

Whatcom Prosperity Project

Experiences of Poverty in Whatcom County



January 2008 SUBSAMPLE REPORT:

Families with young children

Sponsored by:

Early Childhood Opportunities Northwest

And

Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities

Research and reporting by:
Cornerstone Strategies, Inc.



Whatcom Coalition
for Healthy Communities

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Survey Respondents: Who Are They?

The Whatcom Prosperity Project (WPP) was convened initially in summer 2006 by the Whatcom Coalition for Healthy Communities. The goal of this effort has been to bring people together across the different “silos” of service provision to address issues of poverty in Whatcom County and to make action recommendations around policies, resources, service coordination, and community engagement and awareness. The process of talking to people about their experiences and needs became a critical first step to making effective recommendations. In response, the group launched a needs assessment project to provide both quantitative data as well as more in-depth qualitative data. The intent of the study is to provide results of this needs assessment process with low-income families that involved a client intercept paper survey of 610 households (countywide), focus groups and face-to-face interviews with 105 key informants, and an online survey of service providers.

ECONW Subsample Report

Early Childhood Opportunities Northwest (ECONW) is the local grantee for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Head Start dollars (children ages 3 to 5) and Early Head Start (prenatal to age 3). The agency also administers State of Washington government dollars, known as ECEAP, aimed at augmenting the delivery of services to three to five-year olds. Under all these programs, the focus is on families and children who are means tested as low-income. The purpose of the federal and state programs is to prepare disadvantaged children for social and academic readiness by the time they reach the age of kindergarten.

In order to conduct a sub-analysis of the Prosperity Project survey data on this target population, cases were selected who reported having one or more children under six years old by answering the following question, “Including yourself, how many persons in your household are 0-5 years old.” A dichotomous variable was created, where 1 = household with children five and younger, and 0 = household without children five and younger, so that these two populations could be compared and their differences tested with statistical analyses. The ECONW subsample consists of 129 respondents with children five or younger at home, and is compared to the remaining sample of 458 cases. Excluded from this sub-analysis are 25 cases, for which household composition data is missing, therefore this sub-report includes a total sample of 587 cases.

These particular respondents were recruited to participate in the survey through various service access points throughout Whatcom County in early 2007, including nine food banks, two domestic violence service providers, DSHS Community Service Office, Opportunity Council, and five other specialty social service providers.

What follows is a focused examination of this particular population, which will be referred to in the balance of this document as ECONW-eligible households, respondents with young children, or the sub-population.

This subsample report was requested by ECONW as one resource in support of its 2008 federally required community needs assessment. For information about WPP project methodology, goals, and objectives, please refer to the project's main report, which can be found at:

<http://www.whatcomcoalition.org/pdf/wpprpt.presummitdraft.pdf>

Geographic Distribution

Half (50%) of the subsample live in Bellingham (Figure 1). At first, it may seem that Bellingham low-income households are overrepresented in this sample because Bellingham has only 39% of Whatcom County’s population (based on 2005 Census Bureau data). However, in 2005, nearly two-thirds (64%) of all persons living at the poverty level in Whatcom County resided in Bellingham’s city limits. Compared to the overall sample, a large proportion of the subsample with young children live in Everson.

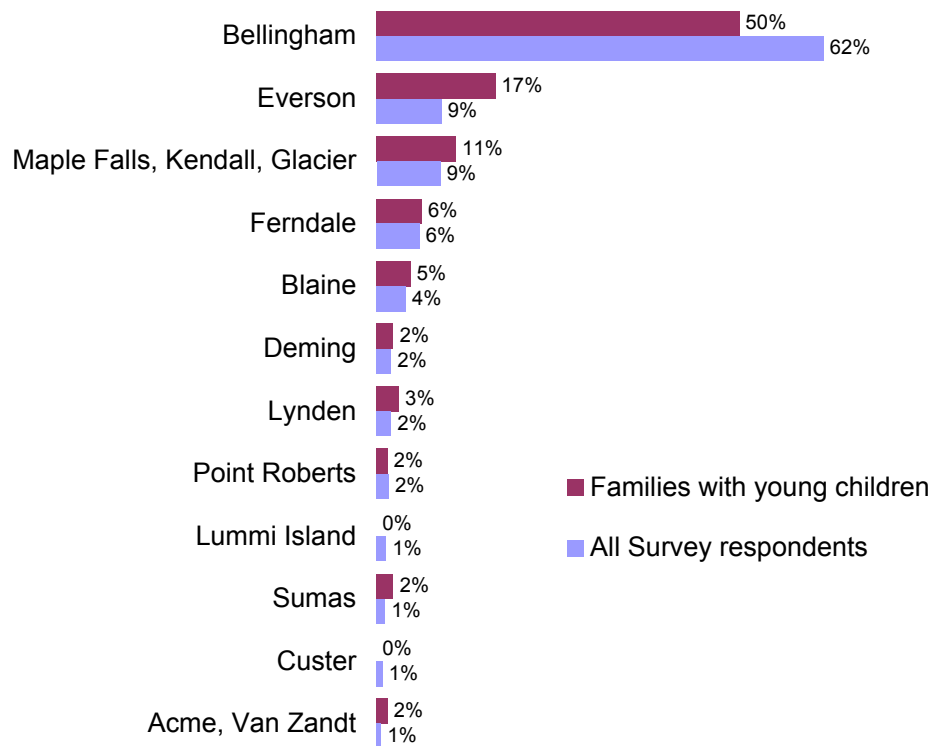


Figure 1: Geographic distribution of survey respondents

Gender and Age

Survey respondents without young children were more likely to be female (60%) than male, and respondents with children five and younger were even more likely to be female (81%). Our subsample ranged in age from 16 to 67 years old, with a mean age of 33 and a median of 31 years. Not surprisingly, households without young children at home are on average older, with a mean age of 45 and a median of 46 years.

Household Composition

Sub-population household size ranged from 2 (16%) to 10 (2%) with a mean household size of 4.5 and a median household size of 4 persons. Households without young children are, on average, much smaller, with a mean of 2.2 and a median of 2 persons.

There is also a statistically significant difference between these two samples in the number of adults per household. The ECONW sample has a mean and median of 2 adults per household, and the remaining sample has a mean of 1.7 and median of 1 adult per household. In spite of the average of 2 adults per household, more than a third (35%) of these households with young children are headed by single parents.

Households with very young children have on average more children under 18 than other households, with medians of 2 and 0 respectively. 40% of the ECONW subsample have three or more children at home.

Race, Ethnicity, and Language

Households with young children are significantly less likely to be white than the comparison group, at 58% and 74% respectively (Figure 2). The subsample is also significantly more likely to identify as Latino or Hispanic, at 19% compared to 7%, and as Native American, at 14% compared to 8%. This suggests that race and cultural factors need to be considered when addressing the social needs of these low-income, ethnically diverse, young families.

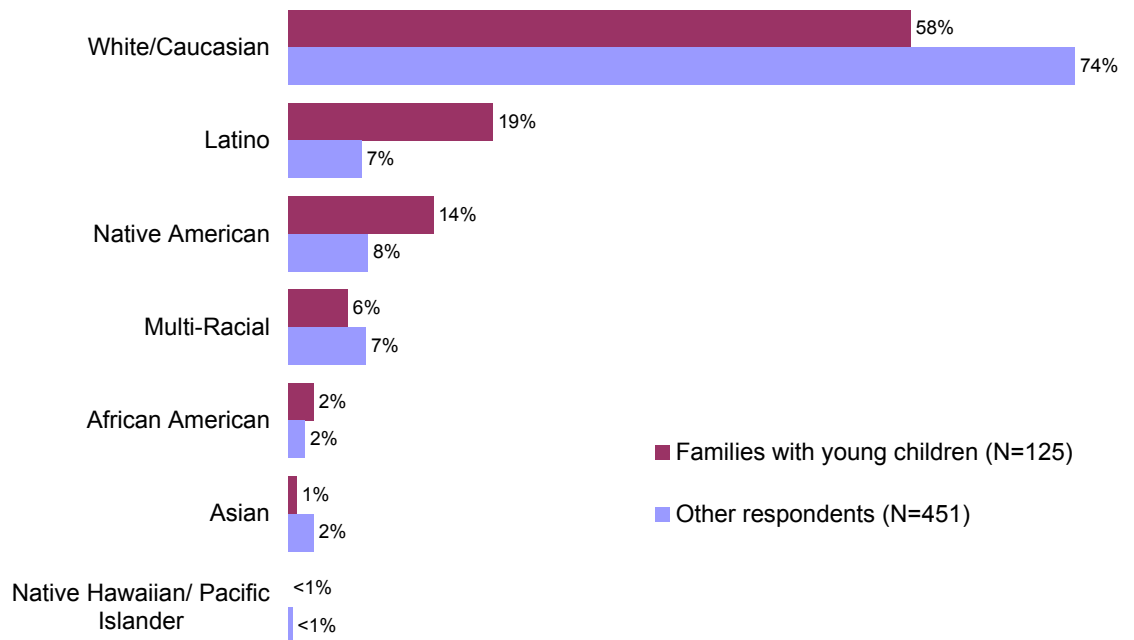


Figure 2: Respondent race and ethnicity

While the majority speak English (78%), in many households with young children Spanish is the primary language spoken at home (16%), followed by Russian or Ukrainian at 6% (Figure 3). This draws our attention to the specific language needs of these families, and thus their children. The comparison population is significantly more likely to speak English as a primary language (89%).

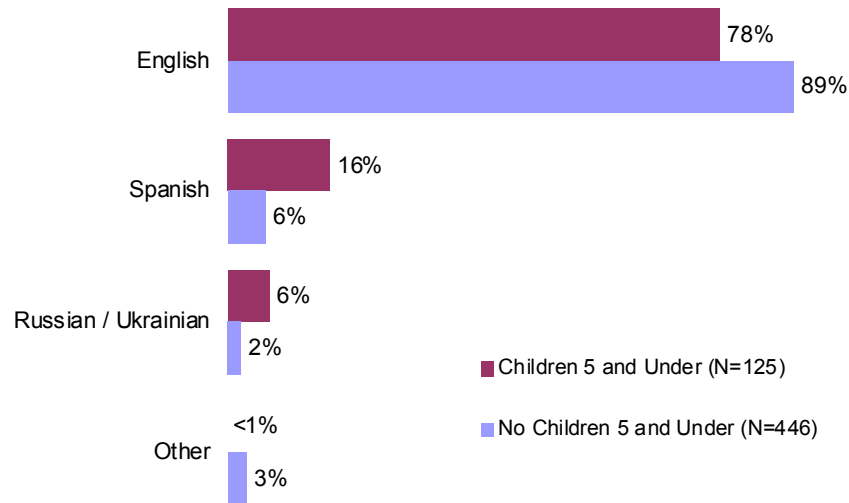


Figure 3: Respondent language usually spoken at home

Disability Status

Survey respondents were asked if anyone in their household has difficulty with certain activities due to physical, mental or emotional conditions lasting six months or more (Figure 4). A global indicator of any self-reported household disability reveals that the subsample of young families is less likely to have a disabled household member (50% compared to 59%). This likely reflects the youth of the subsample. When looking at separate disability categories, the picture is more complex, though the differences between populations are generally small and statistically insignificant. Households with children five and younger are slightly more likely to have members with learning disabilities, which are increasingly diagnosed in young children. The subsample is also slightly more likely to report difficulties going outside the home. The comparison sample is more likely to have difficulties with dressing, bathing, and getting around, and working at a job or business.

Closer examination of the 14% who reported an “other” disability reveals a wide range of physical, mental, and emotional challenges faced by this population. The most common psychological issues reported were bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Sub-population respondents reported nine different physical conditions that interfered with their daily lives, ranging from anemia to scoliosis.

