



Effect of TANF Concurrent Benefits on the Reunification of Children following Placement in Out-of-Home Care

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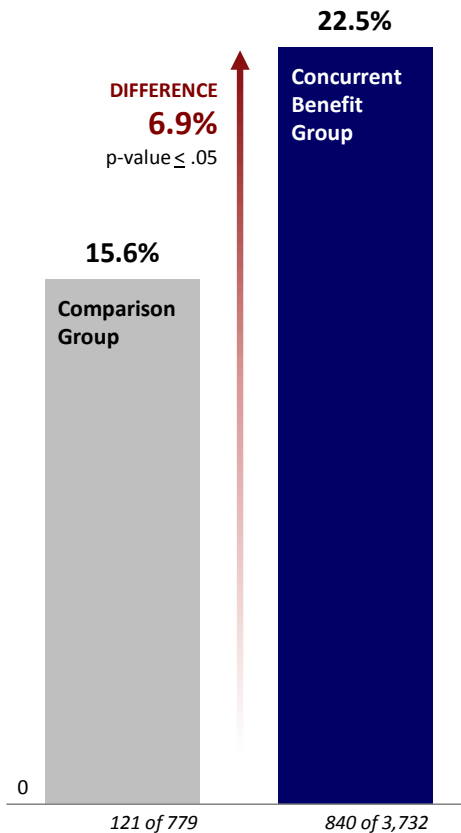
THE TANF CONCURRENT BENEFITS PROGRAM allows for the continuation of a TANF cash grant to a family from whom a child has been removed by Children's Administration (the "removal family") and placed with a licensed or unlicensed caregiver (the "receiving family"). The Children's Administration (CA) must expect that absence to be temporary (180 days or less) and that the child will be reunified with the family of removal (per WAC 388-454-0015). Extensions beyond 180 days are possible if the CA social worker reports that the family is making progress, reunification is still the goal, and ESA's Community Services Division headquarters staff approves it.

An earlier descriptive analysis by RDA of removals of at least 90 days in SFY 2009 showed that 38 percent of children from families receiving concurrent benefits reunified, compared to 36 percent of children from families not receiving concurrent benefits. However, the initial descriptive analysis was not designed to estimate the effect of the concurrent benefits program on reunification rates. The primary objective of this study is to examine whether receipt of concurrent TANF benefits reduces the time to reunification, based on a matched comparison group evaluation approach.

Receipt of concurrent TANF benefits is associated with more rapid reunification for children placed in out of home care

This study compares placement outcomes for children in out-of-home care whose removal family retained the child's portion of the family TANF benefit while the child was in care¹ (the "concurrent benefit group"), to children whose removal family did not retain this benefit (the "comparison group"). Analyses are conducted for a set of families matched on baseline case characteristics, to control for other potential factors that could account for differences in reunification rates.

Children Reunified in 12 months



¹ More precisely, concurrent benefits are defined here as the child's portion of the TANF benefit received by the assistance unit (AU) if the removed child is not the only child making the AU eligible for TANF, or the entire TANF benefit received by the assistance unit if all children are removed from the TANF household..

Key Findings

- Receipt of concurrent TANF benefits is associated with reduced time to reunification, relative to a matched comparison group of children whose families were receiving TANF at the time of removal but did not receive concurrent benefits while the child was in out-of-home care.
- The provision of concurrent TANF benefits is not associated with a statistically significant increase in the proportion of children who are reunified but then subsequently re-enter out-of-home care or are the victims in a subsequent founded CPS intake within 12 months of reunification. Though the differences are not statistically significant for this study sample, the proportion of reunified children who either return to out-of-home placement or are the victims in a subsequent founded CPS intake are higher in the concurrent benefit group. This finding merits longer-term monitoring.
- The out-of-home placement cost savings due to the reduction in time to exit for children who are reunified are partially offset by payment of concurrent benefits to families of children who are never reunified. Some children for whom reunification is the initial permanency goal are later switched from the reunification to the adoption track although concurrent benefit payments have already been made.

