



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 26
Issue 2 June

Article 9

June 1999

Already Hit Bottom: General Assistance, Welfare Retrenchment, and Single Male Migration

Thomas Vartanian
Bryn Mawr College

Joe Soss
American University

Sanford Schram
Bryn Mawr College

Jim Baumohl
Bryn Mawr College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the Family, Life Course, and Society Commons, Social Psychology and Interaction Commons,
and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation

Vartanian, Thomas; Soss, Joe; Schram, Sanford; and Baumohl, Jim (1999) "Already Hit Bottom: General Assistance, Welfare Retrenchment, and Single Male Migration," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 9.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15453/0191-5096.2573>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol26/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you by the Western Michigan University School of Social Work. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**WESTERN
MICHIGAN**
UNIVERSITY

Already Hit Bottom: General Assistance, Welfare Retrenchment, and Single Male Migration

THOMAS VARTANIAN, SANFORD SCHRAM, AND JIM BAUMOHL

Bryn Mawr College
Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research

JOE SOSS

American University
School of Public Affairs

The claim is often made that welfare recipients move to states where benefits are more readily available in more generous amounts. To test that claim, this study uses data on state General Assistance (GA) programs, as well as data on single men from the Public Use Microdata Set of the 1990 U.S. Census. We find only slight evidence that men who lack access to GA seek it elsewhere, and overall we find that the availability of GA has no more than a marginal effect on the location decisions of the men we studied. It seems that poor people, like other people, are interested in more than government benefits (or other financial considerations) when they make such decisions. Among other things, they are likely to care about the quality of their social relations, including networks of family and friends that serve as critical sources of support.

Claims of widespread welfare migration have provided substantial fuel for the recent politics of American welfare reform. Thus, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) gave states the authority to apply different eligibility standards to applicants who have lived in-state for less than 12 months (Lurie 1997). By July 1, 1997, 15 states had adopted this option, most often limiting such applicants to the benefits they received in their prior state of residence (APWA 1997). In response, litigation has argued that such differential

treatment of newcomers is contrary to the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Shapiro v. Thompson* [394 U.S. 618 (1969)], which struck down durational residency requirements for public assistance on the grounds that they undermined a basic constitutional right to travel.¹

Contemporary discussions of the migration of indigents are dominated by rational actor theories which argue that many poor migrants seek to "maximize their utility" by taking welfare in lieu of work, and by moving toward the highest available benefit check (Peterson and Rom 1990). Some analyses combine this motif with old themes from the culture of poverty debate, recycled in recent years to explain "welfare dependency," a lamentable addiction to public assistance that results from a chronic lack of personal responsibility ("character") among some groups of poor people (Murray 1984; Mead 1992). Recent policy innovations have thus emphasized the treatment of individual pathologies through "behavior modification" (Albelda and Tilly 1997). The high point of this wave of "new paternalism" (Mead 1997) was the PRWORA of 1996, but the trend toward "behavioral requirements" for initial and continuing eligibility started much earlier, out on the margins of the social welfare system, in General Assistance (GA) programs run by the states and their counties (Barnes, Baumohl, and Hopper 1992).

GA programs are of a residual sort, providing aid to individuals who can not qualify for higher-benefit, federally-supported programs (Center on Welfare Policy and Law 1994; Greenberg and Baumohl 1996). For nearly a decade, in state and local political environments shaped by fiscal restraint and bitter conflicts about priorities and trade-offs, GA programs have undergone benefit cutbacks and eligibility restrictions (Halter 1996; Greenberg and Baumohl 1996). The state-level politics of GA retrenchment progressed along the same lines as the later and better-known politics of national welfare reform: In state after state, critics attacked GA programs for tolerating dependency; charged that the self-serving nature of dependency gave rise to welfare migration; and averred that GA benefits must be cut to avoid attracting more of the welfare poor (see Glasser 1996). Some GA programs adopted the practice of limiting the eligibility of newcomers (Hershkoff and Loffredo 1997: 104-5).

In what follows, we assess the empirical basis for the persistent and powerful claim that GA benefits inspire interstate migration. While researchers have studied extensively the relationship between Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and the migration of female-headed families (see Moffitt 1992), little attention has been devoted to the relationship between GA and the residential decisions of single males, the principal (though not singular) recipient group in GA programs.

On the evidence, we argue for a fundamental revision in the conceptualization of welfare migration. Typically, researchers have asked whether more generous programs attract migrants, and such inquiry usually has been framed by rational-choice models of decision-making which emphasize the logic of moving so as to maximize benefits. (For a review of the literature, see Moffitt 1992; for an example, see Peterson and Rom 1989; for a critique, see Schram 1995). Given our research, we think that migrants do not focus on welfare benefits as a means to maximize economic advantage. Further, "maximizing utility" involves more than maximizing income (see Schram, Nitz and Krueger 1998; Schram and Soss 1999). Migrants seem more interested in increasing their access to "social capital," including their ability to participate in supportive networks of kith and kin (Stack 1974 and 1996; Milofsky et al. 1993). We think that such motives have been neglected in recent research about welfare migration, and we would make them central to future inquiry.

We argue for this reorientation on both theoretical and policy grounds. Theoretically, the pursuit of access to social capital, even when unsuccessful, likely explains the lack of compelling evidence that welfare recipients move across state lines to more generous programs. As a matter of policy, in an era of restricted welfare eligibility, stingy programs may not so much respond to migration as they may create it by sending poor people in search of far-flung family and friends on whom they can rely, if only for a time.

