



The Well-Being of New York Children Cared for by Relatives

Rachel Dunifon
Wenni Lee
Cornell University



Goals of paper

- Examine characteristics of New York children cared for by relatives
- Compare these children to those in other families
- Offer potential policy implications



Prevalence of children cared for by relatives

- 3% of all New York households
- Nationwide, number of children cared for by relatives has been rising
- May be due to drug use, incarceration, AIDS, violence
- Often follows a trauma in lives of children



Data

- 1999 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF)
- Survey developed and funded by Urban Institute
- Representative of U.S., as well as 13 states, including New York



Measures

- **Children cared for by relatives:** living with and cared for by relatives either in kinship care that is not foster care, or in relative foster care (no parent present)
- **Demographic characteristics:** race, ethnicity, age, sex, receipt of TANF, receipt of Food Stamps, caregiver educational attainment, and family structure



Measures

- **Caregiver mental health:** low scores on a standardized scale
- **Positive school engagement:** index including whether the child does homework on time, or cares about doing well in school
- **Whether child has health insurance**
- **Whether suspended/expelled**



Measures

- **High behavior problems:** has problems getting along with others, feeling depressed
- **Activity-limiting health condition**
- **Child read to regularly:** at least 6 days a week
- **Child taken on outings:** at least once a day
- **Low caregiver aggravation:** lack of stress, frustration in caregiving



Descriptives

- In 1999, 4.7 million children in New York between ages 0-17
- 140,190 New York children were cared for by relatives



Descriptive Characteristics

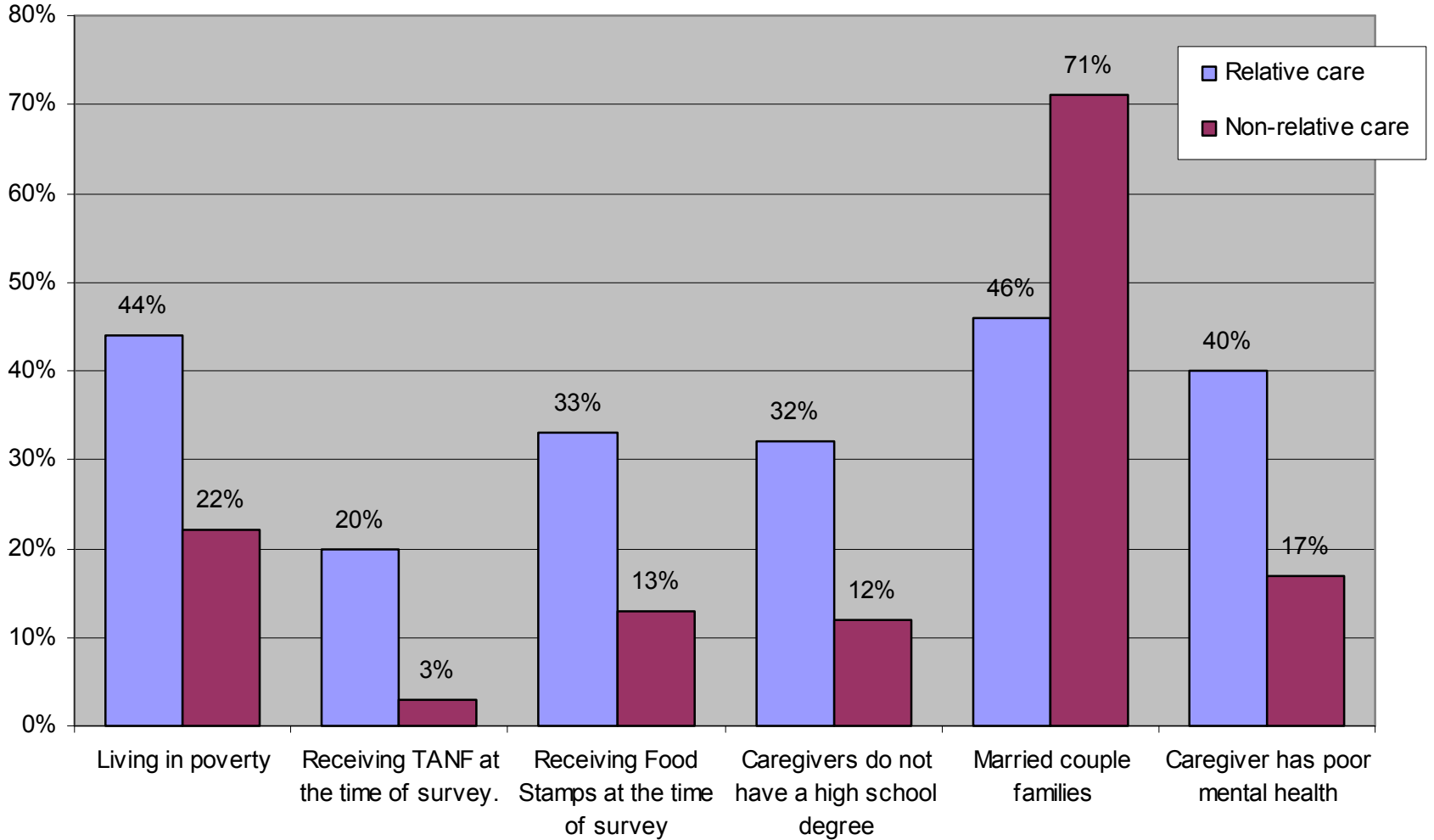
African-American	46%
Hispanic	21%
Living in poverty	44%
Family cut meal in past month	31%
Average child age	10 years
Receiving TANF at time of survey	20%
Receiving Food Stamps at time of survey	33%
Caregiver has no HS degree	32%
Married couple family	46%