Study Population

A total of 19,863 placements (removals) of children who remained in CA custody (that is, did not transfer to another state, tribe, or private entity) occurred from August 1, 2008 through June 30, 2011. Restricting this set to children in removals with sufficiently complete data, in placement for longer than 90 days², and with the permanent plan established as reunification by no later than the child's 90th day in care, yielded removal records for 8,959 unduplicated children.

Examination of TANF payment patterns for this study population showed large variability in the proportion of time in out of home placement associated with receipt of concurrent benefits. For the study population described below, the average number of months a family received concurrent benefits was 5, with a range from near-zero to a maximum of 12 months. As one of many possible ways to illustrate the variability in duration of receipt of concurrent benefits³, the 4,629 children from families receiving TANF at the time of removal were subdivided into groups that received concurrent benefits for different fractions of the months their children were in out-of-home care, up to a maximum of the first 12 months in care (Table 1).³

TABLE 1.

Distribution of cases with different fractions of time family received concurrent benefits during (up to) the first 12 months of child in care,⁴ for families receiving TANF at time of removal

FRACTION OF TIME RECEIVING CONCURRENT BENEFITS	NUMBER	PERCENT
0 (No Concurrent Benefits)	897	19.4
> 0 to 0.1	967	20.9
> 0.1 to 0.25	826	17.8
> 0.25 to 0.50	885	19.1
> 0.50 to 0.90	669	14.5
> 0.90 to 1.0	435	9.4
TOTAL	4,629	100.0

² Much of the information critical for construction of a matched comparison group is only known after a child enters placement, and typically takes about 90 days to obtain. It was therefore necessary to restrict the study population to children in care for more than 90 days, to provide a rich enough set of 'pre-treatment' variables to yield a credible matched comparison group.

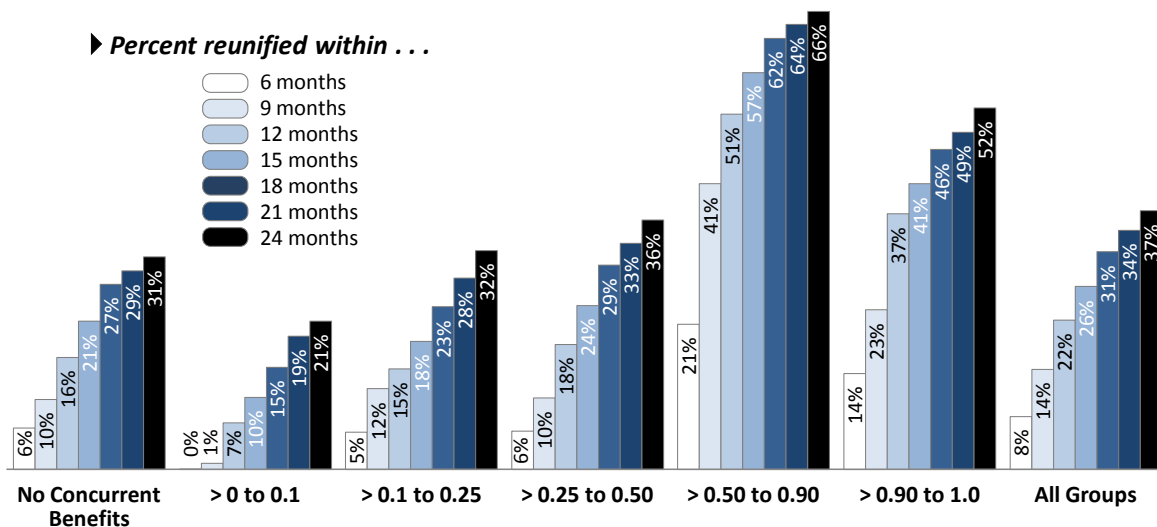
³ Because the definition of concurrent benefits used in the analyses below was simply receipt of any amount of concurrent benefits, yes/ no, this particular way of illustrating the variability in payment of concurrent benefits has no bearing on the results.

