



Family Welfare Research & Training Group

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Child Welfare Entries Among Maryland Welfare Leavers Before and After Welfare Reform

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Introduction

Since the beginning of welfare reform, advocates for children have cautioned that stricter welfare policies may increase the risk of abuse and neglect among poor children. Results from our *Life After Welfare* studies² indicate that the rate of child welfare involvement among children in former TANF families is quite low, at least in the first year after exit. However, it is difficult to determine how these rates may have changed under welfare reform without an empirical pre-reform baseline. This research brief provides an overview of individual and case-level demographic characteristics, and child welfare utilization among children in cases that exited cash assistance before, just after, and later, under welfare reform in Maryland.

Methodology

Sample

We selected a random sample of 373 AFDC cases that closed during our pre-reform baseline year (October, 1994 - September, 1995)³. We also selected a random sample of five percent of all closing TCA cases from each of the first 36 months of welfare reform. Because our previous research found differences between those who exited early in the reform period and those who exited later, we divided the post-reform cases into annual cohorts: October 1996 - September 1997 (n = 2,084 cases; n = 3,700 children), October 1997 - September 1998 (n = 2,244 cases; n = 4,340 children), and October 1998 - September 1999 (n = 2,345 cases; n = 4,749 children)⁴. The 373 pre-reform cases included 643 children.

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²Welfare and Child Support Research and Training Group, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000.

³See Ovwigo, Leavitt, & Born, 2001 for additional details on sample selection.

⁴See Welfare and Child Support Research and Training Group, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000 for more details on sample selection of post-reform cases.

Data

The data analyzed in this report were collected from three administrative data sources. Use of these systems allowed us to follow clients using original case numbers and other identifying information so that child welfare and cash assistance receipt could be tracked, even if sample members moved to different jurisdictions within Maryland during the study period. Child welfare involvement was examined at the individual child level and is reported as such.

Analysis

Bivariate correlational analyses were performed to determine the existence and strength of any relationships across cohorts. Analysis performed for categorical-continuous variables included point biserial correlation, bivariate correlation, chi square test, and logistic regression. Results indicated that all four analyses yielded similar findings, and so the logistic regression analyses are the results reported. For child abuse or neglect investigations, only investigations where the abuse or neglect was indicated or confirmed were counted. Variables included:

Characteristics of Exiting Cases

- " assistance unit size
- " number of adults on the case
- " number of children on the case
- " age of the youngest child on the case
- " jurisdiction of the case (Baltimore City vs the rest of Maryland)

Characteristics of Exiting Case Heads

- " gender
- " racial/ethnic group
- " age at AFDC/TANF exit

Characteristics of Exiting Children

- " gender
- " racial/ethnic group
- " age at AFDC/TANF exit
- " relationship to case head

Two questions of interest were:

- " Did the child enter foster care, kinship care, or intensive family services in the year following the AFDC/TANF case closure?
- " Were investigations of child abuse or neglect opened, and indicated or confirmed, for the child in the year following the AFDC/TANF case closure?

Findings

The five tables and corresponding bullets on the following pages detail the results found for the cohorts of exiters.

Table 1. Characteristics of Study Cases Exiting Cash Assistance

Characteristics of Cases	Pre-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample	
	10/94	9/95	10/96	9/97	10/97	9/98
Assistance unit size**						
Mean	2.67		2.70		2.75	2.80
Median	2.00		2.00		2.00	3.00
St. Dev.	1.10		1.10		1.20	1.24
Range	1 7		1 9		1 11	1 12
Number of Adults						
0 (Child-Only Cases)	12.9% (48)		13.8% (288)		14.6% (328)	14.5% (341)
1	82.0% (306)		83.8% (1,746)		82.5% (1,852)	83.1% (1,948)
2	5.1% (19)		2.4% (50)		2.9% (64)	2.4% (56)
Number of children***						
1	51.2% (191)		48.5% (1,010)		47.3% (1,061)	46.4% (1,087)
2	29.8% (111)		30.7% (639)		30.8% (692)	29.3% (688)
3 or more	19.0% (71)		20.9% (435)		21.9% (491)	24.3% (570)
Age of youngest child						
Mean	5.64		5.51		5.49	5.40
Median	4.40		4.31		4.37	4.27
Std. Dev.	4.34		4.21		4.31	4.32
Range	.05 16.99		.04 16.97		.08 16.98	.07 16.99
Jurisdiction***						
Baltimore City	24.7% (92)		31.8% (685)		41.2% (966)	52.6% (1,290)
Rest of Maryland	75.3% (281)		68.2% (1,471)		58.8% (1,377)	47.4% (1,162)

Note: Bivariate correlational analysis was performed to determine whether there were significant relationships between characteristics and cohorts.

