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Private Child Support: 
Current and Potential Impacts

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This paper examines the effects of a number of methods for enhancing private child support collections: increasing the proportion of those children potentially eligible for child support who get child support awards; using a uniform standard for determining child support obligations; and collecting a greater percentage of current obligations. The paper also estimates the potential of all three methods used in combination to provide income to needy custodial families.

The research demonstrates that the current private child support system falls far short of its potential to transfer income from noncustodial to custodial families. Although the use of a normative standard, improved collections, and extending child support to all those potentially eligible will greatly improve the economic circumstances of impoverished custodial families, private child support cannot be viewed as the sole answer for the economic plight of these families. Increased work opportunities and increased public support are also needed.

Child support is an income transfer to the custodian of a child with a living noncustodial parent. Private child support is paid for by the noncustodial parent. Public child support is paid for by taxpayers. During the last decade a significant amount of
legislation has been enacted to strengthen public enforcement of private child support. The most important legislation was passed in 1975, when Congress established the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) as Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act (the IV-D program). Primarily a state program with significant federal involvement and federal funding, the original IV-D legislation required each state to develop a child support enforcement program providing services to all families receiving benefits from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC).

Since its inception, the IV-D program has grown steadily, and several amendments to the Social Security Act have greatly expanded the scope of its activities. Part of this expansion has been the extension of services to non-AFDC families. During the period 1978 to 1985, total child support collections through the IV-D program increased by 157% (56% in real terms), and the program's caseload grew by 102%. This increase in program activities spanned both the AFDC and non-AFDC components of the program, although the percentage increase in the non-AFDC component was somewhat larger. Between 1978 and 1985 collections for AFDC families rose by 131% (40% in real terms) while collections for non-AFDC families grew by 179% (69% in real terms). The IV-D AFDC caseload grew by 76% over this period and the IV-D caseload of non-AFDC families grew by 260%.

Passage of the Child Support Amendments of 1984, which instituted, among other things, mandatory wage withholding for delinquent noncustodial parents, has caused continued growth in the size of IV-D program throughout the 1980s. The recent passage of the Family Support Act of 1988, which will institute universal withholding by 1994, will ensure growth through the end of this century.

The expansion of the IV-D program reflects the public's concern about the growth in the number of children living with one parent and the public cost of supporting these children when the private child support system fails.

The potential child-support-eligible population consists of children under the age of 18 years who have living noncustodial parents. In 1983 15.3 million children were living in 6.1 million families disrupted by divorce or separation and in 1.8
Private Child Support

million families in which the mothers had never been married. Combined, these children represent one of every five children in the United States today and a 35% increase in the eligible population over 1978. It is estimated that more than two of every five children born today will at some time before age 18 live in a single-parent family and hence become potentially eligible for private child support (Bumpass, 1984).

Under the current system of private child support, non-custodial fathers transferred nearly $6.8 billion to the custodial mothers of their children in 1983. This represented 70% of the $9.7 billion legally owed. Of those families potentially eligible for child support, only 60% had a legal child support order. Of those legally entitled to child support, close to half received the full amount they were owed while just over one-quarter received nothing. Recipiency rates (proportion of the eligible population who receive some child support) have been fairly consistent from 1978 to 1985 (.35 to .36 respectively).

Partly because of the failure of the child support system to transfer sufficient income, about one-third of all eligible children received some form of public assistance. The largest single source of public aid for these children is the AFDC program, which transferred some $13.8 billion to needy families in 1983. This program, combined with Food Stamps, Medicaid, and other smaller programs, cost the public more than $24 billion during 1983 for single-parent families eligible for private child support (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1987). In other words, public child support cash transfers to the poor alone exceed private child support cash transfers to all children eligible for support by a ratio of about three to one.

In spite of these combined private and public income transfers, many child-support-eligible families remain poor. In 1983 the poverty rate for all potentially eligible families was 33% while 41% of potentially eligible single-parent families were poor.

Given the current levels of private and public child support and the impoverished economic situation of many of these families, two important policy questions need to be answered. First, how much income can potentially be transferred under the private child support system to eligible families? Second,
what are the impacts of such increases in these private income transfers on (a) AFDC costs and caseloads; and (b) the income and poverty status of eligible families?

The purpose of this paper is to address these questions by developing national estimates of private child support under five scenarios, each of which differs in effectiveness. The five scenarios are designed to show the impact of three means of enhancing the private child support system: (a) improving collections, (b) raising award levels, and (c) increasing the number of awards.

Data

The 1984 Current Population Survey merged March Annual Demographic File and April Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS), which provides the data for the analysis, is a match file containing detailed micro-level data on 3,821 families eligible for child support. All of these families have children under 18 years of age and were potentially eligible to receive child support in 1983. The data include detailed child support information as well as the demographic characteristics of the custodial mothers and the economic circumstances of the custodial families. This data file provides the most complete national data source. It is ideally suited for the analysis because it contains data on child support income due and received as well as AFDC participation data, including whether the family was a full-year or part-year recipient of AFDC.

The data file does suffer from several weaknesses that have a direct impact on the analysis. The major weakness stems from a complete lack of information about the noncustodial parents. Although the data file contains a wealth of information related to child support, no attempt was made to gather data on the noncustodial parent. Lack of income data on noncustodial parents poses a major obstacle for the estimation of potential transfers. This obstacle is overcome by utilizing an indirect estimation methodology developed by Oellerich and Garfinkel (see Oellerich, 1984; Oellerich and Garfinkel, 1983; and Garfinkel and Oellerich, 1986).5
Methodology: Current and Potential Child Support Obligations

Scenarios Tested

Five scenarios for determining total current and potential levels of private child support are tested. These scenarios are summarized in Table 1. The first scenario serves as the benchmark reflecting the current level of collections. The second scenario is the current obligations/perfect collections scenario. That is, if all that is owed were paid. This provides a benchmark reflecting the current level of obligations.

Table 1
Scenarios for Private Child Support

1. Current private child support system
2. Current private child support with perfect collection: System collecting 100% of current child support obligations
3. Uniform standard,* current obligation rate, and current collection rate: Apply a uniform normative standard at the current rate of securing awards and collect at the current collection rate
4. Uniform standard, current obligation rate, and 100% collection rate: Apply a uniform normative standard in those cases with a current obligation and collect 100% of the new obligation
5. Theoretical limits of private child support system: Apply a uniform normative standard of ability to pay to all potentially eligible cases and collect 100% of obligations

* The uniform standards under each of the remaining scenarios are the Wisconsin Percentage of Income and Colorado Income Shares.

Each of the remaining three scenarios applies a uniform normative standard of ability to pay to the income of the non-custodial fathers to generate a hypothetical child support obligation. The two normative standards chosen represent the two most popular methods of setting award levels currently being adopted by the states, the flat percentage-of-income model and the income shares model. The flat percentage-of-income model
has been adopted by 13 states. The income shares model has been adopted by 23 states (Munsterman and Henderson, 1987). The first standard is the Wisconsin percentage-of-income standard adopted in 1983. The obligation is simply a function of the number of dependent children and the gross income of the non-custodial parent. The Wisconsin standard sets the child support obligation at 17% of gross income for one child and 25, 29, 31, and 33% for 2, 3, 4, or 5 or more children, respectively. The second standard is one recently proposed in an OCSE study and adopted in the state of Colorado. The Colorado Child Support Guidelines (Williams, 1986) determines the needs or cost of the child(ren) based on the combined gross incomes of the custodial and noncustodial parents. The needs of the child(ren) are then shared proportionately by the parents based on the proportion of gross income each receives. If a remarried custodial parent does not have income, then one-half of a new spouse's income is considered available for support obligations.6

The third scenario applies the Wisconsin and Colorado standards to the noncustodial father’s income in only those cases with a current obligation. In addition, the current collection rate is used to adjust the amount due to current levels of collection effectiveness.7 The fourth scenario applies both standards, as in the prior scenario, but utilizes the collection rate of 100 percent. In the fifth scenario the Wisconsin Standard and Colorado Guidelines are applied to the income of the noncustodial father in every potentially eligible case, regardless of whether or not there is currently an award, and 100 percent collection effectiveness is assumed. This scenario provides the theoretical upper limit of private child support transfers under those standards.

Calculating the Normative Standards

The data for the first two scenarios are available directly from the CPS-CSS data file. For the first scenario, current collections, the amount reported as received by the custodial parent is multiplied by the Census family weight,8 and the result summed over all observations. The result is total current collections. The second scenario, 100% collection of what is currently due, is calculated in the same manner. The amount of child support due, as reported in the survey, is multiplied by the Census
family weight and summed over all observations. The result is the total current amount of private child support due.

The methodology for determining the next three scenarios is not as straightforward, since it is not based on current child support obligations and collections. In order to apply the Wisconsin standard and Colorado guidelines to the noncustodial parents' income, the relevant income data must be available. As stated earlier, one of the weaknesses of the CPS-CSS is the lack of any data on the noncustodial parents. To overcome this weakness, the income information is estimated using an indirect methodology developed by Oellerich and Garfinkel (see Oellerich, 1984; Oellerich and Garfinkel, 1983; and Garfinkel and Oellerich, 1989). The method uses the characteristics of the women as proxies for the men's characteristics and an adjusted estimated relationship between wives' characteristics and husbands' income.

To simulate the third child support scenario, the Wisconsin standard and the Colorado guidelines are applied to the estimated incomes of the noncustodial fathers who are currently obligated to pay support. The amount due based on the Wisconsin standard is simulated by simply multiplying the noncustodial father's income by the rate appropriate for the number of eligible dependent children. This amount is then multiplied by the current collection rate for the case to obtain the amount of expected transfer. The result for each sample case is then multiplied by the Census family weight and summed over all observations.

To simulate the Colorado guidelines for this scenario, the estimate of the noncustodial parent's income is combined with the total nonwelfare income of the custodial parent. If a remarried custodial parent has no income of her own, then one-half of the new spouse's income is deemed to be hers. The resulting total income is used to determine the child(ren)'s level of need. The standard of need, "Schedule of Basic Child Support," is provided as part of the guidelines and is based on the estimated cost of raising a child for given income levels. The noncustodian's obligation is determined by multiplying the need by the ratio of the noncustodian's income to the total income of the parents. The amount due is then multiplied by the
current collection rate for the case to obtain the amount of expected transfer. The result for each sample case is then weighted by the Census family weight and the results summed over all observations.