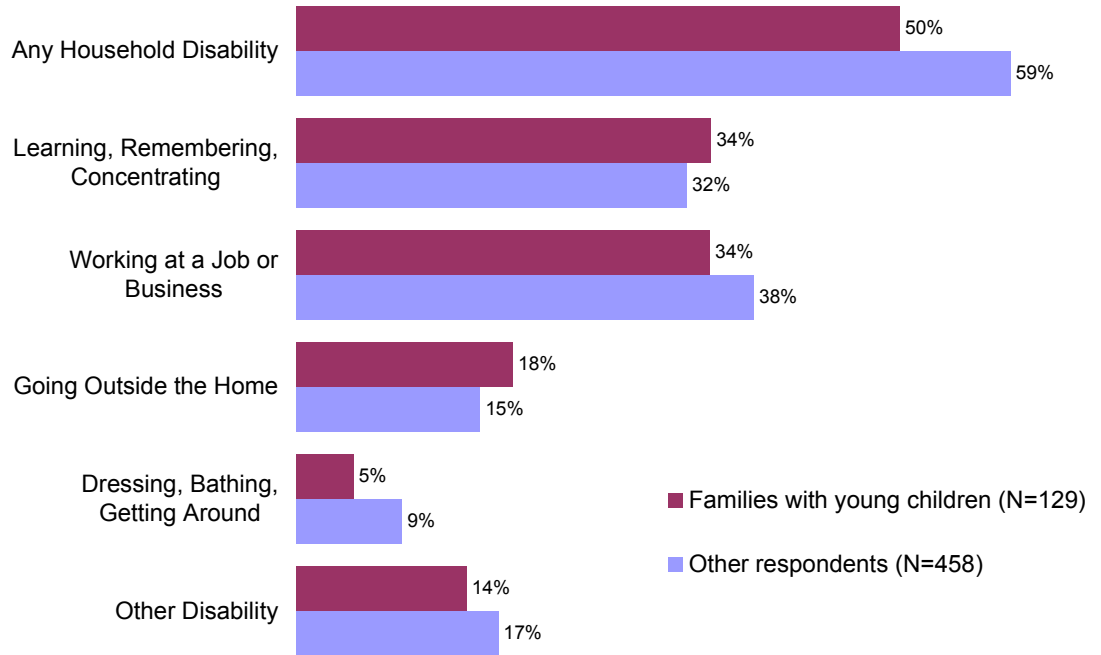


Figure 4: Percent households with a person whose disability limits one or more activities

Duration of Residence in Whatcom County

Respondents with young children have, on average, lived in Whatcom County for a shorter time than the comparison sample. The mean and median number of years of residency for the Head Start sample are 14 and 8 years respectively, compared to 17 and 10 years, though these differences are not statistically significant. Just over 70% of both populations have lived in Whatcom County for four or more years.

Employment, Education and Income

Income

The mean monthly income from all sources for households with children five and younger is \$1,085 and the median monthly income is \$1,000. Monthly household incomes ranged from \$0 to \$3,800 per month. This income profile was comparable to that of the general low-income sample, which had a mean income of \$990, a median of \$800 and a maximum of \$5,000 per month. Among the households with young children, income also varies by household size, ranging from a median income of \$500 for two-person households to \$2,140 for eight-person households. (Table 1). Please note that income is only reported for 101 respondent households because 28 households provided insufficient data (either household size or income estimate) to calculate income by household size.

Table 1: Respondent household income by household size

Household Size	Number of households	Mean monthly income	Median monthly income	Minimum	Maximum
2	15	\$ 726	\$ 500	\$ 50	\$ 1,800
3	20	\$ 802	\$ 900	\$ -	\$ 2,200
4	24	\$ 1,229	\$ 1,000	\$ 360	\$ 3,800
5	13	\$ 1,181	\$ 1,025	\$ 200	\$ 2,300
6	15	\$ 1,129	\$ 1,100	\$ 250	\$ 1,800
7	7	\$ 1,257	\$ 1,200	\$ 800	\$ 1,900
>7	7	\$ 1,728	\$ 1,000	\$ 200	\$ 3,800
Total	101	\$ 820	\$ 627	\$ -	\$ 3,800

Households with young children are significantly more likely than other households to identify wages as sources of household income (62% compared to 45%), most likely reflecting the youth of the sample with fewer retirees and disabled persons. Two sources of support aimed specifically at families with children, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (43%), and child support (11%), are also more common for the sub-population. A few alternative sources of income reported by households with young children include work study at Whatcom Community College, selling chicken eggs, and donating plasma. The comparison population is more likely to list SSI, Social Security, GAU, GAX, and SSD as income sources, corresponding to their increased age and disability.

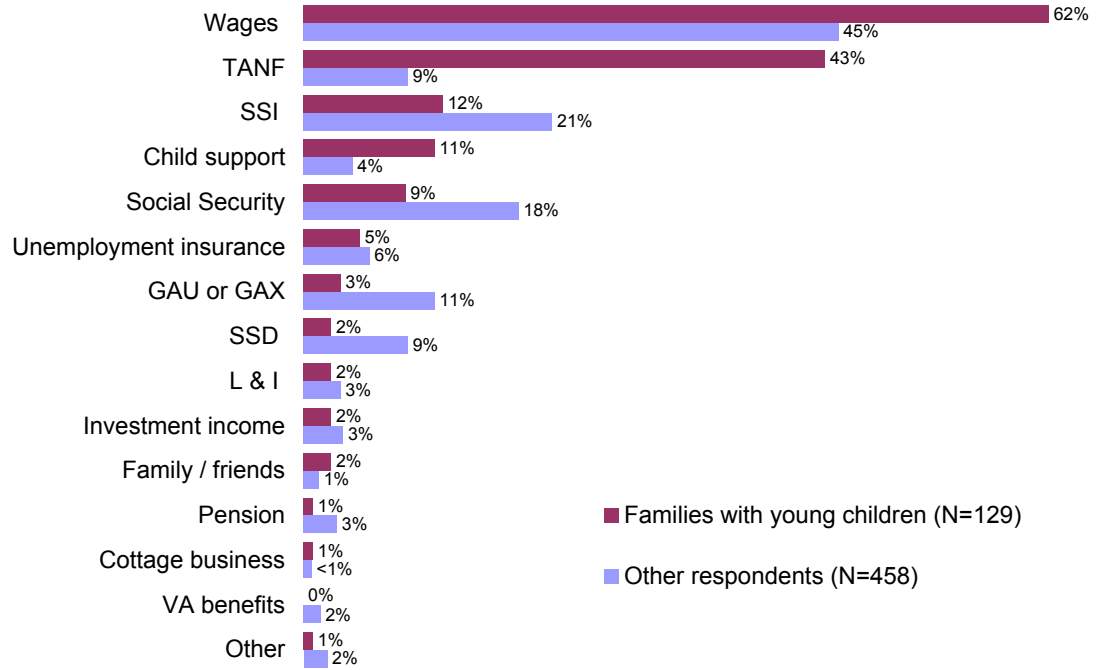


Figure 5: Household income sources

Poverty Status

Adjusting for family size, the proportion of families with young children who report household income at or below the federal poverty level (FPL) is 86% (Table 2); those households at or below 125% of FPL account for 93% of respondent households. This subsample is more likely to fall into both these categories than the full WPP sample, 74% of which are at or below the FPL and 86% of which are at or below 125% of FPL.

Table 2: Low-income respondent households by poverty status and household size

Household size	Number of respondent households	Federal Poverty Level (FPL) threshold Income per month (\$)	% of young children households at or below FPL threshold	Monthly income eligibility limits at 125% of FPL (\$)	% of young children low-income households at or below 125% FPL
2	15	\$ 1,141	87%	1,426	87%
3	20	\$ 1,431	95%	1,789	95%
4	24	\$ 1,721	75%	2,151	88%
5	13	\$ 2,011	85%	2,514	100%
6	15	\$ 2,301	100%	2,876	100%
7	7	\$ 2,591	100%	3,239	100%
8	5	\$ 2,881	40%	3,601	80%
All households	99		86%		93%

Job Skills Training and Living Wage Jobs

Most households with young children reported one or more working adults (Figure 6). This finding is inconsistent with findings reporting above, that only 62% of households received household income from wages or a job. One possible explanation for the discrepancy is that individual survey respondents reported wage income only if they themselves had received wage income in the previous 12 months (rather than think about others in their household who may have also had wage income). Another possible explanation is that the 20 plus respondents who did not report the number of workers in each age category did not have employed adults in their household, creating a non-response bias.

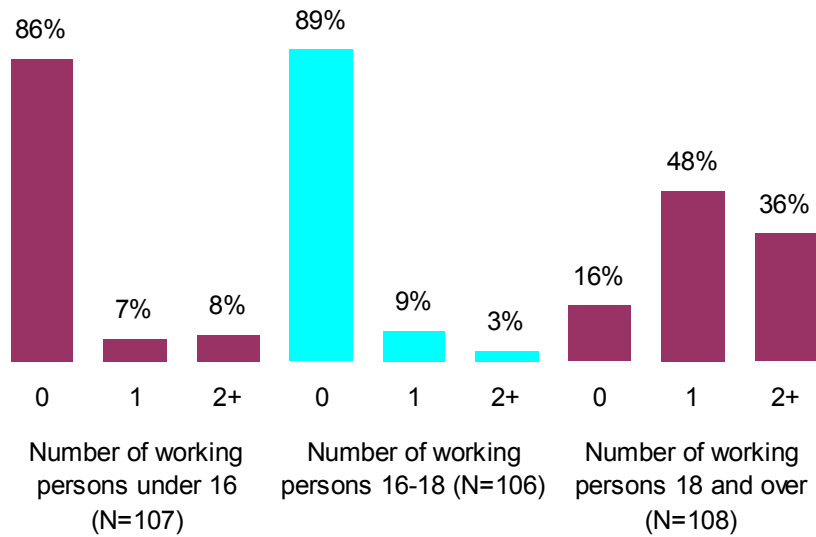


Figure 6: Number of persons per household with children under five who worked for pay in the previous 12 months, by age group

More than two-thirds of survey respondents for both samples (72% ECONW group, 69% comparison group) said that getting or keeping a good job had been a problem for someone in their household. Top reasons for difficulty getting or keeping a good job for families with young children include: not enough jobs (26%), no childcare (23%), not the right skills (23%), no transportation (19%), and physical or mental disability (18%). Many of the same barriers held true for the comparison population, with an even greater emphasis on disability, and much less importance placed on childcare (Figure 7). Open ended-responses brought up low wages, seasonal work, long commutes, and the closing down of businesses. The primarily female subsample also reported pregnancy, lack of job training, lack of confidence, and domestic violence issues as major barriers to employment.

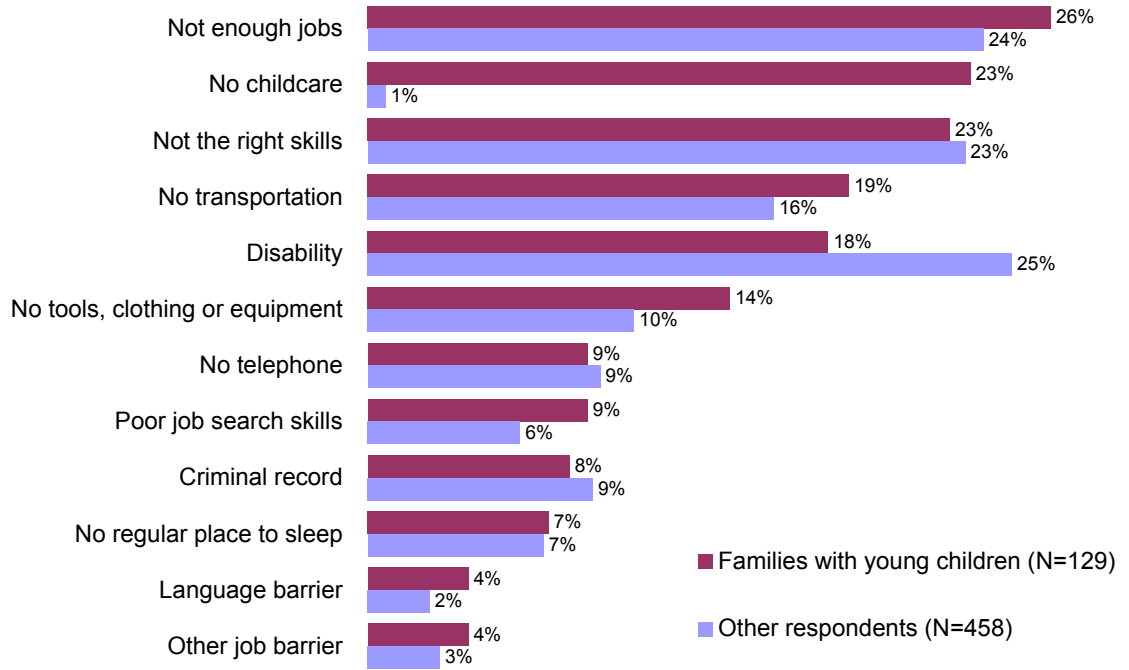


Figure 7: Barriers to getting or keeping a good job

Financial Situation

With the exception of personal bankruptcy, households with young children were more likely than other households to experience every type of financial hardship. Though these differences are small, the consistency of the pattern highlights the financial struggles faced by many low-income families (Figure 8). Most common situations include not being able to save for unexpected expenses (68%), having debt from medical or dental care (50%), and having fines or legal fees that are hard to pay off (29%). The largest difference between the two groups is that families with young children are significantly more likely to be struggling with payday loan debt.

