

Supporting children and families: TANF and Head Start in Puerto Rico



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With almost half of the population in poverty and vast proportions of the island immigrating to the United States for better prospects, Puerto Rican children and families are struggling. The following literature review provides a chronology of public assistance and poverty in Puerto Rico, summarizes the information available for two programs which offer support for families in poverty, and identifies directions for future research.

POVERTY IN PUERTO RICO

Under Spanish colonial rule, Puerto Rico developed an agricultural economy based on the production of coffee, sugar, cattle and tobacco. Rural, mountain-dwelling communities produced coffee on land unsuitable for other crops. These other crops, particularly sugar, were produced on relatively small tracts of land, or *hacendados*, owned by Spanish landowners. Laborers lived and worked on these *haendados*, and often afforded small plots of land to produce food for their families. The landowner-laborer relationship was especially important for the production of sugar, which requires heavy labor for a six month season, followed by an off-season. The *hacendado* system, although exploitative, provided for workers during the off-season (Baker, 2002).

Under the United States' direction, the economy in Puerto Rico shifted towards a sugar-crop economy controlled primarily by absentee American owners. This transformation had a devastating impact on the Puerto Rican economy and destroyed its ability to be agriculturally self-sustaining (Colón Reyes, 2011). First, as Puerto Ricans were no longer producing their own food, they relied on imports for the products they consumed. Reliance on imports meant that they paid higher prices than mainland US consumers for products while also receiving a lower wage than mainland US workers. Secondly, prior agricultural systems were destroyed. With the dismantling of the *hacendado* system, laborers in the sugar fields found themselves unemployed for four to six months of the year. Coffee farmers migrated to urban centers, both relinquishing productive land and contributing to urban centers rife with poverty. Finally, the mechanisms of this economy were controlled by mainland US interests; both tariffs and quotas were controlled by the United States (Baker, 2002).

A decline in cane sugar during the 1920s, combined with population growth, and lack of reinvestment or diversification by US landowners and corporations lead to widespread unemployment, the migration of rural populations to metropolitan areas and widespread poverty. These events were compounded by two hurricanes and the Great Depression of the 1930s, devastating the Puerto Rican economy (Baker, 2002).

In 1947, to address ongoing economic issues in Puerto Rico, the US government developed a program called "Operation Bootstrap," marketed to the Puerto Rican people as a way to help themselves. Over the next 20 years, the economy shifted its orientation from agriculture to exports (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). Operation Bootstrap employed tax initiatives to incentivize investment from the mainland US. The

number of absentee-owned factories in Puerto Rico sky rocketed, as did the gross national product, however these measures of growth failed to combat unemployment and failed to incentivize the growth of Puerto Rican owned industry (Baker, 2002).

The shift towards manufacturing was not all negative. Positive trends included the generalization of literacy, the incorporation of women into the workplace and public life, higher wages, longer life expectancy and increased provision of reliable government services, including: water, electricity, housing, roads, and basic health and education services. However, rapid industrialization failed to provide sufficient jobs to improve the county's economy (Colón Reyes, 2011). Puerto Rico remained plagued by high unemployment, which never dropped below 10-11% due to volatility of employment by US companies, over-concentration of work in a few urban areas, and, beginning in the 1960s, an emergent housing crisis due to migration to these few urban centers of employment (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). In response to these economic pressures, an enormous number of Puerto Ricans began to migrate to the mainland US in search of work. Between 1947 and 1973 approximately one third of the population of Puerto Rico moved to the mainland US in search of work (Baker, 2002).

The economic downturn of the 1970s slowed positive economic trends and exacerbated negative ones; GDP fell from 7% in the 1960s to 2.1% in the 1980s and both employment rates and wages declined. Puerto Rico's per-capita income was half that of Mississippi, the poorest of the states (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007).

