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Teen Mothers and the Revolving Welfare Door. Kathleen Mullan
Harris

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should be widely read by anyone interested in issues of social policy.

Kathleen Mullan Harris, *Teen Mothers and the Revolving Welfare Door*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1997. \$ 39.95 hardcover.

It is refreshing to read a book by a sociologist that not only reveals the author's ability to engage in sophisticated empirical work, but shows how this research can be applied to address critical issues of social welfare. By tackling a topic which is widely regarded as the purview of social workers, Harris demonstrates just how effective good sociological research can be in informing social welfare policy making.

The book is concerned with the topical issue of teen welfare mothers—a group of welfare recipients who are widely regarded to be the most likely to abuse public social programs, and the most difficult to rehabilitate. It is based on an analysis of a longitudinal study of about 300 women in Baltimore who first applied for income support in the late 1960s. Using this data set, Harris followed the recipients through to the late 1980s, and collected a substantial amount of useful information on their behavior, life styles, income, work habits and adjustments.

The study is broad ranging and examines many issues of welfare. Its analysis of the work behavior of welfare recipients is not only the most interesting aspect of the study but of most relevance to current concerns about time-limits and employment. The study confounds many myths and confirms scientifically what many social workers already know, namely that the vast majority of welfare recipients are economically active and that they use income support programs as a safety net as they cycle on and off welfare. A small proportion of the research subjects who were better educated and who had children at a comparatively late age only experienced one spell on welfare. The others, who were poorly educated and only able to find low paying jobs, cycled on and off. The study confirms that this group of women will be most seriously affected by the new welfare legislation. Given their low education and skills, lack of availability of remunerative jobs, and numerous barriers to employment and mobility, these

women and their children will undoubtedly experience serious hardships as the new time limits are imposed.

Reviewing past attempts to assist welfare recipients to obtain the educational and other skills they need to be employable, Harris is not optimistic about the future, especially since the new legislation is accompanied by reductions in budgetary allocations. On the basis of her study she concludes that substantial investments will be needed for the new system to work. The fact that more than ninety per cent of her subjects were economically active reveals that welfare recipients not only want to work but actually engage in work. The fact that they cycle on and off welfare suggests that much more needs to be done to provide them with the skills and opportunities they need to become permanently self-sufficient and productive citizens. Hopefully the lessons of this important study will be heeded.

Patricia L. Ewalt, Edith M. Freeman, Stuart A. Kirk and Dennis L. Poole (Eds.), *Social Policy: Reform, Research and Practice*. Washington, DC: NASW Press, 1997. \$ 38.95 papercover.

The dramatic changes which were introduced in 1996 to the federal government's income support program (AFDC) has again brought social policy to the forefront of national attention. While the federal government has not relinquished control over income support, many observers believe that the substantial devolution of programmatic and budgetary authority for the program to the states, heralds the beginning of the break-up of the New Deal welfare state. The question of whether further federal withdrawal from social policy is likely is an important one. While it is difficult to discern the future, those concerned with social policy need to understand recent events and anticipate the future directions if the well-being of the country's citizens is to be maintained.

This book makes an important contribution to the emerging discussion on the nature of social policy in an era of diminishing federal responsibility for social welfare. Although the book is not specifically written to examine this question, its diverse chapters touch on many aspects of this issue. The book is comprised of more than forty articles which were previously published in the journal *Social Work* and they deal with change taking place in the major fields of social service endeavor including income support,