BARRIERS TO INDEPENDENCE AMONG TANF RECIPIENTS:
COMPARING CASEWORKER RECORDS & CLIENT SURVEYS

Correne Saunders
Pamela C. Ovwigho
Catherine E. Born

Paper presented at the 46th annual workshop of the National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics
This research was funded by the Maryland Department of Human Resources and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, US Department of Health and Human Services
BACKGROUND

- Shift from check management to case management
- Mandatory assessment of employment skills for new TANF recipients (PRWORA, 1996)
- Barrier identification as a means to improve employment placements and stability
- Key issue is determining which barriers to measure, and how
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent do clients’ reports of barriers in a research survey correspond with caseworkers’ documentation in their welfare case records?
- Is there a relationship between caseworker documentation of reported barriers and client characteristics?
METHODS: SAMPLE

- Random sample of single adults with children who received a TANF grant in Maryland in June 2002 (n=1,146).

- For this study, we include only those who responded to a telephone survey between August and October 2002 (n=819, 71.5% response rate).

- Weighted to represent true proportions of Baltimore City and non-Baltimore City cases in the June 2002 caseload.
METHODS: DATA SOURCES

- The TANF Caseload Survey, sponsored by ASPE
  - Included questions re: the prevalence and degree of various barriers over the previous year
  - Conducted through CATI by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (MPR)
- The Client Automated Resource and Eligibility System (CARES), maintained by Maryland DHR
  - Program participation data
  - Electronic Case Narratives
METHODS: DATA CODING

- Case Narratives examined for personal/family and logistical/situational challenges which were recorded between July 2001 and December 2002.

- Three coders, with a quality control set of 24.4% and an overall average agreement rate of 98%.

- Example of a child mental health barrier:
  - “Client returned verification that she is needed in the home to care for her child who was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Mother is needed in the home to supervise and work with mental health providers to stabilize her child’s mood and behavior.”
RESULTS: SUMMARY

- Case records generally indicate lower prevalence rates.
- The degree of survey-admin agreement depends on the type of barrier & the way it was measured.
- Documentation of barriers varies by demographic profile.
- Caseworkers are identifying and documenting barriers among those with the most difficult circumstances.
RESULTS: BARRIER PREVALENCE

Logistical & Situational Self-Reported Barriers

- Child Care: 37.0%
- Transportation: 25.8%
- Eviction: 10.1%
- Housing Instability: 13.9%

Survey: "Double Yes"
RESULTS: BARRIER PREVALENCE

Personal & Family Self-Reported Barriers

- Physical Health: 28.6%
- Mental Health: 16.1%
- Chemical Dependence: 8.3%
- Domestic Violence: 8.0%
- “Double Yes”:
  - Physical Health: 15.5%
  - Mental Health: 4.5%
  - Chemical Dependence: 9.4%
  - Domestic Violence: 2.8%
RESULTS: BARRIER PREVALENCE

Researcher-Assessed Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Case Narratives</th>
<th>“Double Yes”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing Instability</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Dependence</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### RESULTS: BARRIER PREVALENCE

#### Self-Reported Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistic &amp; Situational</th>
<th>Spearman Rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td>0.226***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>0.120**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing-Eviction</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing-Instability</td>
<td>0.151***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and Family Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other family member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol - Ever Diagnosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs - Ever Diagnosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol or Drugs - Ever Diagnosed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Researcher-Assessed Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Logistic &amp; Situational</th>
<th>Spearman Rho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing-Instability</td>
<td>0.213***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal and Family Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payee Physical Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payee Mental Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemical Dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Red – High Correlation
Blue – Low Correlation
RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

Three subgroups of sample members:

• “Survey” - Those reporting at least one barrier in the caseload survey, but with no barriers indicated in the case narrative (n=306)

• “Narrative” - Those for whom at least one barrier was documented in the case narrative, regardless of disclosure in the survey (n=354)

• “No barriers” - Those for whom no barriers were reported in the survey or recorded in the case narrative (n=159)
RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic Characteristics by Barrier Disclosure Type

- % Female
  - Survey: 96.5%
  - Narratives: 96.2%
  - No Barriers: 98.7%

- % African American**
  - Survey: 81.7%
  - Narratives: 75.0%
  - No Barriers: 89.9%

- % Baltimore City**
  - Survey: 62.8%
  - Narratives: 60.8%
  - No Barriers: 75.7%

- % Never Married**
  - Survey: 84.5%
  - Narratives: 81.8%
  - No Barriers: 94.3%

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
# RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic Characteristics by Barrier Disclosure Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Narratives</th>
<th>No Barriers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age</strong>*</td>
<td>28.10</td>
<td>32.72</td>
<td>28.47</td>
<td>30.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age at First Birth</strong>*</td>
<td>20.54</td>
<td>23.04</td>
<td>20.39</td>
<td>21.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Number of Children</strong></td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Age of Youngest Child</strong>*</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>5.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
RESULTS: EMPLOYMENT

Average # of Quarters Worked in Past Year***

% Currently Employed at Time of Disclosure***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
RESULTS: TANF PARTICIPATION

Average # of Months of TANF Receipt in Past Year

Survey  | Narratives | No Barriers | Total
---|---|---|---
8.41 | 8.69 | 8.03 | 8.46

Average # of Months of TANF Receipt Counting Toward 60-month Limit*

Survey  | Narratives | No Barriers | Total
---|---|---|---
24.72 | 30.65 | 23.72 | 27.09

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001
CONCLUSIONS

- Overall, there is a good deal of correspondence between survey-identified and worker-documented employment barriers, but a low rate of “true positives”.

- The degree of agreement depends on the type of barrier and the method of measurement.

- Administrative data generally indicate lower prevalence rates than self-reported survey data.
CONCLUSIONS

- TANF recipients with administratively-documented employment barriers have a different profile than those who do not.

- TANF caseworkers are identifying and documenting barriers among those having the greatest difficulty transitioning off of welfare.
IMPLICATIONS

- **Policy:**
  - Review and refine existing client assessment, barrier detection and barrier removal protocols and processes.
  - Include validated scales or measures for sensitive topics

- **Further Research:**
  - The relationship between documentation of employment barriers and TANF clients’ actual employment and welfare outcomes.
THANK YOU!

For more information, please contact:

Family Welfare Research and Training Group
University of Maryland School of Social Work
525 W. Redwood St.
Baltimore, MD 21201
(410) 706-5201
csaunders@ssw.umaryland.edu

For a copy of the full report, please visit:
www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu