USVI TANF: Family and Staff Needs, Program Challenges and Opportunities after Disruptions

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this panel are those of the presenters and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.

Outline for Panel Presentations

- The Context
  - ✓ Study Purposes and Specific Aims
  - ✓ Research Methodology
- USVI TANF Programs and Services Post Hurricanes Irma and Maria
- Needs of TANF Clients and Staff Post Hurricanes Irma and Maria
- Collaboration Across Agencies
- Conclusions, Recommendations, Next Steps

THE CONTEXT

USVI TANF: FAMILY AND STAFF NEEDS, PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER DISRUPTIONS

The Context

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Purpose(s) of the Study

- To document the current status of the USVI TANF program (in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria).

- To assess the needs of TANF clients and program personnel and the availability of the full range of services.

- To assess what systems/operational structures the USVI TANF program can adapt/adopt to increase the program's resilience and capacity to better serve clients and staff in the event of future disruptions, such as hurricanes.

Specific Aims of the Study

- **Aim 1:** Describe USVI TANF services and programs offered post Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

- **Aim 2:** Assess needs of USVI TANF clients post Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

- **Aim 3:** Assess needs of USVI TANF staff post Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

- **Aim 4:** Assess organizational and structural preparedness of the USVI TANF program for future disruptions to increase resilience and improve response to disruptions.

Design and Methods

- Mixed methods design
- Sampling
- Data Collection
  - ✓ Administrative and Secondary Data
  - ✓ Quantitative Data Collection
  - ✓ Qualitative Data Collection
- Data Analysis

Design and Methods

- Secondary and Administrative Data Collection
  - ✓ Virgin Islands Community Survey (2016 – published 2018)
  - ✓ TANF reports (both internal and submitted to ACF)
  - ✓ USVI TANF Data for FY2015-2016 through FY2018-2019
  - ✓ Reports/media information on the status of USVI residents post hurricanes Irma and Maria
  - ✓ Hurricane preparedness documents/reports

Design and Methods

- Quantitative Data Collection
  - ✓ Brief Demographic Questionnaire
  - ✓ Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-10
  - ✓ Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)
  - ✓ Post-traumatic stress disorder checklist (PTSD PCL)
  - ✓ Brief COPE
  - ✓ Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)
  - ✓ General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES)
  - ✓ Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)

Design and Methods

- Qualitative Data Collection
  - ✓ Key Informant Interviews
  - ✓ Focus Group Discussions

USVI TANF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES POST HURRICANES IRMA AND MARIA

USVI TANF: FAMILY AND STAFF NEEDS, PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER DISRUPTIONS

USVI TANF Programs and Services Post Hurricanes Irma and Maria

Presented by
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Outline for Presentation

- The Disruption

- Impact of the disruptions

- Characteristics of TANF in the USVI

- Programs and Services

- Trends and Changes Post-hurricanes Irma and Maria

September 2017 Track of Hurricanes Irma & Maria over the Eastern Caribbean

Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria

- Health
  - ✓ 20% of households reported difficulty accessing needed medical care
  - ✓ 50% of households had one or more members experiencing at least one behavioral health indicator of potential acute mental health issues (CDC CASPER. 2018).

- Education
  - ✓ Across the Territory 10 schools were shuttered.
  - ✓ Total unmet need for the U.S. Virgin Islands' education infrastructure was $904 million (HUD CDBG-DR Action Plan report, 2018).

Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria

- Housing
  - ✓ 50 percent of households incurred some damages to their primary residences from one or both hurricanes (FEMA 2018).
- Economy
  - ✓ Single-sector economy contributed to high unemployment and conspicuous poverty in the Territory.
  - ✓ Public debt in 2016 was roughly 72% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Impact of Hurricanes Irma and Maria