GENERAL ASSISTANCE

General Assistance is a generic name for state and local programs that provide ongoing or time-limited assistance to low-

income persons. It refers to means-tested programs that serve individuals who do not qualify for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF, what was AFDC), or Supplemental Security Income (SSI, the federal welfare program for the aged, blind, or long-term disabled)—or who are awaiting an eligibility decision by these or other income maintenance programs. Although GA is the most common name, some states and localities use others: General Relief, Home Relief, and Direct Assistance.

GA programs are designed, passed into law, and funded by state and local governments. Predictably, this has produced a myriad program variations across the country. Funding arrangements for GA programs differ considerably, with some states providing all of the funds, others engaging in shared-funding partnerships with localities, and still others leaving localities to fend for themselves. Many states do not have GA programs, or GA is operated in only some local jurisdictions. In states and counties without GA, one usually finds substitute services, such as shelters for housing and soup kitchens for food (Moon and Schneiderman 1995). In these areas, local poor relief looks very much like it did a century ago.

GA benefit levels and eligibility rules also vary from state to state, and in many states, notably California and Wisconsin, from county to county. Some states restrict GA eligibility to older people not yet eligible for SSI or Social Security retirement benefits; to parents waiting for TANF benefits or temporarily suspended from that program or ineligible while their children are in protective custody; to those with an SSI application pending; or to those who are realistically unemployable by some criteria of age or infirmity but who do not meet the stringent disability criteria of SSI. States and localities also employ different definitions of financial need based on income and asset limits.

Like eligibility rules, the structure and amount of GA benefits also vary across states and localities. Assistance assumes many forms: cash payments, vouchers, vendor payments, and in-kind benefits. The amounts of benefits vary widely, though as Greenberg and Baumohl (1996:74) point out, "GA programs share one fundamental characteristic: low benefit levels." In 1992, the maximum GA cash benefit for a single adult reported by states with uniform statewide programs ranged from lows of \$27

per month in South Carolina and \$80 per month in Missouri to highs of \$384 per month in Massachusetts and \$407 per month in Hawai'i (Burke 1995: 78).

THE GA RETRENCHMENT

GA policy responds to different financial incentives than did policy for AFDC (Uccello, McCallum, and Gallagher 1996). Under the old AFDC system, state expenditures were augmented according to a federal matching formula which obligated the federal government to absorb new costs when state program expenses increased. When states cut program expenditures, they also reduced the flow of federal dollars. PRWORA ended this system and created an incentive structure somewhat closer to that which has always informed GA policymaking. Because TANF block grants are not tied to current state expenditures, states that spend more in a given year must absorb all of their costs; and states that spend less are allowed to keep all of their savings. Thus, states have more to lose by generosity and more to gain through miserliness.

Because states and localities own all of the costs or benefits associated with GA programs, historically these have been dramatically affected by ebbs and flows in state economies and political pressures for fiscal retrenchment. Relative to other social welfare programs, GA has been politically vulnerable and poorly funded. Indeed, part of the difficulty of tracking GA programs over time across the states is that they are subject to frequent benefit fluctuations (usually downward) and changes in eligibility rules (usually in the direction of more restrictions).

During the 1991–92 economic slowdown, cuts in GA programs offered states and localities a way to save money without suffering any corresponding loss in federal funds (Barnes, Baumohl, and Hopper, 1992; Halter 1996). The result was a nationwide stampede toward program retrenchment. As the first states began to cut GA programs, others worried openly about becoming welfare magnets for poor, single men. In the end, 17 states made cuts in GA, including Michigan, which terminated its program (Danziger and Kossoudji 1994–95; Halter 1996; Urban Institute 1996). This purge left only 26 states providing GA

benefits for more than 6 months, 3 for 6 months or less, and 3 providing one-time emergency grants (Moon and Schneiderman 1995).

The human consequences of these cutbacks are a matter of dispute. However, findings from a survey of states conducted by the Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law (1994:1) suggest that, contrary to many policymakers' expectations, people terminated from GA were often not able to go to work. For example, in Michigan, "over 80 percent of former GA recipients, nearly 66,000 individuals, did not work for most of the year, following GA termination." In Pennsylvania, "nearly two-thirds of those surveyed lacked paid employment during an entire six-month period, two full years after being cut from GA." Anthony Halter (1996:107) suggested that the primary reason the GA cutbacks did not produce higher levels of work among former recipients is that many "suffered from health problems that made it extremely difficult for them to find work but did not entitle them to disability benefits." While many states developed systematic programs to transfer disabled people to SSI, those who failed to qualify for SSI were not necessarily employable (Lewin-VHI, Inc.1995).

Thus, increased hunger and homelessness were common results. The Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law (1994:2) reported: "Former recipients could not rely on private charity to meet their needs for food, shelter, and medical care. As a result, 25 percent of Michigan GA recipients reported being homeless within 7 months after the program was eliminated, up from 2 percent before termination." Other problems short of increased hunger and homelessness also were associated with termination from GA: In Pennsylvania, "utility shutoffs and evictions went from 9.4 per cent for GA recipients before discontinuance to 18.4 [per cent] after" (Halter 1996:109).