⁴ For example, if a child was only in care for 8 months, the fraction of those 8 months that concurrent benefits were received, etc.

Figure 1 displays the cumulative reunification rates for children whose families received concurrent benefits for different fractions of the child’s months in out-of-home care, up to a maximum of the first 12 months in care:

FIGURE 1.

Variation in reunification rates for children of families receiving concurrent benefits for different proportions of time during the (up to) first 12 months in care



After exploration of alternative approaches, the definition of “concurrent benefit” group adopted for this study includes children whose family retained the child’s portion of the TANF benefit for at least one month while the child was in out-of-home placement in the study period, while the “comparison” group includes children whose families received TANF at the time of removal but who did not receive any concurrent benefits after removal. Using this definition, the 4,330 children from families who were not receiving any TANF at the time of removal were excluded, leaving 4,629 children for analysis: 3,732 receiving concurrent benefits and 897 comparison cases. The mean and median total expenditure on concurrent benefits was \$1,280 and \$800 over the entire period in care, respectively, for this matched sample.

Matched concurrent-benefits and comparison groups of children with similar characteristics were then constructed using the propensity score matching with replacement using the method of Abadie and Imbens (2007). From a very extensive set of potential characteristics, a series of bivariate comparisons and logistic regressions analyses identified the following subset of characteristics that best distinguished concurrent-benefits from comparison groups: administrative region,⁵ child age at removal (collapsed into two groups with similar effects: ages 0 to 9 and 10 to 17), child race/ethnicity,⁶ child behavioral/mental illness issues, primary caregiver gender, yes/no flags for recent (prior 12 months) primary caregiver substance abuse treatment, criminal justice system involvement and domestic violence; number of prior neglect allegations (0-2 versus 3 or more), intake risk prior to removal (no assessment to moderate risk versus moderately high to high risk), and if the child was initially placed with a relative. These characteristics were known prior to or at the date of removal (and are thus ‘pre-treatment’ characteristics). See the Technical Notes for pre- and post-matching results and further definition of matching characteristics. The matched concurrent-benefits and comparison groups (Table 2) comprise the study population.

⁵ We used the six DSHS regions extant during the study period, then grouped into three regions as described in the Technical Notes.

⁶ We combined race/ethnicity from multiple race and ethnicity codes: white only, Hispanic ethnicity but white race only, any Native American, any Black except Native American, and a pooled Asian/Asian-white/unknown category.

TABLE 2.

Counts of Matched and Unmatched Concurrent-Benefits and Comparison Groups

- **Concurrent Benefit** = Family continued to receive child's portion of TANF after removal
- **Comparison** = Family Lost child's portion of TANF at time of removal

	Concurrent Benefit	Comparison	TOTAL
Matched (Retained for Analysis)	3,732	779	4,511
Unmatched (Dropped from Analysis)	0	118	118
TOTAL	3,732	897	4,629

Concurrent Benefits Reduce Time to Reunification

The results from a series of multivariate analyses of time to permanency for the matched concurrent benefit and comparison group children clearly show that the receipt of concurrent benefits is associated with reduced time to reunification (Table 3). The situation is complex, however, due to the partial provision of concurrent benefits to the families of children who never actually reunify with their caregivers. A substantial proportion of children whose initial permanent plan was reunification, and whose families received concurrent benefits, were never reunified and instead exited to adoption, guardianship, or other permanency outcomes.

The analyses here account for this diversion from reunification, as described below. Table 3 shows the distribution of matched children across the different permanency outcomes for the study sample. In general, the proportion of children reunified increases for higher fractions of concurrent benefits paid during up to the first 12 months the child was in care; the highest proportion of adoption is seen for families receiving concurrent benefits for greater than zero but less than 10 percent of the first 12 months the child was in care.

TABLE 3.

