs still exist for terminated workers, their families, and for the communities in which they reside. Particularly troublesome are scenarios in which both partners are employed by the same company in a single-industry community, when that industry shuts down or re-locates. As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan reminded us many years ago, the unemployment rate in the United States is very deceiving because it never includes others, such as family members, who are also affected by job loss. In the United States, unlike most industrial nations, a loss of a job also means the loss of health insurance coverage.

Viewing families in another vein, but still from a macro perspective, Pajarita Charles, Dennis Orthner, Anne Jones, and Deborah Mancini offer us a very provocative article on poor families caught up in a vast and insensitive welfare system. In "Poverty and Couple Relationships: Implications for Welfare Policy," the authors remind us that relationships amidst poverty often depend on economic security, employment support, and the building of interpersonal skills, such as training in parenting and the completion of counseling sessions. Such interventions initiated by government action can help strengthen family bonds during particularly difficult times.

With Teresa Ciabattari's contribution, "Single Mothers and Family Values: The Effects of Welfare, Race, and Marriage on Family Attitudes," we get a glimpse into the consequences of policies that are rooted in false assumptions and stereotypes. We learn, for example, that in the federal government's effort to promote marriage it was assumed by policymakers that poor women, particularly poor women of color, have family attitudes that differ from those of other women. Quite the contrary, contend the authors, as findings reveal that unmarried women of color tend to be more traditional in family attitudes than white women.

Sally Bould expands the discussion about larger forces affecting families in her article, "The Need for International Family Policy: Mothers As Workers and As Carers." Basing her study on United Nations documents on working mothers in developing countries and a case study of a child welfare agency in south Asia, she concludes that globalization, which continues to draw more poor and lower class mothers into the formal labor force, is insensitive to the need for appropriate child care. Consequently, poor children are at risk in the developing world. Bould believes that UN and private foundations need to develop a comprehensive policy and funding mechanisms that take into account women's roles as workers and as carers. Local public funding of quality childcare is not yet possible. To develop "sustainable" services under "local control," funding agencies must also offer local staff requisite training.

But not all family issues revolve around the concept of motherhood. Jocelyn Crowley informs us that a growing number of fathers feel neglected in the ongoing debates about the well-being of children and families and, therefore, seek to address what they perceive to be a serious deficiency. In "Organizational Responses to the Fatherhood Crisis: The Case of Fathers' Rights Groups in the United States," Crowley reports on in-depth interviews with fathers who have been personally affected by child support and custody laws. Contrary to popular perception, argues Crowley, the desire to change public policy is only one of many reasons these men join fathers' rights groups.

Viewing fatherhood from a slightly different angle, Ann-Zofie Duvander and Gunnar Andersson explore the consequences for fertility rates of Sweden's effort to encourage more men to use parental leave with greater frequency. In their article, "Gender Equality and Fertility in Sweden: A Study on the Impact of the Father's Uptake of Parental Leave on Continued Childbearing," the authors report that they expected paternal involvement in leave-taking to be positively associated

with continued childbearing, because fathers' leave-taking makes it possible for women to continue their labor force involvement. Using longitudinal data and events-history analysis, they did find a positive effect on childbearing if fathers took a moderately long leave, but it made little if any difference if the leave was much longer. Their results suggest that family policy that encourages fathers to take parental leave may help to increase fertility rates, a major concern in most of European nations, where the birthrates remain under replacement level.

Keeping with the caregiving theme, Carol Harvey and Satomi Yoshino explore the interaction between families and government in the care of elders in Canada, Japan, and Australia. The proportion of elderly is rising in industrialized societies, and there are concerns about the ability of public health and pension programs to fully support elders. In "Social Policy for Family Caregivers of Elderly: A Canadian, Japanese, and Australian Comparison," Harvey and Yoshino conclude that elders in Australia and Canada seek independence from offspring, while in Japan filial responsibility to elders is an ingrained cultural ideal. However, in all three nations families express a growing need for greater societal assistance and government intervention. In all three nations, legislation has been introduced to begin to financially compensate family members who care for frail family members, symbolizing a growing willingness on the part of governments to recognize this important form of family work.

Nikki Forry and Elaine Anderson follow a similar path in their research on government support of families who provide care to dependents, be they old or young. In "The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit: A Policy Analysis," they provide an informative historical overview of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit (CDCTC) from its inception in 1954 to the present and reveal a pattern of an inequitable benefit distribution that favors higher income families. Barriers and limitations facing lower income families are identified and policy recommendations designed to improve the distribution pattern of CDCTC are offered.

Clearly, not all caregivers in the U.S. are supported financially, nor do they have access to other benefits that are more common in European and Scandinavian countries. By first identifying the major deficiencies in the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, such as only 12 weeks of unpaid leave for those who work for companies of 50 or more employees, Steven Wisensale then provides us with a case study of one state's effort to address America's shortcomings. In "California's Paid Leave Law: A Model for Other States?" we learn that through the expansion of Temporary Disability Insurance, California workers can take time off

from work with pay to care for a newborn, provide care to an elderly parent, or to assist a domestic partner who has fallen ill. To date, it remains the only paid family leave bill in the United States.

As we move into the remainder of the articles in this collection, we shift completely into an international mode, as each contribution is either about a particular country or is presented in a comparative format in which several countries are analyzed simultaneously and specific similarities and differences are identified. Topics covered in the remaining seven manuscripts range from the challenges produced by declining fertility rates, to leave policies, to gender issues, and to issues generated by an ongoing conflict between work and family.

In "Birthstrikes? Agency and Capabilities in the Reconciliation of Employment and Family," Barbara Hobson and Livia Sz. Oláh consider women's fertility decisions in the 1990s as influenced by particular policy configurations in twelve welfare states. Policy configurations provide different levels of support for maternal employment and for gender equality in families. They discovered that the most obvious "birthstrikes" occurred in societies with fewer policies designed to help mothers reconcile employment with family life and where few protections existed for families during uncertain economic times. In these societies, the most highly educated women are more likely than less educated women to forego motherhood or to delay having second children.