Along with GA cutbacks came more emphasis on workfare. Although the recent emphasis on workfare in programs serving poor, single mothers with children has received more attention, it is long pre-dated by the use of workfare in GA programs, where the practice was employed to discourage recipients from taking benefits while also receiving wages from unreported work. Whether GA workfare "smokes out" recipients who work off-book is subject to debate; that it allows recipients to prepare for

market-based jobs that might sustain them is even more dubious (Finder 1998).

In sum, by the mid-1990s, the GA retrenchment had established features: access frequently was restricted to the disabled; benefits were reduced; time limits and behavioral requirements for the receipt of aid were imposed; and participation in workfare programs increasingly was required.

This retrenchment was fueled in good part by fears of welfare migration. Indeed, by the mid-1990s, fears of welfare migration had spread even to remote Hawai'i. In spite of its liberal tradition, Hawaii's legislators capped GA expenditures in 1995, drastically cut benefits, and for a time limited how long recipients could receive them. The main reason given for these drastic actions was the alleged migration of poor, single males to Hawai'i to take advantage of a "good deal [in GA benefits]" (*Hawai'i Senate Journal* 1995: 669–670). There was scant evidence to document these fears, but they nonetheless propelled Hawai'i to join in a GA retrenchment that was as wide as it was deep.

WELFARE MIGRATION: SUBSTANCE OR SYMBOLISM?

Given the political power of welfare migration claims, it is important to inquire about their validity. Although welfare migration may be unlikely in Hawai'i, to what extent have policy disparities on the mainland been sufficient to motivate migration?

To date, little is known about the extent of GA-inspired migration in the United States. However, suggestive evidence can be gleaned from the well-researched relationship between AFDC benefits and the migration of poor families with dependent children. Three waves of studies address this question, each supplanting the findings and conventional wisdom of its predecessor (see Schram, Nitz and Krueger 1998). Thomas Dye (1990: 69) summarized the shift in substantive findings between the first and second waves of studies as follows: "Early studies suggested that the poor migrate for job opportunities and family reasons with little knowledge of welfare rules and payments in various jurisdictions. More recent studies suggest that the poor migrate opposite net flows and toward high benefit states."

The most significant second-wave study was by Peterson and Rom (1989 and 1990). Like many others, they imputed strict

economic rationality both to welfare recipients making residential decisions and to state governments making welfare policies. That is, they assumed that welfare recipients rationally migrate toward higher benefits and that higher benefit states rationally respond by letting their benefits decline faster than other states. As evidence for this dynamic relationship, the authors reported that states with high benefits at an earlier point in time tend to see their poor populations grow during the subsequent period (either through attraction or retention of poor people). Peterson and Rom found that in response, states cut back on benefits in a "race to the bottom" in order to avoid becoming "welfare magnets." However, because Peterson and Rom (1990) used data aggregated at the state level, problems of cross-level inference seriously limit what they can conclude about individual behavior from state-level data.

A more recent, third wave of studies relies instead on large, nationwide, individual-level data sets. These studies uniformly find almost no support for the welfare migration hypothesis and raise questions about the persistence of the focus on whether relatively more generous state programs attract recipients (Walker 1994; Hanson and Hartman 1994; Schram and Krueger 1994; Levine and Zimmerman 1995; Frey et. al. 1995; Gresenz 1997; Schram, Nitz, and Krueger 1998; Allard and Danziger 1998). This substantial body of work strongly suggests that AFDC-inspired migration was a marginal phenomenon. Our confidence in this conclusion is bolstered by the fact that several of these studies converge in the magnitude of their estimates: Hanson and Hartman (1994), Schram, Nitz, and Krueger (1998), and Allard and Danziger (1998) all found that interstate migration among poor, single-mother families occurred at a rate of no more than 5% per year, and all found that the interstate migration of such families from lower to higher benefit states was even less.

Despite the strength of these findings for AFDC, there are plausible reasons to think that GA migration might be greater. GA programs always have varied more than did AFDC programs, raising the potential for stronger migration incentives. Because GA recipients are usually single men, and in the vast majority of cases, individuals without children, they may be less tied to extended kin networks in a given locale. For this same reason,

GA recipients are likely to incur lower moving costs, and can contemplate a move across state borders without worrying about how it might affect children. With such issues in mind, we turn to an empirical analysis of GA migration.

MEASURING GA MIGRATION

To analyze the effects of GA provision on the migration of single, poor men, we examined GA programs during the period preceding the widespread cutbacks of the early 1990s. This was a time of relative stability in GA eligibility standards and in the GA rolls: the nationwide number of recipients dropped only slightly, from 1.35 million in 1985 to 1.12 million in 1989 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986, 1990). In spite of recession, by 1992, the number of recipients, 1.21 million, was still within this range (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1995). Thus, this pre-retrenchment period makes for a good test of the GA migration hypothesis: Because programs were fairly stable, we can see if over this time period state programs with particular characteristics attracted or lost people from the program-relevant population of poor, single men. Our analysis is based on interstate migration on the mainland (that is, excluding Hawai'i and Alaska), and focuses on poor, single men, 24 to 54 years of age, who did not graduate from high school. Given the characteristics of this population—single, under-educated, low-income—the analysis that follows can be considered a limit case for the issue of welfare migration. If there is little welfare migration among this group, there is unlikely to be much among any population.²

To test whether states with GA programs with particular characteristics experienced GA migration, we grouped them into 3 categories: 8 states with *statewide* GA programs that extended eligibility without time-limits to *employable, non-disabled* adults under 65 years of age; 27 states (and the District of Columbia) with statewide GA programs that failed to meet these criteria; and 13 states with only emergency assistance (if that) and no statewide GA program.³ This tripartite distinction served as the basis for several dichotomous variables used in our multivariate analyses of our data (discussed below). In particular, our analysis focuses

on whether there was migration to states in the first category—i.e., those “top GA states” with statewide programs that extended eligibility to employable, non-elderly individuals. We also test to see if there was migration away from states in the last category—i.e., those with no statewide GA program.

