



Strengths and Stressors in Region XI Head Start: The Role of Social Support and Economic Condition in the Well-Being of Children and Families from AIAN FACES 2019

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To best support families with low income, Head Start programs seek to understand their supports and stressors, and how together they inform family and child well-being. In particular, social support can help buffer the impact of poor economic condition on child and family well-being. This is important because families experiencing poor economic condition such as financial strain also report higher levels of parent depressive symptoms, more negative parenting behaviors, and worse developmental outcomes for children (Jackson et al. 2000). The presence of social supports can mean that these stressors have less severe implications for family and child well-being. For example, evidence shows that parents with low income who say they have more social support also report less parenting stress and fewer harmful parenting behaviors such as yelling, slapping, or spanking (Hashima and Amato 1994; McConnell et al. 2011). Social and community support, such as being able to get a meal or a loan in an emergency, can ease financial strain. Community and cultural connections can also be vital forms of social support in American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) communities, and they could lessen parents' sense of financial strain even if they have low household incomes and face material hardships like an inability to afford food or electricity. These connections (referred to as social and community supports in this brief) might be particularly relevant in AIAN communities, where problems are often framed as communal and not individual, and where the community is seen as part of

the solution (Trucksess 2017). Cultural identity can also promote a person's health, resilience, and well-being (Fleming and Ledogar 2008; LaFromboise et al. 2006; Pu et al. 2013; Wexler 2014). Connections across the generations can be another source of support (Bahr 1994; Thompson et al. 2013).

These forms of social and community support could be particularly important because more than half of all American Indian or Alaska Native children in the U.S. live



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning.

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in poverty or near poverty (Barofsky et al. 2018a). Children who live in or near poverty are more likely than children in wealthier homes to have poor cognitive outcomes (limited vocabulary, for example) and poor behavioral outcomes (such as withdrawn, aggressive, and anxious behavior) (Berger et al. 2009). In one nationally representative study, AIAN children who had lived in poverty before kindergarten had lower kindergarten reading and math scores than AIAN children who had not lived in poverty (Riser et al. 2019).

Poverty is not just associated with cognitive and behavioral outcomes. When children live in poverty, their health is more likely to be poor, with higher levels of asthma and obesity, for example (Glied and Oellerich 2014). And compared with parents whose incomes are higher, parents

living in poverty report more depressive symptoms, such as sadness and hopelessness (McDonald et al. 2020), and fewer positive parenting practices (Russell et al. 2008).

To understand the persistence or depth of families' material needs, it is not enough to know their incomes. Understanding the related components of economic condition—such as material hardship and financial strain (see key constructs box)—along with poverty could reveal more clearly how well children and families are coping economically (Gershoff et al. 2007; Mayer and Jencks 1989; Perry 2002). Many families go through brief periods of poverty but continue to face material hardships that last much longer (Iceland and Bauman 2007). Indeed, material hardship confronts more children in the U.S. than does

Key constructs examined

- We use **economic condition** to refer to families' poverty level and experiences of material hardship and financial strain.
 - The **poverty level** uses household income relative to the number of people in the household to determine whether a family is living in poverty. Families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold are considered to have low incomes, with those between 100 and 200 percent of the threshold defined as “near poor” (Czajka and Denmead 2008). For example, 100 percent of the federal poverty threshold for a household of four in 2018 was \$25,701, and 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold for a household of four was \$51,402.
 - **Material hardship** is a lack of access to basic needs (Rodems and Shaefer 2020). In keeping with existing literature (Beverly 2001; Chaudry and Wimer 2016; Zilanawala and Pilkauskas 2012), and with input from the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AIAN FACES) Workgroup (Bernstein et al. 2021b), AIAN FACES 2019 measures five different types of material hardship: medical needs, utilities, transportation, food insecurity (inability to pay for food), and household crowding (see Measures box at the end of this brief for more detail). Each type of hardship is measured by between one and six items.
 - **Financial strain** is the perception or sense that there is not enough money for daily life (Adams et al. 2016). In AIAN FACES, we base the definition of financial strain on parents' answers to questions about whether they thought they could afford the kind of home, clothing, food, or medical care they needed (Conger et al. 1993; Raver et al. 2013).
- **Social and community support** is the type of help that people say they can get from others. In this brief, we consider three forms of social and community support:
 - **Material support** such as being able to get an emergency loan or cash from family or friends¹
 - Support in the form of living with a grandparent or great-grandparent (also called living in a **multigenerational household**)
 - **Community cultural activities** (with someone outside the immediate family) that the child has participated in over the past 12 months

poverty (Rodems and Shaefer 2020), and it has been shown to influence the relationships between family income and children’s social-emotional competence (Gershoff et al. 2007). Also, adults in families who are under financial strain (or feel they can’t afford things that are necessary for daily life), have a higher likelihood of poor mental health (Raver et al. 2015).

Findings from the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey (AIAN FACES) 2015 reveal that about three-quarters of Region XI Head Start families are considered to have low household incomes, with household incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold (Barofsky et al. 2018b). Yet at the same time, almost three-quarters of families say they faced no financial strains in the past year. This brief focuses on the associations between poverty, material hardships, and parents’ perception of financial strain. Looking at these associations is an important way to understand the interplay between families’ strengths and needs in Region XI.

The brief is based on data from AIAN FACES 2019. We use parent reports here to describe families’ economic conditions and the forms of social and community support they have.² We also explore whether families with different levels of social and community support report different

levels of financial strain and material hardship. Finally, we examine whether financial strain and material hardship predict family and child well-being beyond household income, and whether social and community supports predict family and child well-being above and beyond household income, financial strain, and material hardship (see technical appendix for more detailed information on these analyses).³

This brief provides information about the associations between economic condition, social and community supports, and child and family well-being. However, the study design does not allow us to examine the causal connections between these variables. That is, we cannot determine whether economic condition and social and community supports cause or lead to differences in child and family well-being, nor are we able to speak to the direction of the relationships between these factors.

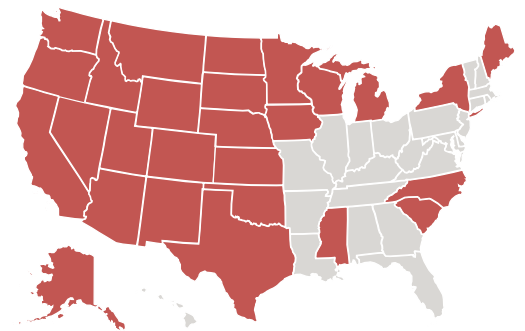
All estimates in this brief are at the child level and should be interpreted as the percentage of children. For simplicity’s sake, we use the terms “parents” and “families,” and not “children’s parents” and “children’s families,” throughout the brief. Weighted estimates from parent-reported data are nationally representative of children in Region XI Head Start.

What is Region XI Head Start?

As part of its management of Head Start, the federal government divides Head Start programs into 12 regions. Ten of the 12 are geographically defined. The other two are defined by the populations they serve: Region XI serves children and families in programs operated by federally recognized AIAN tribes, and Region XII serves migrant and seasonal workers and their families. AIAN FACES 2019 is a study describing the children, families, and programs in Region XI. In 2019, there were about 145 Head Start programs across the U.S. in Region XI. These programs served about 20,000 children, and most of those children were AIAN. It is important to note, however, that not all children served in Region XI are AIAN.

Region XI Head Start programs may enroll families with incomes above the poverty threshold if: (1) all eligible children in the service area who wish to be enrolled participate in Head Start; (2) the program has resources in its grant to enroll children whose family incomes exceed the low-income guidelines in the Head Start Program Performance Standards; and (3) at least 51 percent of the program’s participants meet the income eligibility criteria in the Head Start Program Performance Standards (45 CFR Chapter XIII, <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/hspss-final.pdf>).

States with Region XI Head Start Programs



Research questions and key findings

1. What kinds of social and community support do families have?

- Parents of Region XI children have high levels of social and community support. More than half report they have three of four types of material support, and most report their child participated in at least one community cultural activity in the past year. In addition, about one-fifth of Region XI children live with a grandparent or great-grandparent (either alone or with parents in the house).

2. How are families doing economically?

- More than a quarter of Region XI children live in households where no parent in the household works full time, and more than half live in households with incomes at or below 200 percent of the poverty threshold.⁴
- More than half of parents have at least one type of material hardship, with transportation being the most common (more than one third of parents report at least one transportation-related hardship).
- The majority of parents report they have no financial strains.

3. Do families with different levels of material hardship and financial strain report different levels of social and community support?

- Parents who face the most types of material hardships have fewer material supports (such as the ability to get a loan in an emergency).
- Parents who report feeling no financial strains also say they have more material supports than the parents who feel one or more financial strains.

4. Are material hardship and financial strain associated with the well-being of the child and family, beyond the effects of income?

- Material hardship and financial strain are associated with higher parent depressive symptom scores, and more financial strain is associated with worse parent-reported child health.

5. Are social and community supports associated with the well-being of the child and family, beyond the effects of economic condition?