The fourth scenario demonstrates the upper limit of private child support for those families currently due child support. The scenario applies the Wisconsin and Colorado standards, to determine levels of support, to only those families with a current support order. The collection rate is set at 100%. This allows a direct comparison between the current system of setting awards and the normative standards. In the fifth scenario the standards are applied to every case without regard to prior award or payment status. This scenario provides the upper limits of the private child support system if the Wisconsin or Colorado standards were universally applied and 100% of the resulting obligations were collected.

Results: Current and Potential Levels of Private Child Support

The results of the simulations of current and potential levels of private child support appear in Table 2. The scenarios are represented in the rows of the tables. The three columns of the tables contain the results for the eligible families under each scenario, families not receiving AFDC, and AFDC recipient families.

Scenario 3 clearly illustrates the gains in private child support if current awards were set by and/or updated using either the Wisconsin or Colorado standards and current collection rates were maintained. Under the Wisconsin standard, transfers would double, an increase of $6.5 billion, to $13.33 billion. The Colorado standard would result in a 64% increase in transfers from the noncustodial fathers. Thus substantial increases in private child support transfers would be possible under this scenario. The fourth scenario demonstrates the effects of substituting for existing awards, obligations set by and/or periodically adjusted using either the Wisconsin or Colorado standard, and 100% collection effectiveness. The use of the Wisconsin standard
Table 2

Current Versus Potential Private Child Support Transfers (billions of 1983 dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Total Eligible Families (1)</th>
<th>Families Not on AFDC (2)</th>
<th>Families on AFDC (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.84)</td>
<td>(3.21)</td>
<td>(.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Current obligations</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.84)</td>
<td>(3.21)</td>
<td>(.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uniform standard; current obligors; current collection rate</td>
<td>Wisconsin: 13.33 (3.84)</td>
<td>Colorado: 11.22 (3.84)</td>
<td>Wisconsin: .83 (3.84) Colorado: .82 (3.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Uniform standard; current obligors; 100% collection</td>
<td>Wisconsin: 19.58 (3.84)</td>
<td>Colorado: 16.70 (3.84)</td>
<td>Wisconsin: 1.64 (3.84) Colorado: 1.63 (3.84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the number of eligible families (in millions) with an obligation.

would double existing award levels (row 2). When combined with 100% collection, the use of the Wisconsin standard would almost triple current payments (row 1). The impact of the Colorado guidelines would be somewhat smaller though still very substantial; an increase of $7.0 billion over current award levels. It cannot be ascertained from the data if these differences are due to initially low award levels, the lack of systematic periodic updating, or some combination of the two.10 These results
demonstrate that the current ability of noncustodial fathers to pay child support, as measured by the Wisconsin and Colorado standards, is not adequately tapped by the current system of establishing and updating award levels.

The last scenario provides the most striking results. When compared to the current situation (rows 1 and 2), the current system of setting and collecting private child support does not approach the theoretical upper limits. A perfect system would be capable of transferring from $28 to $32 billion, depending upon which standard was applied. This is almost three times what is currently due (row 2) and more than four times what is transferred under the current system (row 1).

The differences in potential child support transfers between those currently with an award and those without an award can be gleaned from the fourth and fifth scenarios (rows 4 and 5). Under the Wisconsin standard, the 3.84 million families who currently have an award have potential child support income of $19.58 billion. The child support potential income for the 4.05 million families without a current award is $12.86 billion. Thus the 51% of the eligible population without an award has only 40% of the total child support income potential. The proportions of the child support income potential for the Colorado standard are almost identical. There may be several concomitant reasons for this discrepancy. First and foremost is the lower incomes of the noncustodial fathers of those without awards. Second, many families without an award are headed by never-married mothers; thus there are fewer children per family on average. In addition, never-married men have lower incomes than ever-married men. Third, a disproportionate number of those families without an award are black, and black males have lower incomes vis-à-vis white males.

The aggregate results are further broken down into non-AFDC and AFDC families (columns 2 and 3, respectively) because ability to pay and collection effectiveness may differ substantially by the AFDC status of the custodial family. Several findings are worth highlighting. First, the effect of the standards on award levels differs dramatically between the two groups (compare rows 2 and 4). The Wisconsin standard would result in a 111% increase in award levels for families not receiving AFDC,
while for families receiving AFDC the increase is just 41%. The Colorado standard would result in a 77% increase for families not receiving AFDC and 41% for those receiving AFDC. These differences in the impact of the standards between families not on AFDC and families that are recipients of AFDC may reflect the regressive nature of the current system of setting award levels. That is, it appears that low-income noncustodial fathers of children receiving AFDC have obligations closer to their ability to pay as measured by either standard than do their non-AFDC counterparts.

Second, the effects of a perfect system (row 5) are far more dramatic, in percentage terms, for families on AFDC than for those not on AFDC. This indicates the difficulty currently encountered in securing awards and collecting private child support for AFDC families. The upper limit of child support utilizing the Wisconsin standard is $4.4 billion or a 677% increase over current collections. The results for the Colorado standard are equally impressive, with child support totaling $4.11 billion or 621% more than is currently transferred. For families not receiving AFDC the effects of this perfect system which incorporated the Wisconsin standard would result in a 347% increase in transfers, to $28 billion, over current collections, whereas incorporating the Colorado standard would result in a 282% increase, to $23.9 billion.

The results displayed in Table 2 demonstrate impressive gains in private child support. These gains result from the improvement in securing awards and collecting performance combined with the universal application of the Wisconsin or Colorado standards. Overall, the potential of the private child support system (as measured by the two standards analyzed) far outweighs its current performance. Current transfers are but one-fifth to one-fourth of the theoretical limits of the private system, whereas current obligations tap just one-third of these limits. If current obligations were replaced by obligations both set by and updated to the Wisconsin or Colorado standards and collection was 100% effective, approximately three-fifths of the theoretical limits of private child support would be potentially available to custodial families. The dollar potential for families not on AFDC is far more dramatic than for those who are AFDC
recipients, yet in percentage terms the potential increase is far greater for AFDC families. This reflects the lower incomes of noncustodial fathers of AFDC families and the difficulties inherent in securing private support for these families.

Methodology for the Simulation of Economic Impacts

Eight economic impacts of private child support transfers are estimated. AFDC impacts are assessed on three outcomes: (a) total number of families receiving AFDC; (b) total months that all families are on AFDC (family/months of AFDC); and (c) total AFDC benefits paid. Impacts on the economic well-being of families are measured by five outcomes: (a) mean child support income; (b) mean total family income; (c) number of poor persons in families potentially eligible for child support; (d) overall poverty rate for this group; and (e) their overall poverty gap.

Impacts on AFDC Participation

The simulation of the AFDC outcomes is based on the AFDC participation model developed by Robins (1986). This AFDC participation model serves two purposes. First, it is used to predict the number of months in the year a part-year recipient family has received AFDC benefits and the amount of the monthly AFDC benefit. Second, the model is used to estimate the impacts of modified private child support transfers for both full- and part-year AFDC recipients.

The participation model is based on the assumption the families participate in the AFDC program if it improves their well-being. Implicit in the theoretical model are the behavioral responses to child support. That is, the theoretical model implies that receiving child support reduces the probability of being dependent on AFDC. The magnitude of the reduction depends upon not only the magnitude of the change in net nonwage income (e.g., child support) but also net wage income and other nonearned income.11

To predict the current number of months for part-year participants, the coefficients estimated in the participation model are combined with the characteristics of the families who are current recipients of AFDC. This produces a prediction of the
proportion of the year a family participates in the program. The result is then multiplied by 12 to obtain the current number of months of program participation. The reported AFDC benefit is then divided by the number of months to obtain the monthly AFDC benefit. For full-year recipients, the reported AFDC benefit is divided by 12 to obtain the monthly benefit.

The simulation of the AFDC impacts under the five scenarios has two parts. First, the monthly private child support amount is compared to the monthly AFDC benefit. If the child support amount exceeds the AFDC benefit, then the family is no longer eligible for AFDC because of the 100 percent marginal tax rate the AFDC program imposes on child support income. Because the first $50 of child support received monthly is not taxed by the AFDC program, all AFDC simulations incorporate a $50 monthly set-aside. The second part of the simulation methodology is applied to those families whose child support benefits are smaller than the AFDC benefit. The simulation differs for part-year and full-year AFDC recipients. For part-year recipients, the Robins model is used to predict the proportion of the year a family participates in the AFDC program under each scenario. The result is multiplied by 12 to obtain the number of months a family participates. The cost of the AFDC program is obtained by multiplying the number of months by the monthly AFDC benefit. Note that part-year participants can increase as well as decrease their participation under alternative scenarios if estimated child support is below current levels.

Full-year recipients are assumed to differ in their AFDC participation response to changes in child support income. That is, some full-year families may be more entrenched in the program than others. The simulation methodology accounts for this entrenchment by incorporating a measure of the variability in response; the measure is the estimated error variance from the estimation of the Robins AFDC participation model.

Given the number of months a family participates in the AFDC program and their monthly AFDC benefit, the computation of the three outcome measures is straightforward. First, the total number of AFDC families is a weighted count of all families who have a positive AFDC benefit under each scenario.
Second, the total number of family/months of AFDC participation under each scenario is the number of months each family participates in the program multiplied by the Census family weight and summed over all observations. The third outcome measure, total AFDC benefits, is computed by multiplying, for each observation, the monthly AFDC benefit by the number of months of program participation times the Census family weight and summing over all observations.

**Impacts on Economic Well-Being of Custodial Families**

The five outcome measures of family economic well-being include (a) the mean private child support transfer; (b) the mean custodial family income; (c) the number of poor persons in families potentially eligible for child support; (d) the overall poverty rate for these families; and (e) their total poverty gap. Mean private child support transfer is computed by dividing the total private child support generated under each of the five scenarios by the total number of families with a child support award under each scenario. Mean custodial family income is calculated by computing the total family income for each family, summing over all Census family weighted observations and dividing by the total weighted number of families. The total custodial-family income for each family is the total of all earned and unearned income, including private child support and/or AFDC income. For those families who were AFDC recipients during all or part of the year, total family income includes the maximum of either the child support or AFDC transfer for each month multiplied by the number of months, taking into account the $50 AFDC set-aside. The monthly child support transfer is simply the total child support due under a given scenario divided by 12, while the monthly AFDC benefit is determined by the AFDC simulation presented above.

The number of poor persons in families potentially eligible for child support, the third outcome measure, is the weighted count of all persons in those families whose total welfare and nonwelfare income is below the official poverty line appropriate for family size. The poverty rate is computed by dividing the total number of these poor persons by the total number of all poor and nonpoor persons in custodial families. The last
measure, the poverty gap, is determined for all custodial families whose total income is below the poverty line by subtracting the total family income from the poverty line. The result is weighted by the Census family weight and summed over all observations of custodial families under the poverty line.