The research of Marina Adler and April Brayfield runs parallel to the work of Hobson and Sz. Oláh in their focus on maternal employment. In "Gender Regimes and Cultures of Care: Public Support for Maternal Employment in Germany and the United States," the authors explore nationally representative survey data on attitudes toward maternal employment. Their purpose is to examine whether there is increasing convergence of values and policies regarding family life in western societies; in particular, whether there was growing support for maternal employment in the 1990s. They found that public attitudes and policies supporting maternal employment are converging in Germany since reunification, although the former West Germany is still more conservative than the former East Germany. In the U.S., there was little evidence of change within the last decade with respect to attitudes and policies supporting maternal employment.

Continuing the discussion of public policy supporting dual-earner families, Peter Moss and Fred Deven, in "Leave Policies and Research: A Cross-National Overview," explore maternity, paternity and parental leave policies in 19 industrialized societies. They report that Australia and the U.S. remain the only affluent countries to have no universal en-

itlement to paid leave at or after childbirth. They examine research on the utilization, practice and impact of leave policies, reporting that fathers are more likely to take parental leave when it is a paid individual entitlement. They discuss how divergent leave arrangements appear to reflect the values or norms relating to gender and parenting that permeate national social policy. However, they point out that a supranational governmental organization such as the European Union can effectively push some societies to offer leaves, although these are often unpaid. They conclude by offering scholars and policymakers recommendations for future research and governmental action.

In “Seeking the Balance Between Work and Family After Communism,” Steven Saxonberg and Tomáš Sirovátka compare two Central European countries’ leave and daycare policies before and after the fall of communism, Poland and the Czech Republic. Focusing on survey data covering individuals’ abstract and concrete support for gender equality, the authors conclude that post-communist era policies, that tend to support the male-breadwinner family ideal, are increasingly coming in conflict with demands of the general populace, which continues to view gender equity in a more positive light. Catholicism was found to be relatively unimportant as an explanation for the development of state policies and for individuals’ attitudes toward gender equality.

Often running parallel to leave policy and equally important in supporting working families, is childcare. Beginning in 1992, the European Union recognized the importance of childcare and urged some uniformity in its adoption by EU members. In “Trading Well-Being for Economic Efficiency: The 1990 Shift in EU Childcare Policies,” researchers Inge Bleijenbergh, Jet Bussemaker, and Jeanne de Bruijn examine the development of childcare policy in three welfare states with a history of strong male breadwinner policy models: Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, in the context of the development of child care policy in European Union. At the EU and national levels, arguments prioritizing economic efficiency and women’s equal employment opportunities have over time gained ground at the expense of concerns for the well-being of children. The EU still allows nation variability in how EU childcare policy goals will be carried out.

Moving away from a comparative analysis of work and family conflict, Kjersti Melberg offers us a case study devoted exclusively to Norway. In “Family Well-Being Between Work, Care and Welfare Politics: The Case of Norway,” Melberg examines gender equality, work load, and family dynamics within a progressive social welfare state. However,

despite policies that strongly support gender equity and maternal employment, her analysis of a nationally representative survey indicates that the traditional gender divide still persists, affecting both family well-being at home and worker productivity on the job. There is also divergence in terms of national political goals and individuals' attitudes regarding gender equality, which remain more traditional than policy suggests.

Finally, in our concluding article we are reminded that despite the continuing march of globalization and the blurring of political boundaries, each nation has its own story to tell with respect to family policy. In Gerardo Meil's "The Evolution of Family Policy in Spain" we learn how family policy changed over almost seven decades, in response to political, economic and social transformations. The transition to democracy after dictatorship brought about the most dramatic change in family policies, now designed around the goals of improving the economic well-being of low-income families and helping employed individuals reconcile the demands of work and family life. Concerns about low fertility promise to continue to drive change, as does membership in the European Union.

For those of us who have devoted our careers to studying family issues, this collection of papers will give us a greater appreciation for the strong external social, economic, and political forces that have affected the form and function of families over several decades and around the globe. By comparing countries to each other across selected topics or by carving out informative case studies that offer new perspectives on families and the policies that affect them, we are energized anew to become better researchers, teachers, and practitioners. Hopefully, this collection will not only inform but also inspire all of us to continue seeking new solutions to old problems.

In closing, one cannot complete a body of work such as this without recognizing the enormous amount of help provided by others. Therefore, the co-editors would like to thank in particular the authors who participated in this project. Without their hard work, patience, persistence, and cooperative spirit throughout the review and editing process, we would have surely failed in this endeavor. And, we would also like to thank what once was an invisible force that can now be identified, made visible, and thanked publicly for their contribution to this effort. We are of course referring to the wonderfully gracious reviewers who volunteered so much of their limited free time to read the manuscripts, critique their contents and then instruct all of us on how to improve them. In appreciation of their hard work, we provide an alphabetical listing of the reviewers' names.