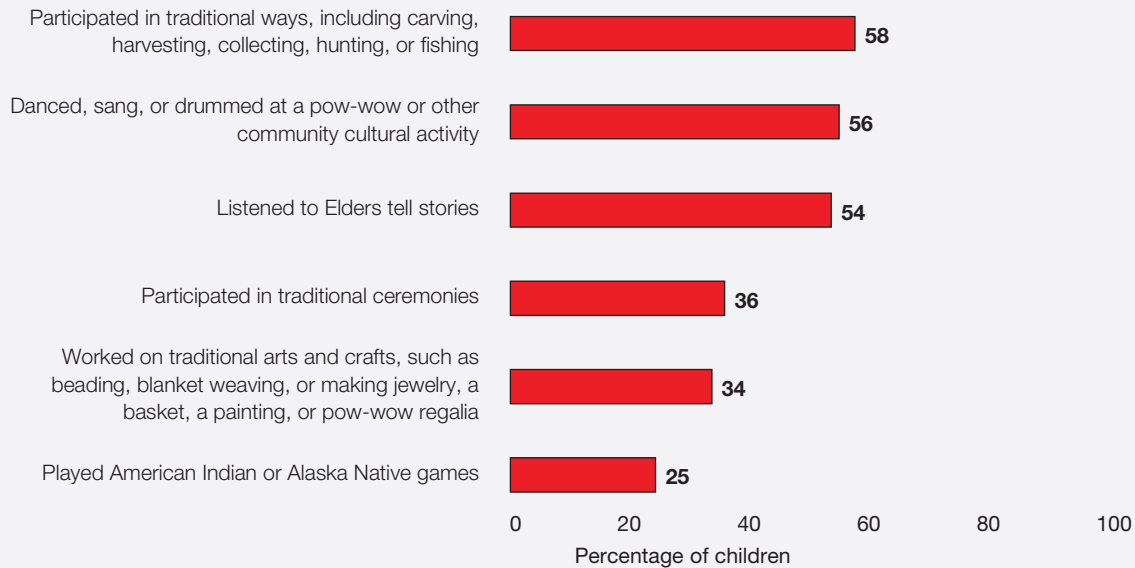
- A child's participation in more community cultural activities is associated with very small increases in children's approaches to learning (learning behaviors like attention and persistence), accounting for economic condition.
- More material supports are associated with lower parent depressive symptoms scores, but living in a multigenerational household is associated with higher parent depressive symptoms scores, beyond the effects of economic condition.

What kinds of social and community support do families have?

Social and community support might reduce parent perceptions of family financial strain, even in the presence of material hardship. To understand how, we look first at the types of support that were available to parents.

We find that Region XI Head Start children and their families have access to a variety of social and community supports. Most children participate in a variety of community cultural activities, and about one-fifth of children live in a multigenerational household. Most parents report having at least one material support, and more than half of parents have at least three of the survey's four types of material support.

Exhibit 1. Children participate in a variety of community cultural activities

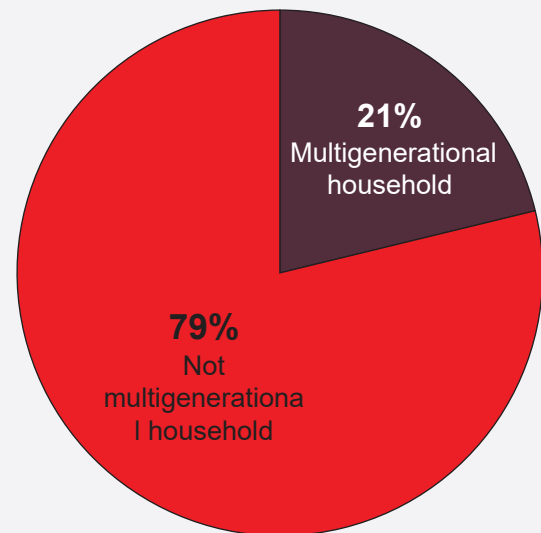


Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.15 in the accompanying appendix.

- In the past year, more than half of children have participated in traditional ways like carving and harvesting (58 percent), have danced, sang, or drummed at pow-wows or other community culture activities (56 percent), and have listened to Elders tell stories (54 percent) (Exhibit 1).
- Children who live in multigenerational households live with at least one grandparent or great-grandparent (Exhibit 2).
- Of children who live in multigenerational households, more than half live with both their grandparents or great-grandparents and their parents (59 percent). The remaining 41 percent of children live in households with their grandparents or great-grandparents and without their parents (Appendix Table A.14).
- Grandparents or great grandparents completed the parent survey in about half of multigenerational households. Of children who live in multigenerational households with their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents completed the parent survey in approximately one-quarter of cases. Of children who live in multigenerational households without parents, grandparents or great-grandparent completed the parent survey in most cases (see technical appendix for more information on respondent relationship to child).

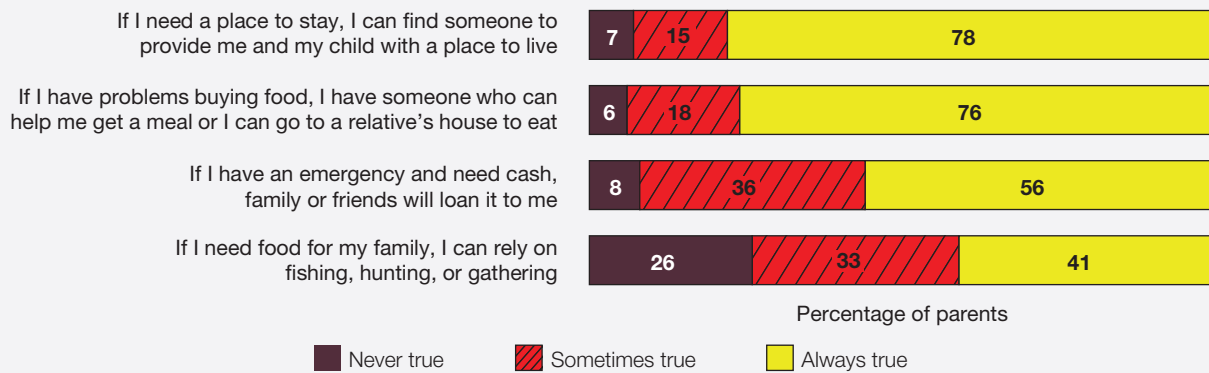
Exhibit 2. About one-fifth of children live in multigenerational households



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.13 in the accompanying appendix.

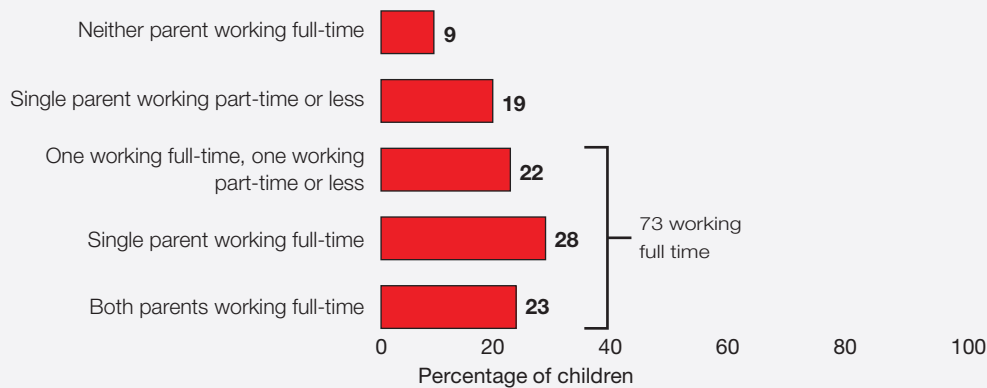
Exhibit 3. The majority of parents have material supports for food and housing if needed



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.12 in the accompanying appendix.

Exhibit 4. Most children live in households with at least one parent working full time



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Data include one- or two-parent households with biological parents.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding. Sums of percentages reported in figures may differ from sums of percentages reported in appendix tables because of different levels of rounding.

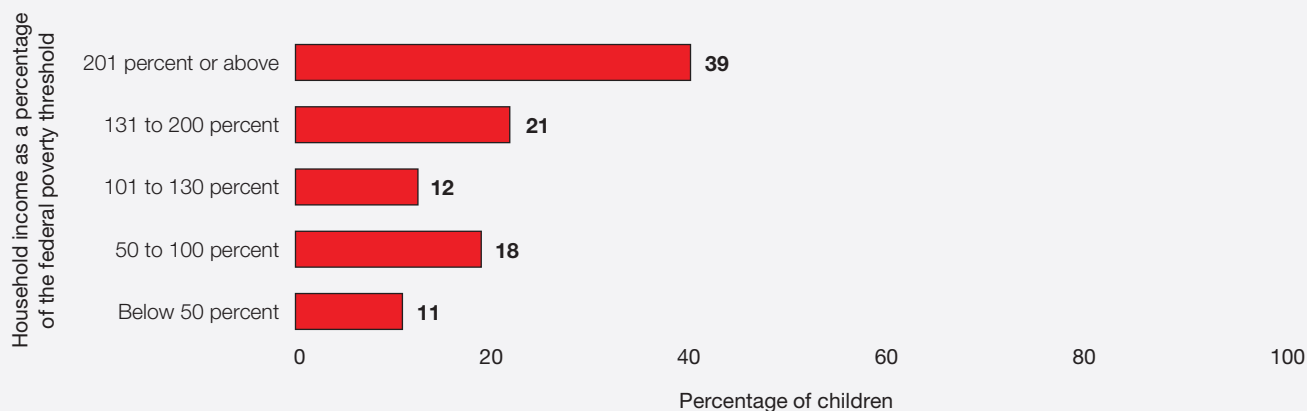
Data are drawn from Table A.3 in the accompanying appendix.