Types of Exit for Matched Concurrent Benefit and Comparison Group Children

Concurrent-Benefit Group and Comparison Group	TYPE OF EXIT				Still in Care
	Reunification	Adoption	Guardianships	Other ⁷	
MATCHED CHILDREN (weighted), TOTAL = 4,511					
Concurrent Benefits	1,471 (39.4%)	803 (21.5%)	313 (8.4%)	116 (3.1%)	1,029 (27.6%)
Comparison	261 (33.5%)	188 (24.1%)	63 (8.1%)	27 (3.5%)	240 (30.8%)
Both Groups	1,732 (38.4%)	991 (22.0%)	376 (8.3%)	143 (3.2%)	1,269 (28.1%)

Table 4 gives the Kaplan-Meier or survival analysis regression estimates of mean and median time to exit of concurrent-benefit and comparison groups for all children and for the matched sample. Comparison of Cox proportional hazard models with and without entry of other case characteristics revealed that inclusion of these characteristics slightly decreased the magnitude of the concurrent-benefit effect, whereas inclusion of the case weights from the propensity score matching procedure slightly increased the magnitude of the treatment effect.

A competing risk regression (Gray, 1988; Fine & Gray, 1999; Gray 2013) showed that the size of the concurrent benefit effect when adjusting for the competing 'risks' of adoption or other permanency goals yields times to exit nearly identical to the weighted Kaplan-Meier estimates of Table 4 (the reduction in the size of the concurrent benefit effect seen when entering other case characteristics in the Cox proportional hazards models is cancelled by the increase due to the competing risks adjustment). Taking these model results together, they are consistent in showing that the reduction

⁷ Age of Majority/Emancipation (85 total children), deceased (1), transfers (42), and unknown (15).

in time to reunification due to concurrent benefits is partially offset by an increased time to adoption, since many of these adoption cases began with one to several months of concurrent benefit payments to the families.

TABLE 4.

Days to Exit from Out-of-Home Care and Percent of Children Reunified within 12 months for Total and Matched Samples

Concurrent-Benefit Group versus Comparison Group	DAYS TO EXIT				Percent Reunified within 12 Months
	75th percentile (25% exited from care)	Median (50% exited from care)	Mean (Average days in care)	25th percentile (75% exited from care)	
ALL CHILDREN (unweighted), TOTAL = 4,629					
Concurrent	381	682	766	1,044	22.3%
Comparison	415	749	802	1,120	17.6%
Difference	-34*	-67*	-36*	-76*	4.7*
Both Groups	392	700	776	1,056	21.1%
MATCHED CHILDREN (weighted), TOTAL = 4,511					
Concurrent	370	686	769	1,064	22.5%
Comparison	423	752	810	1,120	15.6%
Difference	-53*	-66*	-41*	-56*	6.9*
Both Groups	381	698	776	1,074	21.3%

* p-value ≤ .05

Table 5 compares the percentage of children reunified at 3-month intervals from 6 to 24 months for concurrent benefit and comparison groups of the matched children (recall that the study sample is restricted to children in care for at least 90 days). In general, reunification rates at each interval increase with higher fractions of concurrent benefits paid during up to the first 12 months the child was in care.

TABLE 5.

Percentage of Children Reunified for Matched Concurrent Benefit and Comparison Group Children⁸

Concurrent-Benefit Group versus Comparison Group	CUMULATIVE PERCENT REUNIFIED AT END OF:						
	6 Months	9 months	12 months	15 months	18 months	21 months	24 months
MATCHED CHILDREN (weighted), TOTAL = 4,511							
Concurrent	7.9%	15.3%	22.5%	27.2%	32.2%	35.6%	38.6%
Comparison	7.2%	10.5%	15.6%	20.6%	26.3%	28.1%	30.8%
% Difference	9%	33%*	32%*	25%*	19%*	22%*	21%*
Both Groups	7.8%	14.4%	21.3%	26.1%	31.2%	34.3%	37.2%

* p-value ≤ .0001

⁸ For the modeling of total study cohort, an initial follow-up period of 12 months was the maximum that could be used. After completion of the modeling, the exit information of the analysis data set was updated to allow calculation of reunification rates to 24 months. Because the matching and modeling was not redone, the reunification rates in table 4 for intervals after 12 months may vary slightly from actual values, since the case weights of the comparison group were not recalculated.