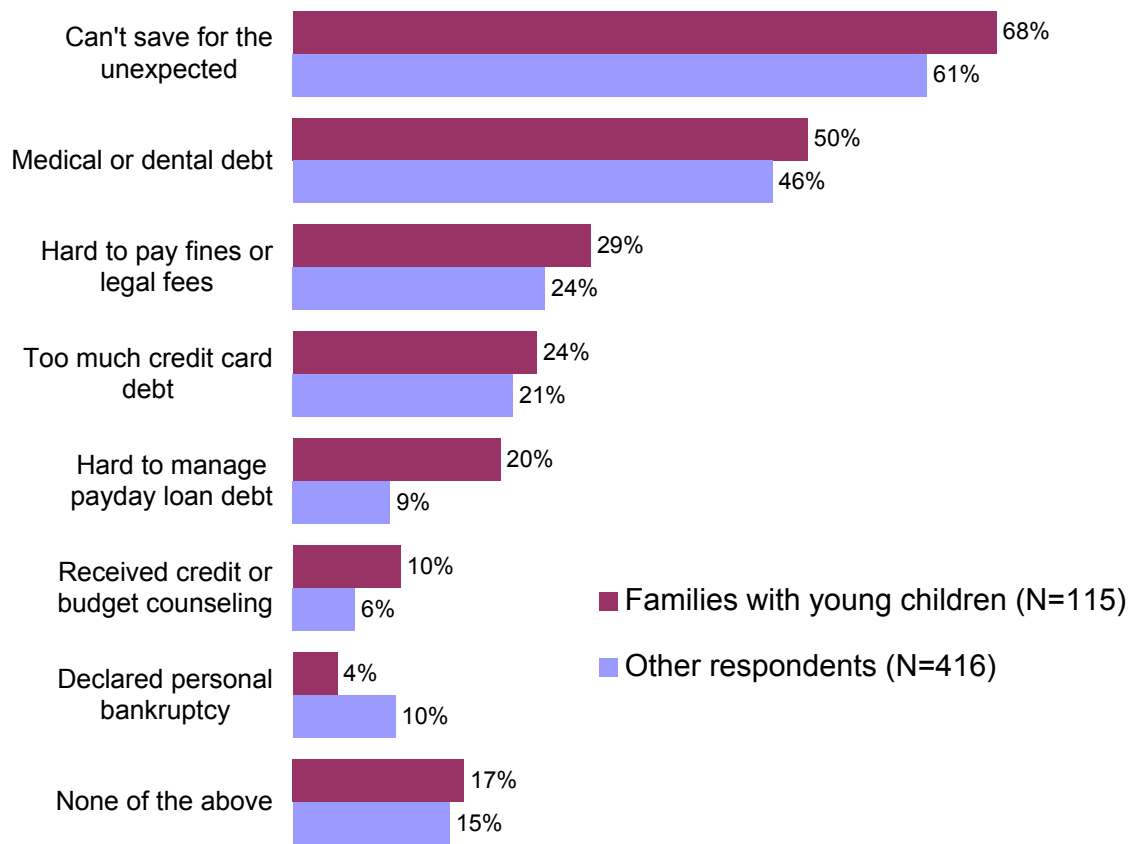


Figure 8: Respondent financial situations

Not only are households with young children more likely to experience troubling financial situations, they are also consistently more likely to report the financial incidents listed below (Figure 9). Subsample respondents commonly said that they have recently had to borrow money from family or friends (85%) and that they had been pressured to pay bills by stores, creditors or bill collectors (64%). More than half said that they fell behind in paying their rent or mortgage payment (58%) and they had to pawn or sell off valuables to make ends meet (54%). Borrowing money, falling behind in rent, and pawning or selling show the greatest between group disparity.

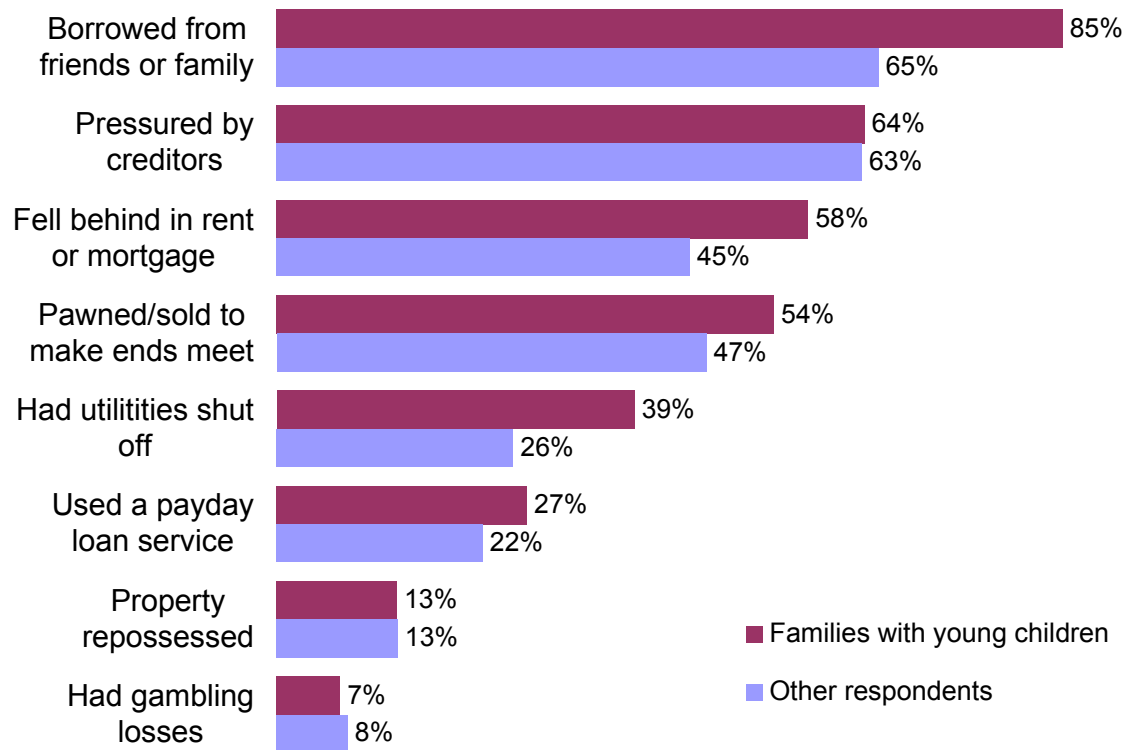


Figure 9: Respondent financial experiences in the last year

Educational Attainment

Compared to the rest of the sample, respondents with young children have significantly lower educational attainment, with 59% compared to 45% having no more than a high school degree. One in five of the subsample does not even have a high school degree or equivalent. The comparison sample is more than twice as likely to have a college degree (15% compared to 7%). Though the sub-population is younger, this analysis was only conducted on respondents at least 25 years old, so age is unlikely to confound the relationship between education level and having young children at home.

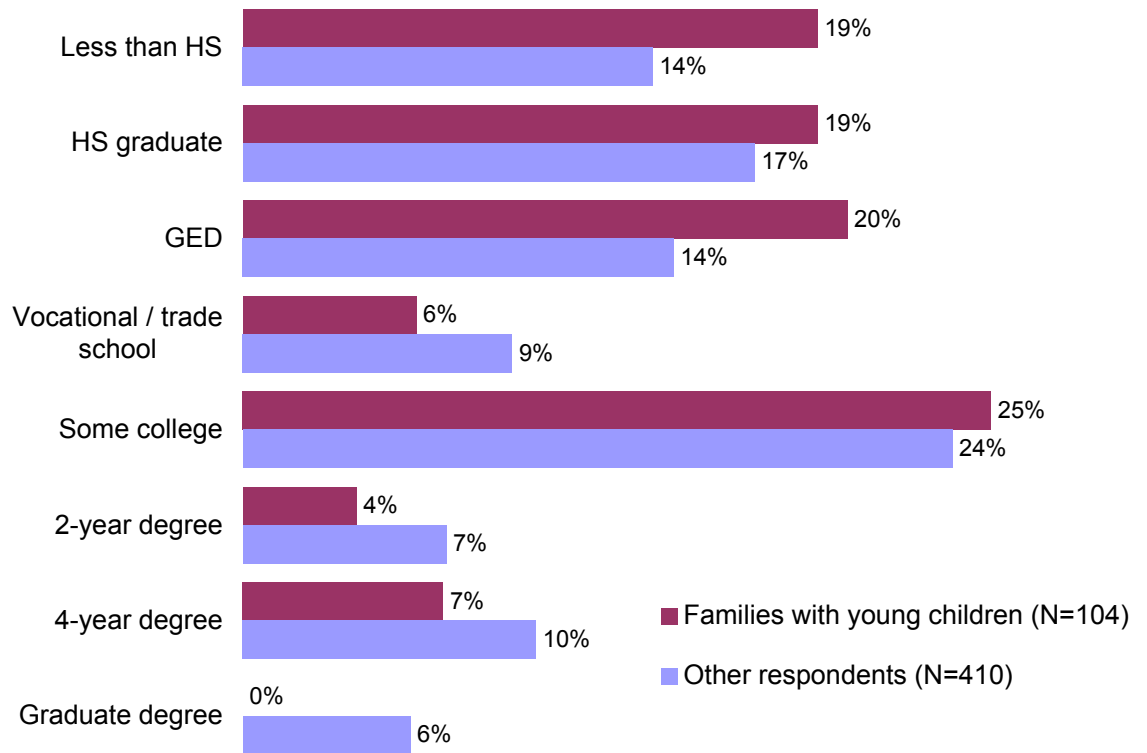


Figure 10: Educational attainment of respondents 25 years and older

Housing

Housing Type

The most common living situation for families with young children is rental housing (63%). They are about half as likely to own their own home as the comparison sample (12% compared to 20%). Though home-ownership rates are low, hopes are high, with 88% of households with young children and 70% of other households hoping to purchase their own home someday. Several respondents in our subsample mentioned plans to buy homes in the open-ended response section.

The ECONW subsample is more likely to share housing, but less likely to be homeless or in transitional housing than other households (Figure 11). This may be due to more housing assistance available to families with children.

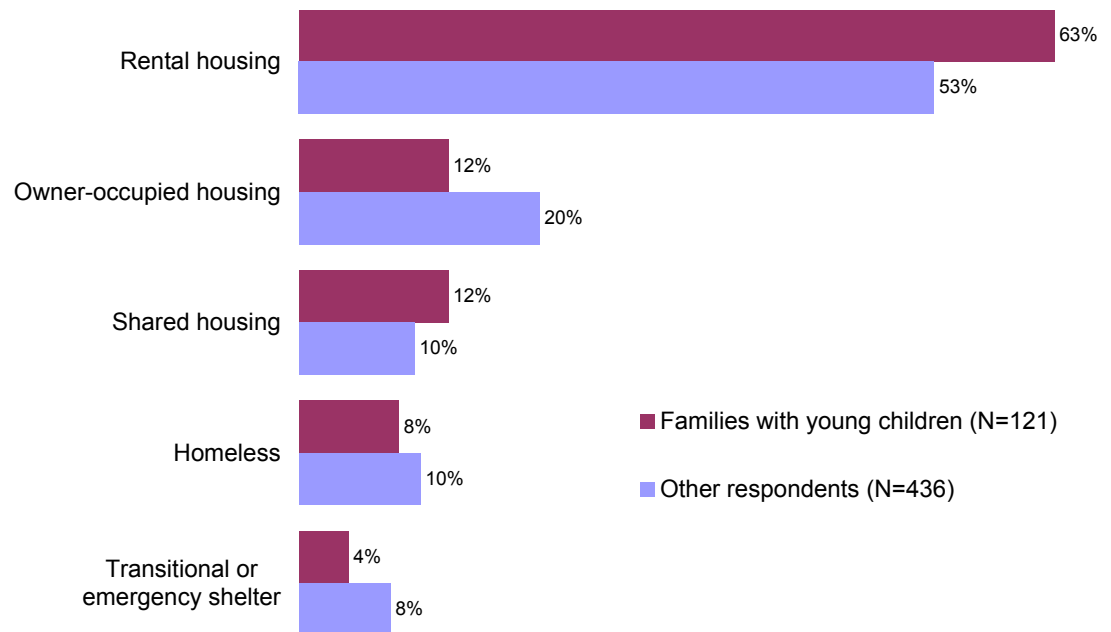


Figure 11: Respondent housing type

One way to further understand these differences in housing status is to examine barriers to homeownership (Figure 12). About two thirds of both groups list poor credit, and not being able to afford down payments and mortgage payments as barriers to homeownership. In response to an open-ended question, several respondents emphasized financial and employment struggles which kept them from buying a home. Households with young children are more likely than other households to report poor credit, and less likely to report mortgage payment affordability as a barrier.