- Only eight percent of parents say they have none of the four types of material supports available to them (Appendix Table A.13).
- More than three-fourths of parents say they can always find someone to give them a place to live, making it the most common form of support (Exhibit 3).
- Over seventy percent of children live in households with at least one parent working full time (73 percent) (Exhibit 4).

How are families doing economically?

Next, we look at families' economic conditions, including parent employment, household income, material hardship, and financial strain.

Exhibit 5. Over one-fourth of children live in households with incomes below the federal poverty threshold



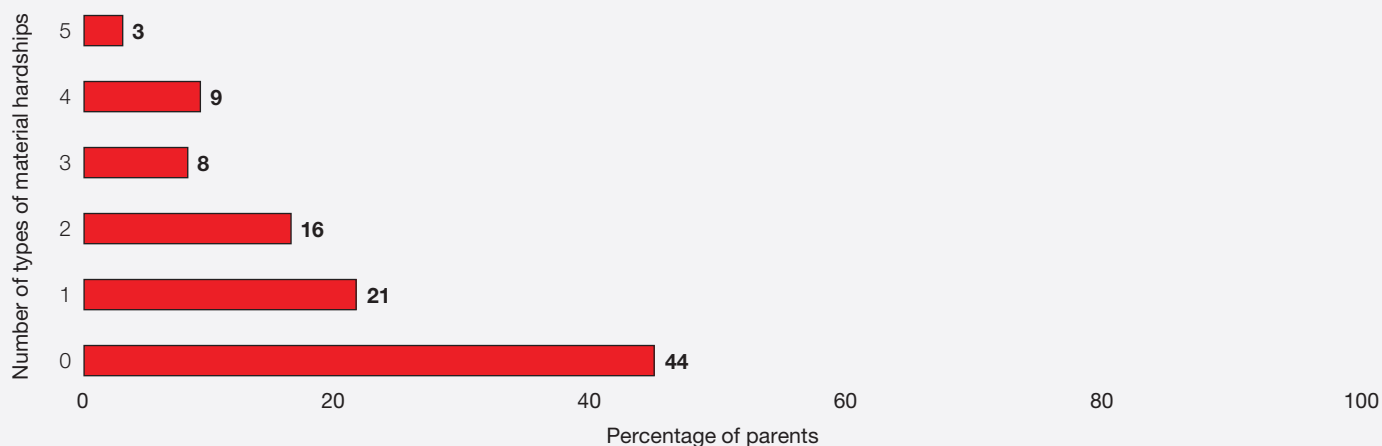
Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Data are drawn from Table A.1 in the accompanying appendix.

Exhibit 6. Most parents report facing few (or no) types of material hardships



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

The five types of material hardships are transportation, utilities, medical, food insecurity, and household crowding.

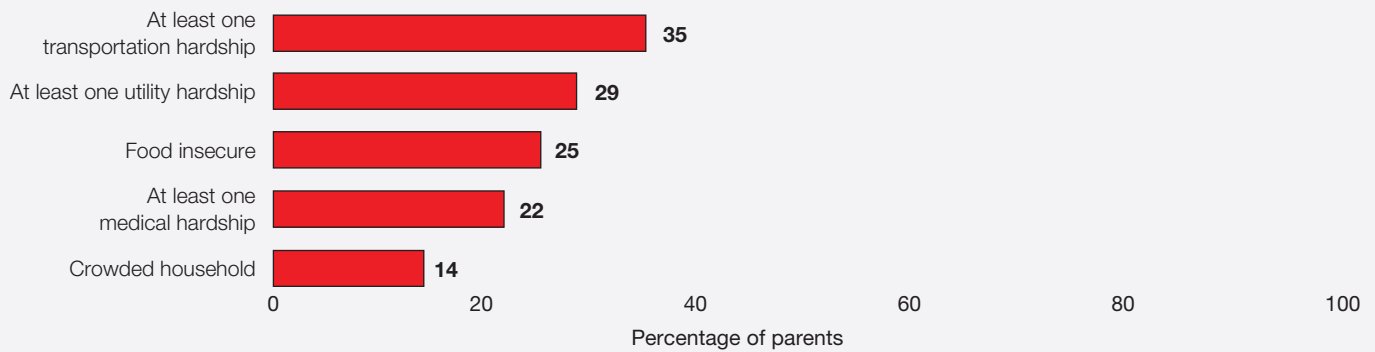
Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Data are drawn from Table A.8 in the accompanying appendix.

Families' economic conditions are mixed. Most children live in households with at least one parent working full time, and most parents report no financial strains. However, more than half of children live in poor or near-poor households, and more than half are in households facing at least one type of material hardship related to medical needs, utilities, transportation, food security, or household crowding. Parents who report facing financial strains and parents in households with lower incomes also report more material hardship compared to other parents.⁵

- Twenty-nine percent of children in Region XI Head Start live in households with incomes below the federal poverty threshold, and more than half live in households at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty threshold (Exhibit 5).⁶
- Just one in five parents (20 percent) say they are dealing with three or more material hardships (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 7. The most common material hardships are transportation-related

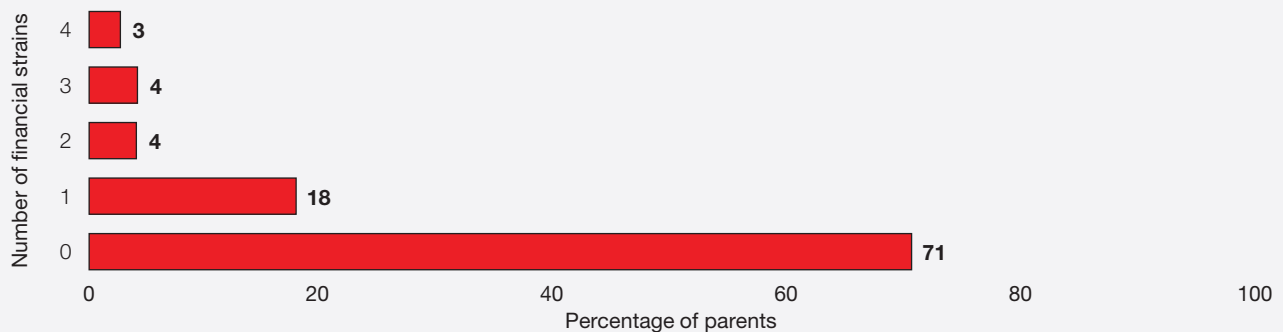


Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.4, Table A.5, Table A.6, and Table A.7 in the accompanying appendix.

- Each of the five types of material hardship are faced by at least 14 percent of parents. Transportation issues are the type of hardship faced by the most parents (35 percent). On average, the most common transportation issue is the inability to afford gas to get where they need to go at least once in the past 12 months (reported by 29 percent) (Appendix Table A.6) (Exhibit 7).
- Twenty-nine percent of parents report at least one of three possible hardships involving basic utilities, with the most common being not having phone or cell service (21 percent) (Appendix Table A.4).
- Twenty-five percent of parents report that their household is food insecure, indicating an inability to pay for food of the quantity, quality, type, or variety they want.
- Twenty-two percent of parents face at least one of two possible medical hardships, most commonly the inability to afford medications, glasses, or other medical supplies (18 percent) (Appendix Table A.5).

Exhibit 8. The majority of parents perceive few financial strains

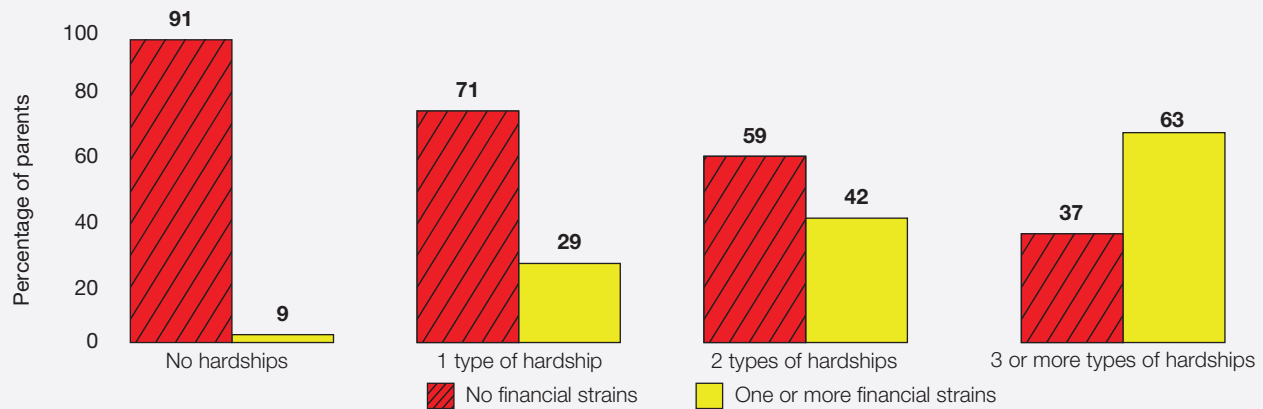


Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.2 in the accompanying appendix.