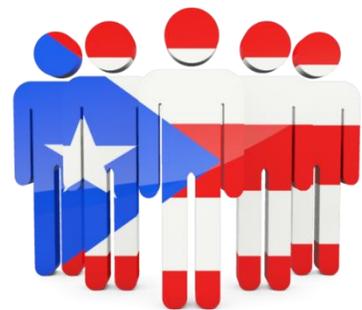
Although output soared in the decades between 1970 and 1990, Puerto Ricans saw little increase in income. In 1969, surveys found that close to two-thirds of all households in Puerto Rico were living beneath the official poverty line. This pattern, Sotomayor suggests, reflects economic growth bypassing the Puerto Rican worker as profits flooded absentee owners (Sotomayor, 1998). Indeed, by 1974 over 70% of all "productive wealth" in Puerto Rico belonged to these external investors (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). Unemployment rates, already high at 10% in the 1960s, rose to 23.5% by 1983 and did not fall below 15% throughout the 1980s (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007).

It was during this period that a larger number of federal assistance programs were extended to Puerto Rico. In particular, these programs provided individual assistance in the form of Food Stamps and other benefits. In an analysis of income inequality and poverty in

POVERTY

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LINE

THE MEDIAN INCOME OF A
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A MEDIAN INCOME OF
\$53,046 PER YEAR



Puerto Rico during the period from 1970-1990, Sotomayor found that through both decades poverty and earned income inequality increased, despite data that showed positive movements in income distribution. This positive movement in income distribution can be attributed to an increase in federal aid money paid to low-income individuals and families (Sotomayor, 1998). Indeed, enrollment in the food stamps program in Puerto Rico peaked in 1978, with 58% of the island's population receiving assistance (Colón Reyes, 2011).

The 1990s saw a period of economic growth throughout both the mainland US and Puerto Rico leading to declining poverty in Puerto Rico. During that period, the number of families with children living below the poverty line decreased by 18%. The percentage of youth 16 to 19 years old who were high school drop outs (16 to 19 years old) also decreased from 22% in 1990 to 14% in 2000. Despite these gains, as of 2000, 58% of children still lived below the poverty line, a rate three times higher than the rate of children living in poverty in the United States. Patterns of child poverty reflect the concentration of employment opportunities in a few urban centers where unemployment was lowest (16%) compared with rural areas (25%). Children living in rural areas were most likely to be living in poverty (70%) followed by suburban areas (60%) and urban areas (53%) (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

These high rates of child poverty may be disproportionately affecting female headed households. Between 1990 and 2000, female headed households increased from 22 to 27%. These families tended to be concentrated in urban areas (34%) rather than rural areas (16%). In the same period, the number of female headed households living in poverty increased by 12% to 71% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Median income for these families in Puerto Rico was \$19,624 compared to a median income of \$53,046 in the mainland United States (American Community Survey, 2013). Estimates suggest that between 25 and 30% of Puerto Ricans live at the lowest level of poverty: total dependence on federal assistance without any additional income (Colón Reyes, 2011).



Trends in poverty among female headed households do not appear to be related to high birth rates or large family size. Indeed, the fertility rate in Puerto Rico has fallen dramatically in the last quarter century. In 1990 the fertility rate was 82.9 births per 1000 women and by 2012 it had dropped to 51.8 births per 1000 women, lower than the average fertility rate for both US women (63.0 births per 1000 women) and women of Puerto Rican descent living in the mainland United States

(58 births per 1000 women) (Child Trends Databank, 2015; Martin et al., 2013). Low birthrates have been linked to the popularity of female sterilization among Puerto Rican women; over 41% of Puerto Rican women and first generation immigrants from Puerto Rico to the U.S. use female sterilization as a

contraceptive method (Frost & Driscoll, 2006; Salvo, Powers, & Cooney, 1992). Rising average age at marriage and greater use of oral contraceptives are also tied to these lower fertility rates among Puerto Rican women (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003).