Concurrent Benefits Are Not Associated with a Statistically Significant Increase in Rate of Post-Reunification Placement Re-Entry or New Founded Abuse

Post-reunification outcomes were measured by a new out-of-home placement (placement re-entry) or a new founded intake on the child within 12 months following reunification (from the date of physical return home, not the date of legal discharge). Children from the matched concurrent-benefit and comparison groups that were reunified before March 1, 2012 were selected, to allow sufficient follow-up time to measure post-reunification outcomes for each child.

The concurrent-benefit group did not show a statistically significant higher rates (at the $p \leq .05$ level) of placement re-entry and/or new founded allegations of abuse than the comparison group (Table 6), when using weighted⁹ logistic regression to adjust for other case characteristics, although there were higher rates before adjustment. The consistently higher rates of re-entry and/or new founded abuse allegations for the treatment group are likely a reflection of the fact that shorter times to reunification tend to be weakly associated with an increased risk of these reunification outcomes. Though non-significant for this particular sample, this difference merits longer-term monitoring.

TABLE 6.

Post-Reunification Re-Entry and Founded Rates for Matched Sample

Group	OUTCOME WITHIN 12 MONTHS OF REUNIFICATION			Children Reunified
	Placement Re-Entry	New Founded Intake	Re-Entry or Founded	
Treatment Group	6.4%	4.2%	8.1%	1,314
Comparison Group	2.8%	1.9%	4.3%	226
Difference (C-T)	3.6%	2.3%	3.8%	—
Logistic Regression p-value (adjusted)	.09	.64	.13	—
Both Groups	5.9%	3.8%	7.5%	1,540

Concurrent Benefit Costs and Savings

Using an estimate of average out-of-home placement costs per child-day of \$27.33 from data provided by Children’s Administration,¹⁰ we can compare the costs of the TANF concurrent benefits to their potential out-of-home placement savings. This comparison should be interpreted as a rough estimate, under the assumption that the estimated concurrent-benefit “treatment effect” reported in this paper is not biased by confounding that is not fully controlled for by our propensity-score matching process. Concurrent benefits are defined here as the child’s portion of the TANF benefit received by the assistance unit (AU) if the removed child is not the only child making the AU eligible for TANF, or the entire TANF benefit received by the assistance unit if all children are removed from the TANF household. Note that prior to the August 2008 policy change that expanded the availability of concurrent benefits, TANF families whose children were placed in a licensed foster home could continue to receive TANF benefits for the absent child for 90 days. When the child was placed in unlicensed care and received a TANF benefit in the placement home, the removal family could not continue to receive benefits for the absent child. With the change in policy in August 2008, the length of time was extended to 180 days and the removal family could continue to receive TANF even if the child was receiving TANF benefits in the placement home. It is important to note that the costs reported in Table 7 include concurrent benefits paid to children placed in a licensed foster home during the first 90 days of placement, as allowed under the policies in place prior to August 2008. Table 7 essentially assesses the costs and savings associated with providing concurrent benefits under the current rules, relative to not providing concurrent benefits at all, rather than assessing the impact of the *change* in concurrent benefit policy that occurred in August 2008.

⁹ Case weights from the matching procedure.

¹⁰ Provided by the Children’s Administration Finance & Performance Evaluation Division. The costs are for out-of-home placement care and do not include expenditures such as transportation, sibling visitation, and other costs.

The results shown in Table 7 are affected by the fact that reductions in time to exit for children who are reunified are partially offset by the longer times to exit for children who are adopted. Payments of concurrent benefits to children who are later switched from the reunification to the adoption track reduce the financial savings resulting from the provision of concurrent benefits.

TABLE 7.