- Despite the number of parents reporting material hardship, parents perceive few financial strains (including being unable to afford the clothing, food, home, and medical care they need), with 71 percent reporting none (Exhibit 8).
- Another 18 percent of parents report just one financial strain, and the remaining 11 percent of parents report they are dealing with two or more financial strains.

Exhibit 9. Parents who report more material hardships are more likely to report financial strains



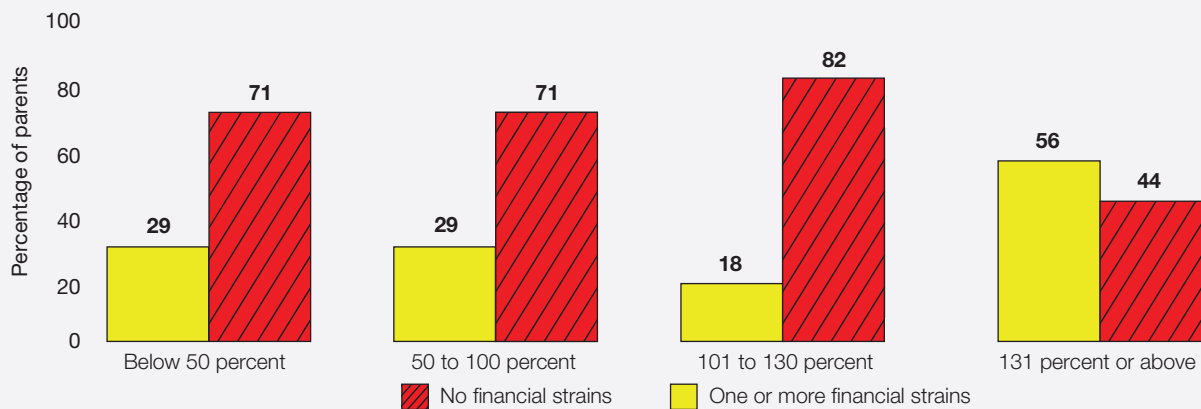
Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Data are drawn from Table A.11 in the accompanying appendix.

Exhibit 10. Parents with the highest incomes do not report as many types of material hardships



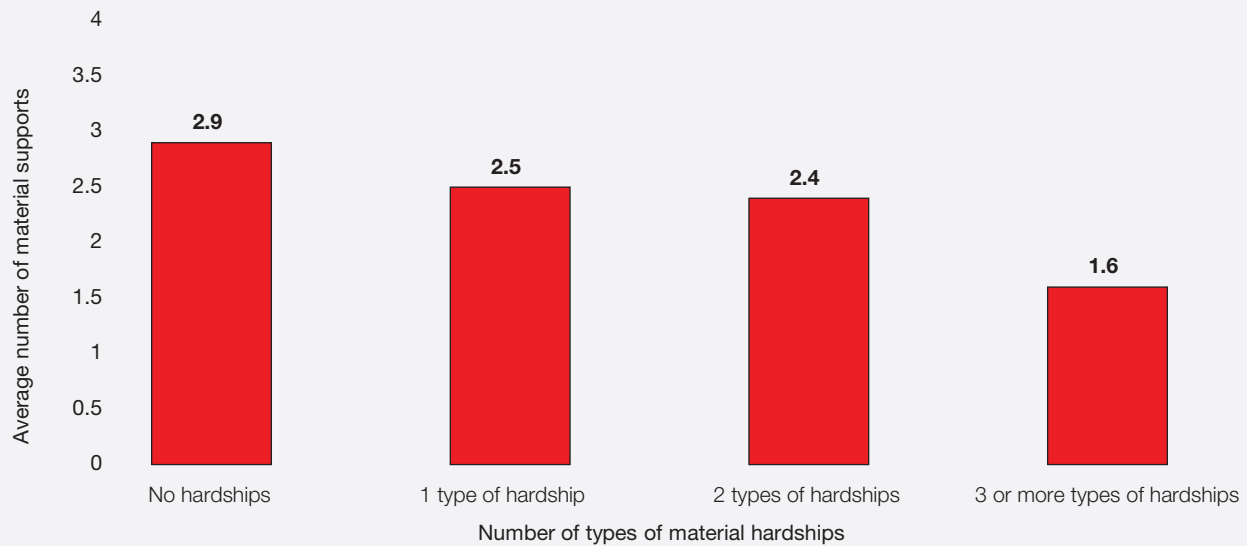
Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Data are drawn from Table A.10 in the accompanying appendix.

- Less than half of parents who report between zero and two types of material hardships report one or more financial strains (Exhibit 9).
- Parents reporting no material hardships are less likely to report one or more financial strains (9 percent), compared with parents with one or more types of material hardships (29 to 63 percent).
- Parents reporting three or more types of material hardships are more likely to report one or more financial strains (63 percent), compared with 42 percent or less for parents with two or fewer types of material hardships.
- More than half of parents (56 percent) in households at 131 percent or more above the federal poverty threshold are not experiencing any of the five types of material hardships measured by the survey. Just 18 percent of parents with household incomes between 101 and 130 percent of the federal poverty threshold report no material hardships (Exhibit 10).
- Although parents with the highest household incomes report fewer material hardships, parents in these households do not report a different number of financial strains compared to parents in other households.

Exhibit 11. Parents who face the most types of material hardships have fewer sources of material support than parents with fewer types of material hardships



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

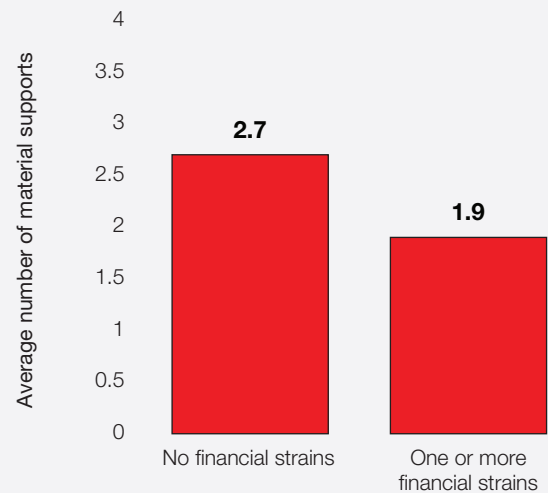
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.18 in the accompanying appendix.

- Parents who report no material hardships have more material supports available to them than parents who report one, two, or three or more types of material hardships. Parents who say they face three or more types of material hardships report fewer material supports than parents who zero, one, or two types of material hardships (Exhibit 11).

Do families with different levels of material hardship and financial strain report different levels of social and community support?

Next, we look at whether parents who face different levels of material hardship and financial strain also report different levels of social and community support, including material support, living in a multi-generational household, and participating in community cultural activities. **We find that parents who experience more material hardship and financial strain tend to have fewer material supports.**

Exhibit 12. Parents who report no financial strains also report more material supports than parents who report one or more financial strains



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.16 in the accompanying appendix.

While parents who experience more material hardship and financial strain tend to have fewer material supports, parents in multigenerational and non-multigenerational households tend to report similar material hardship and financial strain. We examined differences in the percentage of multigenerational households at each level of material hardship and financial strain. We find only one difference: parents who report one type of material hardship are more likely than parents who report none to live in a multigenerational household (Appendix Table A.18). Families in multigenerational households are no more or less likely to face financial strain than non-multigenerational households are (Appendix Table A.16).

Similarly, children’s participation in community cultural activities is not different based on family material hardship and financial strain. We examined differences in the number of community cultural activities reported at each level of material hardship and financial strain. Parents who face more types of material hardships are not significantly different from other parents in the numbers of community cultural activities their child was involved in during the past year (Appendix Table A.19). Similarly, whether or not a family experiences financial strain is not related to their child’s participation in community cultural activities (Appendix Table A.17).

Are material hardship and financial strain associated with the well-being of the child and family, beyond the effects of income?

Poverty is linked to a number of poor outcomes for both children and parents. Next, we examine whether other measures of economic condition (specifically material hardship and financial strain) are related to the well-being of children and families, beyond household income. In this brief, we describe the associations for 4 of 11 children’s development and family well-being outcomes examined – (1) parental depressive symptoms, (2) children’s receptive vocabulary, (3) children’s approaches to learning, and (4) children’s general health status. We focus on these four outcomes to represent the mix of data sources examined (parent surveys, direct assessment, and

teacher child reports). Please see the technical appendix for details about additional analyses for the remaining seven outcomes.