Simulation Results

Impacts of Private Child Support on AFDC

The results for the simulation of the AFDC impacts of private child support appear in Table 3. The five child support scenarios are represented in the five rows of the table, and the columns contain the three outcome measures. Under the current system of private child support 2.07 million families report receiving at least some AFDC assistance during the year. The total number of family/months of AFDC participants is 21.3 million months, and the total reported benefits transferred to these families come to $6.5 billion. If all that were owed to these families in private child support under the current system were paid (row 2), then the number of AFDC recipient families would be reduced by 4.8%, the number of family/months reduced by 4.6%, and the total AFDC benefits reduced by 3.5%; these results are similar to Robins's (1986) estimates.

Under a perfect system of private child support reflected in the scenario giving theoretical limits (row 5), AFDC participation would decline by 16 to 17%, or more than a quarter of a million families. AFDC benefit transfers would decrease by 30 to 33%, depending upon the uniform standard employed. This decrease in benefits amounts to a saving of $1.97 to $2.15 billion, again depending upon the normative standard. The number of family-participation months would decrease by more than 3.5 million, utilizing either the Wisconsin or Colorado standards. The replacement of current awards with obligations established using either the Wisconsin or Colorado standards and collecting 100% (row 4) would result in a saving of more than $570 million in AFDC expenditures and a reduction of 170,000 to 190,000 in the number of AFDC families.

In sum, the results displayed in Table 3 indicate that private child support has the potential to make significant reductions
Table 3

**Impact of Potential Private Child Support Transfers on AFDC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario Description</th>
<th>AFDC Families (millions)</th>
<th>Total Family Months on AFDC (millions)</th>
<th>AFDC Expenditures ($1983 billions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Current transfers</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>21.30</td>
<td>6.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Current obligations</td>
<td>1.97 (4.8)</td>
<td>20.31 (4.6)</td>
<td>6.27 (3.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uniform standard; current obligors; current collection rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>2.01 (2.7)</td>
<td>20.78 (2.5)</td>
<td>6.39 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>2.01 (3.1)</td>
<td>20.68 (2.9)</td>
<td>6.38 (1.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Uniform standard; current obligors; 100% collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1.90 (8.5)</td>
<td>19.55 (8.3)</td>
<td>5.93 (8.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1.88 (9.1)</td>
<td>19.38 (9.1)</td>
<td>5.91 (9.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Theoretical limit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1.74 (16.0)</td>
<td>17.77 (16.8)</td>
<td>4.35 (33.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1.72 (16.8)</td>
<td>17.45 (18.1)</td>
<td>4.53 (30.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the percentage reduction in each measure from the current payment scenario (row 1). Percentages are based on unrounded numbers.

Table 3 presents the impact of potential private child support transfers on AFDC families. It includes scenarios for current transfers, current obligations, uniform standards with current obligors and collection rates, and theoretical limits. Each scenario is evaluated in terms of the number of AFDC families, total family months on AFDC, and AFDC expenditures.

Economic Well-Being of Families Potentially Eligible for Child Support

Table 4 contains the results of the simulations of the five private child support scenarios on the economic well-being of potentially eligible families. Again, the rows of the table represent the five scenarios while the columns contain the outcome measures.
### Table 4

Economic Impacts of Potential Private Child Support Transfers on Custodial Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Current transfers</td>
<td>1,779</td>
<td>9,542</td>
<td>10.16</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>13.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Current obligations</td>
<td>2,552</td>
<td>9,864</td>
<td>9.92 (2.4)</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>13.02 (4.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Uniform standard; current obligors; current collection rate</td>
<td>Wisconsin 3,473</td>
<td>10,397</td>
<td>9.56 (5.9)</td>
<td>36.6</td>
<td>12.72 (6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorado 2,923</td>
<td>10,124</td>
<td>9.61 (5.4)</td>
<td>36.8</td>
<td>12.79 (6.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Current standard; current obligors; 100% collection</td>
<td>Wisconsin 5,099</td>
<td>11,264</td>
<td>9.23 (9.1)</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>12.18 (10.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorado 4,348</td>
<td>10,717</td>
<td>9.23 (9.1)</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>12.23 (10.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Theoretical limit</td>
<td>Wisconsin 4,110</td>
<td>12,514</td>
<td>8.26 (18.7)</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>9.38 (31.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Colorado 3,552</td>
<td>11,919</td>
<td>8.28 (18.5)</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>9.56 (29.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers in parentheses are the percentage reduction in each measure from the current payment scenario (row 1). Percentages are based on unrounded numbers.

The results displayed in Table 4 indicate that private child support has the potential to make important inroads in bettering the impoverished economic conditions of these families. If the private system could effectively secure all that is currently owed to these families (row 2) the poverty rate would be reduced by nearly 1 percentage point (or a quarter of a million persons) and the poverty gap would decline by $620 million. Of course this impact pales when compared to the limits of the system employing either alternative normative standard (row 5). In this scenario mean family income would increase by more
than $2000, while 1.9 million persons would be lifted out of poverty. The poverty rate would fall more than 7.2 percentage points to about 32%, depending upon the standard employed. The poverty gap would be reduced by at least 30%. The effects of modifying existing orders plus 100% collection can be gleaned from the fourth scenario (row 4). This scenario would result in a reduction of 930,000 in the number of poor persons and reduce the poverty gap by more than $1.4 million or 10%. Overall, private child support has the potential to produce significant reductions in the impoverished economic situation of many families potentially eligible for child support. Yet the fact remains in the face of these improvements that more than 31% of all persons living in families potentially eligible for child support would remain poor under even the most optimistic of scenarios.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, the current private child support system falls far short of its potential to transfer income from noncustodial to custodial families. While the current system transfers 71% of current total obligations, these current obligations account for 30 to 34% of the theoretical upper limits of private child support defined by two uniform normative standards adopted in Wisconsin and Colorado. Second, the use of a uniform normative standard would result in substantial increases in private child support transfers, even if there were no other systematic improvements in child support awards or collection rates. The use of standards may alleviate perceived inequities and result in improved payment behavior on the part of noncustodians. Of course, if obligations as a proportion of income increase, there is a possibility that payment behavior may decline. Therefore improved collection mechanisms such as automatic income withholding should be required. The passage of the 1984 Social Security Amendments requiring individual states to establish uniform normative standards is a step toward more equitable obligations within states. In addition, the 1988 Family Support Act requires states to institute universal income withholding
by 1994. Wisconsin, followed by several other states, including Arizona and Texas, has already adopted such laws.

Third, although private child support has the potential to make inroads in reducing the AFDC dependence and impoverished economic circumstances of eligible families, a significant number of families would remain dependent and/or poor. Private child support cannot be viewed as the sole answer for the economic plight of these families. If their economic situation is to be alleviated, it must be attacked by a program which combines increased work opportunities with increased public support and improved private child support.

References


Notes

1 These percentages and those in the remainder of this paragraph were computed by the authors using data reported by the Office of Child Support Enforcement in their annual reports to Congress. Dollar increases have been adjusted using the consumer price index to determine real growth. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement (1982 and 1985).

2 The numbers in this paragraph were computed by the authors from the microdata tapes for the 1979 and 1984 Current Population Survey Matched March Demographic File and April Child Support Supplement.

3 Recipiency rates computed by the authors from U.S. Bureau of the Census (1985, 1989); Table A.

4 The source for these data is U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Social Security Administration, 1985, Table 196.

5 Several other weaknesses of the data source include the following: first, the child support data were obtained from women 18 and over, thereby excluding women under 18 with children eligible for child support. Second, data were collected for the most recent divorce or separation, thereby excluding information concerning child-support eligibles from prior unions. These two weaknesses combined result in an undercount of potential eligible families, the amounts of child support owed and collected, and the amount of AFDC assistance paid to families eligible for child support.

The fourth weakness results from the annual reporting of both AFDC and child support. Annual reporting creates a problem when one tries to adjust family incomes from increases in child support and concomitant decreases in AFDC payments, because AFDC uses a monthly accounting period. This weakness is overcome by incorporating into the microsimulation models a monthly AFDC participation model developed by Robins (1986). The fifth weakness is due to presumed underreporting of private child support by AFDC recipients. This may occur because AFDC recipients do not directly receive private child support payments. Upon acceptance of AFDC assistance, the eligible family assigns its rights to child support to the state, which then receives payments from the noncustodian, so it is likely that the custodial family is unaware of the amount paid to the state. Furthermore, payments received directly by the family may go unreported, since disclosure would subject the mother to the 100% tax rate imposed by the states on child support in excess
of $50 per month. An upper-bound estimate of the underreporting in 1983 is 35%. This is the ratio of the difference between that reported in the survey ($0.57 billion) and the amount reported by OCSE for fiscal 1983 ($0.88 million) to the OCSE amount. The CPS figure is based on 2.07 million families, whereas the OCSE figure is based on an AFDC caseload of 5.83 million families. In addition, the OCSE amount includes arrears collected during the fiscal year.

6 We do not adjust incomes for prior support obligations or health insurance premiums. Neither work-related child care expenses nor extraordinary educational and health expenses are included in the child(ren)'s needs as provided for in the guidelines.

7 The current collection rate for each case is the ratio of current amount paid to current amount due as reported by the custodial mother.

8 The Census family weight is the sample weight provided in the microdata tape which is used to produce population estimates from the sample data.

9 An appendix providing detail of this methodology will be sent to the reader upon request.

10 Work in determining the effect of inflation and other factors on the erosion in the value of awards under the current system is currently under way; see Robins (1989).

11 The coefficients used in this paper are updated estimates of Robins's original model and are based on data from three CPS-CSS match files, for 1979, 1982, and 1984 (the original Robins, 1986, estimates are based only on the 1982 match file). The methodology used to derive the updated estimates is described in Robins (1987). Because the 1979 CPS-CSS match file doesn't identify number of months on AFDC during the survey year, a probit model (rather than a tobit model) is used to estimate the updated (normalized) coefficients. The standard error used in the simulations for this paper is taken from the original tobit estimates given in Robins (1986).
A large body of research has examined the determinants of welfare spending at various jurisdictional levels. This paper takes stock of the accomplishments of these studies within a limited framework. Primary socioeconomic and political factors are surveyed and reviewed with respect to their explanatory association with appropriations for public welfare at the level of states.