The US economic downturn since 2000 has impacted child poverty in many states in the mainland US and, it is suspected, in Puerto Rico (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). Poverty and unemployment have proven difficult problems to solve. Despite efforts to improve the Puerto Rican economy, it has remained constrained by its relationship with the United States (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). A 2006 survey found that 45.4% of the total population of Puerto Rico lived in poverty. Two years later, the rate was found to be .1% higher (Colón Reyes, 2011).

HISTORY OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE IN PUERTO RICO

Federal social welfare programs in the United States generally trace their roots to the 1935 Social Security Act. In comparison with Western Europe, the US was late to develop social welfare programs and developed comparatively restrictive programs. Generally these programs provided needs based assistance (e.g. ADC, SSI, Medicaid, Food Stamps) (Morrissey, 2006).

Race, gender and class had marked effects on the development and stigmatization of these programs and their recipients. United States policy on social welfare was influenced by the competing interests and perspectives of groups who tended to be of high socioeconomic status and removed from the perspectives of social welfare beneficiaries. Restrictive social welfare policies extended to the US' considerations of benefits eligibility for territories. Designations were made to include future US States, like Hawaii and Alaska, as recipients of social welfare programs, but to exclude territories that were to remain unincorporated.

Competing political parties within Puerto Rico made arguments for and against a closer, more state-like relationship with the United States. However, Puerto Rico's worsening economic situation dimmed the prospect of eligibility for federal benefits or statehood. Concurrently, an ongoing, large-scale migration of Puerto Ricans to the mainland United States may have impacted Puerto Rico's standing as a potential state, both "majority attitudes and federal immigration policy had long resisted voluntary non-European population movements to the US" (Morrissey, 2006). Between 1914 and 1930, 3.4% of the Puerto Rican population had immigrated to the United States (Baker, 2002).

The development of social welfare programs in Puerto Rico was similarly effected by US tensions and competing interests and perspectives within Puerto Rico. While within Puerto Rico socialist and labor groups advocated on behalf of workers and rural farmers, upper class women organized charities to address the needs of the poor. These charities, particularly focusing on women and children, "stigmatized recipients even as they served them" (Martinez-Vergne, 1999). However the competing visions of social welfare within Puerto Rico largely occurred in a vacuum due to the Puerto Rican state's lack of autonomy, small tax base and the focus, prior to 1930, of US investment on infrastructure rather than social issues (Morrissey, 2006).

Colón Reyes (2011) identifies two eras of federal assistance programs in Puerto Rico. The first, from 1930-1974, extended some programs operating in the United States to Puerto Rico. This assistance, for the most part, was aimed at over-all assistance to the Puerto Rican economy and did not focus on individual assistance; only skimming the surface of poverty in Puerto Rico. The second era, 1975-present, saw the massive expansion of individual assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) also known as Food Stamps.



In 1933, Puerto Rico received its first major US federal assistance, the Puerto Rican Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA). This program provided food and work to about one third of the population, but was characterized by limited resource allocation as Puerto Rico received more limited resources than the states. In 1935, as a part of the New Deal, President Roosevelt approved the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA) to support structural economic change. Although ineffectual in many ways, it marked a change in US policy towards benefits extended to Puerto Rico: from occasional benevolence to an understanding that deeper economic restructuring was necessary (Morrissey, 2006).

Beginning in 1951, after commonwealth status was established for Puerto Rico and with the implementation of developmental economic policies, Puerto Rico became eligible for modified social security coverage. Further benefits were extended to the Puerto Rican population; in 1955 Puerto Ricans became eligible for disability benefits; in 1965 Puerto Ricans were eligible for the new programs Medicare and Medicaid. Increases in benefits went hand in hand with continual increases in aid and jobs provided through federal benefits programs. In 1950, federal transfers to Puerto Rico constituted 9% of GDP which grew to 29% by 1980 (Morrissey, 2006).