Material hardship is associated with more parent depressive symptoms, and financial strain is associated with more parent depressive symptoms and worse parent-reported child health, after accounting for poverty status and the children’s characteristics.⁷ Neither material hardship nor financial strain was associated with children’s receptive vocabulary or approaches to learning, after accounting for poverty status and the children’s characteristics.

Outcomes overview

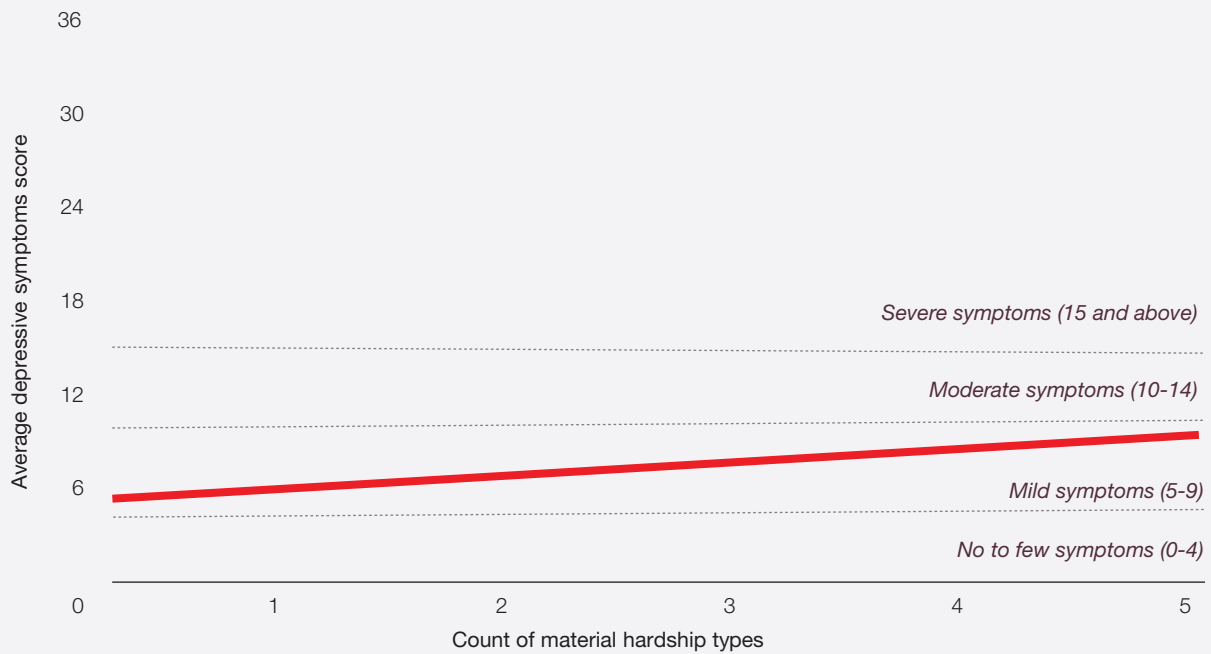
We use **family and child well-being** to refer to aspects of family well-being, including aspects of parental mental health and children’s development.

We examined one measure of **family well-being**: parental depressive symptoms (such as sadness, hopelessness, or restlessness).

We also looked at three measures of **children’s development**: receptive vocabulary (how many words a child understands), approaches to learning (learning behaviors like attention and persistence), and parents’ reports of their children’s general health status.

Please see the technical appendix for details about these outcomes.

Exhibit 13. Parents experiencing more types of material hardships report higher levels of depressive symptoms



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Depressive symptoms (type and frequency) are measured from 0 to 36 points. To calculate depressive symptoms scores, parents reported how often each item in a list of 12 statements applied to them in the past week. Scores for individual items are recoded from 0 to 3 and summed for a possible range from 0 to 36. Data are drawn from Table A.20 in the accompanying appendix.

- Parents’ experiences of material hardships and reports of depressive symptoms are linked. Parents’ depressive symptoms score is 0.82 points higher for each additional material hardship type reported. As an example, parents experiencing no material hardships report depressive symptoms in the mild range on average (5.3). Parents reporting one type of material hardship, all other things being equal, report depressive symptoms scores of 6.2 on average (which also falls in the mild range). Parents facing all five types of hardships report depressive symptoms scores of 9.4 on average, still in the mild range (Exhibit 13).
- Overall, three-quarters of parents (75 percent) report either few or no depressive symptoms (0 to 4 points) or report mild symptoms (5 to 9 points).

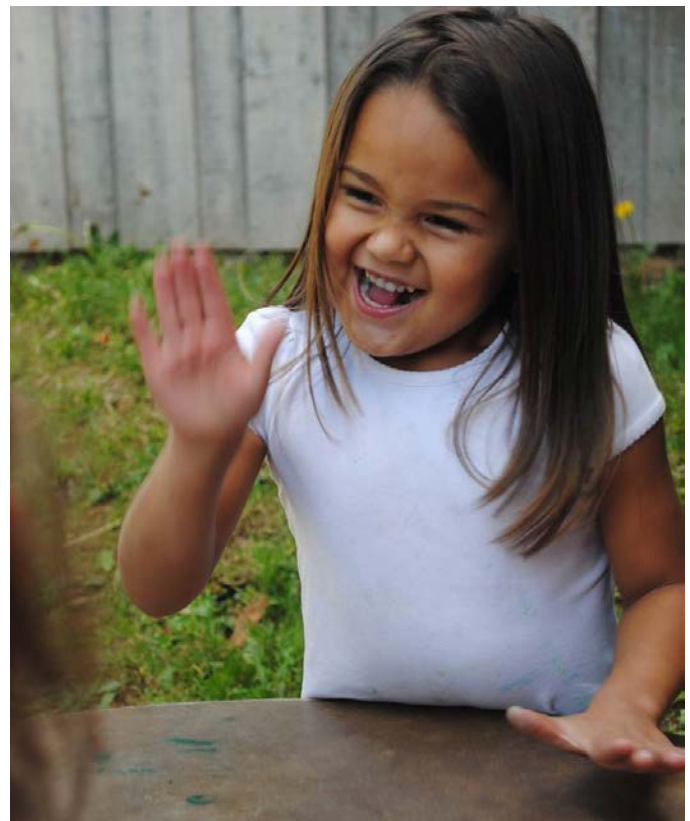
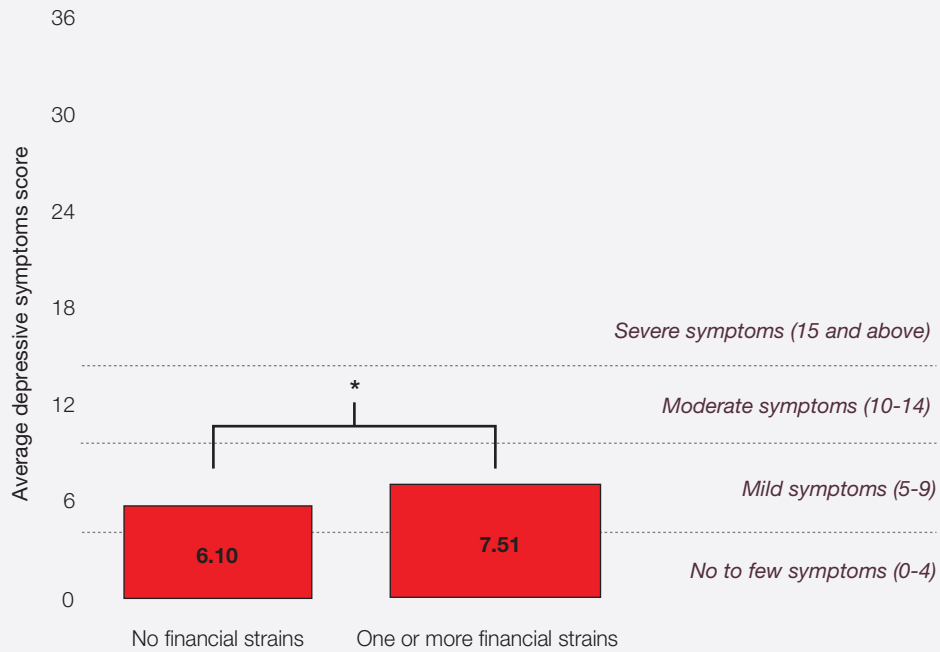


Exhibit 14. Parents experiencing financial strain report higher levels of depressive symptoms



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Figure reports adjusted means, which are average scores accounting for whether the child is AIAN or not, whether the child is new to Head Start, his or her age and sex, the mother's education, parents' employment, household poverty, and material hardship.