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Linda Bell
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Job Loss, the Family, and Public Policy

Kenneth A. Root

SUMMARY. Worker-family units in the U.S. have been impacted by significant work-related changes, including mass layoffs and involuntary job loss through shutdowns. Some post-WWII federal policies have been created to assist displaced workers adapt to job loss, thereby reducing stress in family relations. While these policies assisted dislocated workers to adjust to involuntary joblessness, there are still needs that exist for terminated workers, particularly for those individuals who desire long-term training, those worker-family units that are dramatically impacted—including single parent families and family units where both partners have become jobless—and in communities that are dependent on a single industry or have had multiple workforce reductions. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Displaced workers, family adjustments, job loss

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Job loss and job security have garnered a focus in contemporary media outlets (Barnett, 2004; DePass, 2005; Diaz & Haga, 2005; Munk, 1999; Peraino et al., 2001). DePass (2005) described a manufacturer's interest in obtaining a state subsidy to invest in new production technology that would continue employment for over 400 long-term employees, raising the question of whether the state should provide a financial subsidy to companies to maintain existing jobs. Diaz and Haga (2005) focused on the 2005 military base closure roster that threatened 180 installations and thousands of civilian positions nationwide. Often the media presentation of job loss is a scenario with one or two families highlighted, but in reality, both the number of mass layoffs and the number of workers affected are large. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005) reports that nationwide, in 2004, there were between 1,178-1,458 mass layoff or shutdown events, impacting 114,000 to 150,000 workers—*each month!* The number of mass layoff events was even higher in 2001-2003, affecting 275,000 workers one month (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005).

Job loss issues are major challenges confronting worker-family units today. Root and Park (2005) noted that some of their displaced defense worker sample reported they were relieved to be terminated because job loss brought an end to the stress of worrying about losing their job. They had survived four earlier downsizing decisions, were exposed to numerous rumors, and worried about the plant closing completely. For some of these displaced workers, having an opportunity for an early-out was a relief, a point also made by Milkman (1997) in her study of auto workers.

THE NEED FOR POLICY

Employers utilize plant closings and large-scale layoffs when business conditions change, and under those circumstances, some policy is necessary to both warn and assist the community and those displaced from work. Those who have been terminated through no fault of their own are often angered, hurt, and demoralized. Dislocated workers are frequently penalized in their future earnings, and for those who cannot find work and become long-term unemployed, marital instability is heightened (Bernard, 1966).

While Moen (1980) makes the case that our labor force statistics are based on individual data rather than family data, it is clear that the implications of job loss permeate the family and that dislocated worker fami-

lies generally bear the brunt of job loss. Families of dislocated workers are both impacted by joblessness and assume important roles in providing a supportive response to the immediate crisis (Gore, 1978). Displaced worker and spouse concerns run the gamut from finances, emotional well-being and physical health for all family members, to a pile-up of multiple stressors.

In addition to displaced worker-family units, communities are also left holding the bag when a major employer leaves town. Although a departing firm is unlikely to provide a transfer option, several displaced worker family units leave the community for employment elsewhere. The loss of the departing firm also impacts the community in other ways. For example, tax revenue is reduced but yet there is often an increased demand for the social/mental health services that need to be funded and provided. According to Rothstein (1986) the ripple effect of the original layoff creates additional job loss among supplier firms and subcontractors at three to five times the direct job loss. In impacted communities, finding replacement work after being declared redundant can be very difficult.

Prior to the early 1960s there were no workforce policies affecting dislocated workers, including a pre-notification requirement. Workers could be—and were—terminated on any given day. Neither an advance notice nor a last-minute job-loss announcement was commonly used. For example, Ehrenberg and Jakubson (1988) found in a 1984 U.S. General Accounting Office survey of companies that terminated 100 or more workers in 1983 or 1984, 31 percent of them provided no advance notice, while another 34 percent provided only 1-14 days notice prior to termination. Job loss announcements have now reached near record highs, with Koeber (2002) describing downsizing as a defining feature of a new capitalism under which all types and classes of workers are at risk of losing their jobs.

Manufacturing Jobs Continue to Decline

A number of research endeavors have focused on the closure of automotive plants, meatpacking facilities, and steel mills, as well as other manufacturing sites (Broman, Hamilton & Hoffman, 2001; Buss & Redburn, 1983; Camp, 1995; Dudley, 1994; Leana & Feldman, 1992; Moore, 1996; Root & Park, 2005; Rosen, 1987). These studies emphasize that job loss results in lower pay and benefits for many workers, limited part-time work for others who desire full-time employment, and for some, periods of long-term unemployment that could culminate in

becoming permanently discouraged workers. Other workers retire, or are pushed to take an early exit from the labor force. Sandell and Baldwin (1990) report that dislocated older workers, those who did not complete high school, and those who have been “a factory-based blue-collar worker,” are likely to have reemployment difficulty. Osterman (1988) maintains that involuntary job losers face poor reemployment prospects, largely because the labor market fails to absorb terminated workers well. The repercussions of job loss are summarized in *Job Loss—A Psychiatric Perspective*: “The only certainty about losing a job is that it hurts, it threatens everyone, not only the person fired but the family, peers and, to a significant extent, the community” (Group, 1982:4).

Bowman (1988), Moore (1996) and Zinn (1987) focus on the significance of urban manufacturing workforce reductions for minority workers, with this decline altering opportunities for both workforce stability and upward mobility. Bureau of Labor Statistics data (2004a) indicates that 14% of black families, 11% of Hispanic families, and 9% of Asian families had an unemployed family member in an average week in 2003, compared to only 7% of white families.

Job Loss Impacts Workers at All Levels, and Families in All Socio-Economic Classes as Well as All Stages in the Life Cycle

White-collar and blue-collar workers alike confront job loss, not only from plants and firms, but also from schools. Several major U.S. public school systems—Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore, and Minneapolis—recently have experienced a major reduction-in-force for school personnel (Root & Root, 2005). Couch (1998) reports that experienced workers between 55 and 64 years of age are now among the highest cohorts of job losers. In addition to experiencing higher earnings losses than younger workers, these displaced older workers worry about the effect job loss will have on their retirement assets. Among those most commonly exiting the labor market after job loss are women, non-whites, and older workers (Couch, 1998). Attewell (1999) reports that single parents have higher risks of displacement than their counterparts.