In 1975, with the extension of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to Puerto Rico, federal assistance programs began to provide assistance benefits to individuals. Federal assistance to individuals became the determining factor in trends of increasing income among Puerto Ricans; at peak enrollment, in 1978, 58% of the population in Puerto Rico received SNAP benefits (Sotomayor, 1998; Colón Reyes, 2011). Although the 1980s saw an increase in the number of individuals receiving SNAP benefits due to the economic downturn, these programs became the target of budget cuts (Colón Reyes, 2011). Conversations in mainland United States associated poverty with a “culture of indolence and/or dependency,” and neoliberal policies of the 1990s began to restrict eligibility and budgets for these programs (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007). Individuals enrolled were subject to these cuts; the United States not only “made such subsidies possible, it also made them necessary” (Ayala & Bernabe, 2007).

Puerto Rico’s economy remains in crisis. In 2006, an estimated 45.4% of the population lived below the poverty line (Colón Reyes, 2011). Although the contemporary Puerto Rican state has more autonomy than it has had previously in its colonial history, it remains restrained by federal fiscal authority, political power and economic policy tied to mainland US interests. Federal benefits must be negotiated with the federal government even as benefit rates remain lower than those provided to the States (Morrissey, 2006).

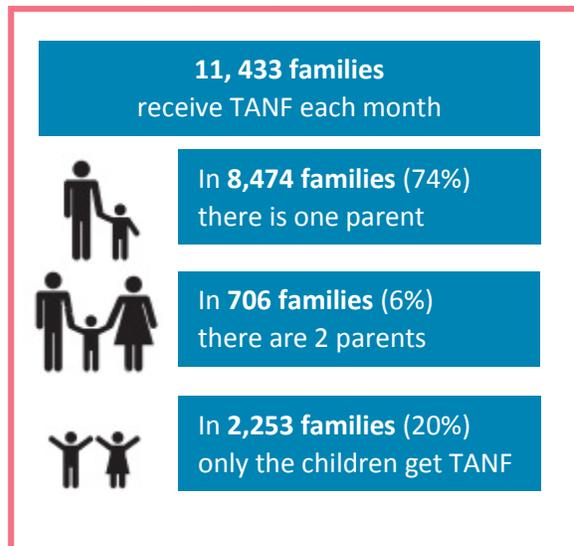
Despite the large contribution of federal assistance to apparent increases in per-capita income, SNAP programs have always provided benefits to only a percentage of those living below the poverty line in Puerto Rico; in 2006-2007, 62% of individuals living in poverty received SNAP. While a critical supplement to purchasing power, SNAP benefits in Puerto Rico are not substantial: in 2009 SNAP recipients received \$1.19 per daily meal. In 2008, individuals with SNAP benefits received \$112.87 in total annual assistance (Colón Reyes, 2011). In Puerto Rico, fewer individuals are covered by Social Security than in the mainland US due to high levels of unemployment; rates of disbursement to surviving children is lower, and TANF payments to Puerto Rico are lower than any of the states (Morrissey, 2006). For example, in 2004, maximum monthly TANF payments for a family of three in Puerto Rico were \$216 while maximum payments were \$679 in California and \$923 in Alaska (Collins, Bosworth, & Soto-Class, 2006).

ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMS

TANF: HELPING PUERTO RICANS IN NEED

Created by President Clinton in 1996, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) is designed to help families in need gain self-sufficiency. Despite operating in both the mainland United States and Puerto Rico, TANF serves individuals and families of distinct profiles by location of the program. In the United States, 90% of TANF recipients are single mothers living in poverty. In Puerto Rico, however, TANF has focused on providing support to individuals with disabilities. 80% of TANF participants have some sort of disability; 28% of TANF participants are elderly and only 66% of TANF recipients are single mothers with dependent children, the majority of whom have disabilities. Colón Reyes reports that TANF in Puerto Rico is more oriented towards providing support to those with disabilities, thus shifting its focus away from single mothers with children (2011).