Public welfare appropriations at the state level (consisting of cash assistance under categorical and other welfare programs, direct payments to vendors, and the provision and operation by the government of welfare institutions) are second in magnitude to only educational outlays—amounting in 1988 to $84.2 billion. As shown in proportion to GNP since 1947 (in Figure 1), welfare spending rose most rapidly during the late 1960s and early 1970s and best exemplifies what Nobel-laureate economist James Buchanan regards as the "alarming" and "horrendous" growth in government (1977, p. 3).

This paper examines research on the causal links between state welfare spending and primary socioeconomic and political factors. Empirical research to explain state spending originated with the effort of Solomon Fabricant in his study of 1942 interstate variations. Subsequent research—which has been conducted primarily by economists and political scientists—has contributed much to our understanding, and the goal here is to summarize the principal hypotheses and findings since Fabricant's path-breaking study. The connection between jurisdictional welfare appropriations and sociological, economic, and political factors is a province which has been neglected by other disciplines. Consequently, this survey examines only research...
Figure 1. States' public welfare expenditures/GNP*

*Source of Figures: All figures were prepared by the author based upon data obtained from sources indicated in the Appendix.

which has appeared in books and journals of political science and economics.

The Explanatory Factors

Poverty

Figure 2 illustrates the path of official poverty in the United States since 1947. From highs in the late 1940s, the incidence of national poverty declined to its lowest levels during the 1970s.

Figure 2. Percentage of population in poverty
Poverty creates social and economic tension which, in turn, can be transformed into political pressure. During periods of widespread economic downturn the poor achieved growing political influence, and this influence is presumably reflected in higher levels of publicly provided assistance to the needy.

Piven and Cloward identify the 1960s as years of explosion in AFDC cases (pp. 183–84), largely as a consequence of the modernization of Southern agriculture and of its impact primarily on blacks (p. 196). As blacks migrated to cities, they "emerged as a political force for the first time...and the relief system was...one of the main local institutions to respond to that force" (p. 196). The economic convulsions and resulting political instability led to a liberalization of relief provisions (p. 197).

Poor voters may bargain for additional transfer payments and taxpayers will acquiesce if they too receive some benefit. Benefits include the reduced likelihoods of crime, social disturbance, and uprising. Taxes to pay for relief may be viewed as insurance premiums to ensure the maintenance of domestic peace and security.

Federal programs hired the disadvantaged, while social workers and lawyers spurred the poor to apply for relief (p. 198) and to vote (pp. 222, 242). After 1964, local governments were prodded by the central government to liberalize relief (p. 246). During the 1960s, federal intervention counseled the poor on how to obtain welfare, challenged local laws that restricted welfare rolls, and supported organizations which applied pressure on local agencies to approve applications for assistance.

Winters (p. 624) and Plotnick and Winters (p. 471) find a direct relationship between needs and state redistribution. In addition to the greater ease of organizing where there are high concentrations of the poor, Plotnick and Winters suggest that the greater visibility of needy people creates a more direct knowledge of their condition and affects the senses of the nonpoor (pp. 462, 471). That is, "taxpayers derive utility from increments to the income of transfer recipients" (Orr, p. 359). However, the empirically direct association which is found between needs and state redistribution may be due, in part, to the fact that benefit
levels rise as more individuals become eligible to receive assistance (Gramlich and Laren, p. 494).

Greater contact with the poor and observation of their distressed condition inspire taxpayers to provide additional aid. This willingness is communicated to lawmakers or observed first-hand by legislators (Plotnick and Winters, p. 466). Also, a higher incidence of poverty makes the nonpoor more aware of their own economic vulnerability and the need for the insurance of an income safety net (Danziger, Haveman and Plotnick, p. 70).

In all the described scenarios, the association between state public welfare and poverty is predicted to be direct.

**Charity**

Private giving by individuals to nonprofit charitable organizations, institutions, and agencies has grown rapidly—especially in recent years. Figure 3 illustrates the path of total giving in real dollars by private citizens since 1947. *To be sure*, not all charitable giving is directed towards the poor or needy. Available data, however, are not broken down according to targeted populations. Consequently, total giving by individuals to charity can serve only as a rough gauge of public generosity towards the poor. But, it may reasonably be inferred that private charity aimed at the poor follows a path parallel to private total charitable giving.

Antipoverty efforts by the governmental sector are critically dependent on sympathetic public opinion (Heclo, 1986). And, charity is a measure of the willingness, generosity, and social conscience of the public. Private charitable contributions provide an index of public concern for the less fortunate. Yet, the humanitarian desire of the public still must be transmitted through political representatives in order to affect welfare appropriations. As Plotnick and Winters express this connection, "voter preferences do not influence the policy decision directly. Preferences only enter indirectly in a representative democracy via election of like-minded legislators and, after the election, by direct or indirect (via interest groups) communication to these lawmakers" (p. 464). The hypothesized relationship between
private giving to charities and jurisdictional welfare outlays is direct and complementary.

Interdependent utilities are presumed between the givers and recipients of charitable contributions (Becker, 1988; Gramlich, 1987), and the motive to provide charity can be classified as direct or ulterior (Rodgers, pp. 180–89). With the former, utility is derived from the act of giving. Satisfaction is obtained from anonymously helping others or from the approval of others. The actual impact of the contribution on the well-being of recipients is irrelevant. With an ulterior motive, satisfaction is derived from the effect of one’s contribution upon recipients. There may be a genuine concern for the poor and in alleviating hardship, or there may be a desire to modify the behavior of the poor either by reducing antisocial activities or by improving their health and education.

A second and opposite association involving charitable contributions consists of a replacement effect, where there is an inverse relationship to jurisdictional welfare spending (Bird, p. 193). The implied assumption is that the total charitable contribution of society has some specific limit and that there is an optimal mix of private and public efforts. Gramlich’s (1987) model of charitable giving enlists both indifference curve analysis and game theory to describe competition between the state and private charitable individuals in the provision of relief. The
two "altruistic" parties function independently and do not co-operatively plan their actions. Although they both wish to help the needy, each party would prefer that the other provide the desired support. Consequently, when one party increases its gift to the poor, the other altruist responds by reducing its gift and thereby from what may be regarded as an increase in income (pp. 418-19).

An inverse relationship between the charitable contributions of individuals and the state is harmonious with Tullock's explanation. Rather than make a private contribution to aid the less fortunate, the typical (selfish) individual will reduce cognitive dissonance by voting for a tax to be paid by all taxpayers (pp. 26-9). Thus, the cost to the individual is diluted while his/her conscience is at rest. In other words, it is "wise to vote charitably and act selfishly" (p. 28).

Empirical evidence of substantial crowding out of private charitable contributions by government transfer payments is found by Plotnick and Winters (pp. 468, 470) and in two studies by Abrams and Schmitz (1984; 1978). This inverse relationship between public and private transfers is a consequence of both a substitution and an income effect. Government transfers have a substitution effect by lowering the need for private charity, and create an income effect by reducing the disposable incomes of taxpayers.

Sharing of Responsibility with Other Jurisdictions.

As illustrated in Figure 4, the share of total public welfare which is assumed by state jurisdictions is highly variable over time, although states are responsible for a generally smaller temporal proportion of the entire federal-state-local obligation. This downward trend would be much more pronounced if the years of the Reagan administration were excluded.

Although states form a separate political system, account must also be taken of federal welfare efforts (Dye, 1966, p. 292). As discussed by Dye (1969, pp. 417–29; 1966, pp. 115–22), until the Great Depression of the 1930s, the provision of public welfare in this country was primarily a state and local responsibility. However, with the Social Security Act of 1935, responsibility shifted from lower levels almost exclusively to a shared
obligation with the central government. And by 1986, aggregate state expenditures for social welfare were approximately equal to like-purpose federal outlays. Currently, the distinction between respective responsibilities has virtually evaporated, and official welfare activity has evolved into a cooperative effort shared by all three jurisdictional levels. In the words of Albritton, "welfare represents a policy arena characterized by a higher degree of interaction among federal, state, and local governments...[with an] inextricable mix of influences and decision-making" (p. 378).

The shift in responsibility from lower levels to the central government is reflected by their respective roles for Public Aid over a 34-year interval. Between 1950 and 1984, in contrast to a 22-fold increase by combined state and local jurisdictions, federal spending grew 51-fold (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, pp. 26, 27). As a proportion of total budget, federal outlays for Public Aid have grown from 2.7% in 1950 to 10.5% in 1984, while combined state-local shares were 6.8% and 9.5% respectively (p. 31, Table 6).

The current division of responsibility is not only between the federal and state levels, but also with local jurisdictions. In many states, local governments still account for a significant portion of welfare funding—particularly for Medicaid. As Albritton shows, overall funding for welfare by local
governments varied from 0% to 25% in 1977–78 (pp. 387-88). In comparison, welfare funding by states during the same fiscal year ranged from 20% to 74%.

Yet, the concept of cooperation between the different levels of government can be taken too far. Gramlich (1987) highlights the noncooperative aspects of the present system of assistance and the free-riding interaction between state and federal welfare programs. When states increase their public assistance payments, there is a reduction in federal benefits. Similarly, when federal housing contributions rise, state contributions fall. Thus, vertical levels "strive to free-ride on the transfers of the other government" (p. 420). In sum, although not unambiguous in impact, the jurisdictional sharing of responsibility can have a profound influence on state social welfare policies.

Political Parties

Democratic control of governorships (upper graph) and of both state legislative houses (lower graph) are illustrated in Figure 5. The patterns that emerge since WWII are cyclical and of a gradual increase. Further, there is a rough degree of correspondence within states between party control simultaneously of the highest executive office and of the legislative branch.

"The Democratic party has traditionally favored a larger government role in providing for social welfare and economic intervention than has the Republican party" (Browning, p. 17). Whereas Republicans are more adverse than Democrats to expansionary spending, Democrats have a greater aversion to unemployment (Hibbs, p. 66; Tufte, p. 83). Democrats tend to vote for more spending and taxes than do Republicans (Chester, p. 409; Peltzman, p. 658). McClosky, Hoffman and O'Hara identify Democratic leaders with a significantly stronger willingness than Republican leaders to employ legislation for the benefit of the poor (pp. 416, 417), and Democrats place a much greater emphasis than Republicans on economic and social leveling (p. 420). Since Democrats favor more of a redistribution of wealth and income than Republicans (Tufte, p. 74), when the Democratic party gains political strength, the additional strength is used to expand social welfare programs (Lewis-Beck and Rice, pp. 16, 20, 26). Nevertheless, a large group of studies
(Dawson and Gray; Dawson and Robinson; Dye, 1966, pp. 244, 245, 293; Fry and Winters; Gray; Hofferbert; Lewis-Beck; Plotnick and Winters; Winters) conclude that the relative power of political parties has little influence on social welfare programs at the state level.