Families with two working adults comprise more than 50 percent of all family units that have at least one working adult (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004b), but when both partners have been downsized, the impact on the family is significantly more traumatic. Financial needs hit home literally and figuratively more quickly, exacerbating the stress of job loss. Bakke (1940), Cavan (1959) and Komarovskiy (1940) provided

early documentation that job loss impacts family dynamics through rearrangement of family roles and financial management, increasing the potential of strained interpersonal relationships.

The Impact of Job Loss Varies—from Insignificance to Major Difficulties

Zinn (1987:162) summarizes the dominant job loss theme:

The devastating impact of plant shutdowns, corporate relocations, and displaced workers in abandoned communities is well known. Business in general is being affected; municipal budgets are being drained by the rising demands for social services. The mental and physical health of laid-off workers, their families and friends deteriorates; rates of divorce, alcoholism, depression, and suicide climb.

Families have differing strengths, allowing some displaced worker-families to respond to negative life events better than others. Those strengths—whether social support, family coping strategies, past experience, or ample financial reserves—act as buffers to modify the impact of job loss for the displaced worker, as well as his/her family. For example, Root (1984), summarizing data from four Midwest closures, found that 18-30 percent of displaced worker-family units sent another family member into the labor force. While several studies have reported that most families weather the storm of job loss, Perrucci and Targ (1988) found that 33 percent of their dislocated sample believed their marriages decreased in happiness over the eight-month period for which they have data. In other research, worker-family units have been described as better off after dislocation because the job loss created new opportunities, growth experiences, or less stress (Little, 1976; Thomas, McCabe & Berry, 1980; Zvonkovic, Guss & Ladd, 1988).

While research on male unemployment and family ramifications has been most typical (Buss & Redburn, 1983; Komarovsky, 1940; Larson, 1984), studies by both Perrucci and Targ (1988) and Gordus and Yamakawa (1988) compare involuntary job loss outcomes between male and female displaced worker-family units. Perrucci and Targ (1988) found that the families of married women experienced similar amounts and kinds of economic strain as those of married men, whereas Gordus and Yamakawa (1988) found that unemployment related losses were greater for displaced women than men. Training for displaced workers and single women in particular is often not practical if the dura-

tion of training is longer than the period of unemployment insurance, leading Gordus and Yamakawa to advocate for federally funded living cost stipends for displaced women without other means of support. Rosen's (1987) sample of blue-collar women, who have lived for years with rounds of layoff, unemployment, and reemployment, would benefit significantly from a training program, but their involvement would require a stipend.

Cottle (2001), Laczko (1987) and Rayman (1988) focus on those redundant workers who become the long-term unemployed. Rayman (1988) acknowledges the relationship between the duration of job loss and the severity of family problems, a finding supported by research completed by Broman, Hamilton and Hoffman (2001).

DISLOCATED WORKER POLICY

Since the 1960s there have been a range of federal programs created to help the unemployed obtain work, retrain, or receive job search assistance. These programs are: Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA), Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN), Economic Dislocation and Worker Adjustment Assistance Act (EDWAA), and Workforce Investment Act (WIA), although most states also have, or have had, supplemental state programs to federal programs.

Those state programs have been important, and necessary, since Leigh (1989) notes that in 1986, JTPA Title III programs assisted only seven percent of the number of eligible displaced workers. While other Federal programs offer assistance to dislocated workers under specialized circumstances, their focus centers on income maintenance rather than providing job search assistance or on-the-job training. For example, Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) provides income support to dislocated workers who have lost jobs because of foreign trade and import competition. Under this 1962 program, funds were available for training and an Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefit extension for 52 weeks was provided (Leigh, 1989).

The Manpower Development and Training Act (*MDTA*) was enacted in 1962 to offer retraining to those who were jobless due to automation, as well as those who were economically disadvantaged (Ginsburg, 1983). Training for individuals whose skills had become obsolete consisted of either classroom instruction or on-the-job experience. Class-

room or institutional training was often completed at vocational schools to prepare displaced workers for the skilled occupations that the Employment Service determined were needed at the local level. Classroom participants received a stipend, while those in workplace training were paid wages, reimbursed 50 percent to the employer by MDTA.

Although MDTA was a federal program, local program agents acting under grants or contracts with the U.S. Department of Labor delivered the services. While there were numerous positive features of this trial-and-error workforce policy, one disadvantage was that individuals were channeled into existing programs, rather than offering training that met the specific needs of the participants. Another disadvantage was that retraining grants were in specific occupations (i.e., welding), and limited, so only a few dislocated workers were involved in retraining at any given period. Critics of MDTA maintained that most of the training and placement opportunities were given to those who were the most qualified and the least needy. In amendments to MDTA in 1968, on-the-job training projects (OJT) were expanded and states were given more authority to initiate their own programs, paving the way for a more decentralized national workforce program.

The Comprehensive Employment Training Act (*CETA*) replaced MDTA. CETA was created in 1973 to help alleviate a high unemployment rate, and to combine various federal funding sources into block grants to local officials who would be in control and held accountable. CETA gave prime sponsorship to local governmental jurisdictions with populations of at least 100,000, with the prime sponsor determining the mix and employment services to be provided (Leigh, 1989). Overall, CETA's emphasis was on short-term job creation programs in public service employment. Critics were opposed to the "make work" programs in the public sector, as well as the "violation" of the contract terms by renewing public service contracts for the same employees. Reagan administration officials later criticized the program as an income support system rather than a training program. The "training" emphasis, and near abolishment of any stipends became a feature of the next training program, the Job Training Partnership Act.

The Job Training Partnership Act (*JTPA*) enacted in October 1983, contained a separate title for dislocated workers (Title III). JTPA created a partnership among business, local elected officials, and state government in administering federally funded employment and training programs for units of local government with an aggregate population of 200,000 or more. Under the JTPA, individual states were also allowed to be in charge of their own programs. To participate, a worker needed

to be a state resident and meet one of three criteria: (a) receive notice of layoff after working with the employer for at least three years and unlikely to return; (b) be laid-off due to a facility closure; or (c) be unemployed for at least 15 weeks after employment with the same employer for three years (U.S. Congress, 1986). No funds were provided for public service employment under JTPA, and income and support services were restricted compared to CETA.