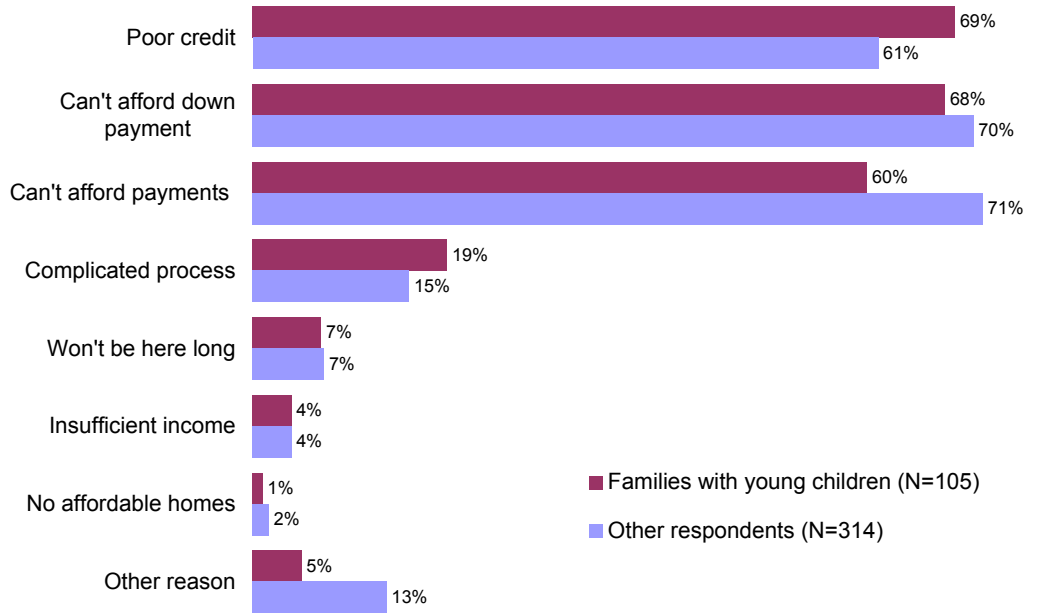


Figure 12: Barriers to homeownership

Housing Cost Burden and Assistance

On average, low-income households with young children pay more than other households for monthly housing costs (Table 3). Housing is considered to be affordable when households spend no more than a third of their pretax income on housing costs. By comparing household income to reported rent or mortgage payment, a conservative estimate of the housing affordability rate can be determined. Families with young children spend an average of 66% of their income on rent, compared to 54% for other households. For both sample groups, 61% of respondents are spending more than a third of their household income on mortgage or rent payments. The proportion of low-income clients paying more than a third of income for total housing costs is certainly higher than what could be estimated with this survey data because the questionnaire did not measure other housing costs such as utilities, insurance, property taxes and maintenance.

Table 3: Renter cost and cost burden

	ECONW Sample (N=105)	Comparison Sample (N=350)
Mean monthly cost (rent or mort. pmt.)	\$ 517	\$ 460
Median monthly cost (rent or mort. pmt.)	\$ 529	\$ 400
Mean cost burden (% of income spent on rent)	66%	54%
Median cost burden	44%	42%
Cost burden >30% of income	61%	61%

About a third of both samples receive housing assistance in the forms of rent subsidies (e.g. Section 8 voucher) and down payment assistance meant to reduce the household's housing cost burden. The charts in Figure 13 compare the average cost burden (mean cost and percent of income paid for rent or mortgage payment) with and without some form of housing assistance for our two sample groups. While the effect of housing assistance on households without young children is not insignificant at 13 percentage points, the benefit of housing assistance to households with young children is enormous, reducing cost burden by about half (79% compared to 40%).

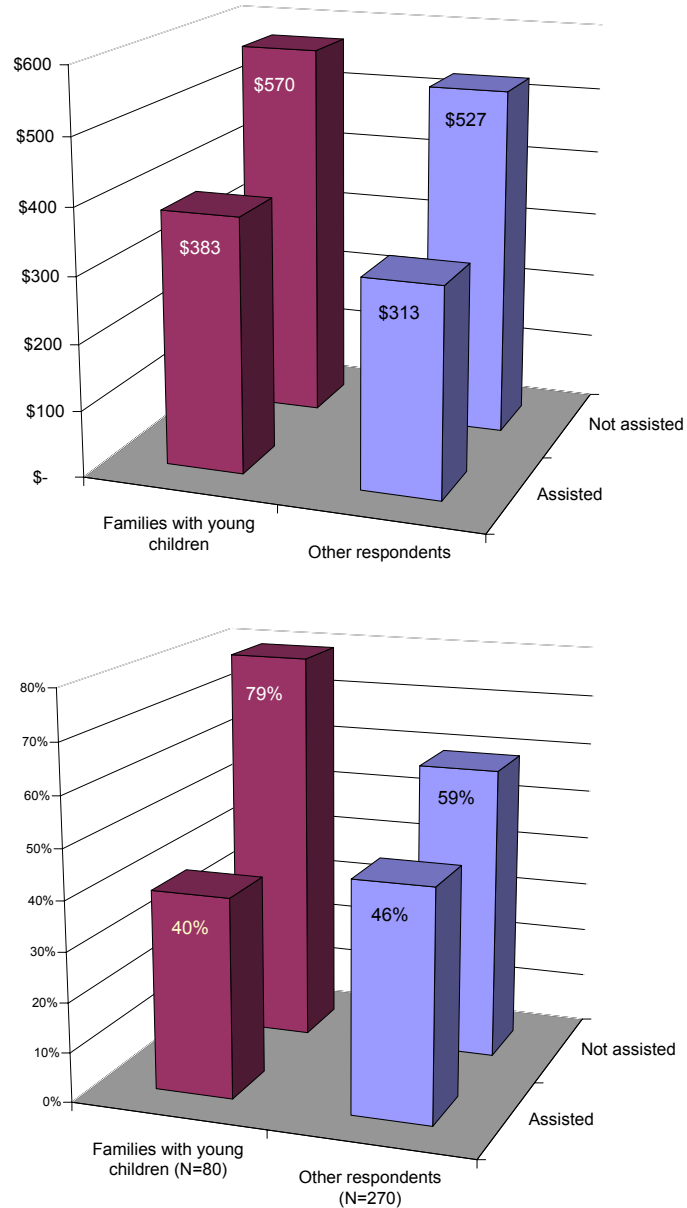


Figure 13: Mean cost burden for survey respondents with and without housing assistance

Housing Condition

Most households with young children reported their housing to be in good shape (38%) or needing only minor repairs (43%). Just 3% say that their home is in such bad shape that it is unsafe (Figure 14). One open-ended response mentioned poor maintenance as a housing issue. This conditions are very similar for the comparison group.

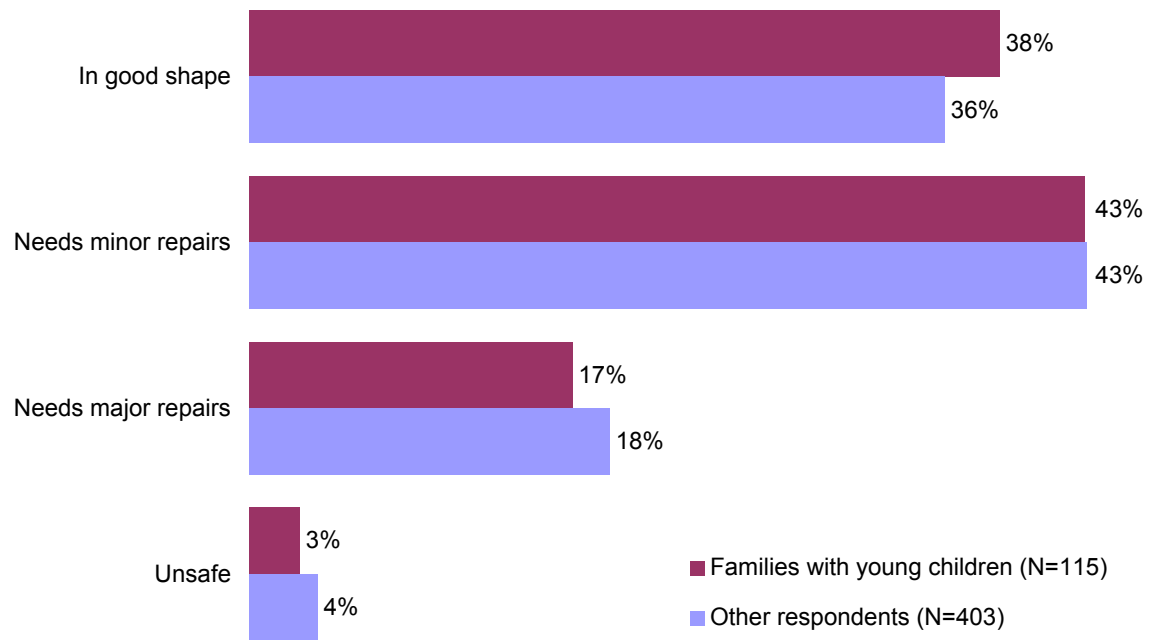


Figure 14: Housing condition

Housing Situations

A comparison of housing situations experienced by the subsample and the comparison group leads to a deeper understanding of the housing challenges facing low-income families with young children (Figure 15). The sub-population is significantly more likely to experience one of the most common housing challenges: having to share housing with another household to make it more affordable (44% compared to 33%). This theme was echoed in the open-ended response section, where several respondents mentioned over-crowding due to shared housing and financial struggles associated with housing issues.

Families with young children are not immune to homelessness, nor are they strangers to shelter life, reporting these experiences at similar rates as other households. About one in five of both groups reported having been homeless for more than a week sometime in the last year. The lack of family shelters where men, women and children could all live together was mentioned by several respondents in the open-ended section.

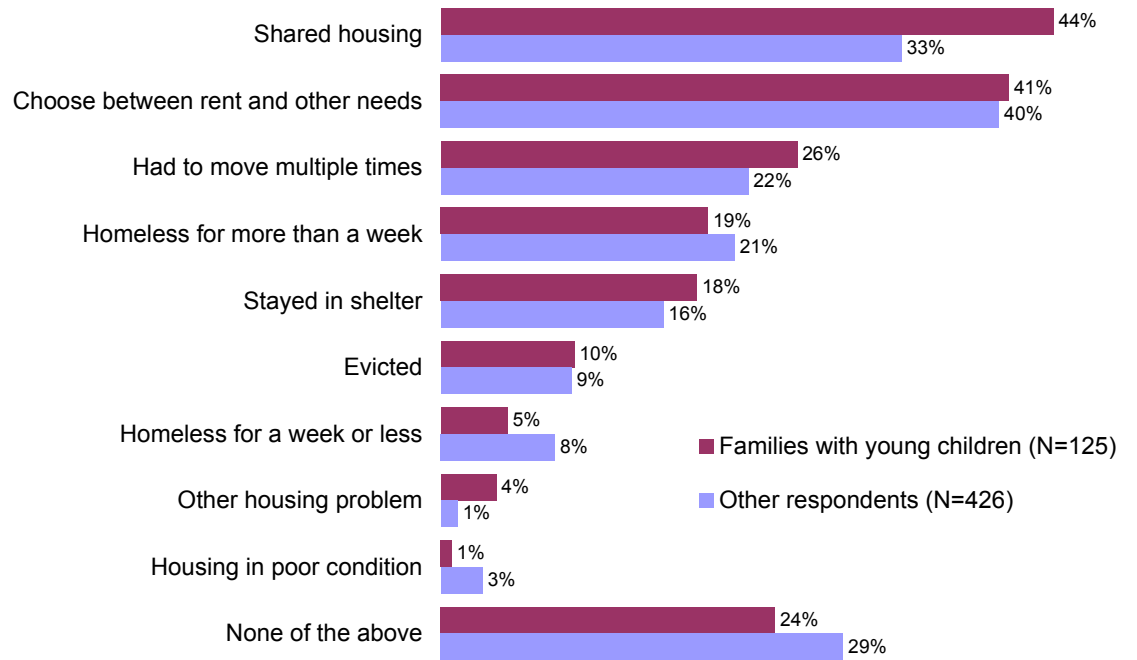


Figure 15: Housing situation

Health and Healthcare

Overall Health Status

The difference between self-reported health status of our two groups was small, with average health for both groups between good and fair. Respondents with young children were somewhat more likely to report very good health (20% compared to 15%), and less likely to report poor health (8% compared to 15%). This corresponds to earlier findings that our target population is younger and has fewer disabilities.