US mainland discourse about earned and unearned benefits has also permeated Puerto Rican culture. Public assistance programs aimed at poor communities are stigmatized: in the best case they are considered as providing free subsistence to a population incapable of providing for themselves or, in the worst case, providing to the individuals who “live off” of tax-payer money (Colón Warren, 2010). Nieves-



Rosa (2003) found in a qualitative study of TANF and ex-TANF participants that these individuals had internalized beliefs that welfare reform is positive because it promotes values of work. These same individuals, however, criticized reform because they felt that meeting their family’s basic needs was impossible with jobs available in the labor market. The study found that recipients were not non-working, but rather they experienced severe job instability (Nieves-Rosa, 2003).

HEAD START: POVERTY PREVENTION

Head Start was developed in 1965 as a program to assist disadvantaged preschool children in meeting their developmental needs. The project began with President Lyndon B. Johnson’s declaration of The War on Poverty and emerging research findings about the detrimental effects of poverty. Efforts focused on assistance for low income groups in order to mitigate negative outcomes by using education to diminish social and economic inequality (Office of Head Start, 2015b). The program was developed to address cyclical poverty by providing early childhood education tailored to the needs of children from low-income families. Over the 50 years of its implementation, Head Start has evolved from eight-week training to a full year program, federal funding has grown from \$96,400,000 to \$8,598,095,000¹. Enrollment has grown by more than half; the coverage of 561,000 children, families, and pregnant women enrolled in 1965 expanded to reach 927,275 in 2014 (Office of Head Start, 2015a). Currently, funded entities apply for a 5-year grant to launch and sustain Head Start Programs in order to assure and maintain quality (Office of Head Start, 2015b).

By 2014, 70 grantees and delegates in Puerto Rico offered Head Start and Early Head Start programs to 34,261 enrollees (National Head Start Association, 2015). Puerto Rico received \$281,645,776 in Federal support for 2014 (National Head Start Association, 2015). Although at first glance, funding for the program appears relatively comparable to states serving similarly sized populations, pervasive poverty levels in Puerto Rico suggest a need for more assistance; the 2014 *Program Information Report* identified that only 27% of children eligible for Early Head Start/Head Start programs were being served.

HEAD START IN PUERTO RICO: 2013

	Number of grantees/delegates	Children enrolled
Early Head Start	27	2,688
Head Start	43	31,573
Total	70	34,261

COVERAGE

73% OF PUERTO RICAN CHILDREN ELLIGIBLE FOR HEAD START PROGRAMS WERE NOT SERVED IN 2013

¹ In 2014. Reports for 2015 were in progress at the time of writing. Data found on <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/data/factsheets/2014-hs-program-factsheet.html>

COVERAGE

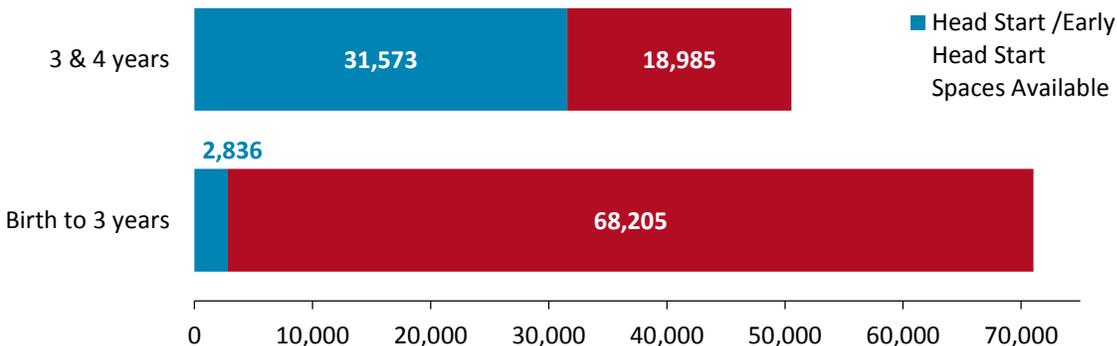
ONLY 2,836 SPACES ARE AVAILABLE FOR THE 71,041 CHILDREN AGES BIRTH TO 3 YEARS WHO ARE IN POVERTY