JTPA required states to match federal funds on a dollar-for-dollar basis, but the match was reduced if the state's unemployment rate exceeded the national average (U.S. Congress, 1986). While the state match was relatively unimportant in determining whether the resources would be available or not, Levitan and Gallo (1988) note that the matching requirement had an impact on participant selection. Targeted recipients were those receiving unemployment insurance, and there was a tendency to select community colleges as the service providers.

The Economic Dislocation and Worker Adjustment Assistance Act (EDWAA) replaced Title III of JTPA in an attempt to improve services to dislocated workers. EDWAA, which became effective in July 1989, created state-level rapid response assistance to sites after pre-notification was given. Rapid Response Teams met with soon-to-be displaced workers and provided information about job search assistance and retraining. Because workers were not provided an income stipend during training, many were forced to forgo this training opportunity.

The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act (WARN) was passed in 1988, mandating 60 days advance notice to employees and state government if the company was closing or planning to lay off a large number of workers (LeRoy, 1992). This legislation was prompted by a concern over the loss of several thousand workers in the closure or relocation of manufacturing firms. The Office of Technology Assessment (U.S. Congress, 1986) acknowledges that prior to WARN the typical, but not required, notification of termination was two weeks for white-collar workers and seven days for blue-collar workers, although some unionized workers had a pre-notification clause in their contract that provided six months notification (Perrucci & Targ, 1988). Because job loss in the Northeast and Midwest had been particularly acute, state representatives and local community leaders in these regions discussed potential legislation to regulate closures and relocations. Ohio's Community Readjustment Act was proposed in 1977 (Kelly & Webb, 1979), with similar legislation debated in Massachusetts, Illinois, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Maine, and Rhode Island. Between 1980 and 1982, plant closure measures were introduced in

several states. Rothstein (1986) notes that several states created inter-agency task forces to provide information and technical assistance to workers and communities that would be impacted by job terminations. The proposed state legislation was a response to a perceived job loss crisis and the failed National Employment Priorities Act of 1974. While never enacted, the National Employment Priorities Act contributed to future federal legislation that requires pre-notification to workers and the state.

The benefit of pre-notification was to help soon-to-be-terminated workers anticipate job loss and obtain reemployment more quickly. WARN applied [1] to employers with 100 or more workers when 50 or more lose work in a 30-day period, [2] if mass unemployment equals at least 33 percent of employees, or [3] if at least 500 employees lose their jobs. The legislation contained in WARN was passed as part of the Omnibus Trade and Competitiveness Act, but vetoed by President Reagan in 1988. WARN was resubmitted and passed in July 1988 (Ehrenberg & Jakubson, 1988). Critics maintained that 60 days was not enough time to accomplish the tasks necessary for either worker-family units to prepare for the transition, nor for communities to recruit new industries to employ those who were dislocated.

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was signed into law August 7, 1998. The WIA Dislocated Worker component (Title III) focuses on designing and managing training and employment programs at the local level; providing “customers” access to employment, education, training, and information services they need at a one-stop shop; as well as choices in deciding the training program that best fits their needs (Eberts, O’Leary & DeRango, 2002). This legislation also required linkages with TAA that similarly provided some services to those dislocated workers due to foreign trade. Programs which similarly provided some services to those dislocated workers due to foreign trade. In contrast to the JTPA, the WIA emphasizes returning to work rather than entering a training program (Wandner, 2002).

Local Workforce Investment Boards, partnering with local elected officials, are responsible for planning and overseeing the local WIA program. Critics believe there is too long a delay between the request for, and receipt of, federal funds, thus hampering retraining implementation. Other criticisms include shortages in training funds, which in turn create difficult choices. For example, priority is given to recipients of public assistance and other low-income individuals over dislocated workers. Also, there is concern over high attrition among displaced

workers from select community college courses (Jacobson, LaLonde, & Sullivan, 2002).

Implementing WARN was a benefit for many soon-to-be displaced worker-family units because the family units now had some lead-time to respond to job loss. When job loss is not sudden, it becomes more manageable and less stressful and displaced workers return to the job market faster when they are given advance warning (Leigh, 1989; Noble, 1993). Unfortunately, WARN does not cover all workers, so it is still possible for reasonably large numbers of workers to be terminated without any preparation. Additionally, some research documents that companies have not adhered to WARN requirements (Addison & Blackburn, 1994). Compliance with the law is crucial and extends the pre-notification WARN provisions to all who are confronted with involuntary job loss.

WARN was also important in providing Job Center and WorkForce personnel with preparation time. Not only were Job Centers better able to prepare for the terminations, but also through EDWAA they were able to meet with the soon-to-be displaced workers through Rapid Response. The pre-notification process minimized the impact of the congestion effect—the then preferred approach for the company to terminate all workers on a specific day, and in the process create an overload on service providers. While the employer's production schedule continues to control the displacement termination dates in a shutdown or downsizing decision, employers are more commonly using staggered release dates, which are beneficial for workers and their families. A significant improvement for those terminated would be worker selection of the release date that best fits their needs.

With continued WIA funding, Rapid Response Teams are important in initiating an early understanding of what help and services are available to dislocated workers. However, there is no one providing continuous monitoring of individual displaced workers. Many displaced workers have a series of consecutive replacement jobs as they search for a good fit with post-displacement employment, and for this reason alone, the availability of long-term counseling would be beneficial. Other modifications in policy or programming could similarly assist dislocated worker-family units.