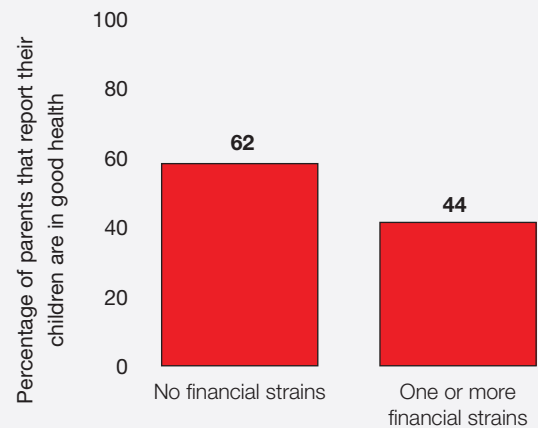
Depressive symptoms (type and frequency) are measured from 0 to 36 points. To calculate depressive symptoms scores, parents reported how often each item in a list of 12 statements applied to them in the past week. Scores for individual items are recoded from 0 to 3 and summed for a possible range from 0 to 36.

Asterisk indicates that the differences between groups are statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

Data are drawn from Table A.20 in the accompanying appendix.

- Dealing with one or more financial strains is associated with depressive symptoms scores that are 1.4 points higher than those for parents with no financial strains (Exhibit 14).
- Sixty-two percent of parents with no financial strains report their children are in good health, while only 44 percent of parents with one or more financial strains report their children are in good health. Accounting for other child and family characteristics, we find that parents without financial strains are 26% more likely to report that their children are in good health (Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 15. Parents not experiencing financial strain are more likely to report good child physical health



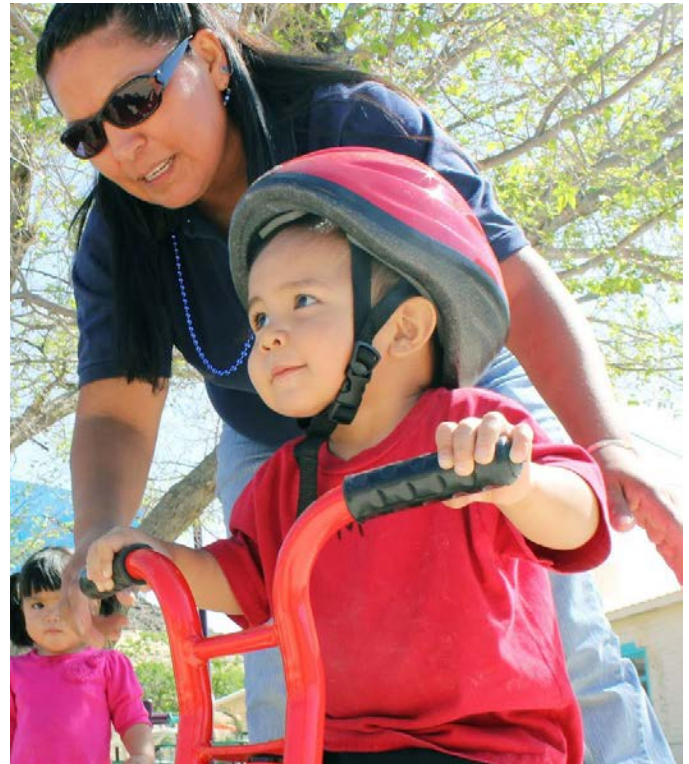
Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Data are drawn from Table A.30 in the accompanying appendix.

Are social and community supports associated with the well-being of the child and family, beyond the effects of economic condition?

Each of the three types of supports (material support, multigenerational household, community cultural activities) is associated with one of the four family and child outcomes.⁸ Family access to more types of material support is associated with lower levels of parent depressive symptoms, living in a multigenerational household is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, and child participation in more types of community cultural activities is associated with higher child approaches to learning scores (Exhibit 16). These supports are not associated with children’s receptive vocabulary. We were not able to examine whether social and community supports are associated with the child health due to our small sample size.



Source: National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning.

Exhibit 16. Social and community supports are associated with two child and family well-being outcomes after accounting for economic condition and other characteristics

	Parent depressive symptoms	Child approaches to learning
Household poverty level as a percentage of the federal poverty threshold (Ref: > 130%)^a		
<50%	No	No
50-100%	No	No
101-130%	No	No
Financial strain	No	No
Material hardship	No	No
Count of types of material supports	Parents with more material supports have lower levels of depressive symptoms	No
Count of types of community cultural activities	No	Children who participate in more community cultural activities have higher approaches to learning scores
Multigenerational household	Parents in multigenerational households have higher levels of depressive symptoms	No

Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey and Teacher Child Report.

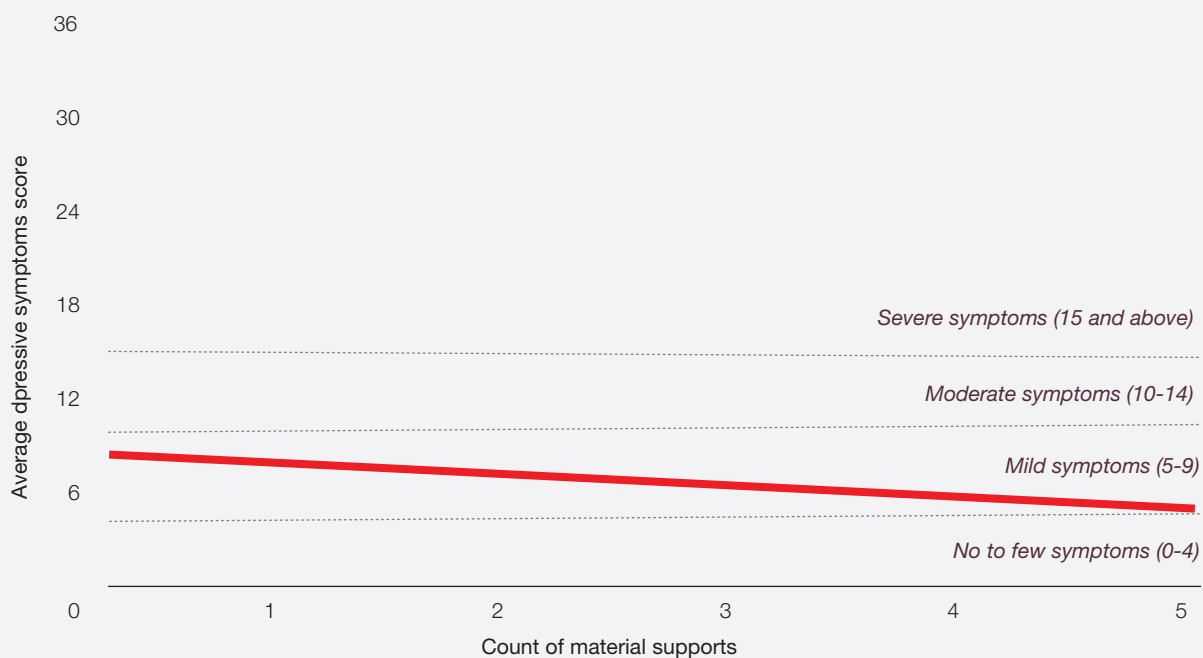
Note: Statistical significance is the probability that the results are caused by something other than chance. “Yes” indicates that the association is statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

Results presented in this table are based on regression models that control for economic condition (household poverty, financial strain, and material hardship) and other characteristics.

Data are drawn from Table A.20 and Table A.22 in the accompanying appendix.

^a Households with incomes greater than 130 percent of the poverty threshold are the reference category. The reference category is the comparison group for the other household poverty categories listed in the table to examine differences in the outcome.

Exhibit 17. Parents who report more material supports report lower levels of depressive symptoms



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

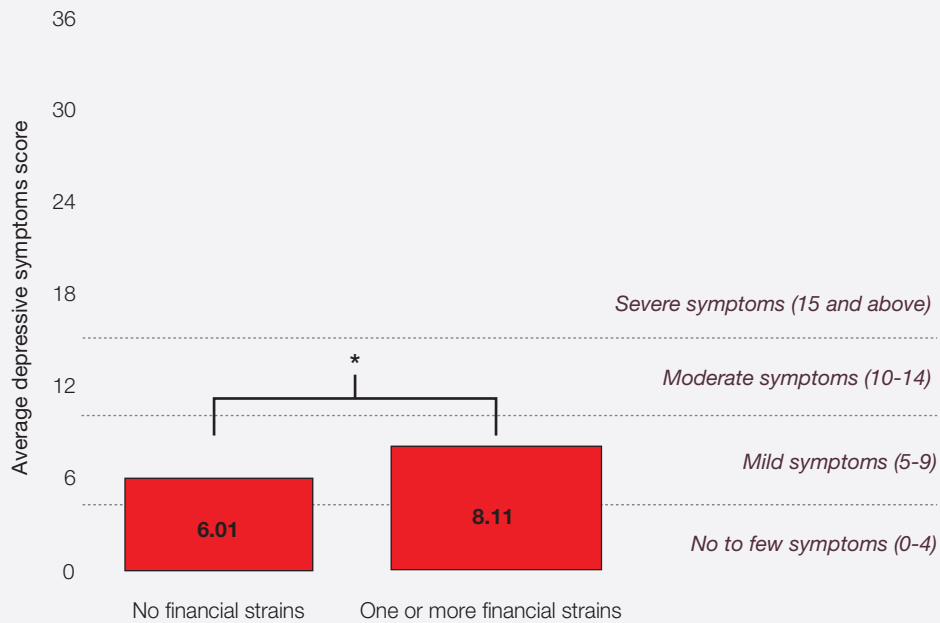
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Depressive symptoms (type and frequency) are measured from 0 to 36 points. To calculate depressive symptoms scores, parents reported how often each item in a list of 12 statements applied to them in the past week. Scores for individual items are recoded from 0 to 3 and summed for a possible range from 0 to 36. Data are drawn from Table A.20 in the accompanying appendix.