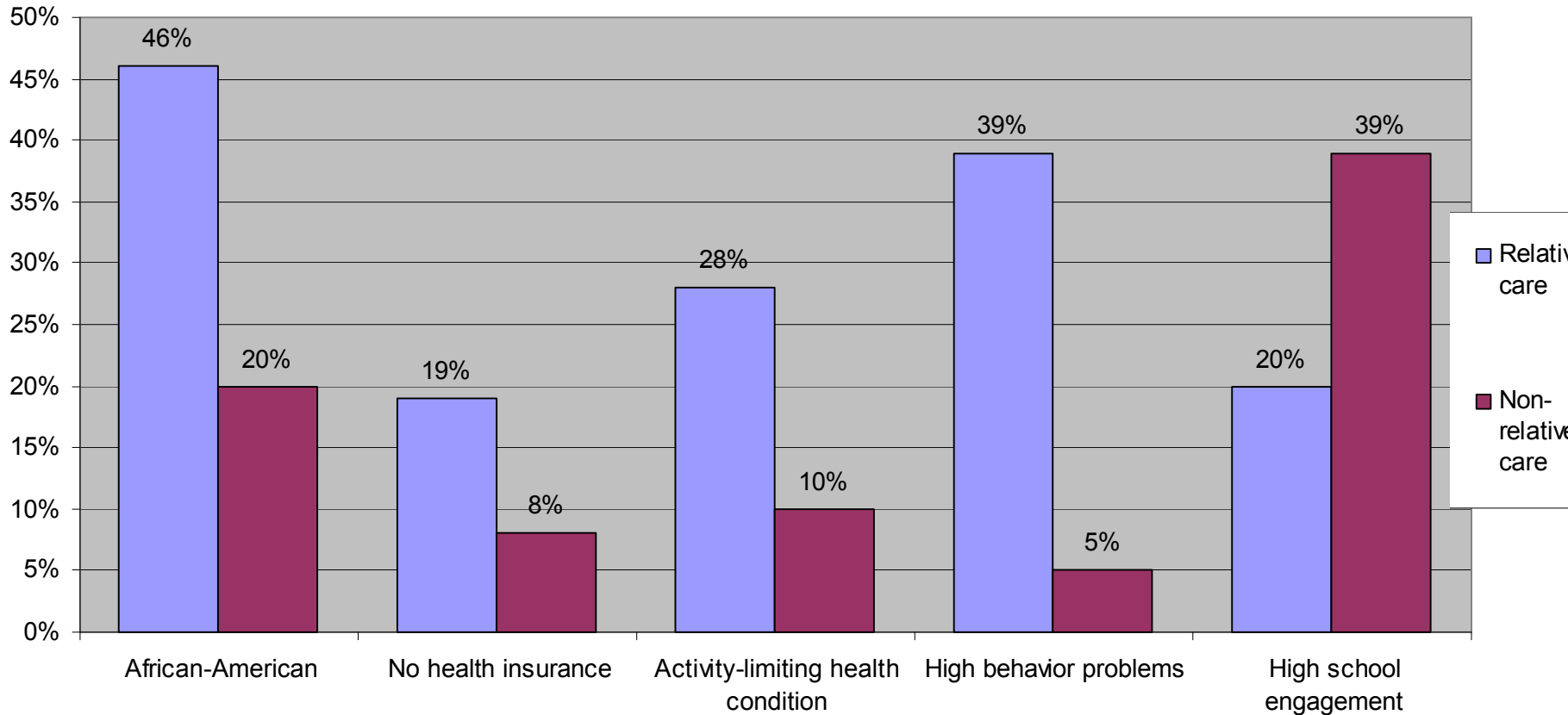
Descriptive characteristics

Poor caregiver mental health	40%
Child has no health insurance	19%
Child has activity-limiting health problem	28%
High behavior problems	39%
Read to regularly	41%
Regularly taken on outings	52%
High school engagement	20%
Suspended or expelled	16%
Low caregiver aggravation	16%