There are several areas where existing policy is not sensitive to worker-family needs. Each is discussed below. First, our society appears blind to the special needs of those family units where both members of a two-worker family unit are displaced or the adult in a single-parent household is economically dislocated. Recall that Gordus

and Yamakawa (1988) have already proposed that women without means of other support should receive a living-cost stipend while they were involved in training.

Second, Trade Adjustment Assistance is a wonderful aid for those who are able to receive it and want it, but Root and Park (2005) have found that those made redundant who do not qualify for TAA, but would like long-term training, are disgruntled when other dislocated workers qualify. While life options are not equal, there is a need to reconsider support for longer-term training for more displaced workers than just those who receive TAA. A further problem with TAA is the fact that service workers, a growing portion of the U.S. labor force, are not covered by TAA at all.

Third, job loss researchers know that younger employees and their spouses experience higher job loss stress levels than older workers. With thousands of U.S. workers in this “threatened” category (Wilson, Larson & Stone, 1993), we have done little to alleviate the stress of perceived job insecurity and the issue will likely remain with us for a considerable time unless some reform measure is implemented.

Fourth, some social science research has focused on the diminished perceptions of self-worth among underemployed workers (Warr, 1984), yet we seem to have little concern for those dislocated workers whose post-displacement wages are significantly less than their pre-termination earnings. Our society has seemingly accepted a lower compensation and benefit bar for re-employed job losers.

Fifth, according to Wandner (2002) targeting is the process by which individuals are selected to participate in job training programs. Selection is necessary because the number of potential program participants exceeds the resource capacity, and receipt of services is not an entitlement. The problem is that even if selected for retraining in any non-TAA supported program, an important kink is the length of time UI benefits will run. Most often, that period is six months. This means that while some direct costs may be covered for a longer period of time, the UI benefits run out, and the displaced worker will either have to have alternative income sources, or will have to drop out of their training program. Either option creates a major negative impact on families.

The problem of job displacement is not uniform across occupations, nor evenly distributed in communities or geographical regions of the country. In towns and cities where the unemployment rate is high, both formal and informal job search methods appear plugged as lay-offs and the rippling of joblessness continues. Sociological research documents that primary groups—whether a nuclear family unity, a work group, or a

friendship alliance—are important in the daily life of individuals (Komarovsky, 1967), and provide support to overcome stressful life events (Hanlon, 1982). Zippay (1990) notes that among blue-collar workers, networks are interlocking—family members are neighbors, who are also coworkers. These social networks are important in securing work, but networking with relatives is no longer operational in the job search when relatives and friends are also without work.

Further complicating the situation for those confronting job loss is their reluctance to ask for help. Many confronting joblessness are without work for the first time, and they have been accustomed to being the helper rather than needing help. Typically, displaced workers are unfamiliar with how the system works as well as embarrassed by needing some form of assistance. Rayman and Bluestone (1982) acknowledge that while unemployment is a social condition, displaced worker-family units manage it privately.

CONCLUSIONS

The dislocation of experienced workers has been a serious problem in the United States for many years. Some worker-family units are confronted with an inordinate amount of stress and difficulty when they are made redundant. Among the displaced workers most affected are women, minorities, and older worker-family units. Like some terminated workers, some communities are also affected to a greater degree than others after a mass layoff or shutdown occurs. In those communities that lose their dominant industry or encounter a number of workforce reductions, jobs will be more difficult to obtain and a longer spell of unemployment will be likely for those seeking replacement work. Worker-family tensions may be exacerbated under those circumstances.

Prior to WARN, U.S. workers could be made redundant at the end of a given day without much assistance; often released on the same day, even though there could be hundreds of workers terminated in the same city. Other federal workforce policies have been created which have helped many displaced worker-family units. Under provisions of these federal job loss policies, worker-family units are able to retain their family cohesion and have WorkForce assistance that helps them retrain for, or find, replacement work. Thus, displaced workers have been helped by MDTA and more recent legislation through pre-notification, early comprehension of available options through Rapid Response, job

search assistance or retraining, opportunities for participation in on-the-job training programs, or relocation assistance, and for some, a cost-of-living stipend or extended unemployment compensation.

While federal policies have helped dislocated workers adjust to involuntary joblessness, important needs persist for displaced employees, particularly those who are impacted the most and reside in communities that are dependent on a single industry or have had multiple workforce reductions. The benefit of pre-notification is not available for all employees, but in a just society, this should be a given. In addition, quality jobs are in short supply, increased opportunities for retraining are sorely needed, and workers in retraining programs outside of TAA still need stipends and/or extended unemployment compensation. Changes in federal economic dislocation policies that would relieve job security stress and extend the breadth of benefits to all displaced workers would be welcomed. In the process, the well-being of workers and worker-family units would be ensured.

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Poverty and Couple Relationships: Implications for Welfare Policy

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SUMMARY. Previous welfare policies have discouraged men from assuming active roles with their partners and children, leaving many single-mother families without the relational and financial involvement of men. In an effort to inform social policy, this study explores the impact

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of economic, human and relationship capital on couple relationships. Focus groups, conducted with 95 low-income African-American and White adults, revealed that economic security, relationship skills, employment support, fathering classes, and couples counseling are critical to successful couplehood. Based on these findings, we suggest that family policies be designed to strengthen at-risk couple relationships by promoting sustained father-family attachment, bolstering men's employment and educational opportunities, and providing parenting and relationship skills training. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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Although U.S. welfare policies established over the past 70 years were intended to strengthen low-income, vulnerable families, some of these policies have discouraged the formation and continuation of marriage, as well as cohabiting and co-parenting relationships among economically disadvantaged families. Public welfare payments and support have been primarily directed toward single mothers and their children, primarily because public laws often limit benefits, such as cash assistance, food stamps or housing vouchers, when another parent is in the household (Seccombe, 1999). As a result, the presence of men or fathers in U.S. poverty households has been discouraged and typically causes termination or the substantial reduction of benefits to the family if men stay involved with their families (Edin, 1997). Thus, what was once called Aid to "Families" with Dependent Children (or AFDC) evolved into what essentially became Aid to *Mothers* with Dependent Children (Horn & Sawhill, 2001).