Furthermore, it is commonly hypothesized that the greater the competition between parties within a state, the more liberal
the social welfare policies adopted by that state. More competition is presumed to force the parties to appeal to the have not groups for support. And, in appealing to the more numerous low-income groups, the government tends to redistribute income away from high-income groups (Downs, p. 202).

Jennings points out that the “generosity of a state’s social welfare policies depends upon the organization and mobilization of the lower classes” (p. 416), and that even though “lower-class support [may be] concentrated in one party,... welfare benefits can be expected to increase only if that party gains sufficient power to implement [the programs]” (1979, p. 416). Further, he argues that opposition party control of the two houses of the legislature or between the governor and the legislature can create a barrier to the implementation of social welfare policies (p. 417). Hence, in contrast to the hypothesis that divided control of the state government (as an indicator of interparty competition) stimulates higher welfare benefits, a divided state government “frequently stands as a barrier to more generous welfare policies” (p. 417).

To measure interparty competition, Dawson and Robinson examined the relative popularity of the governor and the percentage of legislative seats held by the major party. State welfare policies are defined as those programs which benefit lower socioeconomic groups through a redistribution of wealth. Their findings indicate that the level of welfare programs is far more a function of the wealth of a state (its ability to pay for public welfare) than of competition for the votes of the poor (p. 289).

In a more general sense, according to Hofferbert “the party system and its operation do not seem to go very far toward explaining the kind of policies produced in the states” (p. 82), and state welfare expenditures are unaffected by either party (p. 81). Gray concludes that economic variables “have greater explanatory power and the direction of the relationships [with state welfare policies] is more clear-cut than for the political variables” over time (p. 250). Dawson and Gray similarly discovered that socioeconomic factors better predict state welfare efforts than do political factors (pp. 472, 474), and that politics within states is a comparatively weak variable and growing
Public Welfare Spending

weaker (p. 471). Once economic development is controlled, Dye finds that the association between partisanship and public policy disappears (1966, pp. 244, 253, 258, 259; 1969, p. 101), and that competition between the parties has no liberalizing effect either on state welfare policies (1966, p. 144) or upon tax and revenue levels (1966, p. 246). Neither Democratic nor Republican control within a state has a major or consistent influence on policy (1966, pp. 244, 293–94).

The typically loose empirical relationships may be due to the difficulty of identifying a single national party position which applies interregionally across all states (Key, 1964, p. 284; 1949, p. 392). As Hansen expresses it, "the single Republican-Democrat dichotomy . . . cannot begin to capture the diversity of state party systems" (p. 428). Since each party is divided into 50 individual state organizations, they merely reflect the socioeconomic characteristics of their local constituencies rather than a unifying national philosophy (Dye, 1969, pp. 108–09; Dye, 1966, pp. 239–41). Neither major party offers a consistent program from state to state (Dye, 1966, pp. 241, 247, 293). Jennings offers the succinct opinion that "party labels . . . are . . . meaningless" (1979, p. 429). The difficulty lies in grouping together all Democrats regardless of region, since the "Ideological differences among Democrats may be as great as between the average Democrat and Republican" (Mogull, 1990, p. 366). For example, "Many Southern Democratic states are far more conservative than . . . Republican Northern states" (Hansen, p. 428), and Piven and Cloward see the Southern and Northern regional differences within the Democratic party as an "unmanageable" fragmentation (p. 252). In addition, Dye suggests that intrastate welfare policies of both Democrats and Republicans in rural environments may be more similar than within the same party in rural versus urban areas (1966, p. 141). Since both parties compete in the same vote market, their policies are more alike than same-party policies in other states (Dye, 1969, p. 94).

Finally, Burtless argues that "The choice of redistribution policy is ultimately political rather than . . . economic" (p. 47). Plotnick and Winters, however, broaden the theoretical approach to one where state redistribution policies are the result not only of competition between parties, but of its interaction
with a host of economic and political factors (p. 471)—a methodological viewpoint shared by Buchanan (1967, p. 171).

**Fiscal Resources**

Browning states that expenditures for social welfare increase with economic development (p. 168), Jennings identifies per capita income as responsible for a significant amount of the variance in state welfare spending (1980, p. 39), and Orr shows AFDC payments to be "strongly influenced by state per capita income" (p. 368). Albritton concludes that "welfare recipients benefit from spillover effects from the general prosperity of nonwelfare-related citizens" and that the economic well-being of a state provides the strongest link with welfare policy (p. 396). Plotnick and Winters find per capita income to be positively and significantly related to state welfare guarantees (p. 470). Mogull concludes that "the ability to assist the poor is, by far, the most powerful single determinant" of welfare appropriations (1981, p. 408), and that "fiscal resources are the prime determinants of state and local antipoverty expenditures" (1978, p. 296). According to Dye, "all available evidence indicates that economic development is significantly related to . . . welfare policy in the states" for all major programs (1969, p. 429), and "A state's income is the single most important variable determining the level of welfare benefits" (pp. 429, 431). He advises that "it is far better to be poor in a wealthy state than in a poor one" (p. 431).

For the record, per capita personal income in constant dollars has grown steadily since 1947, as shown in Figure 6. Despite several dips (in 1958, 1974–75, and 1980–81), states have generally enjoyed a healthy fiscal base.

However, to the extent that a causal relationship exists between state fiscal health and transfer payments, the association is not necessarily straightforward. In the words of Plotnick and Winters, "the conflict between economic and political explanations of redistribution is an artificial one" (p. 471). Sharkansky and Hofferbert find the interaction of state wealth with both high voter turnout and intense interparty competition to be responsible for high levels of welfare expenditures (p. 878).
Browning similarly emphasizes that "politics and economics interact to affect the level of expenditures" (p. 26). And, Dye too concludes that social and economic conditions together determine state budgets (1969, p. 164).

A close empirical relationship between the fiscal strength of a jurisdiction and subsequent welfare spending does not explain the basis for that association, and various explanations may be envisioned. For example, Orr identifies a supply function by noting that higher taxpayer incomes cause a downward shift in the marginal cost of supplying assistance, which subsequently intersects the demand curve at increased equilibrium levels of transfers (p. 363). Plotnick and Winters express this somewhat differently by stating that greater affluence allows the nonpoor to "indulge at higher levels their impulse to aid the needy" (p. 462).

An alternative explanation of the linkage between economic activity and transfer payments is from the perspective of demand—based upon the proposition advanced by Adolph Wagner in the late 1800s. Referred to as his "law of expanding state activity, "Wagner’s rule postulated that state expenditures grow both absolutely and as a percentage as national income rises (Wagner, pp. 7,8).

From either perspective, the relationship between income or wealth and government transfers is presumed to be direct and
close. However, it remains theoretically unclear as to whether the functional association with public welfare is due to supply or to demand, or to an equilibrium composite of both.

Outside Grants

Since the 1950s, federal grants have been apportioned among the states based upon a formula which accounts for population, needs, fiscal resources, and payments to recipients. States then include the federal monies in their public welfare expenditures. This is also true, although to a much smaller degree, for local monies (Albritton, pp. 387–88). Grants-in-aid can be justified on the ground that states may be unable to cope with a problem which is too large or too complex to be handled without federal assistance (Dye, 1969, p. 469). Specific rationales for extending intergovernmental grants for welfare include benefit spillovers, income redistribution, counter-cyclical stabilization, the establishment of minimal support levels, helping subnational jurisdictions to attain national goals, assisting locales to uniformly conform to national policy, and an equalization of welfare efforts.

Conditional categorical grants stimulate states to spend more for public welfare by the amount of the grant (Gramlich, 1977, p. 234), and Orr finds that federal AFDC grants displace state funds of equal value, but have no significant income effect on state AFDC payments. On the other hand, the increased spending on welfare due to lower realized cost (that is, the marginal price effect) is significant, and changes in the AFDC matching formula have a nonnegligible impact on state benefit levels (Orr, p. 366). According to Hansen and Cooper, "Federal aid...is the best predictor of state expenditure growth" (p. 26), and Gramlich contends that "without federal matching [grants] and using reasonable elasticity estimates, benefits...would drop to almost nothing" (1986, p. 347).

As illustrated in Figure 7, with the increasingly active participation of the federal government in welfare programs, per capita real grants to states from both federal and local jurisdictions grew especially rapidly during the 1960s. However, when President Ronald Reagan assumed office in January 1981, he
dramatically altered the cooperative federal relationship with subnational levels of government. The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 curtailed federal grants, consolidated categorical grants into broad purpose block grants, loosened restrictions on the use of funds, and eliminated the matching feature of some types of grants (Herber, p. 52; U.S. G.A.O., p. i). These changes are likely to have caused a contraction of state (and local) welfare spending—due both to the loss of a price effect and to a shift of funds into other programs. Consequently, the “New Federalism” should prove to have widened the fiscal disparity between rich and poor states (Herber, pp. 61–2; Albritton, p. 385).

Taxes

In relation to income, taxes imposed by all governmental levels combined has increased from 3% in the late 1940s to 6.5% in the 1980s. On a per capita basis, real aggregate taxes from all levels rose from $1,281 in 1950 to $3,064 in 1986. This latter trend is traced in Figure 8 and illustrates the persistent rise in the burden and effort of public programs.

There are, however, large differences among individual states in tax burden (taxes in relation to personal income) and in tax effort (tax dollars per capita). For example, in FY 1985–
Figure 8. Per capita total taxes (in real dollars)

86, Alaska collected $4,489 in per capita taxes while Mississippi collected only $965 (U.S. Dept. of Commerce, p. 98). Per thousand dollars of personal income, Alaska again ranked highest with $253, while New Hampshire was lowest with $84 (p. 102). Part of the interstate difference is due to a differential reliance on local governments to supply services. But the most important reason for differences in the tax burden is state economic development, where the relationship is inverse (Dye, 1969, pp. 451, 453).

Taxation is the "extraction of resources from citizens" and the question of who pays (and who benefits) is a political issue (Hansen, p. 416). The antipoverty policies of the Kennedy-Johnson War on Poverty and Great Society created much higher taxes—which are estimated to have been between $115 billion and $195 billion in 1980 (Danziger, Haveman and Plotnick, pp. 71, 72). Hansen concludes, however, that revenue elasticity and legislated tax changes have little independent impact on spending at the state level (p. 439). Although the empirical relationship between revenues and subsequent expenditures was direct from 1960 to 1970, it turned inverse from 1970 to 1976 (Hansen and Cooper, pp. 28, 32).