- Physical Environment
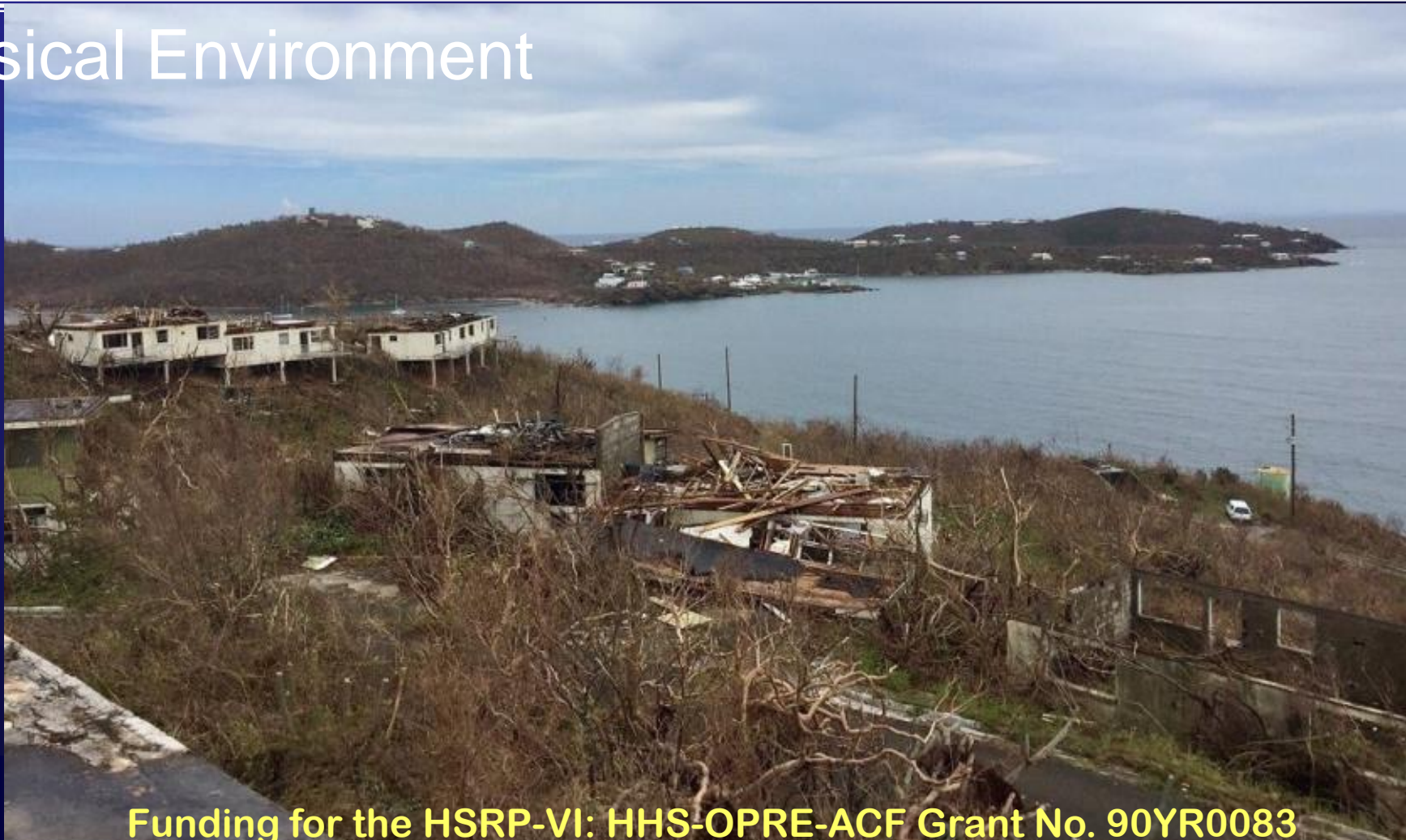
Characteristics of TANF Recipients: Socio-demographic

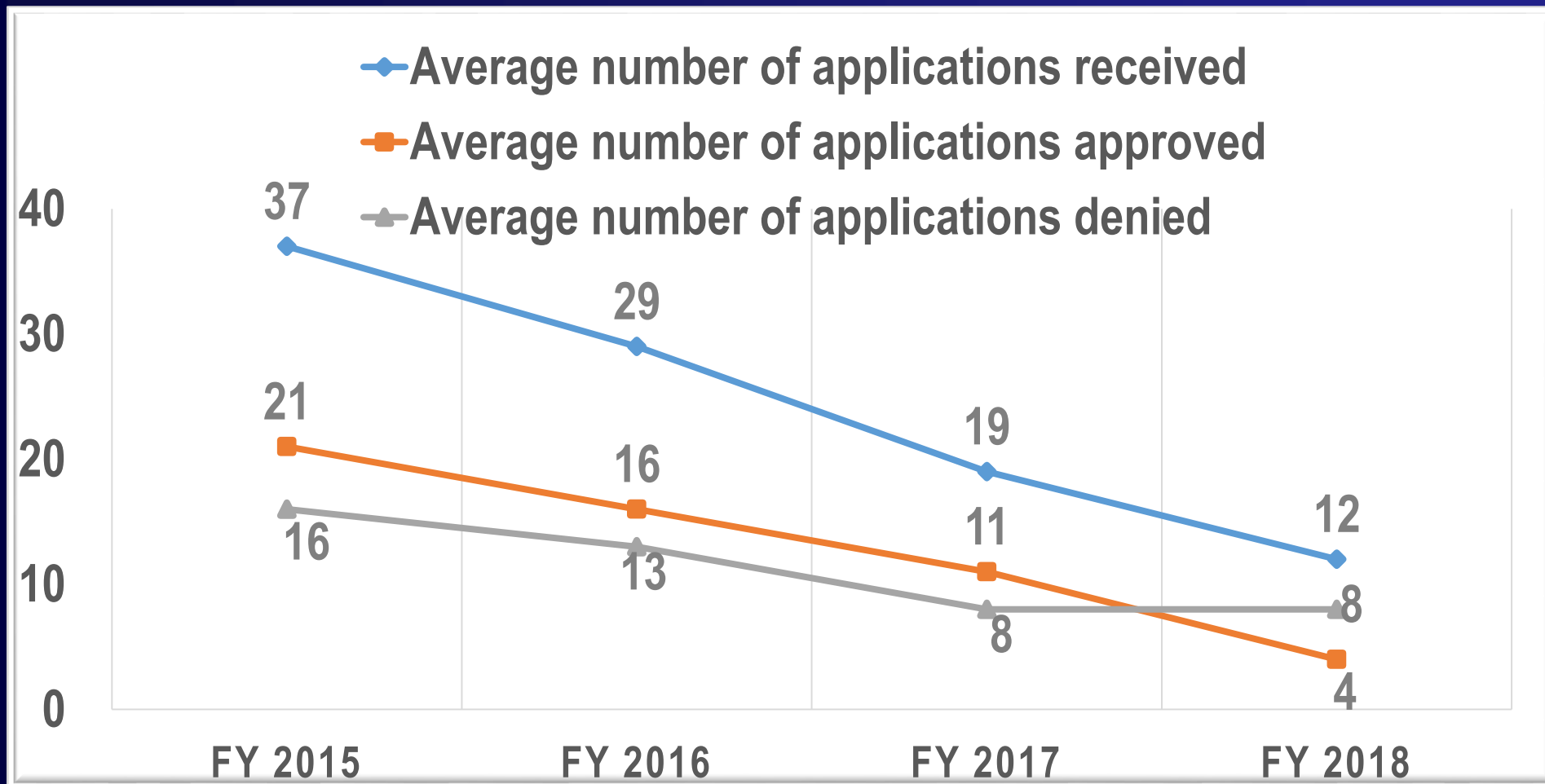| Characteristics of Families Receiving TANF Benefits FY 2015 - FY 2017			
Head of Family Characteristics	2015	2016	2017
	Percent (%) (n=294)	Percent (%) (n=228)	Percent (%) (n=178)
Black	75.0	72.8	71.0
Hispanic	24.1	25.7	27.8
Other	0.9	1.5	1.2
< High School diploma	45.5	43.0	42.3
High school diploma	46.5	47.6	46.6
> 12 years education	8.0	9.4	11.1
Never married	89.7	88.7	90.9
Divorced/separated/widowed	9.7	9.7	8.2