Costs and Savings for Matched Sample

- **Concurrent Benefit** = Family continued to receive child's portion of TANF after removal
- **Comparison** = Family lost child's portion of TANF at time of removal

Difference, Mean Days in Care	Children in Treatment Group	Concurrent Benefit Costs	Out-of-Home Care Savings	Net Cost	Net Cost per Child (n = 4,511)
41	3,732	\$4,776,438	\$4,181,818	\$594,620	\$132
Average concurrent benefits cost per child in the matched treatment group: $\$4,776,438 \div 3,732 = \underline{\$1,280}$					

Summary

This study compared placement outcomes for children in out-of-home care whose removal family received concurrent TANF benefits, relative to children whose removal family did not retain this benefit. Analyses were conducted for a set of families matched on baseline case characteristics, to control for other potential factors that could account for differences in reunification rates. We found that receipt of concurrent TANF benefits is associated with reduced time to reunification, relative to the matched comparison group. We also found that although the provision of concurrent TANF benefits is not associated with a *statistically significant* increase in the proportion of children who are reunified but then subsequently re-enter out-of-home care or are the victims in a subsequent founded CPS intake within 12 months of reunification, the proportions were higher in the concurrent benefit group. This finding merits longer-term monitoring to see whether these differences persist. Finally, we found that the provision of concurrent benefits is approximately cost-neutral from a budget perspective, with the cost of the provision of concurrent TANF benefits being slightly greater than the savings associated with reduced foster care payments resulting from more rapid reunification of children in families receiving concurrent benefits.

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SUMMARY OF ANALYTICAL APPROACH

- “Treatment” of concurrent benefits was defined as continued receipt of the child’s portion of TANF benefits after removal of the child, for any number of months while the child was in placement. The comparison group was defined as children whose families were receiving TANF at the time of removal, but did not continue to receive the child’s portion of their TANF benefit while the child was in placement (removed from the home).
- Propensity score matching with replacement (Abadie and Imbens, 2007) using the genetic search algorithm of (Diamond and Sekhon, 2005) as implemented in the MatchIt R package (Ho, Imai, King & Stuart (2007), was used to construct a matched treatment-comparison sample.
- Kaplan-Meier estimates of mean and median time to exit and cross-tabulation of percent reunified within 12 months were calculated (Table 4).
- A series of Cox proportional hazards regressions using R (R Core Team 2013, Harrell 2013) showed only minor reductions in the magnitude of the treatment effect (hazard odds ratio) after adjustment for other case characteristics.
- Results from Competing Risk survival analysis models (Gray, 1988; Fine & Gray, 1999; Gray 2013) indicated that there is an increase in the magnitude of the treatment effect when accounting for the probability of a child moving from the reunification track to adoption or other permanency outcomes.¹¹
- Logistic regression showed that the observed differences in percentage of post-reunification placement re-entry and/or new founded abuse allegations between treatment and comparison groups were not statistically significant when accounting for case weights and adjusting for other case characteristics.

MATCHING RESULTS

Table 8 shows the change in covariate ‘balance’ for each category of the characteristics of the matched concurrent benefits and comparison groups.

TABLE 8.

Pre- and Post-Matching Percentages for Concurrent Benefits-Comparison Characteristics

* = Covariates used for matching

** = Additional covariates used in time to exit and post-reunification outcome models

Covariate	Before Matching (TOTAL = 4,629)			After Matching (weighted) (TOTAL = 4,511)		
	Concurrent Benefits (n = 3,732)	Comparison (n = 897)	Abs(Δ)	Concurrent Benefits (n = 3,732)	Comparison (n = 779)	Abs(Δ)
Region (collapsed)*						
Region 1*	18.1	16.4	1.7	18.8	17.4	1.4
Regions 2, 3, 6*	42.5	49.2	6.7	42.5	42.6	0.1
Regions 4, 5*	38.7	34.4	4.3	38.7	40.0	1.3
Region						
Region 1	18.8	16.4	2.4	18.8	17.4	1.4
Region 2	11.8	14.4	2.6	11.8	11.1	0.7
Region 3	16.8	17.4	0.6	16.8	16.6	0.2
Region 4	12.5	15.0	2.5	12.5	15.0	2.5
Region 5	26.2	19.4	6.5	26.2	24.9	1.3
Region 6	13.9	17.4	3.5	13.9	14.9	1.0
Age at Removal > 9*	16.4	21.3	4.9	16.4	16.4	0
Primary Caregiver is Male*	6.3	9.7	3.4	6.3	6.3	0