To test these hypotheses, we examine the period from 1985 to 1990 using data from the 1990 U.S. Census Public Use Microdata Set (PUMS) 5% sample. We use data on all non-institutionalized, single men 24–54 years of age, who had not completed high school, had incomes below the poverty level, and were living in the continental 48 states and the District of Columbia in 1990. We restrict our analysis to this group in order to exclude younger men who moved out of state for post-secondary education and older men who are automatically treated as unemployable by many GA programs.

The PUMS is a large national data set that enables us to see if people were living in a different state in 1990 than they were in 1985. Thus, we can test to see if poor, employable, single men who did move during that period were more likely to move to a state where they could qualify for General Assistance. We also can check to see if they came from a state that would be less likely to offer them GA. With these data, we can also calculate the probability of moving based on the availability of GA in the state of origin. We can also calculate the probability of receiving any form of public assistance after an interstate move. We present these findings below.

The PUMS provides data on numerous other factors that might affect interstate migration. In our multivariate analyses, we control for whether men were living in 1985 in the state where they were born, as people living in their state of origin are less likely than others to leave. We also control for race, age, education, marital status, and disability. We also examine the jobs to working age population ratio on the grounds that job availability affects interstate migration.

MODELING GA MIGRATION

We start our examination of the PUMS data by comparing the 1985–1990 interstate migration rates for single men, single women

and single women with children, aged 24–54, who had incomes below the poverty level and had not completed high school. We find that these rates are very similar: gender and the presence of children do not affect interstate migration rates very much at all:

% Living in a Different State in 1990 Than in 1985 N

Single Men	8.2	34,652
Single Women	6.7	7,465
Single Women with Children	9.8	45,570

Less than 10% of each group moved out of state between 1985 and 1990, an annual interstate migration rate of less than 2%. Thus, if there is any welfare migration, it is a marginal phenomenon.

Single mothers with children moved out of state most frequently and were most likely to be eligible for public assistance (AFDC in the years analyzed); however, as discussed above, extensive research has demonstrated that there is very little welfare migration by poor, single mothers with children. In our PUMS group of poor, single mothers with children, only 48% of the approximately 10% who were migrants moved to a higher benefit state between 1985 and 1990 and only 47% of all these migrants were receiving public assistance in 1990.

Next, we compare the male migrants and non-migrants. Table 1 indicates that there were few major differences between migrants and non-migrants, and the differences were not consistent with the popular logic of welfare migration. Migrants were less likely than non-migrants to be living (in 1990) in a state with a statewide GA program that extended eligibility to employable persons (19% vs. 26%). In 1990, migrants were slightly more likely to be living in a state that did not offer GA on a statewide basis (25% vs. 22%).

Table 1 also indicates that migrants were more likely to have been working in 1989 (55% vs. 42%), and to have more income from sources other than public assistance (\$2575 vs. \$2065 on average); to be white (60% vs. 50%); to have completed at least the 9th grade of school (57% vs. 51%); to be living (in 1990) in group quarters (14% vs. 7%) or in a household of one person (47% vs. 45%); and to be slightly younger (on average, 35 vs. 37 years of age). Migrants were less likely to have been never married at some

Table 1

Migrant and Non-Migrant Poor Single Males, Age 24–54, Without a High School Degree, 1990.

	<i>Non-Migrants (Same State as '85)</i>	<i>Migrants (Different State)</i>
Worked Last Year	41.6%	55.1%
Living Alone	44.9%	46.6%
Living in Group Quarters	6.9%	14.3%
Race=White	49.8%	60.3%
Age	36.6	35.6
Never Married	61.4%	54.6%
Disability (Limits Work)	35.5%	30.4%
Disability (Prevents Work)	25.8%	18.7%
Finished 9 th Grade or Beyond	51.2%	56.8%
Living in State of Origin	65.8%	28.0%
Non Public Assistance Income	\$2,065.38	\$2,574.61
Receiving Public Assistance	21.2%	16.3%
Living in a Top GA State	25.8%	19.4%
Living in a State with No GA	22.1%	24.8%
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1990	-.30	-.30
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1985	-.30	-.29
Moved to a Top GA State from a More Restrictive State	—	14.0%
Moved From a Top GA State to a More Restrictive State	—	16.0%
Number of Cases	31,881	2,771

Source: U.S. Census, 1990 PUMS 5% sample.

point (55% vs. 61%); less likely have a work-limiting disability (30% vs. 36%) as well as a work-preventing disability (19% vs. 26%) or to have received public assistance in 1989 (16% vs. 21%). Migrants were substantially less likely to have been living in

1985 in the state where they were born (28% vs. 66%), which is consistent with the idea of "step migration," i.e., that having already moved out of state increases one's chances of doing so again. The rate of change in the jobs/working age population ratio is the same for both groups. (Nor did other measures of job availability produce any differences.)