Characteristics of TANF Recipients: Socio-demographic

Characteristics of Families Receiving TANF Benefits FY 2015 – FY 2017			
Head of Family Characteristics	2015	2016	2017
	Percent (%) (n=294)	Percent (%)(n=228)	Percent (%) (n=178)
Female Recipients	97.0	96.0	96.0
Average age (20-29)	56.4	56.6	54.0
Receiving SNAP	98.1	98.4	97.8
Subsidized housing	20.7	18.2	17.2
Medicaid Assistance	100.0	100.0	100.0

Applications to USVI TANF Program: FY2015 – FY 2018

Legend:
- Average number of applications received
- Average number of applications approved
- Average number of applications denied

	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018
Received	37	29	19	12
Approved	21	16	11	4
Denied	16	13	8	8

Characteristics of USVI TANF: FY 2015 – FY 2018

Average Total Number of Recipients

1126

871

682

530

FY 2015   FY 2016   FY 2017   FY 2018
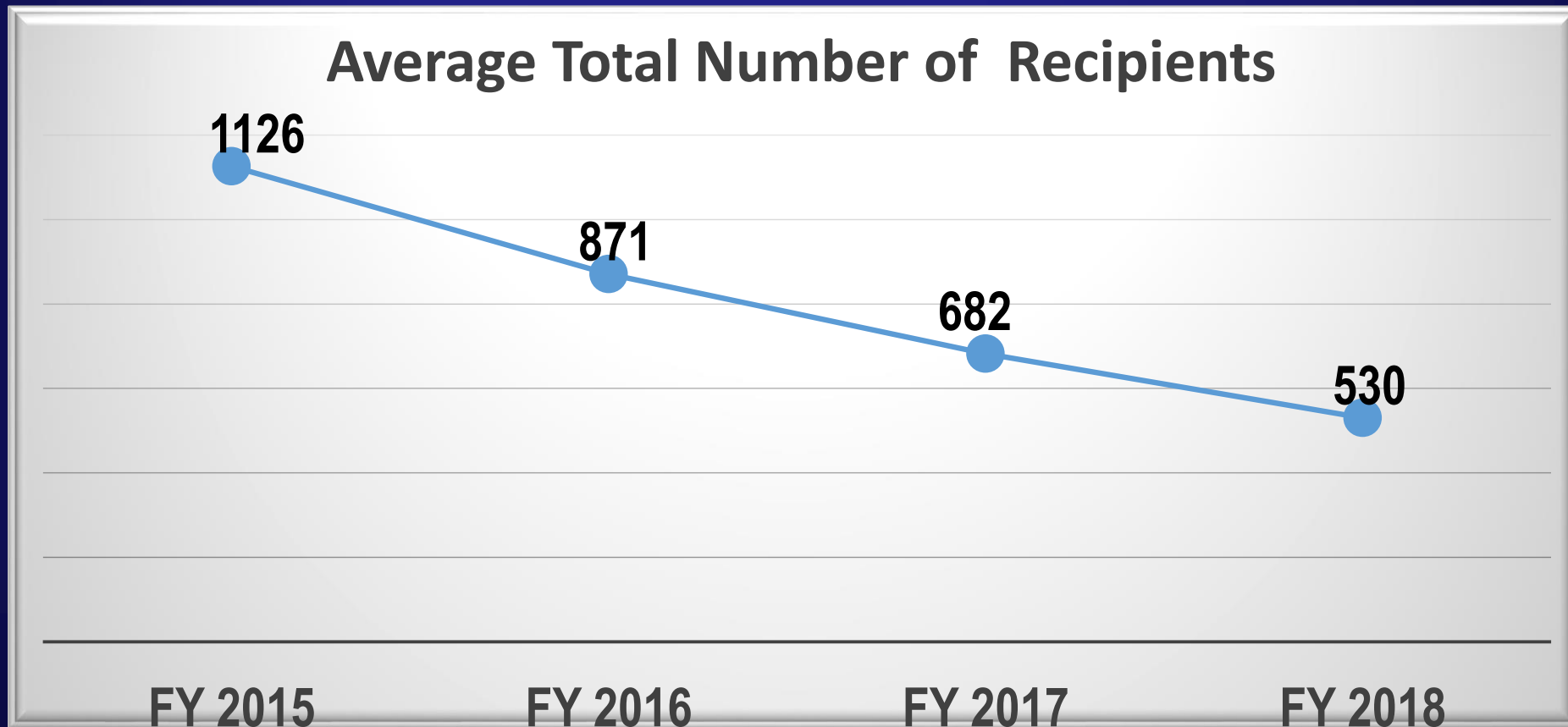
Characteristics of USVI TANF : FY 2015 - FY 2017