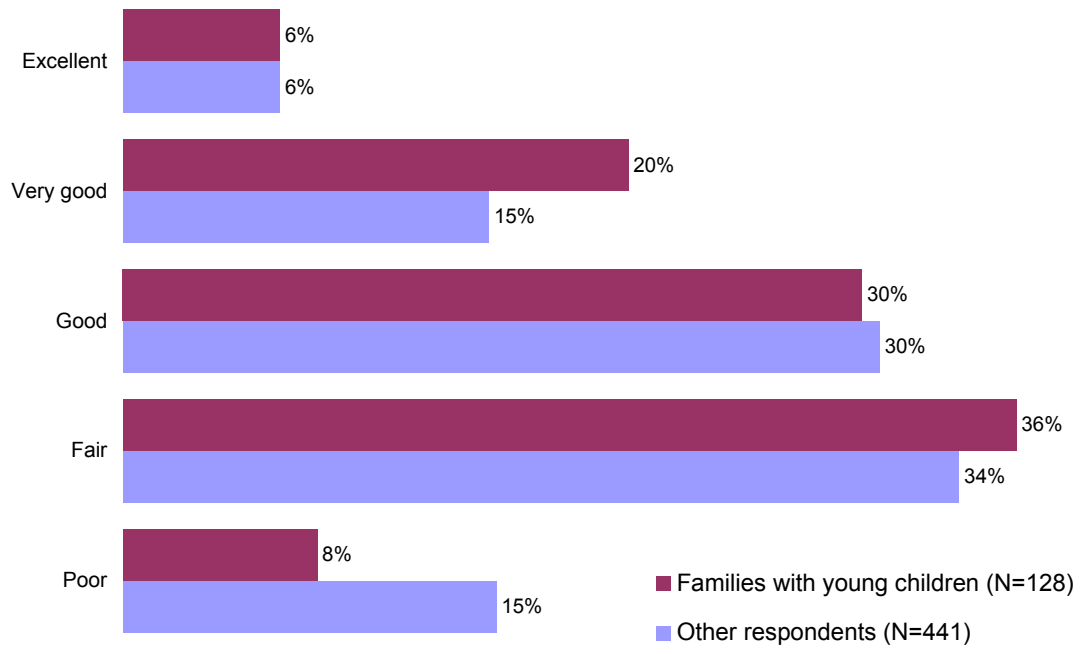


Figure 16: Respondent general health status

Health Insurance

As Figure 17 portrays, DSHS medical coupon is the most common type of health insurance for both groups, but much more frequently reported by respondents with young children (64% compared to 41%). The comparison group is three times as likely as the target group to rely on Medicare for healthcare needs (19% compared to 6%), which again correlates to the older average age of households without young children. A quarter of young families and a third of other households have no health coverage at all; a stark reminder of the healthcare access challenges in our community.

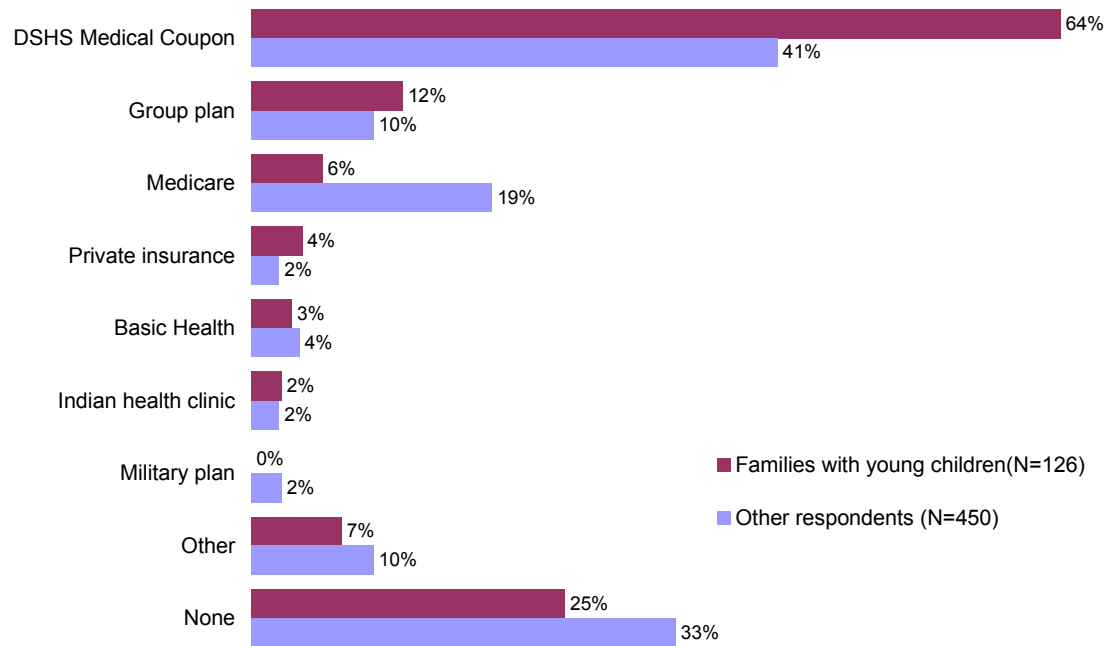


Figure 17: Respondent's type of health insurance

Child Health Insurance

Among households with children under six years old living at home 90% say their children are covered by health insurance, compared to 75% of parenting households without children 0-5 years old.

Primary Care

Respondents in both groups are most likely to go to a community health center or a private doctor's office for their healthcare needs (Figure 18). The emergency department is also a common source of healthcare for respondents with young children, at 38% compared to 28% of other respondents. Walk-in clinics are used more by respondents without young children. Church and therapy were also indicated as sources of healthcare by our target population.

An open-ended response section revealed that several respondents with young children have nowhere to go for affordable health care (N=5).

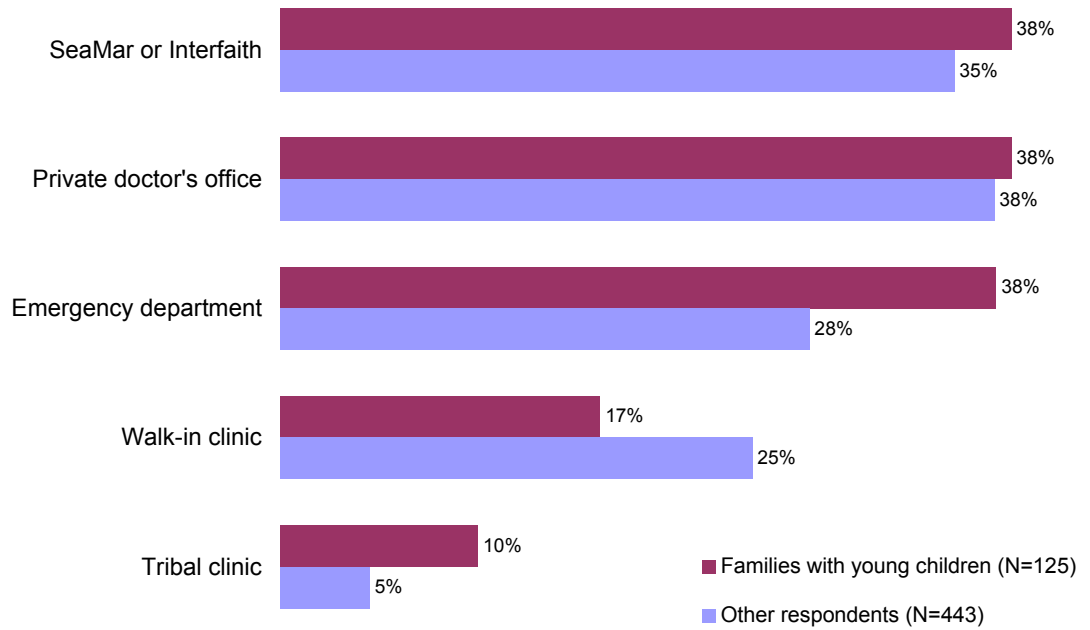


Figure 18: Where survey respondents usually go for medical care

Health Information

While insurance policies often restrict where an individual may seek medical care, sources of health information may reveal more about social supports and constraints. By asking where respondents usually seek advice or information about their health, we find that both groups are equally likely to go to a doctor or other health professional (68%). Respondents with young children are much more likely to seek help from family (40%) and friends (30%) compared to other respondents, at 25% and 26% respectively (Figure 19). Both groups are equally likely to seek advice and information from a hospital or pharmacist, though individuals with young children are less likely than others to use the internet, social service agencies, or the library for these purposes. These findings suggest that young families have stronger social networks than other types of households, thus rely less on other health information resources.

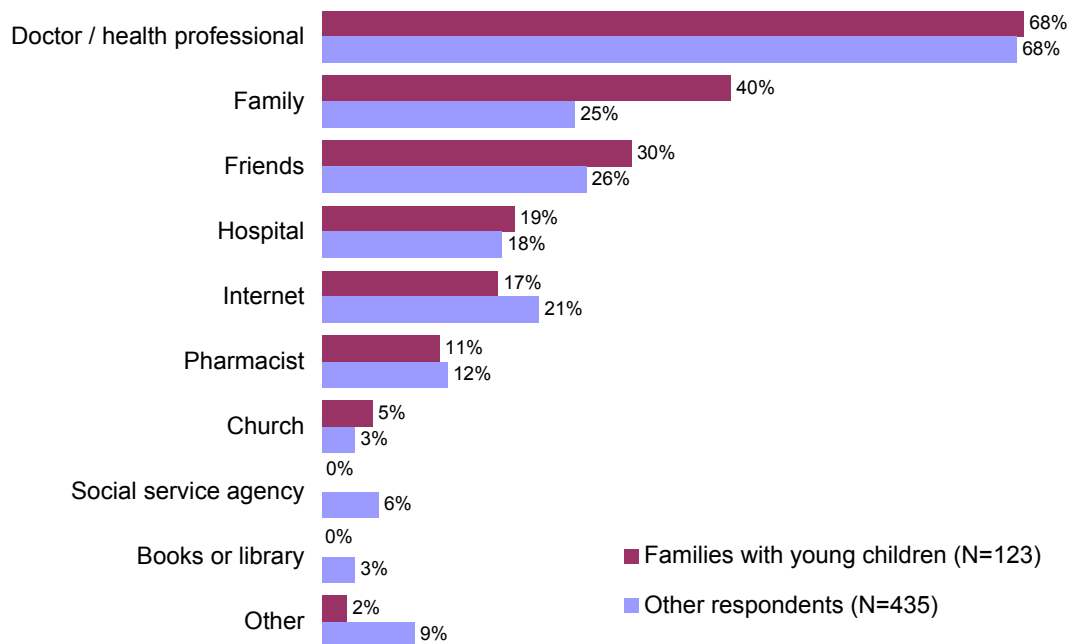


Figure 19: Where survey respondents usually go for advice or information about health

Access and Barriers

More than half (58%) of respondents with young children and 67% of others said that in the last 12 months, they needed medical, dental, mental health care or medication, but didn't receive it. Both groups report high costs and lack of insurance as the most common reasons for not receiving needed care (Figure 20). In an open-ended response, several respondents from our subsample reported high costs and inadequate coverage, especially when it comes to dental, vision, and prescriptions. Practical challenges ranging from long waits to transportation and time conflicts all weigh more heavily on respondents with young children at home. This analysis also brings up the pervasive issue of childcare (16%), central to the lives of families with young children and interconnected to all other spheres of their lives.