These comparisons suggest that migrants were neither the more needy group nor those most likely to use welfare. Indeed, the differences strongly suggest that poor, single men move for reasons quite other than improved prospects of support by General Assistance.⁴

Table 2 displays the results of a more rigorous test of these first impressions. It presents the results of a logistic regression calculating how each of a select group of these variables affects the likelihood of a poor, single man moving from one state to another between 1985 to 1990. A logistic regression has a dichotomous dependent variable and calculates the degree to which each variable affects the probability for the average case in realizing one or the other value in the dichotomous variable. The logistic results in Table 2 are for the dichotomous dependent variable of migration where the possible values are not having moved or having moved. The results presented estimate the effect of each variable on the probability of having moved. We are most interested in those factors where the parameter estimate is significant and indicates that the variable affects the odds of having moved. Along with the coefficient estimates from the logistic regression analysis, we also translate these coefficient estimates in Table 2 into average probabilities of moving.⁵

In Table 2, we find that all variables in the equation were significant except for disability status, which did not affect the probability of moving to another state.⁶

Several factors increased the likelihood of moving. Looking at the probability estimates in Table 2, however, we find that while variables often significantly affected the probability of moving, most often the effect was quite small. The overall probability of moving is estimated to be 8% on average and all the other probabilities tack quite closely to that norm. Accounting for the other factors, whites had a 10% probability of moving compared to a 7% probability for nonwhites. Those with more than a 9th-grade

Table 2

Coefficient and Probability Estimates for the Likelihood of Migration, For Poor Single Men, Aged 24–54, Without a High School Degree, 1985–90.

	<i>Coefficient Estimate (SE)</i>	<i>Probability of Moving</i>
Overall		8.2%
Living in a Top GA State in 1985	–0.163 ((0.052)**	7.0
Living in a State with No GA in 1985	0.276 (0.050)***	10.1
All Other GA State in 1985		8.0
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1985 ? 1 SD above the Mean	0.712 (0.228)**	8.6
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1985—1 SD below the Mean		7.8
Living in State of Origin	–1.698 (0.045)***	3.6
Not Living in Original State		16.4
Race=White	0.468 (0.042)***	9.9
Race=Nonwhite		6.5
Age—1 SD Above the Mean	–0.29 (0.003)***	6.5
Age—1SD Below the Mean		10.1
Finished 9 th Grade or Beyond	0.361 (0.042)***	9.5
Less Than a 9 th Grade Education		6.9
Never Married	–0.395 (0.045)***	7.1
Married at Some Point		10.0
Disability Status	0.000 (0.046)	
Intercept	–0.640 (0.139)***	

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; and *** = $p < .0001$.

Note: For continuous variables, the coefficient estimate is given for the first category of the variable listed in the table. For dummy variables, coefficient estimates are given for the included variables in the regression models.

education had a 10% probability of moving compared to 7% for those less educated. Never having been married reduced a poor, single man's probability of moving out of state to 7%, compared to a 10% probability for men who had been married at some point. Men one standard deviation above the mean age had a 7% probability of moving while those one standard deviation below the mean had a 10% probability. Residing in the state in which he was born greatly reduced a man's probability of moving out of state: to 4% compared to the 16% probability of men who did not live in their native state in 1985. We also found that men living in a state with a rate of increase one standard deviation above the mean in the state's job/working age population ratio had an 9% probability of moving, while those living in a state one standard deviation below that mean had a probability of only 8%.

Yet, for our purposes, the most interesting factor to positively affect the probability of moving was whether a person lived in a state that did not have a GA program. Living in such a state increased a man's probability of moving to 10%. Men living in a state that provided GA statewide to non-elderly, employable individuals had only a 7% probability of moving.

It seems, then, that the type of GA program in a state does significantly affect the probability that a poor, single man will move; however, the effect is quite small. The overwhelming majority of single men in our sample did not move out of state, and their probability of moving was only slightly revised depending upon the type of GA program available in their state of residence.

Table 3 presents additional probability estimates that reinforce the idea that GA has at best a limited effect on migration. The overall probabilities indicate that the men we studied were about as likely to move to a state without GA as they were to move to a top GA state (1.7% vs. 1.6% for the full sample; 21% vs. 19% for the migrants). Individuals in the full sample from top GA states were only slightly more likely than average to move to another top GA state (1.7% vs. 1.6%) and only slightly less likely to move to a non-GA state (1.3% vs. 1.7%). Among migrants, they were somewhat substantially more likely than average to move to another top-GA state (25% vs. 19%), while only slightly less likely than average to move to a non-GA state (19% vs. 21%). Individuals in the full sample from non-GA states were slightly more likely than others

Table 3

Probability Estimates for the Likelihood of Migration To a Top GA State or a Non-GA State, For Poor Single Men, Aged 24–54, Without a High School Degree, 1985–90.

	<i>Full Sample</i>		<i>Migrants</i>	
	<i>Probability of Moving</i>		<i>Probability of Moving</i>	
	<i>To A Top GA State</i>	<i>To a Non-GA State</i>	<i>To A Top GA State</i>	<i>To a Non-GA State</i>
Overall Probability	1.6%	1.7%	19.4%	21.0%
State of Residence in 1985:				
Top GA State	1.7	1.3	25.2	18.9
Non-GA State	1.9	1.5	*	15.1
All Other States	1.3	2.0	17.7	24.5

* = $p > .50$.