Average Monthly TANF Recipients:
FY 2015 - FY 2017

	2015	2016	2017
Total Children	766	588	458
Total Adults	294	228	178
Total Families	358	280	222
Total Recipients	1060	816	636

●Total Recipients ●Total Families ●Total Adults ●Total Children

Characteristics of USVI TANF : FY 2015 - FY 2017

Average Monthly Amount of Cash Assistance

Category	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
One Child	233	232	234
Two Children	305	305	302
Three Children	379	384	386
Four or More	491	505	504
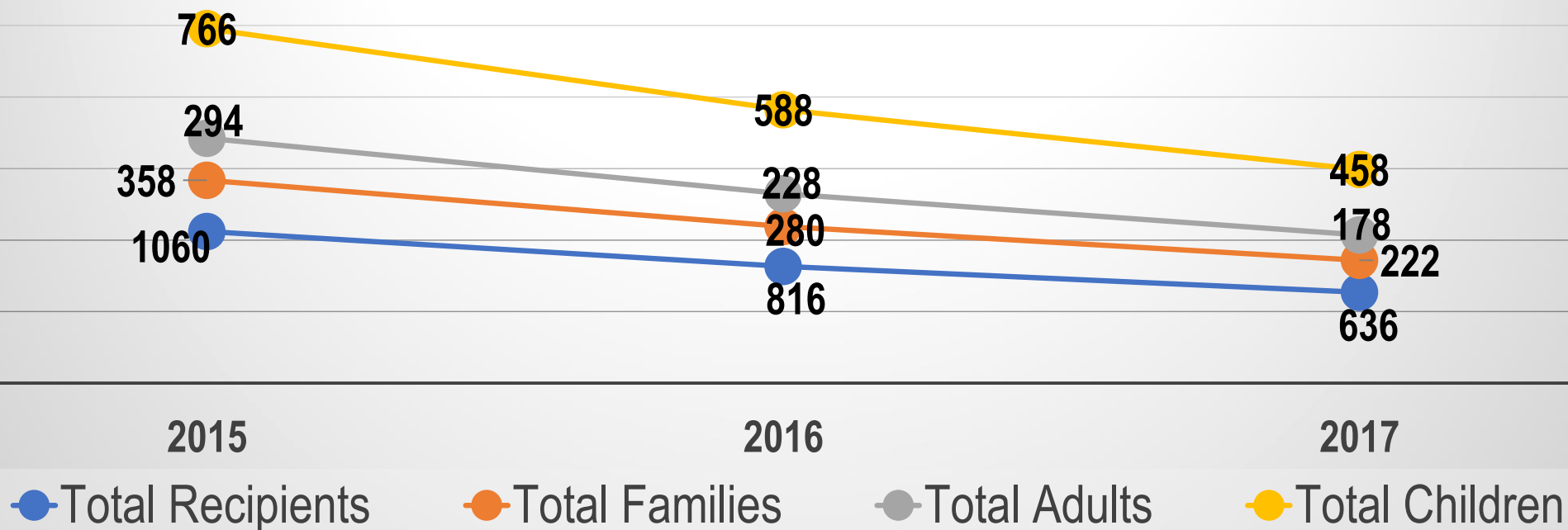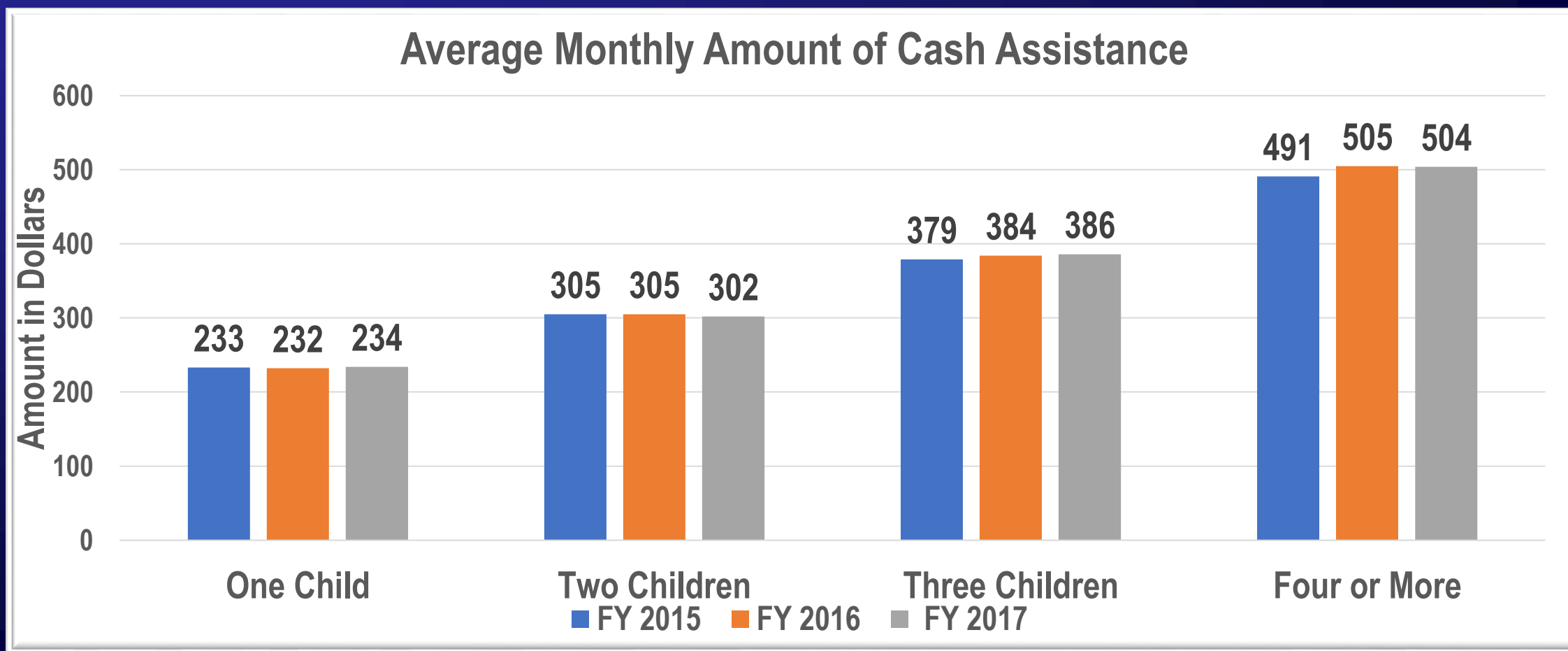
Characteristics of USVI TANF : FY 2015 and FY 2018