¹¹ Since some TANF concurrent benefit funds are in fact being spent on cases that never result in reunification, the treatment effect values in Table 2 provide the most realistic estimate of the net benefit of the program.

Covariate	Before Matching (TOTAL = 4,629)			After Matching (weighted) (TOTAL = 4,511)		
	Concurrent Benefits (n = 3,732)	Comparison (n = 897)	Abs(Δ)	Concurrent Benefits (n = 3,732)	Comparison (n = 779)	Abs(Δ)
Primary Caregiver Race						
White	65.9	60.5	5.4	65.9	65.0	0.9
Asian/other	3.9	4.2	0.3	3.9	2.4	1.5
Black	10.5	11.2	0.7	10.5	11.4	0.9
Hispanic	9.8	12.0	2.2	9.8	8.9	0.9
Native American	9.9	12.0	2.1	9.9	12.3	2.4
Primary Caregiver AOD TX prior 12 months*	58.6	48.8	9.8	58.6	58.3	0.3
Primary Caregiver Mental Illness prior 12 months**	65.6	53.1	12.5	65.6	65.7	0.1
Primary Caregiver criminality prior 12 months*	47.3	52.7	5.4	47.3	50.0	2.7
Domestic Violence prior 12 months*	42.7	39.8	2.9	42.7	41.8	0.9
Child is Male*	50.8	47.5	3.3	50.8	48.0	2.8
Child Race*						
White*	52.6	47.4	5.2	52.6	54.8	2.2
Asian/other*	3.2	3.8	0.6	3.2	3.0	0.2
Black*	15.9	16.7	0.8	15.9	15.8	0.1
Hispanic*	15.1	18.3	3.2	15.1	13.3	1.8
Native American*	13.2	13.8	0.6	13.2	13.0	0.2
Child is Different Race than Primary Caregiver**	23.6	21.7	1.9	23.6	19.6	4.0
Child Mental Illness/Behavioral Issues (CODB and FAMLINK)*	55.8	55.8	0	55.8	56.3	0.5
N prior neglect intakes > 2*	52.3	59.0	6.7	52.3	54.2	1.9
Homelessness prior 12 months*	34.5	35.8	1.3	34.5	32.0	2.5
SDM Risk Mod. High - High*	73.1	77.4	4.3	73.1	73.4	0.3
SDM risk						
No SDM found	17.3	13.8	3.5	17.3	17.3	0
Low Risk	0.5	0.8	0.3	0.5	0.5	0
Moderate Risk	9.1	8.0	1.1	9.1	8.6	0.5
Moderately High Risk	41.5	42.8	1.3	41.5	42.0	0.5
High Risk	31.6	34.6	3.0	31.6	31.4	0.2
Placement Type Indicators						
First event with Relative*	41.6	38.9	2.7	41.6	40.6	1.0
Placed with Relative by 90 th day in care**	48.3	49.6	1.3	48.3	50.4	2.1
Any use of Group Care in first 90 days of placement**	5.3	5.2	0.1	5.3	5.1	0.2
Placement Move in first 90 days in placement**						
No Moves in first 90 days**	54.8	55.6	0.8	54.8	54.5	0.3
Moved TO or BETWEEN Relatives**	10.8	8.2	2.6	10.8	10.6	0.2
Moved FROM Relatives to Non-Relatives, or between Non-Relatives**	34.5	36.1	1.6	34.5	34.9	0.4
SW-child visit compliance**	86.4	86.4	0	86.4	85.9	0.5

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