All percentages are based on coefficients that are significant at the .001 level, unless indicated. Other variables included in the models tested were state of birth, race, age, level of education, marital status, disability, and rate of change of the ratio of workers to working age population 1985–89.

to move to a top-GA state (1.9% vs. 1.6%) and slightly less likely than others to move to a non-GA state (1.5% vs. 1.7%). Among the migrants, men from non-GA states were not more likely than average to move to a top-GA state but were somewhat less likely than average to move to a non-GA state (15% vs. 21%). Yet, other than these limited effects, migration flows of poor, single men seem largely unaffected by GA.

But what about the employable migrants who did go to states where they would be eligible for GA? Were they more likely than other state residents to be receiving public assistance? Table 4 displays results of a logistic regression which addresses this.⁷ The analysis is limited to employable men who in 1990 resided in top GA states. Table 4 indicates that these migrants had a 28% probability of receiving public assistance compared to 23% for non-migrants (and 24% overall). In this sense, then, migration and GA receipt seem connected. Yet, given the significance of the other factors listed in Table 4, migration is a marginal influence

Table 4

Coefficient and Probability Estimates for the Likelihood of Receiving Public Assistance, For Poor Single Men, Without a High School Degree, Without Disabilities that Prevent Working, Living in the Top GA States, 1990.

	Coefficient Estimate (SE)	Probability
Overall		23.7%
Living In Group Quarters	0.246 (0.124)*	19.7
Living Alone	1.022 (0.77)***	32.5
All Other Living Arrangements		16.4
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1990—1 SD above the Mean	-3.505 (1.150)**	22.2
1985 to 1989 Rate of Change in the ratio of Workers to Working Age Pop. for the State of Residence in 1990—1 SD below the Mean		25.1
Migrate	0.291 (0.139)*	28.0
Did Not Migrate		23.4
Living in State of Origin	0.332 (0.075)***	25.7
Not Living in State of Origin		20.8
Non-Public Assistance Income—1 SD Above the Mean	-.0003 (0.00003)***	10.5
Non-Public Assistance Income—1 SD Below the Mean		36.0
Worked Last Year	-.544 (0.095)***	18.1
Did Not Work Last Year		26.1
Race=White	-.393 (0.074)***	20.4
Race=Nonwhite		26.3
Age—1 SD Above the Mean	0.017 (0.004)***	25.8
Age—1SD Below the Mean		21.2
Finished 9 th Grade or Beyond	-.209 (0.072)**	22.5
Less Than a 9 th Grade Education		25.7
Disability (Limits Work)	.960 (0.090)***	37.7
Non-Disabled		21.3
Intercept	-2.595 (.374)	

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; and *** = $p < .0001$.

Note: For continuous variables, the coefficient estimate is given for the first category of the variable listed in the table. For dummy variables, coefficient estimates are given for the included variables in the regression models.

on the growth of the rolls in top GA states. All of the variables except marital history affected the probability that members of this sample of poor single men in top GA states would receive assistance. Notably, in spite of the fact that the analysis excludes men with a disability that prevents them from working, we still find that lesser impairments (affecting the kind and amount of work a man can do) significantly increased his probability of taking public assistance. Even in the states that provide GA to the non-disabled, these modest impairments increase a man's probability of taking public assistance to 38% compared to 21% for non-impaired men. This and other findings probably reflect the greater likelihood that certain poor, single men will leave the labor force. Men whose age was one standard deviation above the mean had a 26% probability of receiving public assistance compared to 21% for those whose age was one standard deviation below the mean. Being white reduced the probability of receiving aid to 20% compared to 26% for non-whites. Being educated beyond the 9th grade decreased a man's odds of taking public assistance (23% compared to 26% for the less educated). Men with non-public assistance income (in 1989) one standard deviation above the mean had a 11% probability of receiving public assistance while those whose non-public assistance income was one standard deviation below the mean had a 36% probability. Similarly, having worked in the past year reduced a man's probability of taking assistance to 18% compared to 26% for those who did not work. Not surprisingly, job growth was negatively related to receiving aid, though the effect was slight. Poor, single men living alone (in a household of one person) also had a heightened probability of receiving assistance: They had a 33% probability compared to 20% for men living in group quarters and 16% for men in all other living arrangements. Lastly, men living in their state of origin were more likely to receive assistance (26% compared to 21% for those men not living in their state of origin).⁸

In sum, in top GA states, advancing age, impairment, lack of education, lack of recent work history, lack of material resources generally, a relatively loose labor market—and non-white status—have most to do with whether a man collects public assistance. Migration is a relatively trivial factor.

CONCLUSION: ASSESSING GA MIGRATION IN CONTEXT

The dramatic national welfare reforms of recent years have been animated in good part by concerns that welfare recipients are inured to dependency. The welfare migrant has been used to personify this attitude and policymakers have used the spectre of welfare migration to rationalize welfare retrenchment. Such imagery has been at work in policymaking for state GA programs for a long time and it is in these programs where many of the recent approaches to retrenchment—time limits, behavioral requirements, and workfare, in particular—were tested out.