	FY 2015	FY 2018	Percentage Change
Average Monthly Caseload	358	245	-32%
Adult Recipients	294	168	-43%
Child Recipients	766	519	-32%

Characteristics of USVI TANF: Programs and Services
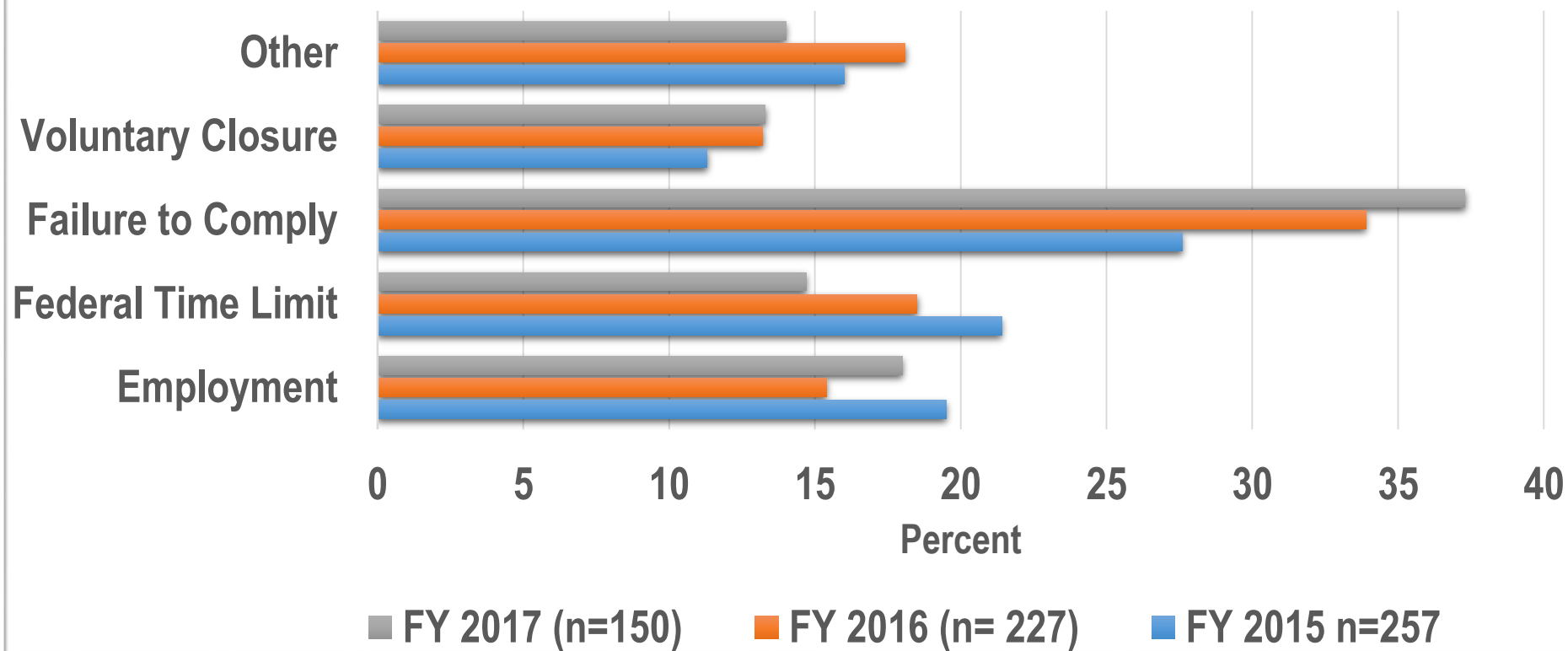