- Each additional material support is associated with a decrease of 0.94 points in parent depressive symptoms. As an example, parents with no material supports report depressive symptoms scores in the mild range on average (8.5). Parents reporting one type of material support, all other things being equal, report scores of 7.6 on average (which also falls in the mild range). Parents with all four types of material supports report scores of 4.8 on average, which is in the lowest range (no to few depressive symptoms) (Exhibit 17).



Exhibit 18. Parents who live in multigenerational households report higher levels of depressive symptoms



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.

Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019.

Figure reports adjusted means, which are average scores accounting for whether the child is AIAN or not, whether the child is new to Head Start, his or her age and sex, the mother's education, parents' employment, household poverty, and material hardship.

Depressive symptoms (type and frequency) are measured from 0 to 36 points. To calculate depressive symptoms scores, parents reported how often each item in a list of 12 statements applied to them in the past week. Scores for individual items are recoded from 0 to 3 and summed for a possible range from 0 to 36.

Asterisk indicates that the differences between groups are statistically significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

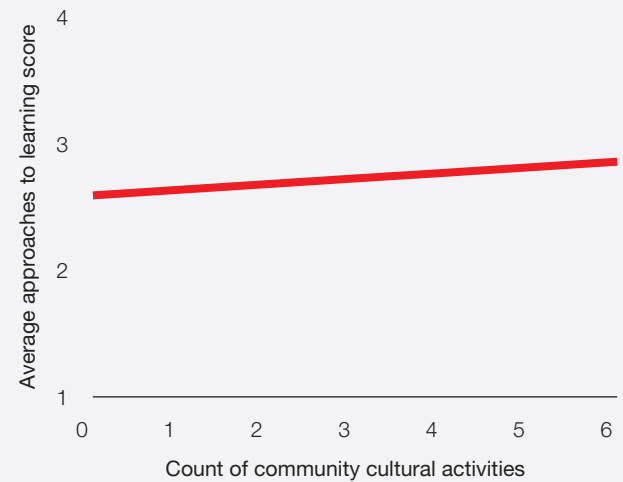
Data are drawn from Table A.20 in the accompanying appendix.

- Living in a multigenerational household is associated with parent depressive symptoms scores (which are measured on a scale from 0 to 36) that are 2.10 points higher than scores for parents who do not live with the child's grandparent or great-grandparent. However, depressive symptoms scores are in the mild range for both groups (Exhibit 18).
- Some children in multigenerational households live in households with grandparents or great-grandparents, and without parents. We find a similar association between parent depressive symptoms and living in a multigenerational household when we exclude these children from the analysis (see technical appendix for more detailed information on these analyses).



- Each additional community cultural activity is associated with an increase of 0.04 points in approaches to learning, which is measured on a scale from 1 (child never shows positive approaches to learning behaviors) to 4 (child very often shows positive approaches to learning behaviors). This represents a very small difference in scores. As an example, children who do not participate in any community cultural activities have approaches to learning scores of 2.6 on average. Children who participate in all six community cultural activities, all other things being equal have scores of 2.9 on average. In both cases, this would indicate that children often exhibit positive approaches to learning behaviors (Exhibit 19).

Exhibit 19. Children who participate in more community cultural activities have somewhat higher approaches to learning scores



Source: Fall 2019 AIAN FACES Parent Survey.
Note: Statistics are weighted to represent all children enrolled in Region XI programs in fall 2019. Data are drawn from Table A.22 in the accompanying appendix.

Limitations

To our knowledge, this is the first national portrait describing how social and community supports, economic condition, and child and family well-being relate to each other in Region XI Head Start families. Our last two research questions account for other factors that could play a role in child and family well-being, such as household income and parents' employment and education.

However, it is possible that there are other influential factors we did not measure in the study, and consequently could not include in our analyses. This includes information about the supports parents receive from Head Start. Although AIAN FACES measures social and community supports, economic condition, and child and family well-being, there are many ways these constructs could be measured. For example, the AIAN FACES survey has questions about the number of community cultural activities the child participates in to understand experiences with Native culture, but when looking at associations between social and community supports and parent-reported economic condition, it could be that the parent's participation in community cultural activities is a more important buffer for the experience of economic condition. It is also possible that we did not include the full depth of social and community supports, such as the nature of families' engagement with these supports (for example, the frequency and quality of experiences). Similarly, our measures may not completely capture families' economic conditions. For example, our measure of material hardship looks at how many types out of the five parents report, but it does not address the intensity of the hardships families experience.

Also, our sample size of 526 children limits the types of analyses we can conduct. For example, we were not able to address Research Question 5 for the parent-reported child health outcome because there were too few cases across the many factors we wanted to account for. So we cannot say whether the level of social and community support the family receives is linked to parent-reported child health. Finally, there are some findings that while statistically significant, are so small that they would not be considered meaningful.

Conclusions and Implications

This brief sheds light on the forms of social and community supports families with children in Region XI AIAN Head Start programs have, and on their economic condition. It also discusses the associations between families' economic conditions and their social and community supports and examines whether families' economic conditions and social and community supports are associated with child and family outcomes.

This brief shows that families and children in Region XI Head Start programs have access to social and community supports. However, families' economic conditions are mixed. Although there is at least one parent

working full time in most households, more than half of parents report at least one type of material hardship. Some of the most common material hardships parents report facing (transportation- and utilities-related hardships) are highlighted as topics to cover in program community needs assessments (National Center on Program Management and Fiscal Operations 2020) and are probably already on the minds of program leaders in Region XI. But this national data could support the case for larger-scale investments or partnerships to support families' access to the transportation and utilities they need. Further, as parents who report more material hardships also report more financial strain and fewer material supports, these investments may help families who are especially in need of support.

Although the majority of families live in or near poverty, the majority of families also say they do not face financial strains. A similar difference between poverty and experience of financial strain was observed in AIAN FACES 2015 (Barofsky et al. 2018b). The relatively low perception of financial strain may point to the strengths of and supports available for families in or near poverty in Region XI. It may also be the case that there is a disconnect between some of our measures of poverty and how families in Region XI experience financial strain.

Our analyses highlight the associations between economic condition, social and community supports, and some dimensions of children's development and families' well-being. We find that economic condition and social and community supports are associated with parent depression and child health. The study design and data do not allow us to examine whether one of these factors causes or leads to differences in the other, nor can the design and data speak to the direction of the relationship between factors. Nevertheless, for those facing financial strain and material hardship, identifying these risks early on would be important to refer families for mental health supports, child health services, and material supports.

Findings also point to supports that can have a positive association with child and family well-being. Material supports predict lower parent depressive symptoms scores, although we find that material supports are unrelated to children's

developmental and health outcomes. Finally, children's participation in more community cultural activities does have small but positive associations with children's approaches to learning (a key school readiness skill), although we find no association to the other children's development outcomes we examine.

Unexpectedly, we find that parent depressive symptoms scores are higher in multigenerational households compared to non-multigenerational households. Connections between the generations are a vital source of support in Native families. We do not measure how or why households became multigenerational, or what the stability of that housing arrangement is. Further, our sample of multigenerational households is diverse. In nearly half of multigenerational households, parents are not in the household and a grandparent or great-grandparent is the child's primary caretaker or guardian. Finally, the study design does not allow us to examine causal connections between measures of social and community supports and child and family well-being – that is, whether living in a multigenerational household causes or leads to differences in parent depressive symptoms. For example, depression could influence parents' perception and reporting of social and community supports. Moreover, there may be unobserved factors, related to both multigenerational households and parent depressive symptoms, that explain the pattern of results presented in this brief. Future research is warranted to explore the full context or complexity of these intergenerational relationships.

Results from our analysis point to factors that programs may want to consider to best serve families with children in Region XI AIAN Head Start programs, particularly parents' access to social supports.

Community and program efforts such as direct provision of food and connecting families to housing may be one way to improve parent well-being in areas like depression. Results also suggest that it may be worth looking closer at the nature of children's participation in community cultural activities, such as participating in traditional ways like carving, in relation to children's school readiness. Such findings help add to the research base showing what is already well known in AIAN communities, that there is a vital connection between cultural identity and well-being.

AIAN FACES 2019

This research brief uses data from the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2019 (AIAN FACES 2019). Other AIAN FACES 2019 products describe the study's design and methodology (Bernstein et al. 2021a; Bernstein et al., 2021b).