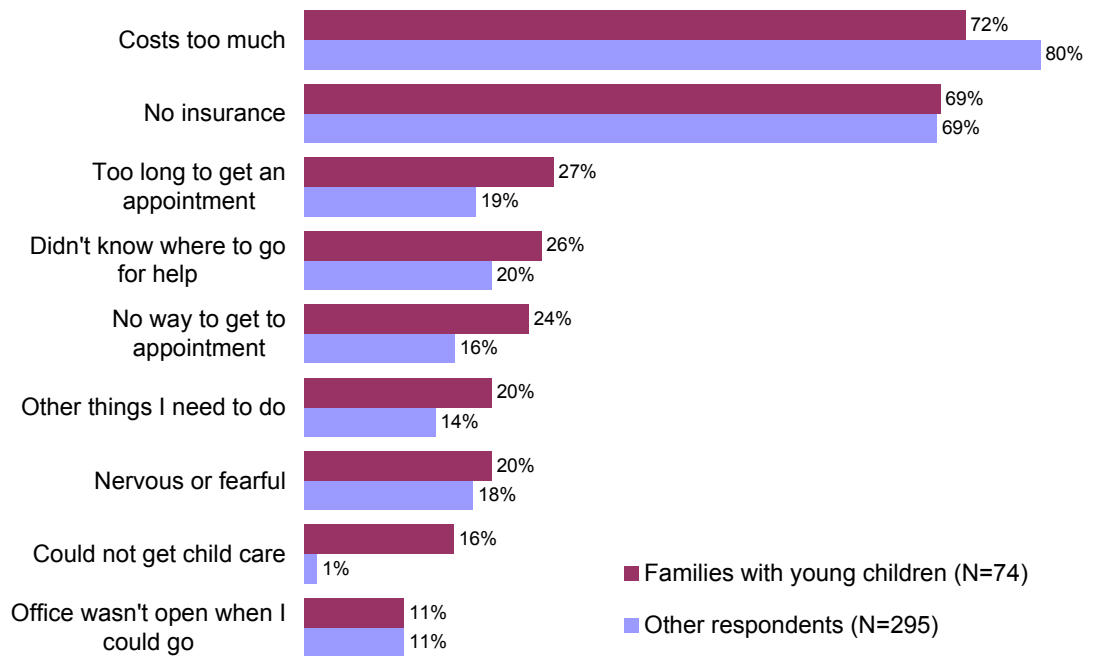


Figure 20: Barriers to care (medical, dental, mental health, and prescription combined)

Parenting and Childcare

There is arguably nothing more important to parents than the care and support their children receive, leading to significant concern and the responsibility to find quality, affordable childcare. However, 43% of low-income households with children five and under find it difficult to maintain adequate childcare services.

Child Characteristics

Respondents with children at home were asked to describe their children in terms of hopes, concerns, and child disabilities (Figure 21). Here we examine the child characteristics of the 129 households with children five and under. Less than half (49%) report that their children are doing well in school, and 15% say that their children are having trouble in school. Only 41% believe that their children receive adequate medical care. Learning disabilities are common, at a rate of 16%, followed by developmental disabilities (8%). As noted earlier, these types of disabilities are more prevalent in our target population, while disabilities affecting mobility and work are more common among the older, comparison population (Figure 4). Many of these parents are also worried about the weight or eating habits of their children, especially that they are overweight.

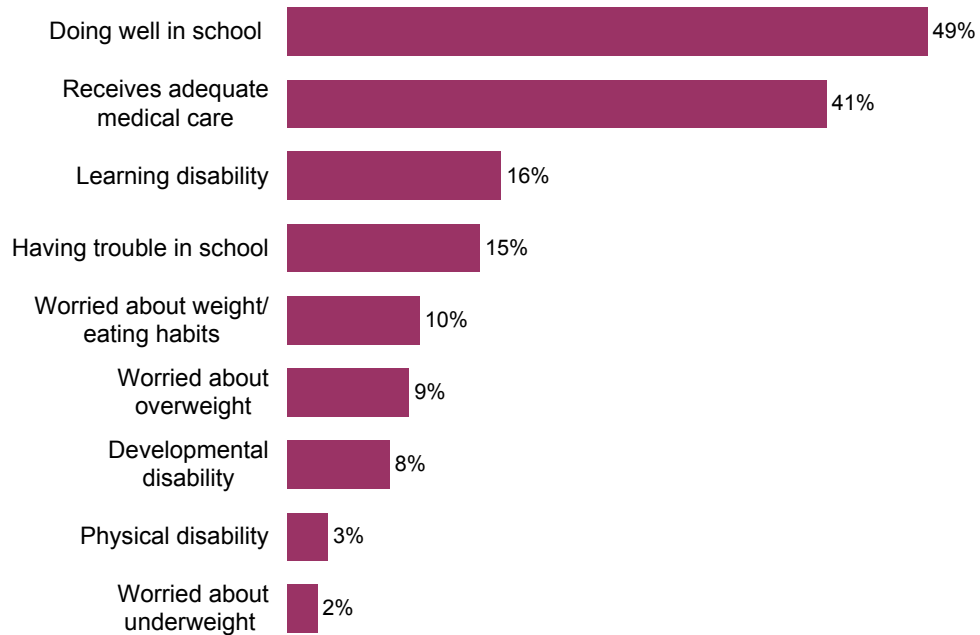


Figure 21: Characteristics of survey respondents' children (N = 129)

Childcare

About three quarters (74%) of our subsample uses some amount of childcare, ranging from one hour per week to 52 hours per week. The average child is in care 24 hours per week (mean = 24, median = 27). The most common forms of childcare are friends, neighbors, relatives (42%) and grandparents (31%). About a third of respondents use licensed childcare and one in five use Head Start (Figure 22). YMCA and tribal after school programs were also mentioned.

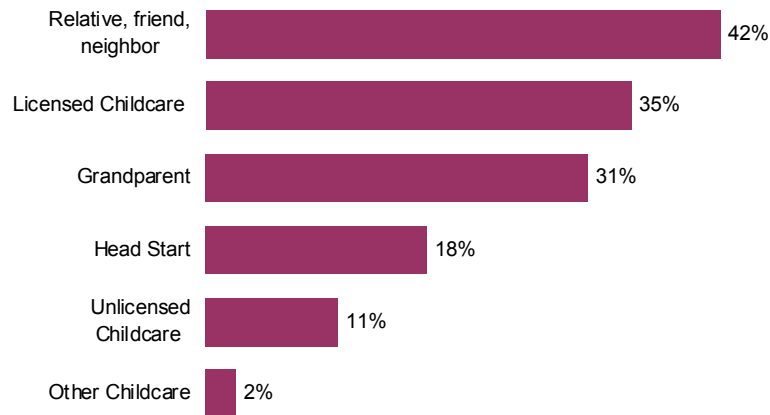


Figure 22: Type of childcare services used (N=84)

As mentioned above, 43% of low-income households with young children find it hard to get and keep adequate childcare services. Of this group, 39% attributed this difficulty in part to affordability (Figure 23). Many also find it difficult to find childcare services that fit their needs, such as weekend (36%), evening (31%), infant (28%), and part-time care (21%). One in five (18%) reported other problems with childcare including: children’s behavior and illness, long wait lists, and schedule and transportation challenges. One respondent conveyed fears of the daycare system, while another told of family problems.

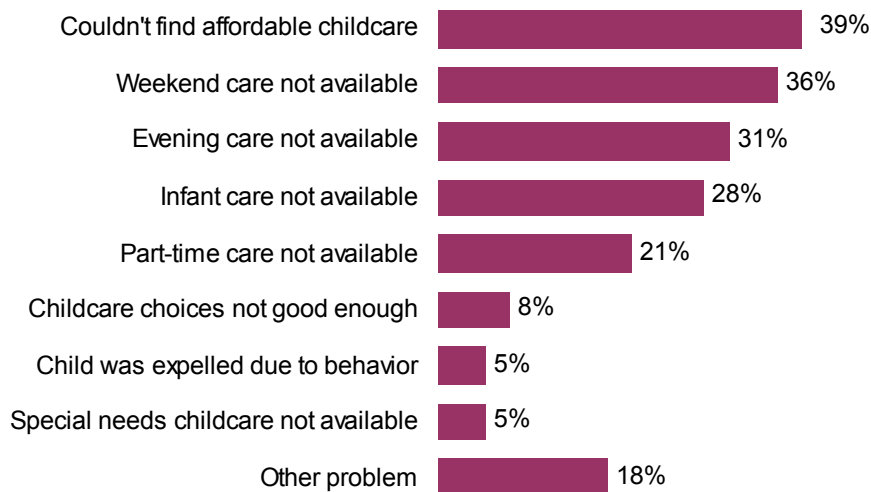


Figure 23: Barriers to keeping adequate childcare services (N=39)

Food and Nutrition

Food Security and Assistance

Families with young children are more likely than other low-income households to rely on food assistance programs, and, generally, this group is more food secure than other respondents (Figure 24). Even so, about half of the respondents in the subsample (52%) said that in the past 12 months someone in their household had skipped meals and because they could not get enough food and nearly a third (30%) said that someone at home had gone hungry.

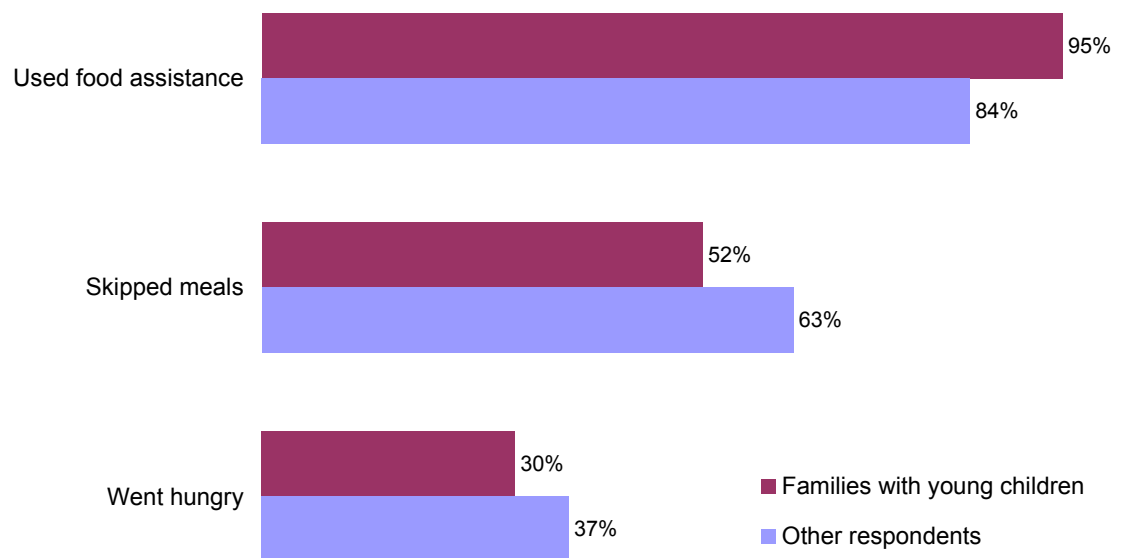


Figure 24: Household food security and assistance indicators

Accessing Community Food Resources

Survey respondents rely on a wide variety of supplemental food sources (Figure 25). Food banks and food stamps are the most common, with three quarters of both groups using food banks and 71% of respondents with young children using food stamps (58% of the comparison group). Programs such as Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and free and reduced school lunches are specifically aimed at families with children, and used at high rates by the subsample (50% use WIC and 18% use school meals). Soup kitchens and churches are used more by our comparison population, which may not qualify for other forms of assistance. Respondents with young children also mentioned specific sources of grocery items: the Salvation Army, Hope House, and gleaners; as well as prepared meals: Salt on the Street, Bellingham Community Meal Program, CAST (Faith Lutheran), and Food Not Bombs.