Number of Work-Eligible Individuals (WEIs) with Hours of Participation in Work Activities : FY 2015 - FY 2018

	Unsubsidized Employment	Work Experience	Vocational Education	Job Skills Training	Other
FY 2015	3	49	2	12	24
FY 2016	3	35	3	12	14
FY 2017	3	22	3	7	6
2018	0	9	3	4	2
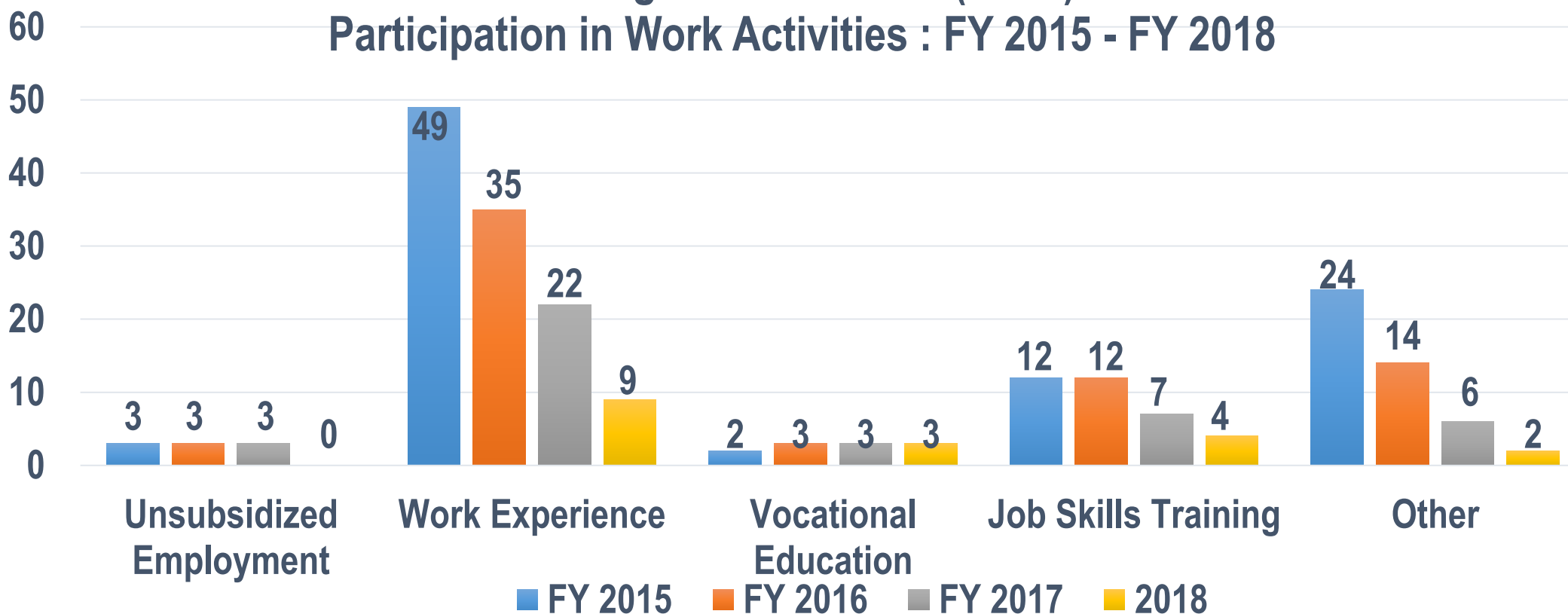
Characteristics of USVI TANF: FY 2015 - FY 2017

TANF Closed-case Families by Reasons for Closure
FY 2015 – FY 2017

Categories (top to bottom): Other, Voluntary Closure, Failure to Comply, Federal Time Limit, Employment

X-axis: Percent (0 to 40)

Legend:
- FY 2017 (n=150)
- FY 2016 (n= 227)
- FY 2015 n=257

USVI TANF: Trends and Changes

- TANF caseload decline and continued reduction in program participation suggest that
  - ✓ fewer eligible families are participating in TANF;
  - ✓ families may not know they are eligible; and
  - ✓ families may find it difficult to enroll, or are being otherwise diverted.

USVI TANF: Trends and Changes

- TANF caseload decline and continued reduction in program participation
  - ✓ low benefit levels and mandated work activities make receipt of TANF less attractive
  - ✓ stringent benefit reduction sanctions for failing to comply with requirements also contribute to low uptake of TANF programs and services.