The preceding analysis suggests a need to reconceptualize the issue of welfare migration. Put simply, our findings do not support the claim that relatively generous states attract utility-maximizing migrants. Although poor, single men arguably have greater capacities than other impoverished people to move across state lines, our analysis reveals that generous benefits exerted few, if any, “magnetic effects.” It seems that in all but the most extreme cases, generous benefits are unlikely to exert a “pull” strong enough to induce migration. It seems that poor people, like other people, are interested in more than government benefits (or other financial considerations) when they make residential decisions. Among other things, they are likely to care about the quality of their social relations, including networks of family and friends that serve as critical sources of support. In this important sense, the earliest studies of welfare migration seem more to the point than later studies which emphasized utility maximization.

On the other hand, restrictions on aid that threaten the survival of poor people may “push” them across political borders. We find evidence that poor, single men leave bottom-tier GA states in greater than expected numbers, thought not for top GA states. We suspect that more evidence of this sort will be forthcoming as states implement new, restrictive reforms under the TANF system.

NOTES

1. The question of whether a state can require recipients who have lived there less than 12 months to receive the benefits of they would have

gotten in their prior state of residence is before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Anderson v. Roe* (98–97). See Hershkoff and Loffredo (1997: 43–44) and Zubler (1997) for a discussion of the constitutional and legal issues involved.

2. A caveat is in order here: Our analysis does not concern intrastate migration. Of the men we studied, 49.1% made an intrastate move between 1985 and 1990. Of those who did not move out of state between 1985 and 1990, 52.9% moved to a different house. In states like California, where GA benefits vary greatly among the counties, some of these moves may be GA-related. Given our analysis of interstate moves, we doubt that such is the case, but only further research will tell. Research of this sort will need to rely on state and local data bases.
3. We based our initial classification on 1987 data compiled by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (Shapiro and Greenstein 1987). We then checked these against a 1989 report prepared for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Lewin/ICF and James Bell Associates 1990). Finally, because the status of 7 states remained unclear, we validated these entries through phone interviews with state-level administrators.
4. Examination of the same variables for all poor, single males and for all single males regardless of income indicated similar results as those reported in Table 1.
5. Probability estimates were determined by multiplying the actual variable value of each sample member by the coefficient estimate from the multivariate model. These Xb estimates were then used within a logistic regression equation, which takes the form $1/(1+e^{-xb})$, for each sample member. On the basis of this calculation, means values for these probability estimates were determined. Thus, the probability estimates refer to the *average* probability of migrating, given particular characteristics.
6. Disability is measured in the PUMS both as limiting and preventing work in 1990. Table 2 presents results for work-limiting but not work-preventing disability. When the latter is used in the equation instead, it is significantly negatively related to migration. It does not, however, appreciably change the results for the other variables, except to decrease the significance of the variable for living in a state with no GA. We would expect work-preventing disability to discourage migration for two reasons. First, individuals with such disabilities are more likely to stay where they know they can count on family, friends and available community and medical services. Second, many people with work-preventing disabilities collect SSI, a program with a national benefit floor. Although some states supplement the national SSI benefit minimum, state supplements are not so great as to create any likely migration pull given the other concerns of these disabled individuals.

Disability that prevents work, therefore, not only is very likely to discourage migration to another state but it also most often qualifies an individual for SSI making the move for GA moot. Yet, both disability variables are of limited utility since they measure disability only in 1990 and not retrospectively back to 1985 at the beginning of the period we are studying. The work-limiting disability variable is, however, at least relevant to the GA population. Using no disability variable produces essentially the same results as reported in Table 2 for the other variables. Nor does removing individuals with work-preventing disabilities from the sample affect the results.

7. Public assistance, as measured in the PUMS, includes SSI and AFDC as well as GA. Members of our sample did not qualify for AFDC because they were not living with children. If they were sufficiently disabled, they could qualify for SSI; however, we exclude at this point people with disabilities that prevent them from working. Therefore, the people who indicated receipt of public assistance here should be receiving GA.
8. In a test not shown here, we found that migrants returning to their state of origin were no more likely than anyone else to take GA.