A Puerto Rico community assessment identified that 62% of children under the age of five were eligible for enrollment in a Head Start program, yet 96,000 eligible children and their families were not being served in 2013 (2014). In particular, Early Head Start programs are not adequately meeting the needs of the children in the youngest age groups. Early Head Start in Puerto Rico has 9% lower enrollment than the program in the mainland United States

and programs are only available in 43 out of 78 municipalities. In 2014, the Program Information Report noted that 71,041 children from birth to 3 years old were in poverty, yet only 2,836 Early Head Start spaces² were offered. In 2014, Puerto Rico applied for the Preschool Development Grant through the U.S. Department of Education, but funding was declined. Plans for the grant were to increase numbers of Head Start Programs in high-need geographical areas.

The Head Start and Early Head Start program in Puerto Rico assists children who are especially at risk of poverty due to economic or developmental barriers. The annual Program Information Report for the Early Head Start and Head Start Programs stated that services were provided to 578 homeless children during 2013 and 2014, and the Head Start Collaboration office participates in meetings of the Multisector Council for Support of the Homeless Population to coordinate support for young children in the homeless population. Likewise, in 2013, 23% of children served by the program had a disability (Community Assessment, 2014). Children from extreme poverty and those with special needs both receive assistance through the programs to ensure healthy development.

PUERTO RICAN CHILDREN IN POVERTY



Determining the current extent of effectiveness and societal change due to Head Start and Early Head Start coverage is unclear, as most research studies about Head Start in Puerto Rico are restricted to those who make in-person visits to the University of Puerto Rico (Meléndez, 2014). However, based on data from the 1997 Family and Child Experiences Survey (FACES), Head Start in Puerto Rico is characterized by families with higher levels of education, lower levels of income, and greater involvement with the program than Hispanic and non-Hispanic families in Head Start living on the mainland (Garcia & Levin, 2001).

² This number combines Federally funded Early Head Start spots (2,688) and Office of Head Start-funded Early Head Start Home Visiting spaces (148).

Hispanic families both in Puerto Rico and in the States reported greater satisfaction with the program and more extensive social support than non-Hispanic families (Garcia & Levin, 2001). A study that identified parental involvement with Head Start as a predictor of a child's academic readiness found that for Puerto Rican families, parental involvement was more tied to their level of education than to social capital in the program (O'Carroll, 2012). Head Start and Early Head Start programming serves a distinct cultural group in Puerto Rico; however, the program's effects on the economic climate have not yet been assessed.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

After an extensive search of the literature, very little information arose concerning public assistance in Puerto Rico. Program evaluations should be prioritized in order to understand the effectiveness of TANF and Head Start programs in providing the assistance needed to help alleviate Puerto Rico's historic poverty. We suggest the following directions for future research:

1. INVESTIGATE THE CHANGES MADE BY TANF AND HEAD START PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS ON THE ECONOMIC CLIMATE OF PUERTO RICO.

Although both programs have demonstrated effects in increasing financial self-sufficiency for families and child school readiness nationally, no evidence exists to demonstrate how these outcomes are contributing to Puerto Rico's current economic climate. Many of the families on TANF program were plagued by unstable employment, despite financial assistance to meet basic needs. Likewise, school readiness from Head Start programs provide children with positive skills in pursuing their educations, but with Puerto Rican parents in Head Start showing on average higher levels of education and lower incomes than parents in Head Start within the continental United States, there are underlying causes to poverty that are not being addressed other than level of education.

2. EXAMINE THE IMPACT OF HEAD START ON CHILD WELL-BEING IN PUERTO RICO.

Reports on Head Start suggest that coverage does not sufficiently meet the needs of the qualified community; however, these reports do not explain what impacts Head Start has had on children who have received services. Evaluating the how successful Head Start participation is in leading to positive outcomes for impoverished children can lead to greater investment from stakeholders and optimism for Puerto Rico's future.