Clayton maintains that "Tax revenues are a good measure of public commitment to social purposes" (p. 48), and that resistance to taxes rather than to spending is the key indicator of
support for public welfare (p. 102). Buchanan similarly states that the demand by the taxpaying public for transfer payments is dependent upon its willingness to accept the tax burden (1977, p. 6). Correspondingly, Mogull employed a tax burden variable to help account for welfare outlays and found the association both significant and strong. Furthermore, state spending for public welfare is becoming increasingly related over time to the tax burden (1981, pp. 407, 409; 1978, p. 299).

Penniman concludes that the public decision to spend on welfare is complex. "Citizens frequently find the relation between taxes and expenditures hard to keep in mind" (p. 520), and decisions on taxation are greatly dependent on the past political, social, and economic environments (p. 521). Further, her analysis presumes that interparty competition, citizen participation, the length of governor's term, the probability of reelection, apportionment within the legislature, and the effectiveness of lobbyists are some of the diverse political factors which interact to influence state taxation policies (p. 525). Additional dimensions include the growth of population and affluence, and the reliance of a state on income rather than on sales and other taxes (pp. 553–54).

Debt

Between 1947 and 1986, the aggregate net debt of states rose from $13.4 billion to $41.8 billion in dollars of constant purchasing power, while per capita real magnitudes increased from $93 to $173 and peaked at $257 (see Figure 9). Thus, state debt has grown substantially—particularly during the 1970s.

Buchanan (1967) emphasizes the fiscal illusions and false conceptions involved in spending when budgets are permitted to be unbalanced. By permitting a debt alternative to taxation, the connection between spending and taxes becomes more difficult to construct since the "two...choices become independent, in any current period sense" (p. 100). Allowing for public borrowing "makes any reasoned comparison of benefits and costs almost impossible" (p. 112), and there is a perception of a lower cost to the expenditures. Consequently, the public becomes more accepting of larger public outlays and "more reluctant to levy current taxes" than in a no-debt model (pp. 100–01).
According to Sharkansky, the most hospitable environment for expanding public services would be in those states where burdensome per capita expenditures and debt are low and where per capita personal income is high (p. 1223). Whereas the Buchanan analysis envisions a direct association between debt and public welfare expenditures, the Sharkansky hypothesis anticipates an inverse relationship. Yet, “State officials often fear that espousal of a new tax or tax increase is tantamount to political suicide” (Hansen, p. 419), and borrowing may be the only feasible method of financing necessary current social welfare programs.

**Summary and Final Comments**

In brief, the preceding review of the literature portrays the following functional relationships between primary economic/social/political dimensions and subsequent spending for public welfare at the level of states:

- Poverty—a direct association;
- Charity—a direct association if it represents willingness/generosity/social conscience, but an inverse association if “crowding-out” occurs;
- Sharing of Responsibility—an inverse association;
- Political Parties
  - Strength of Democratic Party—a direct association,
Public Welfare Spending

Competition Between Parties—either a direct or an inverse association;
Fiscal Resources—a direct association;
Grants-in-Aid—a direct association;
Taxes—an inverse association;
Debt—an inverse association according to Sharkansky, but a direct relationship according to Buchanan.

This review has focused only on journals and books serving the fields of political science and economics—within which the relevant research on state welfare spending has appeared. Yet, clearly an understanding of causal relationships is also important to sociologists and social work professionals. Consequently, not only can this survey of current knowledge serve as a challenge to those with both the expertise and an interest in the issue, but the anticipated contributions from scholars in these disciplines can add new dimensions and layers of comprehension. It is a contribution to which this researcher looks forward.

As indicated throughout the paper, there are a multitude of avenues of inquiry to be explored and clarified with many issues still to be resolved. It is especially disturbing when plausible theoretical relationships fail to receive substantiation from the empirical evidence. (This problem is nowhere more apparent, for example, than with the presumed influence of Democratic controlled legislatures.) Cross-fertilization from research conducted by scholars of diverse disciplines can greatly help to clarify our understanding of the causal factors which systematically influence welfare spending on each jurisdictional level. Sociologists and social work professionals have much to contribute to an issue which up-to-now has been preempted by economists and political scientists.

References


Appendix

Sources of Data

Public Welfare Expenditures

Public Welfare Spending


**Gross National Product**


**Poverty**


**Charitable Giving**


**Partisanship**


**Personal Income**

Economic report of the president (1988).

**Welfare Grants-in-Aid**

Bureau of the Census (annual). *Compendium of state government finances*.

Bureau of the Census (annual). *State government finances*.


**Tax Revenues**


Bureau of the Census (annual). *State government finances*. 

Debt
Bureau of the Census (annual). *Compendium of state government finances*.
Bureau of the Census (annual). *State government finances*.

Population
This article analyzes and critiques conservative welfare proposals and their assumptions. The concept of subemployment is introduced along with relevant data to identify the nature of the job problem in the U.S. since the early 1970s. Particular emphasis is placed upon the magnitude of employment difficulties during the 1980s. The article concludes that without a major job creation component, conservative welfare reforms intensify rather than ameliorate the subsistence living conditions of the poor.

The primary purpose of this paper is to analyze and critique conservative welfare proposals. The fundamental assumption of conservative welfare reform is that there are plenty of jobs available for those who really want to work. Thus conservatives hold that true welfare reform will occur only if social policies are designed to compel current welfare recipients to enter the work force. Using U.S. government employment statistics, we argue that conservatives' welfare reform proposals are fatally flawed because they underestimate the extent of the economy's inability to provide jobs, and fail to distinguish adequate from inadequate jobs. The data indicate that conservative welfare proposals will not only compound rather than ameliorate the material conditions of the poor, but also increase the risk of poverty to millions of other Americans.

*We would like to thank Ed Pawlak for his meticulous editing and Bob Leighninger for his encouragement.
Conservative Views on Welfare

Conservatives accept the long-standing distinction between respectable and unrespectable poor (Feagin, 1973; Levitan and Johnson, 1984, p. 15; Murray, 1984; Patterson, 1981; Katz, 1986). The respectable poor are those who are influenced by and behave in accordance with the dominant values of society, express a commitment to the work ethic, and who have suffered misfortune not of their own making. The able-bodied respectable poor are those who work in low-wage jobs, however difficult the conditions, because it is the right thing to do. The unrespectable poor are the hard-core poor whose life styles and values reflect a deviant subculture. They include able-bodied adult males who do not work and able-bodied female heads of households on welfare. Through the 1980s, according to Gotsch-Thomson (1988, pp. 226-227), the Reagan administration tended to see most or all of the poor as members of a deviant subculture that promotes antisocial character traits, or as the unrespectable poor.

Conservatives believe that there is support for their assumptions about employment, and point to the number of jobs that have been created in recent decades. The evidence does partially support this claim. For example, more workers were employed on an annualized monthly average in the Reagan years than under the two previous administrations. (See Table 1, col. 2.) Indeed, the U.S. economy led the advanced capitalist economies in the number of additional workers employed during the 1970s and 1980s. The deep recession of 1981–82 may have reduced the growth in employment for a time, but conservatives are quick to point out that employment bounded ahead thereafter.

Conservatives do not distinguish good jobs from bad jobs and argue that for those at the bottom of society any job is appropriate and has positive consequences for the able-bodied poor, their families, and society (Murray, 1984; Mead, 1986; Segalman and Basu, 1981, pp. 309–368). The market determines whether a job is useful or is designed to satisfy some want (see Gordon, 1972, pp. 25–42). The market should be the arbiter of wages, which reflect the marginal productivity of the worker (Mead, 1986, p. 232). There is no place in the conservative world
view for concepts of exploitation, surplus labor, or marginalized labor (Gordon, 1972).

While some jobs may pay low wages, those at the bottom of the income distribution, according to Mead (1986), are only qualified for low-wage, menial jobs (p. 72). But, from the conservative perspective, even a low-wage job can represent the first step toward upward mobility into the economic mainstream of the society. It can provide a person with work experience, a chance to acquire skills, make useful contacts, and impress one's superiors. Diligent and reliable work may lead to opportunities for better jobs where one is employed or, with increased experience and skills, to jobs with other employers. Conservatives conclude, therefore, that "People can escape poverty if only they use some elbow grease. The poor are those who lack the determination to make it" (Ellwood, 1988, p. 7).

Even if one's hard work is insufficient to raise one's self and family out of poverty, there are other reasons, or incentives, for people to take menial, low wage jobs: to serve as a positive role model for one's children and win the respect of one's family, friends, and neighbors. Whether the jobs are beneficial to the poor or not, society needs someone to do them, and there are millions of workers employed in menial, relatively low wage jobs without the benefit of government assistance. Conservatives maintain, therefore, that it is unfair to provide some and not others with assistance. Underlying their expressed concerns with the flagging work ethic of the poor, there is perhaps an even more fundamental concern, namely, that public assistance and significant reform cost too much.

From the conservative perspective, increasing rates of poverty in the late 1970s and early 1980s reflected not a lack of opportunities but rather the influence of a new class of middle-class professionals and government bureaucrats, and big government and its alleged misconceived, New-Dealish taxes, regulations and social-welfare policies. The new class fostered an artificial and demoralizing distinction between good and bad jobs, basically arguing that no one should have to work in a bad job (Murray, 1984; Mead, 1986). The new class also helped to reinforce the increasingly antiwork attitude among poor people by blaming the system and by arguing that their conditions
were caused by forces beyond their control, and that as a consequence, government had an obligation to assist them (Mead, pp. 46 and 57, examples on pp. 56–61). Government bureaucrats and leftist-oriented professors concocted this explanation out of self-interest. Levitan and Johnson (1984) refer to Reagan who “suggested that the federal bureaucracy actively perpetuates poverty claiming that the war on poverty created a great new upper middle class of bureaucrats who found they had a fine career as long as they could keep enough needy people there to justify their existence” (see p. 30, and other references on pp. 30–31; also see Piven and Cloward, 1987).

The welfare state itself is also seen as a cause of increased poverty rates. The unrespectable poor are rewarded for their alleged sloth. They are lured out of legitimate jobs by generous and accessible welfare benefits or into the erratic employment of the underground economy. Indeed, conservatives ask, why work at a minimum wage job, when one could get more from a multitude-benefit public aid package (or from a publicly subsidized job) (Mead, 1986). Ellwood (1988, p. 4) points out that conservatives hate welfare because they see it “as a narcotic that destroys the energy and determination of people who already are suffering from a shortage of such qualities. They hate it [also] because they think it makes a mockery of the efforts of working people. . . .”