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

- * □ The mean size of exiting assistance units increased slowly across cohorts, from 2.67 people to 2.80 people. The Pearson correlation coefficient between exit cohort and assistance unit size was very small at .034, but statistically significant (p < .01).
- * □ During the baseline year, 12.9% of exiting cases were child-only. By the third year of welfare reform, the percent of child-only exiting cases had increased to 14.5%. However, the relationship between time of exit and number of adults on the case was not statistically significant.
- * □ The proportion of exiting cases with three or more children increased across cohorts. The Pearson correlation coefficient between exit cohort and number of children on the case was statistically significant (p < .001), although very small, at .045.
- * □ The mean age of the youngest child on the exiting case decreased across cohorts. However, the relationship between time and age of the youngest child on the case did not reach statistical significance.
- * □ The proportion of exiting cases from Baltimore City increased across cohorts. The correlation between jurisdiction and time of exit was statistically significant (p < .001) and the Pearson correlation coefficient was .185.

Table 2. Characteristics of Adult Heads of Study Cases Exiting Cash Assistance

Characteristics of Adult Case Heads	Pre-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample	
	10/94	9/95	10/96	9/97	10/97	9/98	10/98	9/99
Gender								
% female	94.1% (351)		96.2% (1,917)		95.7% (2,143)		96.0% (2,251)	
Racial/Ethnic Group***								
% African American	56.6% (206)		66.9% (1,300)		73.5% (1,585)		79.9% (1,802)	
% with Caucasian	40.1% (146)		30.3% (589)		24.1% (521)		18.5% (418)	
Age of payee**								
Mean	31.60		31.37		32.49		32.47	
Median	29.86		30.04		30.92		30.83	
Std. Dev.	9.09		8.82		10.37		9.95	
Range	18.01	76.27	18.16	86.04	18.18	83.51	18.16	76.96

Note: Bivariate correlational analysis was performed to determine whether there were significant relationships in means of the samples over time on the Age of Payee variable. Multiple analyses were run on the gender and race variables; logistic regression results are reported here.

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

- * □ A slightly higher percentage of the post-reform exiting case heads were female. This relationship did not reach statistical significance.
- * □ Higher proportions of exiting case heads were of African American descent in the post-welfare reform years. Trends in racial composition of Maryland's welfare caseload over time are consistent with the above finding (Ovwigo, 2001). The relationship between time of exit and ethnicity had a correlation of .100 and is statistically significant (p < .001).
- * □ The mean age of exiting case heads decreased from the baseline year to the first year after welfare reform, but increased and remained higher the next two years after welfare reform. The relationship between time of exit and mean age of payee had a Pearson correlation coefficient of .046 and was statistically significant (p < .01).

Table 3. Characteristics of Children in Cases Exiting Cash Assistance

Characteristics of Children	Pre-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample	
	10/94	9/95	10/96	9/97	10/97	9/98	10/98	9/99
Gender								
Female	49.7%	(319)	49.9%	(1,572)	49.7%	(2,154)	49.9%	(2,364)
Male	50.3%	(323)	50.1%	(1,577)	50.3%	(2,179)	50.1%	(2,377)
Racial/Ethnic Group***								
% African American	56.6%	(357)	69.5%	(2,125)	75.5%	(3,211)	83.1%	(3,884)
% Caucasian	39.6%	(250)	27.4%	(837)	22.0%	(836)	15.4%	(720)
Age of Children**								
Mean	7.04		7.13		7.27		7.41	
Median	6.29		6.53		6.81		7.03	
Std. Dev.	4.49		4.46		4.55		4.63	
Range	.05	16.99	.04	16.99	.08	16.98	.07	16.99
Relationship to case head***								
Child	94.0%	(604)	92.1%	(3,404)	90.2%	(3,911)	88.9%	(4,220)
Other	6.0%	(39)	7.9%	(291)	9.8%	(425)	11.1%	(528)

Note: Bivariate correlational analysis was performed to determine whether there were significant relationships in means of the samples over time on the Age of Children variable; multiple analyses were run on gender and race; logistic regression results are reported here.

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

- * □ Similar to the adults, the later leaving cohorts had a greater proportion of African American dependents. Again, trends in racial composition of Maryland's welfare caseload over time are consistent with this finding (Ovwigbo, 2001). The correlation was .154, with a statistical significance of $p < .001$.
- * □ The mean age of children in later-exiting cohorts was higher than earlier-exiting cohorts. The Pearson correlation coefficient was .026 for the relationship between time and age of dependents, with a statistical significance of $p < .01$.
- * □ The dependents were less likely to be the children of the case head in later-leaving cohorts, and more likely to be related to the case head in a different way (e.g. niece, grandchild, foster child, etc). The correlation was .051 with a statistical significance of $p < .001$.