REFERENCES

- Albelda, Randy and Chris Tilly. 1997. *Glass Ceilings and Bottomless Pits: Women's Work, Women's Poverty*. Boston: South End Press.
- Allard, Scott and Sheldon Danziger, 1998. "Welfare Magnets: Myths and Realities. A Paper Presented at "Welfare Reform: A Race to the Bottom?" Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC: March 27.
- American Public Welfare Association (APWA). 1997. *State-by-State Welfare Reform Policy Decisions*. Washington DC: September.
- Barnes, Ed, Jim Baumohl, and Kim Hopper. 1992. "The New Paternalism in American Public Welfare: General Assistance Reform in Alameda County, California." Presented at the Conference on Justice and Human Rights Advocacy, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, March 3.
- Burke, Vee. 1995. "Cash and Non-Cash Benefits for Persons with Limited Income: Eligibility Rules, Recipient and Expenditure Data, FYs 1992-1994." Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Center on Social Welfare Policy and Law. 1994. *The Tragedy of State GA Cuts*. Washington DC: July.
- Danziger, S. and S. Kossoudji. 1994. "What Happened to General Assistance Recipients in Michigan?" *Focus* 16: 32-34.
- Dye, Thomas R. 1990. "The Policy Consequences of Intergovernmental Competition." *Cato Journal* 10 (Spring/Summer): 59-73.
- Edin, Kathryn and Laura Lein. 1997. *Making Ends Meet: How Single Mothers Survive Welfare and Low-Wage Work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Finder, Alan. 1998. "Evidence is Scant That Workfare Leads to Full-Time Jobs." *New York Times*, April 12: A1.
- Frey, William H., Kao-Lee, Liaw, Yu Xie, and Marcia Carlson. 1995. "Interstate Migration of the US Poverty Population: Immigration 'Pushes' and Welfare Magnet 'Pulls.'" Research Reports 95-331. Ann Arbor MI: Population Studies Center, University of Michigan.
- Glasser, Irene. 1996. "Homelessness and General Assistance: Untangling the Relationship." *Sage Race Relations Abstracts* 21, 3: 3-19.
- Gordon, Linda. 1994. *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare*. New York: The Free Press.
- Greenberg, Mark, and Jim Baumohl. 1996. "Income Maintenance: Little Help Now, Less on the Way." In *Homelessness In America*, ed. Jim Baumohl. Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Gresenz, Carole Roan. 1997. "An Empirical Investigation of the Role of AFDC Benefits in Location Choice." Working Paper Series 97-05, DRU-1611-RC. Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation.
- Halter, Anthony. 1994. "State Welfare Reform for Employable General Assistance Recipients: The Facts behind the Assumptions." *Social Work* 41: 106-110.
- Hanson, Russell L. and John T. Hartman. 1994. "Do Welfare Magnets Attract?" Discussion Paper #1028-14. Madison WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Hawai'i Senate Journal*. 1995. Honolulu: Journal of the 18th Legislature of Hawai'i.
- Hershkoff, Helen and Stephen Loffredo. 1997. *The Rights of the Poor*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press.
- Levine, Phillip B. and David J. Zimmerman. 1995. "An Empirical Analysis of the Welfare Magnet Debate Using the NLSY." Working Paper 5264. Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Lewin/ICF and James Bell Associates. 1990. *Characteristics of General Assistance Programs: 1989*. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services: August.
- Lewin-VHI, Inc. 1995. *Impairment Trends in the Growth of Applications and Awards for SSA Disability Benefits*. Fairfax, VA: Author, May 24.
- Lurie, Irene. 1997. "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: A Green Light for the States." *Publius* 27: 73-88.
- Mead, Lawrence M. 1997. *The New Paternalism: Supervisory Approaches to Poverty*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Mead, Lawrence M. 1992. *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Milofsky, Carl, Anthony Butto, Michael Gross, and Jim Baumohl. 1993. "Small Town in Mass Society: Substance Abuse Treatment and Urban-Rural Migration." *Contemporary Drug Problems*, 20: 433-72.
- Moffitt, Robert. 1992. "Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System: A Review." *Journal of Economic Literature* 30: 34-6.

- Moon, Ailee and Leonard Schneiderman. 1995. *Assessing the Growth of California's General Assistance Program*. Berkeley CA: California Policy Seminar, University of California.
- Peterson, Paul E. and Mark Rom. 1989. "American Federalism, Welfare Policy, and Residential Choices." *American Political Science Review* 83: 711-729.
- Peterson, Paul E. and Mark C. Rom. 1990. *Welfare Magnets: A New Case for a National Standard*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Schram, Sanford F. 1995. *Words of Welfare: The Poverty of Social Science and the Social Science of Poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Schram, Sanford and Joe Soss. 1999. "The Real Value of Welfare: Why There is No Welfare Migration." *Politics & Society* 27: 39-66.
- Schram, Sanford, Lawrence Nitz, and Gary Krueger. 1998. "Without Cause or Effect: Reconsidering Welfare Migration as a Policy Problem." *American Journal of Political Science* 42: 210-30.
- Schram, Sanford F. and Gary Krueger. 1994. "'Welfare Magnets' and Benefit Decline: Symbolic Problems and Substantive Consequences." *Publius* 24: 61-81.
- Shapiro, Isaac and Robert Greenstein. 1987. *Holes in the Safety Nets: Poverty Programs and Policies in the States*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Stack, Carol. 1996. *Call to Home: African-Americans Reclaim the Rural South*. New York: Basic Books.
- Stack, Carol B. 1974. *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Uccello, Cori, Heather R. McCallum, and L. Jerome Gallagher. 1996. *State General Assistance Programs 1996*. Washington DC: The Urban Institute.
- U.S. Census of Population and Housing. 1992. 1990: Public Use Microdata Samples. U.S. [machine readable data files] / prepared by the Bureau of the Census. Washington DC: U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration. 1986. *Social Security Bulletin*. 49, 12: 52.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration. 1990. *Social Security Bulletin*. 53, 12: 65.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 1995. *Quarterly Public Assistance Statistics: Fiscal Years 1992 & 1993*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance: 79.
- U.S. House of Representatives. Committee on Ways and Means. 1996. *The Green Book*. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Urban Institute. 1996. *Do General Assistance Programs Provide an Adequate Safety Net?* Washington DC: The Urban Institute.
- Walker, James R. 1994. "Migration Among Low-Income Households: Helping the Witch Doctors Reach Consensus." Madison WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Discussion Paper #1031-94.

Zubler, Todd. 1997. "The Right to Migrate and Welfare Reform: Time for Shapiro v. Thompson To Take a Hike." *Valparaiso University Law Review* 31: 893–950.

Thanks to Sheldon Danziger, Chuck Green, Gary Krueger, Julia Littell, Larry Nitz, Frances Fox Piven, and Brian Richardson for helpful suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.