According to this conservative analysis, there are two principal results. First, the new class of government bureaucrats, academics, journalists, and other prowelfare state reformers created inflated expectations among the poor about the kinds of jobs to which they should feel entitled. Thus, an increasing number of able-bodied adult poor persons became “impatient with menial pay and working conditions and keep quitting in hopes of finding better” (Mead, 1986, p. 73). Then even the (respectable) poor exhibited a “pathological instability in holding jobs,” the “main reason for the work difficulties of the disadvantaged” (Mead, p. 73). The poor may say they want to work, but it is highly conditional, i.e., “unless the government first provides them with training, transportation, child care, and, above all, acceptable positions” (Mead, p. 80). Mead (1986) refers to a study in which 70% of WIN mothers rejected many of the unskilled jobs.
they were most easily qualified for, as waitresses, domestics, nurses’ aids (p. 153). He and other conservatives like Murray are not sympathetic to welfare recipients who turn down low-wage jobs. Instead, they point to the many others who work in such jobs without extra governmental supports — “Why should unwilling workers be bribed to work when many other Americans, not on welfare, do ‘dirty’ jobs every day?” (Mead, p. 84). These developments have a second consequence, conservatives argue. They reduce the size of available work forces in many labor markets, put upward pressure on wages, and finally have the impact of driving many businesses into bankruptcy.

Conservatives conclude that there should be no accessible alternatives to work, and that benefits outside of work must be kept low, restrictive, and require a work obligation. Without the discipline of a regular job, increasing numbers of able-bodied poor people behave in ways that increase their chances of becoming dependent on welfare or caught up in patterns of erratic employment (Gotsch-Thompson 1988, p. 228). In time, their dependency increases and other aspects of their lives become disorganized or, at least, cease to be oriented to the society’s dominant values. These patterns are, according to conservatives, reflected in the “breakdown” of families, the large number of teenage pregnancies and births, failure in school, drug use, and crime. And, finally, conservatives assert, these patterns of behavior are passed on to the next generation.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) is singled out among government programs for playing a particularly destructive role in the lives of poor people. Gotsch-Thomson (1988) points out that AFDC is often identified as the primary influence undermining the family — “Because welfare ‘competes’ with the low earnings of the male head of household, he often leaves the family and the responsibilities it entails” (p. 228).

Conservative welfare reform proposals provide various mixtures of incentives and constraints to pressure welfare mothers to work and thus reduce their dependency on AFDC and related public aid programs, but “tend to favor mandatory requirements and low-cost job placement assistance with workfare required from those who remain on the rolls” (Gueron 1988, p. 17; also see Burtless, 1989, p. 103; Ellwood 1989, p. 278).
They also want to narrowly target benefits and support services to long-term recipients and require that virtually all recipients, even those with children under 3 years of age, be subjected to a work requirement.

Criticisms of Conservative Views

The validity of the conservative position is dealt serious blows by estimates of the extent of the jobs problem in the United States over the last two decades. Low-wage jobs will not eliminate poverty in the short run and, given occupational and industrial trends, are even less likely to reduce poverty in the long run. In the following sections of the paper, evidence is presented in support of these statements.

Subemployment is a comprehensive indicator of the inability of the economy to provide adequate employment opportunities for those able and interested in working. The concept of subemployment was first used by Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz in the mid-1960s and then by the Kerner Commission to document dimensions of employment problems in cities that had experienced major riots (Miller, 1973; Vietorisz, Mier, Giblin, 1975a; Levitan and Taggart, 1974). Since then the concept has been used occasionally to dramatize the inadequacy of the official unemployment measure, to present other measures of employment, and to provide ammunition for proponents of full employment policies (Levitan and Taggart, 1974; Gross and Moses, 1972; Vietorisz, Mier, Harrison, 1975b).

The concept of subemployment includes not only the number of officially counted unemployed persons, but also three other categories of nonemployed or inadequately employed workers who are usually ignored by those who discuss and analyze the employment performance of the U.S. economy. In a nutshell, subemployment includes: (a) the unemployed, (b) nonlaborforce participants who want a job now, (c) those who are in part-time jobs only because they cannot find full-time jobs, and (d) those who work full-time, year-round (FTYR) but still have earnings that are at or below various poverty levels.

Data were collected on employment-related categories and earnings from published reports of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the U.S. Bureau of the Census from 1972
through 1987. The year 1972 was selected because information only became available for all of the relevant categories in that year.

Table 1 contains the six employment-status categories that are central to the analysis. These categories require some discussion in order to clarify their meaning and to illuminate the trends that are depicted. Column 2, labeled total employment, represents the number of persons who were identified as employed in the civilian sector of the labor force on an annual monthly average from 1972 through 1987. The criteria used by the BLS to identify the employed population contradict common sense and fail to distinguish levels of job adequacy. According to the BLS, persons are employed when they have a paid job regardless of the level of earnings, but persons may also be employed even if they get no pay, as long as they worked fifteen or more hours in a family enterprise. Furthermore, a person is counted as employed under certain circumstances even when he/she is not working in a job at all, but is temporarily out of work "because of illness, bad weather, vacation, labor-management disputes, or personal reasons" (BLS, 1988, p. 119). Thus, workers who are on strike, which may last for months and years, are considered employed. The available BLS data do not permit us to distinguish the number of strikers in the total employed category. We do want to emphasize, however, that these workers are not on the job and getting wages. Fortunately, there are some categories of the employed which can be identified. Not all of the total employed category are adequately employed, and the inadequately employed should be identified as problematic aspects of the economy.

The figures for total employment in column 2 of Table 1 were derived by averaging the monthly employment estimates for each of the years in questions in order to get an annual, average monthly estimate of employment. According to these estimates, employment increased 33.7% from 81.6 million in 1972 to 109.1 million in 1987, or by 27 and 1/2 million workers. Moreover, the absolute number of employed workers increased at an accelerating rate. When we categorize the years from 1972 through 1987 into three periods, corresponding to the
### Table 1

**Employment Trends 1972–1987**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Total Employment</th>
<th>Total Unemployment</th>
<th>Want Job Now</th>
<th>Economic Reasons</th>
<th>FTYR3*</th>
<th>FTYR4**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>81,582</td>
<td>4,815</td>
<td>4,457</td>
<td>2,625</td>
<td>4,255</td>
<td>7,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>84,427</td>
<td>4,306</td>
<td>4,439</td>
<td>2,520</td>
<td>4,475</td>
<td>7,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>85,988</td>
<td>5,361</td>
<td>4,480</td>
<td>2,963</td>
<td>5,100</td>
<td>8,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>84,566</td>
<td>7,831</td>
<td>5,226</td>
<td>3,748</td>
<td>4,289</td>
<td>6,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>87,347</td>
<td>7,288</td>
<td>5,147</td>
<td>3,594</td>
<td>4,206</td>
<td>7,708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>90,577</td>
<td>6,855</td>
<td>5,670</td>
<td>3,556</td>
<td>4,505</td>
<td>8,237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>95,579</td>
<td>6,074</td>
<td>5,342</td>
<td>3,429</td>
<td>4,266</td>
<td>8,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>96,591</td>
<td>5,965</td>
<td>5,313</td>
<td>3,468</td>
<td>4,612</td>
<td>9,148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>96,362</td>
<td>7,650</td>
<td>5,703</td>
<td>4,203</td>
<td>5,393</td>
<td>10,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>98,316</td>
<td>8,573</td>
<td>5,837</td>
<td>4,673</td>
<td>6,232</td>
<td>12,521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>99,666</td>
<td>10,684</td>
<td>6,596</td>
<td>6,173</td>
<td>6,536</td>
<td>11,094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>98,379</td>
<td>10,395</td>
<td>6,494</td>
<td>6,236</td>
<td>6,881</td>
<td>11,543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>105,856</td>
<td>8,538</td>
<td>6,065</td>
<td>5,743</td>
<td>7,345</td>
<td>12,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>105,617</td>
<td>8,060</td>
<td>5,927</td>
<td>5,598</td>
<td>7,348</td>
<td>12,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>106,456</td>
<td>7,994</td>
<td>5,864</td>
<td>5,596</td>
<td>7,409</td>
<td>13,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>109,093</td>
<td>7,186</td>
<td>5,729</td>
<td>5,419</td>
<td>7,321</td>
<td>13,381</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Full Time Year Round Fully Employed earning less than Poverty Standard for a family of three.

** Full Time Year Round Full Employed earning less than Poverty Standard for a family of four.

Sources: The data are derived from a secondary analysis of multiple issues of two government publications. Columns 2–5 come from selected tables in volumes 18–35 of the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Employment and Earnings. The data for columns 2 and 3 are taken from table A-3 of the issues for February 1972 through March 1984, thereafter table A-4; column 4 from tables of the April issues: A-50 for 1974 through 1976, A-53 for 1977 through March 1982, A-52 from 1983, and A-53 thereafter; column 5 from table A-7 for the issues of February 1972 to June 1976, table A-8 for July 1976 through January 1984, and thereafter table A-9. Columns 2, 3, and 5 are based on the average monthly estimates for each of the years, and column 4 is derived from average quarterly estimates for these years. Columns 6 and 7 are adapted from a table, variously numbered, included in the U.S. Bureau of the Census’ Current Population Reports, P-60 Series: table 53 from issue #90 (1973); table 61 from issue #97 (1975); table 61 from issue #101 (1976); table 58 from issue #105 (1977); table 58 from issue #114 (1978); table 58 from issue #118 (1979); table 62 from issue #123 (1979); table 64 from issue #129 (1981); table 59 from issue #132 (1982); table 55 from issue #137 (1983); table 55 from issue #142 (1984);
The data in columns 6 and 7 are adapted from the column in these tables for workers in full-time jobs who worked 50-52 weeks a year.

presidential administrations, the number of workers increased by 5.8 million (an average of 1.16 million a year) in the Nixon-Ford years (1972-1976), 7.7 million (an average of 1.54 million a year) in the Carter years (1977-1981), and 9.4 million (an average of 1.57 million) in the Reagan years (1972-1987). Claims that employment has been increasing are substantiated by this evidence. But the other columns in Table 1 tell a different story and portray an economy in which tens of millions of workers were unable to get a job or who were in part-time or low-wage jobs.