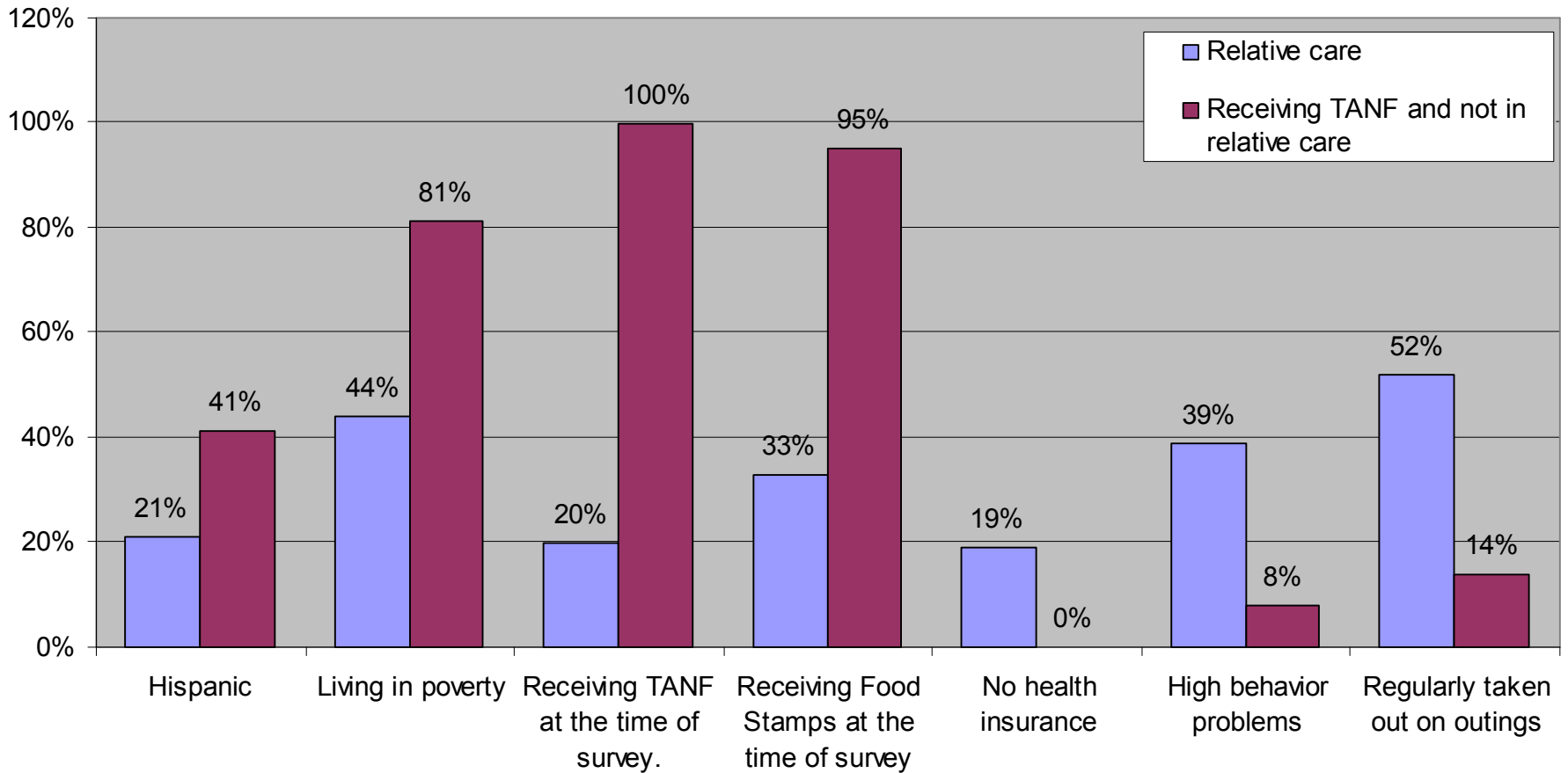
Comparison of families of New York children living in relative care vs. those living with parents