NEEDS OF USVI TANF CLIENTS AND STAFF IN THE AFTERMATH OF HURRICANES IRMA AND MARIA

Outline for Presentation

- Data Collection Activities
- Key Findings – Quantitative Data
  - ✓ Study Participants
  - ✓ Quantitative Instruments
- Key Findings – Qualitative Data
  - ✓ Emerging Themes – Clients
  - ✓ Emerging Themes - Staff

Data Collection Activities

- Securing of IRB approval
- Approach to sample selection
- Quantitative data collection
  - ✓ Timeframe
  - ✓ Use of ACASI software on computer tablets
- Qualitative data collection
  - ✓ Timeframe
  - ✓ Key informant interviews
  - ✓ Focus group discussions

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

- **Study Participants → n = 36**
  - ✓ **Age**: 18-29 (25%); 30-39 (25%); 40-49 (33%); 50+ (17%)
  - ✓ **Education**: Less than HS (14%); HS graduate (36%); some college (19%); college grad + (30.5%)
  - ✓ **Ethnicity**: Hispanic (28%); Non-Hispanic (72%)
  - ✓ **Marital Status**: Single (58%); Married (31%); Separated or Divorced (11%)
  - ✓ **Children in Households**: 0 (25%); 1 (25%); 2-4 (36%); 5+ (14%)

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE (PSS) 10 ITEMS

- Used to assess stress and helps researchers understand how different situations, in this case, the hurricanes, affect an individual's feelings and perceived stress
- 0-13= low stress; 14-26= moderate stress; 27-40=high stress
- Findings reveal that 5.6% are experiencing 'high stress' levels and 69.5% are experiencing moderate stress
- Reliability coefficient of $\alpha=0.73$

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER CHECKLIST (PCL) 17 ITEMS

- Estimates symptoms of PTSD following a significant traumatic experience (such as hurricanes Irma and Maria) and was used following the impact of Hurricane Andrew in the state of Florida.

- Possible symptoms of PTSD in 41.7% of the study participants, based on a cut-point of a score of 30 points, with scores in the range of 17-67.

- Reliability of $\alpha=0.95$

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

BRIEF COPE 28 ITEMS

- Assesses several different dimensions of coping: self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame

- Reliability coefficients calculated for each of the 14 subscales.

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

BRIEF COPE

- **Acceptance** and **Religion** were the two coping mechanisms most used by study participants
- 38.9% reported 'I have been learning to live with it' a lot of the time' and 33.3% reported 'accepting the reality of the fact that it has happened' a lot of the time'.
- Reliability for the Acceptance Scale: α=0.84

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

BRIEF COPE

- 38.9% reported 'praying or meditating a lot' and 27.8% reported 'trying to find comfort in their religion or spiritual beliefs a lot of the time'.

- Reliability for the Religion Scale: $\alpha=0.78$

- Ten of the 14 subscales had acceptable reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .66 (Active Coping) to .86 (substance use)

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

CESD-10   10 ITEMS

- Used to assess symptoms of depression in the general population
- Cut score used to identify individuals with major depressive symptoms is a cut score greater than or equal to 10.
- For the current sample, 44% could have major depressive symptoms
- Reliability for the CESD-10 is acceptable: α=0.70

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

GENERAL SELF-EFFICACY SCALE (GSE)

- Used to assess personal competence in dealing with a variety of stressful situations
- GSE scores ranged from 16 to 38; higher scores represent greater self-efficacy, with 38.9% of respondents having scores lower than 30
- Reliability of α=0.89

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

BRIEF RESILIENCE SCALE (BRS)

- Used to assess individuals' ability to bounce back from stressful situations
- Scores for the study sample ranged from 8 to 27, with higher scores associated with greater resilience
- Using a score of 20 or more to represent resilience, 47.2% of the study participants could be considered resilient.
- Reliability of $\alpha=0.71$

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

EMOTION REGULATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- Used to assess individuals' emotional life and poses questions about how respondents control and manage their emotions
- Two sub-scales: Suppression Scale; Re-Appraisal Scale
- ERQ – Suppression Scale or expressive suppression
  - ✓ Suppression of emotions
  - ✓ Can lead to distress and have negative effects on well-being

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

EMOTION REGULATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- ERQ – Re-Appraisal Scale
  - Comprises 6 of the 10 questions on the questionnaire
  - Regular use of cognitive reappraisal to reduce negative emotions is linked to higher levels of well-being
  - Regular use of cognitive reappraisal is also linked to higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depression

Key Findings – Quantitative Data

EMOTION REGULATION QUESTIONNAIRE

- ERQ – Suppression Scale (4 items)
  - ✓ Scores range from 7 to 28; higher scores represent greater suppression of emotions (unhealthy behavior)
  - ✓ Reliability of α=0.71

- ERQ – Re-Appraisal (6 items)
  - ✓ Scores range from 17 to 42; higher scores represent greater cognitive reappraisal of emotions (healthy behavior)
  - ✓ Reliability of α=0.81

Emerging Qualitative Findings

- Focus group discussions with TANF clients
  - ✓ Clients feel that they are left on their own to secure employment opportunities/complete job searches
  - ✓ Clients expressed gratitude for cash benefits associated with TANF program, but desire additional services
  - ✓ Clients expressed discomfort receiving cash benefits without at least providing some volunteer services
  - ✓ Clients expressed some reservation in being able to adequately prepare to address their children's needs in the advent and aftermath of hurricanes

Emerging Qualitative Findings

- Focus group discussions with TANF clients
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  - ✓ Clients expressed some reservation in being able to adequately prepare to address their children's needs in the advent and aftermath of hurricanes