Head Start is a national program designed to help children be ready for school by promoting their social-emotional, physical, and cognitive skills. The program provides educational, health, nutritional, social, and other services to enrolled children and their families. Head Start places special emphasis on helping preschoolers develop the reading, language, social-emotional, mathematics, and science skills they need to be successful in school. The program also works to engage parents in their children's learning and to promote progress toward the parents' own educational, literacy, and employment goals (ACF n.d.). Head Start works toward these goals by providing grants to local public agencies and to private nonprofit and for-profit organizations, who in turn provide comprehensive children's development services to economically disadvantaged children and their families. Region XI AIAN Head Start programs also offer traditional language and cultural practices based on community needs, wishes, and resources.

Methods

For AIAN FACES 2019, we selected a nationally representative sample of Region XI Head Start programs from the 2016–2017 Head Start Program Information Report, with one or two centers per program and two to four classrooms per center. Within each classroom, we selected all children for the study. In total, 22 programs, 40 centers, 85 classrooms, and 720 children participated in the study. More information on the study methodology and measurement used in AIAN FACES 2019 and tables for findings presented here are available in the Fall 2019 Data Tables and Study Design report (Bernstein et al. 2021b). The sample we used for this brief includes 526 children who were enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2019 whom we had a complete parent interview for, along with either a direct child assessment or teachers' report of children's skills and behavior.

All findings are weighted to represent children who were enrolled in Region XI Head Start in fall 2019. Some findings in this brief are statistically significant at the .05 level, but they are very small in size and may not always be practically meaningful.

We report percentages and averages (means) to answer the first two research questions. To answer the third research question about whether families with different levels of supports report different levels of strains and hardships, we conducted chi square and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to examine differences between groups.

To answer Research Questions 4 and 5, we conducted a series of linear and logistic regressions predicting children's and families' well-being from information parents provided about financial strain, material hardship, and social and community support. We examined parental mental health, specifically parental depressive symptoms, as one factor that contributes to family well-being. Children's developmental outcomes included approaches to learning, receptive vocabulary, and general parent-reported health status. For each outcome, we ran several models. All models included control variables: child race/ethnicity, child age, child sex, child's year in Head Start, parent employment, and maternal education. We then added household poverty status, material hardship, and financial strain, and social and community support variables in a stepwise fashion, with each model building on the one before. We did this to determine whether accounting for each economic condition changes or explains the associations found in earlier steps. For example, if the association between parents' depressive symptoms and household poverty status disappears only when material hardship is added, this would suggest that parents in poverty have more parental depressive symptoms because they could be more likely to deal with material hardship.

Details about the analysis and variables used can be found in the technical appendix. The technical appendix also includes information about family and child outcomes not reported in this brief.

Measures

- **Poverty.** This measure is based on 2018 thresholds set by the U.S. Census Bureau, which are determined by household income relative to the number of family members. For example, the federal poverty threshold for a family of four in 2018 was \$25,701. AIAN FACES reports a household's poverty level as a percentage of this federal poverty threshold.
 - AIAN FACES measures household income, which is different from family income. Household income is the income of all members of the same household, and family income is the reported income of the child's parents or guardians. For example, if two families live in the same household, household income would be the income of both families (the entire household), and family income would be the income of each family. In AIAN FACES, we use household income to give a full picture of all the resources available to children in the home environment. Household income does not, however, reflect eligibility for Head Start. Head Start qualifying criteria use family (not household) income, and there are other (non-income-based) ways to qualify for the program.
 - Federal agencies establish poverty guidelines based on thresholds to assess eligibility for income-based programs. For example, those at or below 130 percent of the threshold may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or free school meals.
 - We created four categories to reflect the level of financial need: (1) households with income less than 50 percent of the federal poverty threshold, (2) households with income at 50 to 100 percent of the threshold, (3) households with income 101 to 130 percent of the threshold, and (4) households with income greater than 130 percent of the poverty threshold.
- **Material hardship.** AIAN FACES uses measures of transportation hardships, lack of basic utilities, unmet medical needs, household crowding, and food insecurity.
 - We assessed *hardships with transportation, basic utilities*, and medical needs in the past 12 months using seven items based on the Multisite Implementation Evaluation of Tribal Home Visiting [MUSE] study's Family Resources Check-In [FRC] (Whitesell et al. 2017) and one newly developed item. We asked parents to report whether statements about transportation, utility, and medical hardships applied to them or their families. (Examples are "We didn't have access to a reliable vehicle," "My family couldn't afford to pay for medications, glasses, or other medical supplies that we needed," and "Has there been a time when you and your family had the water to your home turned off because payments were not made?") We categorized families' reported hardships as follows: (1) transportation hardship, if the parent responded "yes" to any of the three transportation items, (2) lack of basic utilities, if the parent responded "yes" to any of the three basic utility items, and (3) unmet medical needs, if the parent responded "yes" to either of the two medical need items.
 - We assessed *household food security* using six items that corresponded to guidelines in the U.S. Department of Agriculture *Guide to Measuring Household Food Security*, Revised 2000 (Bickel et al. 2000). We asked parents how well each of six statements about food security describe them (for example, "I/we could not afford to eat balanced meals.").
 - We use the number of people per room in the house as a measure of *crowding*. We base this measure on parents' report of the number of people in the household divided by the number of separate rooms. Researchers have used more than one person per room as a benchmark for crowding in work conducted for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (Blake et al. 2007). We also took a count of the number of types of hardships experienced by each household (ranging from no hardships to all five types of hardships).

Measures *(continued)*

- **Financial strain.** This measure is constructed from four items that measured parents' sense that they have enough money to afford the kind of home, clothing, food, and medical care they need (Conger et al. 1993; Raver et al. 2013). We categorize a family as "reported a financial strain" if the parent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that they have enough money to afford any of the four items (home, clothing, food, or medical care). Possible answers were "strongly disagree," "disagree," "neutral," "agree," or "strongly agree." We also created a count reflecting the number of financial strains experienced by a Head Start family. This is similar to other scoring practices for the same items (Raver et al. 2013).
- The analysis includes three measures of *social and community supports*:
 - **Multigenerational households** are homes where children live with grandparents or great-grandparents (with or without their parents).
 - **Number of material supports** is a count of each time the parent says they always: (1) are able to find someone to provide them and their child with a place to live if they need a place to stay, (2) have family or friends who will loan them money if they have an emergency and need cash, (3) have someone who can help them get a meal or go to a relative's house if they have problems buying food, and (4) can rely on fishing, hunting, or gathering if they need food for their family.
 - **Community cultural activities** counts the number of activities the child participated in over the past 12 months. The six activities are listening to Elders tell stories; participating in traditional ways like harvesting or fishing; dancing, singing, or drumming at a pow-wow or other community activity; working on traditional arts and crafts; participating in traditional ceremonies; and playing American Indian or Alaska Native games.

Demographic characteristics of Region XI children and families in fall 2019

In fall 2019, Region XI Head Start served a diverse group of children and families with a wide range of strengths and needs.

- Eighty-seven percent of children were American Indian or Alaska Native (either alone or in combination with another race or ethnicity).
- Sixty-one percent of children were attending Head Start for the first time. In fall 2019, 42 percent of children in Region XI Head Start were 3 years old, and 58 percent were 4 years old.
- Forty-nine percent of children lived in households where a language other than English was spoken, with a Native language spoken in 43 percent of children's homes. Ninety-six percent of children were primarily spoken to in English at home.
- Eighty-seven percent of children lived with a mother who had at least a high school diploma or GED, and 82 percent lived with a father who had at least a high school diploma or GED.

Endnotes

¹ AIAN FACES asked parents about two noneconomic supports alongside the material supports: (1) whether they could easily find someone to watch their child if they needed to run an errand, and (2) if there was someone they could talk to if they had troubles or needed advice. We do not include noneconomic supports in this brief because they did not contribute meaningfully to our analyses when we included them in our models.

² The term “parent” refers to the child’s primary caretaker or guardian. For children in our sample, the primary caretaker or guardian was a biological or adoptive parent (84 percent), grandparent or great-grandparent (11 percent) or other relative or non-relative (5 percent).

³ We also examine whether the associations between financial strain and material hardship, and family and child outcomes vary based on social and community supports. See the technical appendix for additional information about these analyses.

⁴ See “What is Region XI Head Start?” box for details about eligibility for families with incomes above the poverty threshold in Region XI Head Start programs.

⁵ In this brief, we focus on statistically significant findings at the $p < .05$ level with a clear pattern for interpretation. The technical appendix includes the details on all analytic findings, including those not described in this brief.

⁶ Region XI Head Start programs may enroll families with incomes above the poverty threshold under certain conditions (see “What is Region XI Head Start” box).

⁷ In addition to poverty, models accounted for parent employment and maternal education, child race/ethnicity (whether they were AIAN), child age, child sex, and whether the child was new to Head Start.

⁸ Models examined whether supports were related to family and child outcomes after accounting for poverty status, material hardship, and financial strain. Models also accounted for parent employment and maternal education, and child characteristics including race/ethnicity (whether or not they were AIAN), age, sex, and whether they were new to Head Start. However, the design of this study does not allow us to examine causal connections between social and community supports, and family and child outcomes. That is, associations presented in this brief do not indicate that the presence of social and community supports causes or leads to differences in child and family outcomes.

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