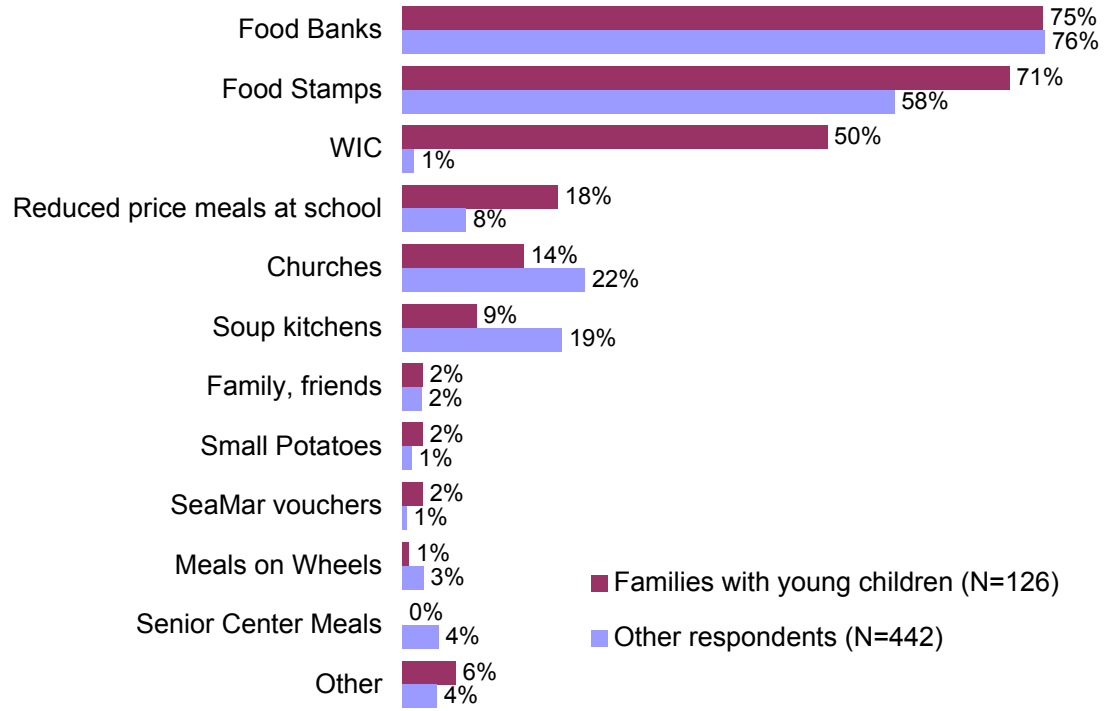


Figure 25: Food assistance programs used by survey respondents

Transportation

Transportation Challenges

Respondents with young children are more likely than others to report not being able to afford car repairs (51% compared to 42%), and to be uninsured (50% compared to 36%). Many have additional car problems, including inability to afford gas (43%), not having access to a car (33%), or not having a license (26%).

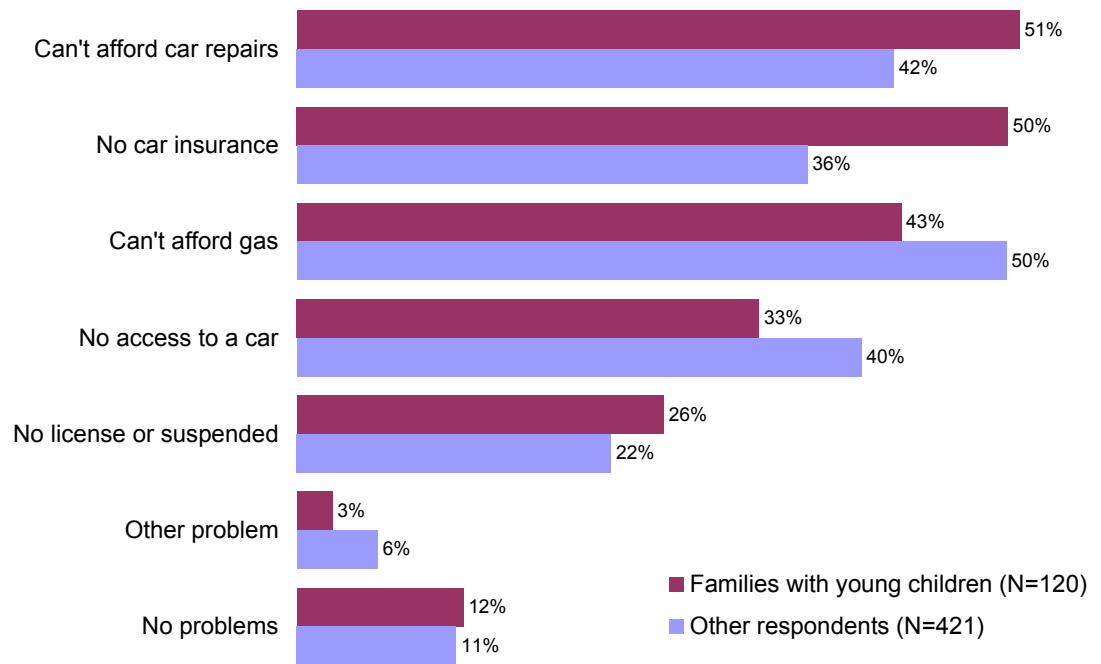


Figure 26: Household car problems (insurance Chi-Sq = .005)

Public Transit Use

Despite all of the car problems reported, only 36% of respondents with young children reported that someone in their household regularly uses the bus, compared to 49% of other households.

Barriers to Public Transit Use

When asked why people in their households don't regularly use the bus, 62% of respondents with young children said they prefer to use their cars, while a mere 1% prefer walk or bike (Figure 27). The next most common reasons for not taking the bus are related to bus schedules and routes: times/days don't work for them (28%), and no bus stop close to home (25%), and no service where they are going (14%). They also mentioned the difficulty of using public transit with children, especially when children in the same household go to different schools. Carpooling and using taxis were also mentioned as alternatives. Our comparison population is more likely than our target population to attribute low usage to disability (18% compared to 1%) and less likely to prefer car travel to the bus (46% compared to 62%).

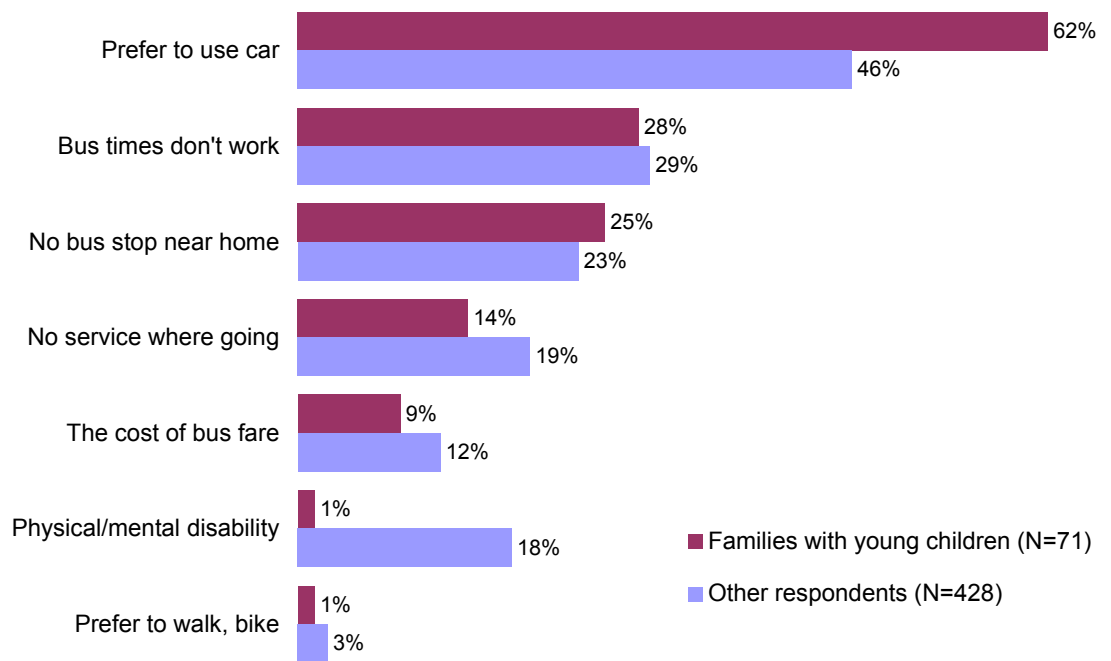


Figure 27: Barriers to bus use by non-regular bus users

Community Services Assessment

Service gaps analysis

Survey respondents rated both the *importance* and the *availability* of 14 categories of community services in Whatcom County to their own household currently. Below, we examine the perspectives of families with young children on community services as a way to gauge local service gaps to this sub-population.

Importance of services. With a few notable exceptions, families with young children and other households are equally likely say that each of these community services are extremely important to their households at the time of the survey (Figure 28). However, families with young children are much more likely to say that affordable childcare and basic education are extremely important.

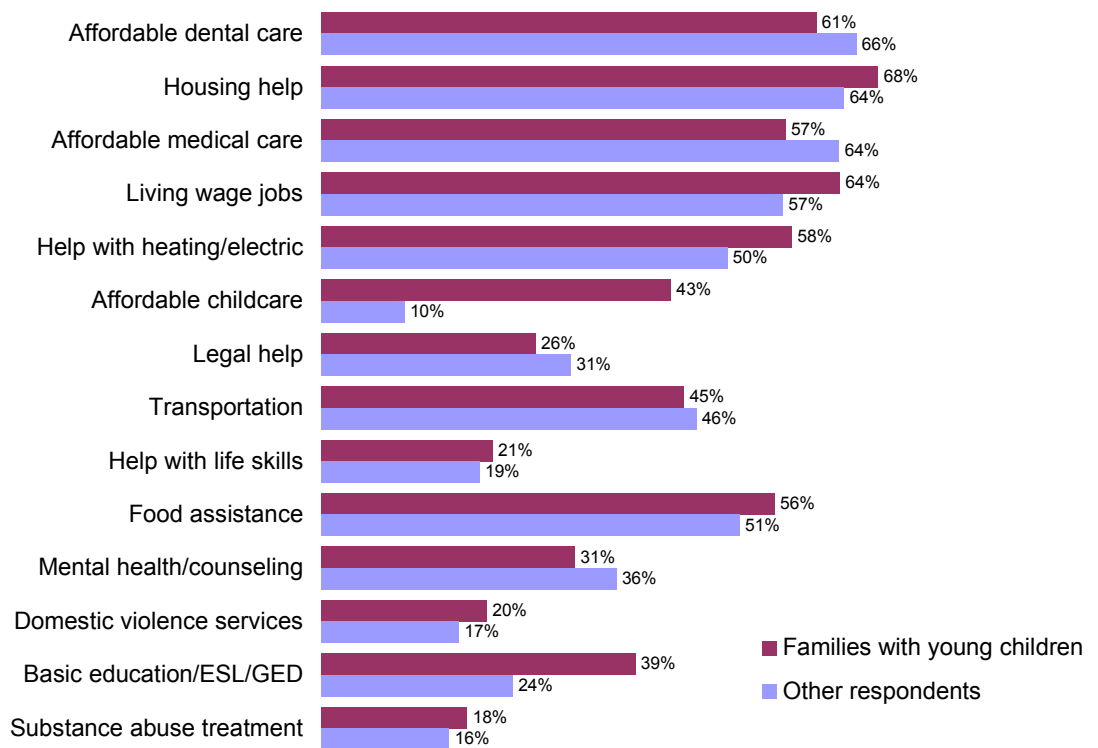


Figure 28: Proportion of families with children five years old and younger and other respondents who rate services extremely important to their households

Availability of services. Regarding service availability, where there are significant differences between the two groups, families with young children are less likely to report that community services are “very hard to get.” And that is the case for all services except housing, energy, transportation and food assistance (Figure 29).