3. IDENTIFY BARRIERS AND SOLUTIONS FOR CREATING CONSISTENT EMPLOYMENT FOR PARENTS.

Puerto Rico has chronically high levels of unemployment despite periods of high output production. Jobs offered by US companies are unstable, these jobs are highly concentrated in a small number of city centers, and company financial success is not distributed among employees. Due to job scarcity, Puerto Rico continues to endure vast migration to the States. Rural areas of Puerto Rico experience particularly high unemployment rates due to the geographical disparity of job availability. Furthermore, it is unclear what resources exist to help the unemployed identify jobs and return to the workforce. To relieve poverty in Puerto Rico, researchers can identify barriers for creating sustainable, fair employment in Puerto Rico.

Knowledge of these barriers will inform and help to identify potential solutions for increasing employment rates.

4. EXPLORE FAMILY WELL-BEING

Teasing apart the influences of unemployment, changes in family structure, and vast immigration to the United States on well-being for families would contribute to making positive developments across Puerto Rico. It also would be beneficial to find causes as to why the TANF program in Puerto Rico serves higher rates of people with disabilities than the rest of the United States. Finally, without public assistance, it is unclear how families are surviving. With a median household income of \$19,624, Puerto Ricans earn almost half as much as those in Mississippi (\$39,031), the poorest of U.S. states (American Community Survey, 2013). With a fuller picture of family expenses and income, and noting the consequences of such low earnings, programs will better address needs unique to Puerto Rican families. More information about families in Puerto Rico is needed in order to bring about sufficient and useful aid.

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Appendix A: Lit search findings

A literature search was conducted using the search terms detailed in the table below. Google scholar was used as a search engine to broaden the search to include peer-reviewed articles, reports, dissertations and all other publications. Searches were conducted looking for all key words in the title. A closer examination of articles found that only a handful provided relevant information and many were duplicated. Articles with black text are relevant articles that are not duplicative.

SEARCH TERMS: PUERTO RICO TANF

Colón, L. (2011). *Sobrevivencia, pobreza y mantengo: La política asistencialista estadounidense en Puerto Rico: El PAN y el TANF*. San Juan: Ediciones Callejón.

Torres, María del Mar Velázquez. *La reforma de bienestar social: estudio de las características sociodemográficas y laborales de las participantes del Programa de Asistencia Temporal para Familias Necesitadas (TANF) en Puerto Rico*. Diss. Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2010.

Collins, S. M., Bosworh, B. P., & Soto-Class, M. A. (Eds.). (2006). *The economy of Puerto Rico: Restoring growth*. The Brookings Institution Press.

SEARCH TERMS: PUERTO RICO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

Hedges, William L. "298 Reviews controlling candidates), President Johnson has now added his voice to those who say that substantial federal public assistance must be given to contenders for these high offices; and in this the mighty USA is learning from the infant Commonwealth of Puerto Rico."

Downey, Thomas. *Welfare and Taxes: Extending Benefits and Taxes to Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands, Guam, and American Samoa: Report to the Acting Chairman, Subcommittee on Public Assistance and Unemployment Compensation, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives*. GAO, 1987.

Morrissey, Marietta. "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico." *Latin American Perspectives* 33.1 (2006): 23-41.

SEARCH TERMS: PUERTO RICO WELFARE

Romberg, Raquel. *Witchcraft and welfare: Spiritual capital and the business of magic in modern Puerto Rico*. University of Texas Press, 2003.

Morrissey, Marietta. "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State US Social Insurance and Public Assistance in Puerto Rico." *Latin American Perspectives* 33.1 (2006): 23-41.

Morris, L. (1979). Women without Men: Domestic Organization and the Welfare State as Seen in a Coastal Community of Puerto Rico. *British Journal of Sociology*, 322-340.

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