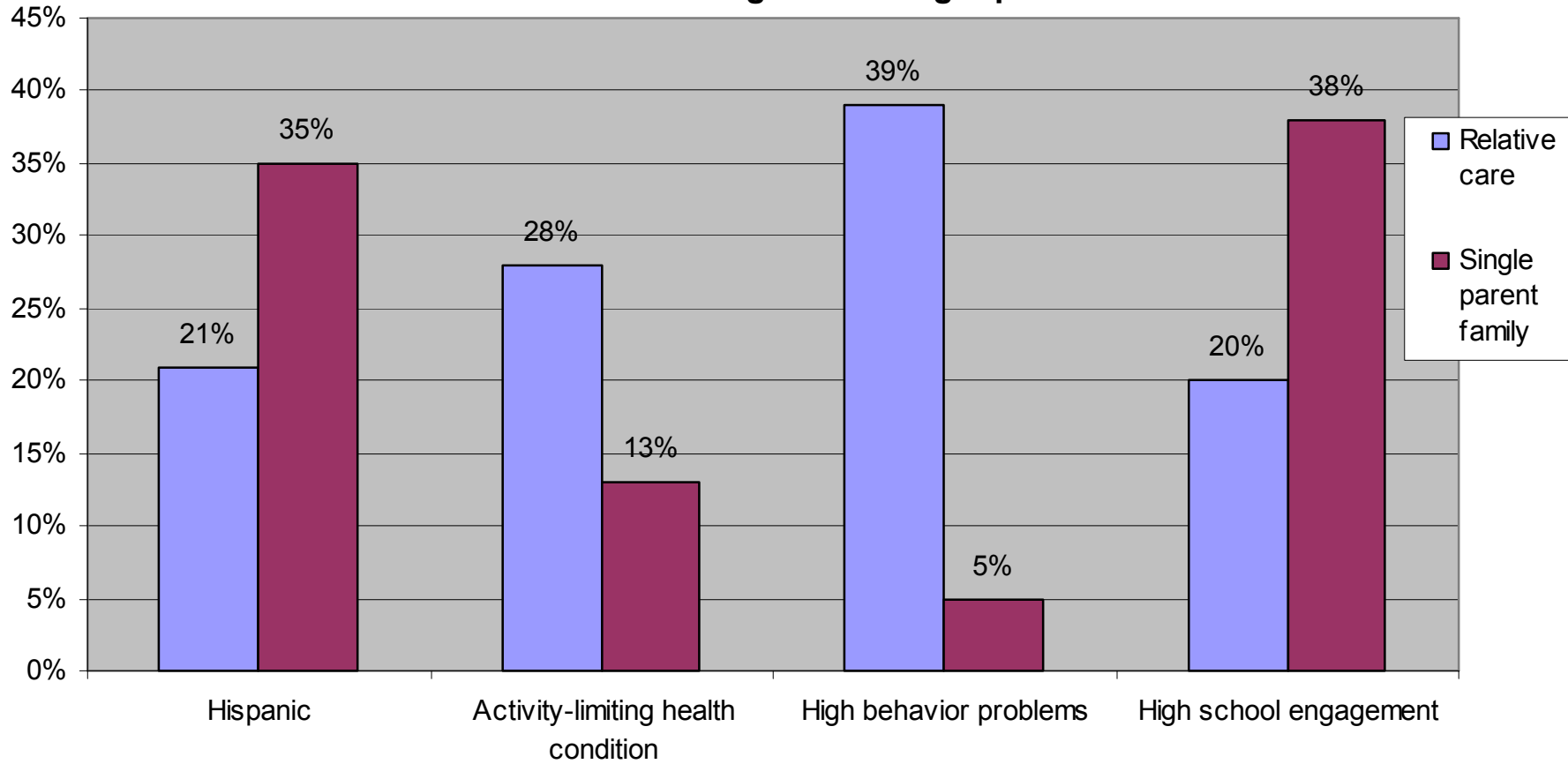
Comparison of New York children in relative care vs. those living with parents



Comparison of New York children living in relative care with those receiving TANF but not in relative care



Comparison of New York children living in relative care with those living with a single parent





Summary

- Children cared for by relatives have some disadvantages
 - Twice as likely to be poor
 - Less likely to live with married couple
 - More likely to have caregiver with poor mental health
 - More health & behavior problems, lower school engagement



Summary

- Despite these disadvantages, children cared for by relatives are doing just as well as children living with parents in some areas
 - Just as likely to be read to regularly
 - Just as likely to be taken on outings
 - Caregiver stress is not unusually high



Summary

- Children in relative care mostly fare better than children receiving TANF and living with parents
- Children in relative care mostly fare worse than those living with a single parent



Policy Implications

- Children in relative care fare worse than children in all other groups on behavior problems
 - 39% have high level of behavior problems
 - Linked to adult criminal behavior
 - May be due to experiencing trauma
 - Could benefit from special counseling and treatment



Policy Implications

- 28% of children cared for by relatives have an activity-limiting health condition
 - 19% do not have health insurance
 - Concerns over whether children are receiving appropriate treatment
 - May benefit from screening and treatment programs



Policy Implications

- Families may not be receiving public assistance for which they are eligible
 - 20% receiving TANF
 - 33% receiving Food Stamps
 - 19% of children uninsured



Policy Implications

- High rates of mental health problems among caregivers
 - 40% have poor mental health
 - May benefit from outreach and treatment programs



Conclusion

- Families of children cared for by relatives face some disadvantages, but also have some real strengths
- Policies targeted toward addressing children's health and behavior problems, access to public assistance, and caregiver mental health issues may provide benefits