Emerging Qualitative Findings

- Illustrative quotes to support theme(s):
  - ✓ *To be really honest, outside the cash assistance we don't get any other support outside of the cash assistance. And trust me, I think all of us are just really grateful that at least we get that.*
  - ✓ *I just want a job.*

Emerging Qualitative Findings

- Focus group discussions with TANF staff
  - ✓ Expressed feeling unappreciated and not listened to
  - ✓ Expressed frustration with poor working conditions after the hurricanes that (at the time of data collection) remained unaddressed; promises made for relief were not met several months after multiple timelines for reprieve
  - ✓ Expressed feelings of being overworked, particularly in the wake of significant staff losses in the aftermath of the hurricanes
  - ✓ Expressed lack of support from management when dealing with abusive clients

Emerging Qualitative Findings

- Illustrative quotes to support theme(s)
  - ✓ *...people on the upper level, they need to have some kind of empathy ...*
  - ✓ *... they (Administrators) need to actually keep up with what they telling us they going to do and not just telling us to shut up.*
  - ✓ *And ... they are coming 'oh I appreciate you', uh, don't do that. Because you just doing me lip service. Show me something to make me believe I am appreciated ... because right now people don't want to come to work ...*

COLLABORATION ACROSS AGENCIES

USVI TANF: Family and Staff Needs, Program Challenges and Opportunities after Disruptions

Collaboration Across Agencies

Presented by

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Presentation Outline

- The nature and structure of collaborations

- Chracteristics of the collaborations

- Factors that resulted in suboptimal results

- Impact of disruptions on collaborative efforts.

Nature and Structure

- Memorandums of Understanding with

- Governmental Agencies
  - ✓ Department of Justice/Paternity and Child Support
  - ✓ Department of Labor/Job Training
  - ✓ Department of Education
  - ✓ University of the Virgin Islands
  - ✓ Department of Health

Nature and Structure

- Non-governmental
  - ✓ Day Care Centers
  - ✓ Women's Shelters

Characteristics of Collaborations

- DOJ/PCS requires clients' cooperation to establish and locate non-custodial parents to secure approval of TANF application

- Clients are interviewed by DOJ staff and complete an additional 30-page application

- DHS Units provide work experience in the nursing home, Head Start, or clerical assignments so that clients could meet this requirement.

Characteristics of Collaborations

- DHS ETOs assess clients and refer them to job placements at governmental or non-governmental agencies or for training/education through the Department of Labor, for courses at the University, or completion of their GED.

Factors resulting in suboptimal results

- Length of time for approval from the Paternity & Child Support Division within the Department of Justice
- Limited coordination between TANF staff and employers
- Clients lack of job readiness preparedness
- Need for more counseling and mentorships for clients
- Mismatch between client's skills and job requirements
- Agency's financial inability to hire staff liaisons

Impact of Disruptions on Collaborative Efforts

- Two category 5 hurricanes exacerbated the tenuous nature of some collaborative efforts.

- Severe physical damage to office buildings

- Offices relocated often in crowded and hazardous conditions

- Work experiences limited to DHS units due to lack of staff to implement cooperative agreements

- Second DOJ/PCS dislocation led to longer approval delays
  - ✓ Internet connectivity challenges

Impact of Disruptions on Collaborative Efforts

- Communication impacted due to loss of
  - ✓ Electricity
  - ✓ Agency land lines
  - ✓ Cell phones
  - ✓ Internet connectivity

- Other Challenges
  - ✓ Territory wide curfew
  - ✓ Exodus of staff

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

USVI TANF: FAMILY AND STAFF NEEDS, PROGRAM CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES AFTER DISRUPTIONS

Conclusions, Recommendations & Next Steps

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Conclusions

- The number of TANF recipients (both adults and children) in the USVI TANF program has been on a steady decline over the past three to five years

- The number of TANF closed cases over the past three to five fiscal years has been consistently increasing due to sanctions for non-compliance

- The number of WEI TANF adult recipients that are receiving employment experience has declined each year from 2015 to 2018

Conclusions

- Though the sample size was small for the current study, the behavioral health data show that TANF clients and staff have some depressive symptoms as well as positive signs of PTSD.

- Challenges with poor working conditions – facilities and limited staff persons have resulted in low morale among TANF staff.

- TANF clients are desirous of more support from Employment Training Officers in identifying opportunities for employment and volunteering.

Recommendations

- Attention needs to be given to understanding the factors that contribute to the continued decline in the number of adult and child TANF recipients

- Consideration needs to be given to possible internal and external client factors that contribute to the increasing number of TANF clients sanctioned annually.

- Attention needs to be given to behavioral health needs of TANF clients and staff relative to possible depressive and PTSD symptoms.

Recommendations

- Management needs to consider innovative strategies and/or training and partnerships to increase employment opportunities for TANF clients.

- Management should consider meeting with staff whose immediate work environments have been impacted by the passage of Hurricanes Irma and Maria to discuss realistic timeframes for addressing working conditions.

Next Steps

- Finalize qualitative analyses, refine and finalize themes
- Complete and share final report with VIDHS partners
- Work with VIDHS partners to optimize utilization of study findings
  - ✓ To strengthen preparedness efforts around disruptions
  - ✓ To take deeper dive into revitalizing the USVI TANF program
  - ✓ To support VIDHS partners around optimizing human service programs and services for vulnerable children and families

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