Various waves of U.S. welfare reform have attempted to address the issue of economic security by shifting more responsibility to the mother's own economic activity. This has led to a variety of reform initiatives that promoted human capital investments on the part of single mothers, including opportunities to complete their education, get job skills, and move quickly into the labor force (Orthner & Kirk, 1995). These reforms, however, did little to encourage men and fathers to assume productive roles in their families and often discouraged men from

sustaining long-term relationships with their partners or their children (Cabrera & Peters, 2000). The only substantial outreach to men came in the form of enhanced Child Support Enforcement rules that attempted to capture the income of men as an offset to welfare checks that the mothers were receiving (McLanahan & Carlson, 2002). States were also given the flexibility to use their Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to support fatherhood programs and employment assistance, but few states have used these funds to provide significant human capital development types of support (Sonenstein, Malm, & Billing, 2002). Unlike mothers, welfare reform has done little to help fathers gain education or employment skills or direct assistance in finding and sustaining jobs.

It is within this context that the next wave of welfare policy reforms is being shaped. Serious considerations are being given to promoting marriage among low-income families and if not marriage, to sustaining couple and co-parenting relationships on behalf of the children. Under the reauthorization of TANF, current policy includes incentives to strengthen couple relationships and reduce the likelihood that men will leave or abandon their families (Ooms, Bouchet, & Parke, 2004).

This article briefly examines the underlying assumptions that will have to be included in a transformed welfare policy that supports full family (including fathers) involvement. It also examines qualitative data from interviews with low-income fathers, mothers and couples that can help us understand the barriers to implementing such a policy as well as some program strategies that may help overcome these barriers.

BACKGROUND

Policies to support the strengthening of low-income couples are being developed and implemented across many states under TANF reauthorization legislation, but research on low-income, unmarried couples and parents is still in its infancy (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004). We know much more about the status of single-parent-hood and its consequences for children than we know about the sources of resilience and stress among their parents. Nonmarital childbearing is of particular concern because evidence strongly suggests that children who grow up in single-parent families are worse off, on average, than children who grow up in two-parent households (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Even after taking into account important family characteristics such as income, race and socioeconomic status, children

from single-parent families are more likely to experience unfavorable physical, cognitive, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). Research shows that these children are more likely to be at high risk for the following outcomes: lower socioeconomic achievement, less education, poorer psychological well-being, lower social integration (Amato & Booth, 1997), lower rates of high school and college completion, teenage childbearing, and idleness in young adulthood (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

Evidence from unmarried parents of these children, however, suggests that many of them begin their parenting with the hope of remaining a couple after their child is born (Waller, 2001). Among the national sample of mostly unwed, low-income families in the longitudinal Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, for example, 82% of the parents were in a romantic and intact relationship at the time of the birth of their child and 51% of these couples were cohabiting at the time (McLanahan et al., 2003). Additionally, 80% of the fathers provided financial and other forms of support during their partner's pregnancy and the majority of mothers and fathers (60% and 75% respectively) reported their chances of marrying one another as "good or almost certain" (McLanahan, 2003). Despite high expectations for marriage, only 9% of the couples actually married within one year of their baby's birth. Another 49% continued to be romantically involved and 42% were no longer together (Bendheim-Thoman Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, 2003). Thus, the dissolution patterns that are well chronicled had begun. The dynamics of complex parenting patterns with multiple births from multiple fathers had been put into motion as well.

Research on the potential benefits of two-parent, low-income families, however, is promising. Conger and Conger (2002) report that children from lower-income families who received affective (warmth and nurturing) and structural (rules and consequences) support made competent transitions to adolescence and young adulthood. McCubbin and McCubbin (1996) found that economically disadvantaged couples often demonstrate high levels of warmth, affection, and emotional support for one another. When optimism and collective efficacy are present in low-income families, children perform much better in school and are more likely to go on to college and increase their opportunities. Even rates of physical and sexual abuse of children are much lower among low-income families when the biological father remains in the household than when that father leaves and other men enter the relationship with the mother and children (Wilson, 2002).

In their study of economic and relational assets among low-income families, Orthner, Jones-Senpai and Williamson (2003) note that low-income families with earnings less than \$20,000 per year are often weak on economic assets but their relationship assets are not significantly weaker than families with incomes greater than \$40,000. On measures of communication, problem-solving, value congruence, and social support, low-income couples exhibited essentially similar patterns of strengths and weakness. The researchers report, "It appears that lower income families typically struggle with the challenges that come from having fewer financial resources but that this does not strongly influence their overall pattern of relationship strength" (p. 19).

While the potential value of men participating in co-parenting relationships is often recognized, low-income women are not always sure that the father's contribution will be helpful. One in ten low-income fathers are involved with the courts and prison systems (Mumola, 2000). Over half of low-income fathers have not completed high school (Randolph, Rose, Fraser, & Orthner, 2004). Many low-income fathers do not have significant training in job skills and the unemployment rates of these fathers are very high (Blau, Kahn, & Waldfogel, 2000). Their roles as fathers are further complicated by involvement with multiple partners that produce children who reside in different households (Carlson & Furstenberg, 2003). Some of these men also bring with them risks of violence due to poor adult relationship modeling and inadequate skills to manage challenging interpersonal relationships (K. L. Anderson, 1997).

Thus, both fathers and mothers in low-income families recognize the potential vulnerability of their relationships. Opportunities for co-parenting are threatened by inadequate fatherhood role modeling and the sometimes competing demands from other partners and children. This promotes a fragile sense of trust and commitment that must be overcome if these new parenting relationships are to be sustained.