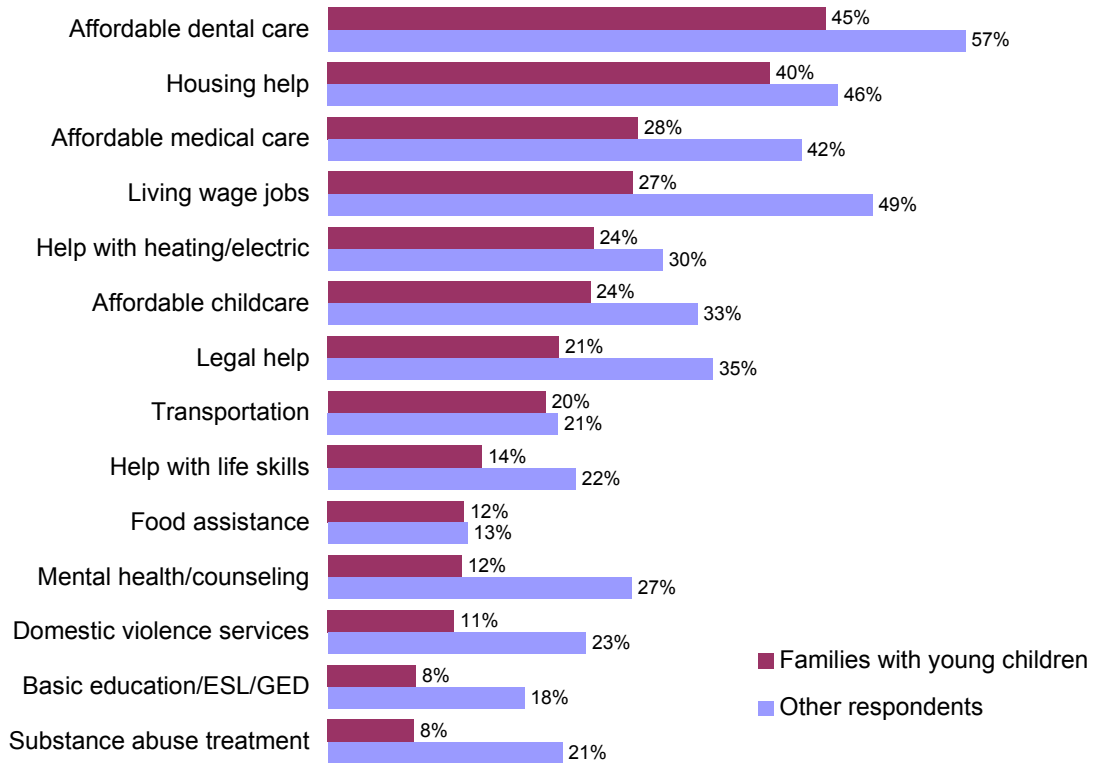


Figure 29: Proportion of families with children five years old and younger and other respondents who rate services “very hard to get”

Services gap analysis using importance-availability index. From an individual household’s perspective, if a social or health service is both “extremely important” to their household and “very hard to get”, there is a perceived extreme service gap for that particular service. Figure 30 presents the proportion of families with young children compared to the proportion of all other respondents who perceive an extreme service gap for each of the 14 services.

The differences here are significant for only two community services: the subsample with young children are more likely to experience an extreme service gap for affordable childcare and less likely to experience the same for living wage jobs.

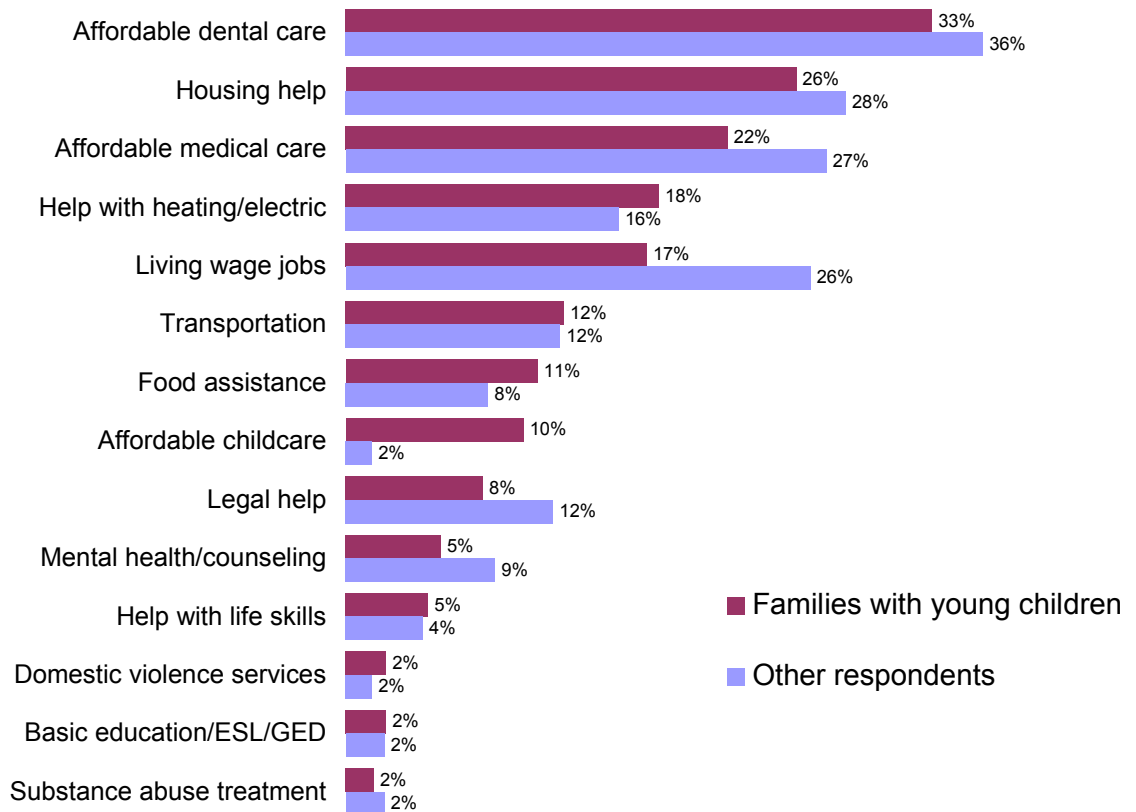


Figure 30: Proportion of families with children five years old and younger and other respondents who perceive an extreme gap in their community for the listed service (extreme service gap is defined here as “extremely important” to their household and “very hard to get”)

Services gap analysis using importance-availability coordinate system. Because respondents rated these services on five-point scales,¹ another way to analyze these data is to calculate the average importance and availability scores for each service. These data form the basis of an “importance-availability” coordinate rating system (Figure 31). The average importance and availability ratings were calculated and plotted on a two-dimensional chart. The lines making up the “crosshairs” of each graph represent the average importance score and the average availability score of all services combined for this sub-population.

The importance-availability charts are divided into quadrants that rate the services as follows:

Quadrant I Services that rank above average in importance, and below average in availability

Quadrant II Above average in importance and availability

Quadrant III Below average in importance and availability

Quadrant IV Below average in importance, and above average in availability

Individuals and organizations planning for future services may want to pay particular attention to the services that appear in the first quadrant (I). These highlighted services are those that, on average, are extremely important to low-income households who have children under five, and are very hard for them to access.

For this list of services, *housing help, dental and medical care, living wage jobs and help with heating/electric and affordable childcare* appear to be high priority services needing attention for households with young children. These finding should not diminish the importance of other services that are needed by a smaller percentage of the population such as domestic violence services and substance abuse treatment.

¹ Importance scale ranged from 1, for “not important” to 5, for “extremely important”; Availability scale ranged from 1, for “very hard to get” to 5, for “very easy to get”

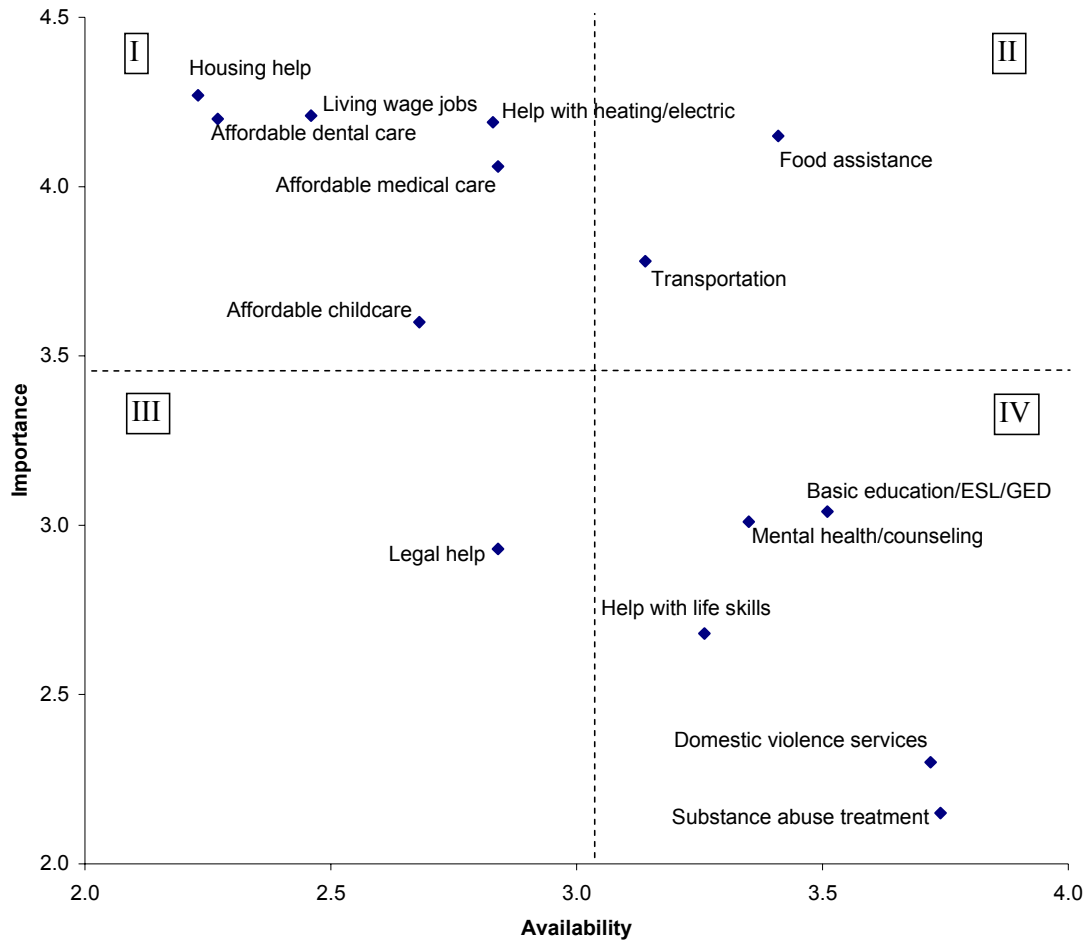


Figure 31: Low-income households with young children perspectives on services importance and availability

Other Respondent Comments

At the end of the paper survey, respondents were invited to comment and give recommendations to service providers with the following open-ended question:

The Whatcom Prosperity Project wants to find ways to help everyone in our community be successful in their lives. Based on your own situation, would you like to suggest ways that people or organizations in Whatcom County can support you in your success?

Following are the open-ended responses from the sample of 129 respondents with children five and younger at home. The most frequently mentioned needs are living wage jobs, affordable dental care, energy assistance, and above all, affordable housing for all types of families.

Employment, Education, and Income

Employment Opportunities

Help cut commutes. Help get job closer to home.

Help get people jobs.

Labor for groups that pay daily. So a four people group could car pool and bring four paychecks back.

Training Opportunities

If DSHS offered work study / experience on weekends – help those who don't have time during the week to get the skills they need.

[Help with] budgeting.

Housing / Energy

Family Shelter

Need shelter for men with children.

Family (co-ed with children) transitional housing.

Affordable Housing

Provide more low income houses within the city limits (not condos/complexes or duplexes).

Help create affordable housing for young adults.

Also help with loans to pay for a house.

More low income housing.

Need affordable housing.

Better housing help.

Affordable housing more readily accessible.

I would be happy to have them find me a place and help me with free stuff.

Energy Assistance & Home Repairs

Be in communication with Puget Sound Energy so they don't shut power off.

Subsidized utility bills.

Covering energy costs, or revamping my apartment for lower cost.

Assistance with home repairs.

Health and Healthcare

Medical

Help with medical care costs, including mental health and medications.

Affordable health care.

Dental

Dental help would be wonderful. I have not received dental care in years.

Dental care.

Affordable dental care.

Child Services

Support group for grandparents raising their grandchildren;

I think you need to advertise more volunteer projects children can be included in.

Aid for any children regardless of available Social Security Number.

Food and Nutrition / Basic Needs

What They Have

TANF clients: helpful to get food voucher.

County has done enough to help low income people with food and clothing.

What They Need

Provide food assistance at end of month when peoples' supplies are running low.

Need more food sometimes.

Transportation

Provide a weekend help center that will have repair/gas vouchers on hand.

Help with transportation needs

Need transportation from and to job due to schedule of bus. Bus gets to my job too late. I have lost a lot of work because of this.

Respect / Humanity

Promote honesty, integrity and fairness to the financially under privileged.

Other

Stop bureaucracy and political corruption.

DSHS has been very helpful.

Whatcom County is doing a good job, but changes need to be made at the state and federal levels.