Table 4.
Child Welfare Involvement of Children within One Year of Cash Assistance Exit

Type of Child Welfare Service	Pre-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample		Post-Reform Sample	
	10/94	9/95	10/96	9/97	10/97	9/98
Foster Care* % (N affected/T total)	0.62% (4/643)		0.51% (19/3,700)		1.34% (58/4,340)	
Kinship Care** % (N affected/T total)	0.16% (1/643)		0.30% (11/3,700)		0.67% (29/4,340)	
Intensive Family Services % (N affected/T total)	0.16% (1/643)		0.92% (34/3,700)		0.46% (20/4,340)	
Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations*** % (N affected/T total)	2.18% (14/643)		0.59% (22/3,700)		2.81% (122/4,340)	

Note: Multiple analyses were run on these variables; logistic regression results are reported here. Children are counted once per category but may be counted more than once across categories if they entered more than one service (e.g. intensive family services and kinship care).

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

- * ☐ Both before and after welfare reform, rates of child welfare involvement after cash assistance exit were low.
- * ☐ There was no linear trend in foster care entry after cash assistance exit. However, later post-reform exiters had higher rates of entry than the baseline year exiters. The correlation was very small at .013, and was statistically significant (p < .05).
- * ☐ Kinship care entry rates increased over time.⁵ The correlation between time of exit and kinship care entry was .053 and reached statistical significance (p < .01).⁶
- * ☐ The entry rate for Intensive Family Services was highest during the first year after welfare reform. There was no pattern over time. Post-reform exiters rates were higher than the baseline level, but this difference was not statistically significant.⁷
- * ☐ Child abuse and neglect investigation rates dropped between the baseline year and the first year after welfare reform. However, during year two the rates exceeded that of the baseline year and increased again in the third year after reform. The correlation was .079 and was statistically significant (p < .001).

Summary and Conclusions

⁵ It is possible that some of these cases were caretaker TANF cases transitioning into the foster care system.

⁶ This trend may be partially explained by the higher proportions of Baltimore City cases in the later cohorts. In Maryland, kinship care is predominantly a Baltimore City phenomenon. Logistic regression indicated that jurisdiction (Baltimore City vs the rest of Maryland) was a significant predictor of kinship care entry (p < .001). However, even controlling for jurisdiction, cohort remained significant (p < .01).

⁷ Logistic regression indicated that jurisdiction was a significant predictor of intensive family services entry (p < .001).

Case trends:

- * □ The mean size of exiting assistance units increased across cohorts. This was due to the decreased proportion of exiting cases with two or fewer children and the increased proportion of exiting cases with three or more children in the post-reform samples.
- * □ The proportion of exiting cases from Baltimore City increased across cohorts.

Demographic trends:

- * □ A greater proportion of the exiting case heads and dependents were of African American racial heritage in the post-welfare reform years. This pattern mimics the trend in racial makeup of the active Maryland welfare caseload (Ovwigo, 2001).
- * □ The mean age of exiting case heads and dependents increased slightly across cohorts.
- * □ Across cohorts, a smaller proportion of the dependents on the exiting cases were the children of the case head and a larger proportion were related to her in a different way (e.g. niece, grandchild, etc). This pattern is similar to national caseload trends away from the typical mother-child assistance unit (U.S. House of Representatives, 2000).

Child Welfare Involvement trends:

- * □ Both before and after welfare reform, rates of child welfare involvement after cash assistance exit were low.
- * □ Child welfare involvement for the first year after welfare reform was similar to the baseline year. However, years two and three were higher than the baseline year. The difference between early leavers and later leavers was not inconsistent with previous findings. An earlier report described dissimilarities among other characteristics, such as the proportion of exiting cases with a child under the age of three increasing across cohorts, as well as rates of post-exit employment decreasing across cohorts and recidivism increasing across cohorts (Welfare and Child Support Research and Training Group, 2000).
- * □ Foster care and child abuse or neglect investigations were correlated with time of exit, even when controlling for the jurisdiction of the exiting cases.
- * □ Intensive family services was correlated with the jurisdiction of the exiting cases, but not time of exit.
- * □ Kinship care was correlated with both time of exit and jurisdiction. Analysis indicated that cohort was a slightly better predictor than jurisdiction, but both were statistically significant.

References

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