FOCUS OF CURRENT RESEARCH

Research suggests that children benefit from a caring relationship with two parents and that many low-income, new unmarried parents wish to maintain their relationship, but face potential obstacles to building and sustaining long-term commitments. Therefore, the question facing policymakers and program developers is this: How do we help low-income couples build and sustain a long-term committed relation-

ship? That is one of the more significant and new family policy questions and a broader question than how to help couples get married. Marriage, among many couples, is still a confusing, if not remote, concept, particularly among lower income women and men who seek career stability, home ownership, and extended family connections (Edin & Kefalas, 2005). But developing the means to help couples and families get a good start, form sound relational commitments, and build a network of social and economic support to sustain those commitments is one of the new policy frontiers.

In this research, we examine the role of economic, human, and relational assets or relationship capital in the motivation to sustain couple relationships. Theories of economic and human capital consistently hypothesize that when persons or groups exhibit greater assets, such as earnings or job skills, outcomes based on these assets will be greater (Coleman, 1988). Just as having financial capital, such as income, savings and investments, helps us feel more secure in our lives, other forms of “capital” represent assets that can be accumulated and retained as a means of achieving other benefits. Economic capital, which includes financial capital, as well as security in the form of health insurance, household assets and reduced debt, has been consistently linked to family strength outcomes (cf. Orthner et al., 2004). Human capital includes personal assets that can foster economic capital and promote economic and personal security. Education, job skills, work history and personal motivation to succeed are examples of human capital. A third dimension is relationship capital. Similar to social capital (Putnam, 2000), relationship capital is based on the quality of the connections between the people who make up a household, such as having shared values and communication and problem-solving skills (Orthner et al., 2003).

Based on the research findings discussed above, as well as the assumptions of how capital assets may contribute to couple commitments, we expected that men and women in our focus group interviews with low-income couples and parents would report wanting to enter and maintain relationships with partners that offer opportunities for these sources of capital. We also anticipated that they would exit relationships that failed to deliver them. We hoped to learn more about which specific economic and human sources of capital were most pivotal to the sustainability of their relationships and which mechanisms and resources they would endorse as most likely to help increase their potential for long-term partnering and parenting together.

METHODS

Focus group interviews were employed to gather information from single parents and couples about the role of economic, human, and relationship capital in their relationships and to learn about their needs and interests in participating in couple development programs. Feedback from focus groups has been found to be more specific, spontaneous, and meaningful than that obtained from individual surveys and questionnaires (Patton, 2002; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Group interviews may also be particularly advantageous with low-income, vulnerable individuals because of the “safety in numbers” factor (Patton, 2002). In addition to offering a safe environment, the collective nature of focus groups may provide participants with a more empowering and validating experience, especially for historically oppressed individuals (Madriz, 2000).

Sampling Strategy

As is typical for focus groups, a purposeful sampling strategy was utilized in order to ensure that participants possessed characteristics reflecting those of the study population and had experiences relevant to the central purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). Male and female residents of North Carolina were recruited who fit the primary criteria of being economically disadvantaged and able to share information about couple relationships. Additionally, participants were recruited based on the following demographic characteristics: residence (urban and rural); race (African-American and White); and relationship status (single mothers, single fathers, single people without children, married couples, and cohabiting couples). These subcategories were created to produce a range of perspectives on the topics of interest.

Participants were recruited through community organizations such as social service agencies and churches, personal referrals (snowballing), and advertisements posted at local agencies and businesses. In some instances, the group was “piggybacked” on to another event, such as a job training session or parenting group meeting. Incentives in the form of \$10 grocery store gift certificates, child care, and transportation (if needed) were provided in order to alleviate obstacles that may have inhibited participation in the study (Morgan & Scannell, 1998). The use of incentives was also intended to convey appreciation for the participants’ time and willingness to share their perspectives and experiences.

Group Characteristics and Procedures

Ninety-five men and women, most of whom were parents of young children, participated in twelve focus groups conducted between March and July 2004. The groups ranged in size from 4 to 14 participants, the larger number reflecting a decision to over recruit in anticipation of low attendance rates. Reflecting the higher rate of poverty among African-Americans compared to Whites in North Carolina (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000), as well as the out-of-wedlock birth rate (Buescher, 1997), 79% of group participants were African-American and 21% were White. To increase the comfort level and avoid any power differential (Casey & Krueger, 2005), groups were deliberately created to be as homogeneous as possible. For example, separate groups were conducted for men and women (except for couples) and African-Americans and Whites.

Table 1 contains participant characteristics by gender, race, couple status, and parental status for the full sample ($N = 95$). The sample consisted of 47 female participants and 48 male participants. The age of participants ranged from 17 to 52 with an average age of 25. Thirty-three focus group members or 35% of the sample were married, 14 or 15% of the sample were living with a partner, and 48 or 50% of the sample were single. Most of the participants, regardless of current relationship status, had children and hence were recruited to the group because of current or previous relationship experience. The focus groups were conducted in various urban and rural North Carolina community settings, such as recreation and job centers and churches that were both familiar to and convenient for participants. Each group lasted ninety minutes and was audio-taped.

An eight focal question interview guide was used. The interview protocol was based on findings from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (McLanahan et al., 2003) and the work of Orthner and his colleagues (2003). As seen in the Appendix, the protocol covered four areas related to couple relationships: (1) barriers to young couples staying together; (2) social and emotional factors that help to stabilize relationships; (3) community services and resources that help couples sustain their relationship; and (4) preferences on potential providers, location of services, and needed supplemental supports and incentives, e.g., child care. Although questions were consistent across groups, the interview protocol was modified slightly to reflect the group composition. Each question was also accompanied by standard probes to encourage specificity and to keep the interviews focused. The groups were