Before discussing the meaning and implications of the figures in columns 3 through 7, the categories must first be explained. Column 3 in Table 1 represents the annual average monthly unemployment estimates for 1972-1987. To be counted as unemployed by the BLS, a person must have been out of work when interviewed but available for work and, in the prior four weeks, “made specific efforts to find employment” (BLS, 1988). In conventional analyses of the economy’s ability to provide employment for people, official and academic analyses of the employment status of the labor force would be limited to employment and unemployment estimates. The only remaining step would be to derive the unemployment rate by dividing the number of unemployed persons by the combined number of unemployed and employed. However, in the present analysis, the unemployed are just one of four categories that are relevant for determining the economy’s jobs’ performance.

In column 4, there are annualized averaged quarterly estimates of persons who were not counted as unemployed because they were not actively looking for unemployment, but who said that they “wanted a job now” (BLS, Employment and Earnings, April, 1973-1988). Persons in this category are classified into five subcategories by the BLS, according to the chief reason given for why they had not been actively pursuing a job, including: (a) “going to school,” (b) “ill health, disability,” (c) “home responsibilities,” (d) “think cannot get a job,” and (e) “other reasons”
According to an earlier study by Gellner (1975), most of these persons have worked within the past few years and will work again within the next year or two (pp. 20–28). In many cases, individuals have temporarily stopped looking for employment because they are confronted with barriers to employment. There are many areas of the country in which there are insufficient job opportunities for those with modest or below average education (Kasarda, 1989; O’Hare, 1988; Shapiro, 1989; Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). In many other inner-cities, there is a lack of transportation to the suburbs where there may be appropriate jobs (Kasarda, 1989). For many homemakers with young dependent children, child day care is inaccessible or too expensive (O’Connell and Bloom 1987). In the case of minorities, there is the fear of discrimination that leads many African-Americans and Hispanics to limit their search for employment to the inner-cities, and then to withdraw from this search when they fail to find adequate employment (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). Bear in mind that the individuals who are categorized as nonparticipants who want a job now are available for employment. Remove some of the barriers to employment and many of them will be employed.

Column 5 presents estimates of the annualized monthly average of persons who are employed part-time (35 hours or less a week), because they cannot find full-time work. Workers in this category include both those who ordinarily work full-time but are on reduced work schedules and those who have not been able to find full-time jobs. In the calculations of the BLS, involuntary part-time workers are subsumed in the employed category, but we created a separate category for them to highlight the fact that these are workers who are less than fully employed and who, by the standards we are using in this paper, typically have low wages, i.e., wages that are less than the poverty line for a family of three and/or for a family of four. In an analysis of the BLS data on involuntary part-time employment, Levitan and Conway (1988, p. 11) find: “Slack work and the inability to find a full-time job account for nearly 94% of involuntary part-time employment.”

The last two columns in Table 1 include estimates from the U.S. Bureau of the Census for March of each year for the
Table 2

Minimum Wage and Poverty Standard Equivalents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>Minimum Wage</th>
<th>MWEF3*</th>
<th>MWEF4**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>$1.60</td>
<td>$1.66</td>
<td>$2.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>2.40</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>3.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>5.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>5.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>5.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Minimum Wage Equivalent for the poverty level of a Family of Three.

** Minimum Wage Equivalent for the poverty level of a Family of Four.

Sources: The figures for the official minimum wage in column 2 are taken from the U.S. Bureau of the Census' *Statistical Abstract of the U.S.* 1988, table 654. The figures on which the minimum-wage equivalents of the poverty level for a family of three and for a family of four are based come from various issues of the U.S. Bureau of the Census' *Current Population Reports*, Series P-60. The figures in columns 3 and 4 were derived by a two-step process. First, the poverty levels for a family of 3 and for a family of 4 were taken from the Series P-60 issues between 1974 through 1988 that focus on poverty. Second, these poverty levels were divided by 2000, which is the equivalent of a FTYR job (i.e., 2000 hours, or 50 x 40-hour weeks). The resultant figures in columns 3 and 4 represent the hourly equivalent from 1972 through 1987 of the poverty levels of a family of 3 and of a family of 4.

number of persons who were employed full-time, year-round (FTYR) during the previous year, i.e., who worked more than 35 hours a week for 50 to 52 weeks. Column 6 includes the estimates of FTYR workers who had total earnings at or under the poverty line for a family of three (FTYR3), and column 7
includes the estimates of FTYR workers who had total earnings under the poverty line for a family of four (FTYR4). In order to clarify the meaning of what such earnings represent, Table 2 lists the hourly-wage equivalent of the official poverty levels for a family of three and for a family of four for 1972–1987, and the official minimum wage standards for the same years. Notice that the minimum wage approximates the value of the poverty line for a family of three until 1980, but then it falls farther behind the poverty line for a family of three in each subsequent year. By 1987, there was a substantial difference of 35% between the poverty line for a family of three and the minimum wage. The poverty line for a family of four has always been considerably higher than the minimum wage, and the discrepancy has grown even greater through the 1980s. The major point to be derived from the figures in Table 2 is that a poverty-level minimum wage would have to be significantly higher than the official minimum wage. For example, on an hourly basis in 1987, a minimum wage that reflected the poverty line for a family of three would have been $4.53 and for a family of four would have been $5.81. Figure 1 presents these data in a graphic form. The minimum wage standard used in the U.S. is outrageously low, particularly given the fact that the poverty levels are conservative estimates of poverty (Sheak, 1988). The point that should be emphasized, therefore, is that the FTYR earnings’ standards that we are using are higher than the official minimum wage, but, nonetheless, at or below the official poverty lines.

All but the “want a job now” category in Table 1 show substantially more growth than the employed category between 1972 and 1987, although since 1983 the categories of (a) unemployed, (b) “want a job now,” and (c) involuntary part-time, have been declining, while the FTYR3 category has been on a plateau and the FTYR4 has continued to increase. The chief implications of these trends for the two questions which are the foci of this paper are that employment did not grow fast enough in any of the years studied to provide jobs for all workers who did not have them or adequate jobs for all of those who were employed. In 1972, there was an annual monthly average of 9.3 million persons who were either unemployed or who did not have a job but “wanted a job now.” The numbers in these two
categories peak in 1982 at 17.3 million, but even as recently as 1987 the number 12.9 million, is still substantially higher than it was in 1972 or throughout the 1970s. In order to grasp the extent to which workers were employed but inadequately employed, the involuntary part-time workers combined with either FTYR3 or FTYR4 must be taken into account before the picture is complete. In 1972, 6.9 million persons were in either the involuntary part-time or FTYR3 categories and 9.8 million were in the involuntary part-time and FTYR4 categories. The numbers for the involuntary part-time and FTYR3 workers peak in 1983 at 13.1 million, but at 12.7 million in 1987 the numbers remain considerably higher than the 1972 figures of 6.9 million. The totals of the involuntary part-time and FTYR4 are even more dramatic. They are 9.8 million in 1972, then rising to a peak in the most recent year of 1987 at 18.8 million.

Although the trends in the five categories vary to some extent, the general picture is clear enough, namely, that the economy has been unable to provide jobs for millions of workers and only inadequate jobs for even larger numbers of other workers.
In order to get a more concise overview of the trends, we introduce, in Table 3, the concept of labor supply, combine the previous measures of the jobs-performance of the economy in the concept of subemployment, and present subemployment indices. The concept of labor supply includes the employed, the unemployed, and those “who want a job now.” The concept of subemployment refers to the economy’s inability to provide jobs for all those who want them or adequate jobs to all who are already employed; it is a composite measure of the categories of (a) unemployed, (b) “want a job now,” (c) involuntary part-time, combined separately with (d) the two measures of FTYR. These subemployment indices can be expressed as follows:

**Table 3**

*Labor Supply, Subemployment and Subemployment Indices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Labor Supply</th>
<th>Subemployment Poverty</th>
<th>Subemployment Poverty</th>
<th>Subemployment Index for</th>
<th>Subemployment Index for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>90,854</td>
<td>16,152</td>
<td>19,103</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>93,172</td>
<td>15,740</td>
<td>18,809</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>95,829</td>
<td>17,904</td>
<td>21,215</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>97,623</td>
<td>21,094</td>
<td>23,327</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>99,782</td>
<td>20,235</td>
<td>23,737</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>103,102</td>
<td>20,586</td>
<td>24,318</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>106,995</td>
<td>19,111</td>
<td>23,170</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>107,869</td>
<td>19,358</td>
<td>23,894</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>109,715</td>
<td>22,949</td>
<td>28,253</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>112,726</td>
<td>25,315</td>
<td>31,604</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>116,946</td>
<td>29,989</td>
<td>34,547</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>115,268</td>
<td>30,006</td>
<td>34,668</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>120,459</td>
<td>27,691</td>
<td>32,851</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>119,604</td>
<td>26,933</td>
<td>32,382</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>120,314</td>
<td>26,863</td>
<td>32,480</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>122,008</td>
<td>25,655</td>
<td>31,715</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* See pages 14–15 for a discussion of the concepts and data in this table.

Sources: Same as table 1.
Subemployment

\[ S_1 = \frac{U + W + P + F_3}{E + U + W} \]
\[ S_2 = \frac{U + W + P + F_4}{E + U + W} \]

where \( S \) represents the Subemployment Index; \( E \), the total number of employed workers; \( U \), the total number of unemployed workers; \( W \), those who want a job now; \( P \), those who are part-time workers for economic reasons, and \( F_3 \) represents those full-time workers earning less than the poverty standard for a family of three; while \( F_4 \) are those full-time workers earning less than the poverty standard for a family of four. Of the two measures of subemployment referred to in Table 3, one is based on FTYR3 estimates, which is called Subemployment "3," and the other based on FTYR4 estimates, called "Subemployment "4." Next, the subemployment indices are derived by dividing each of the subemployment measures by the labor supply. Three points should be highlighted from the data in Table 3. First, enormous numbers of workers were subemployed in the years from 1972 through 1987. Second, the numbers for both subemployment "3" and "4" are much higher in the 1980s than in the 1970s, but decline from their peaks in 1983 in the subsequent four years. At the same time, they are much larger in 1987 than they were in 1972 or in the other years of the 1970s. Third, the subemployment indices follow similar patterns, with the subemployment "4" measure increasing marginally over the subemployment "3" measure over the years. Both indices decline after 1983 but remain at higher levels than they were in the baseline of 1972 or, for that matter, through the 1970s. The subemployment indices lead to the summary and disheartening conclusion that, even since the deep recession of the early 1980s, one out of four or five workers in the labor supply have been subemployed, depending on whether subemployment "3" or subemployment "4" is used. These two indices clearly establish that the economy has not been generating enough adequate jobs for those in the labor supply.
Subemployment and Poverty

There are significant links between subemployment and poverty, but not all of the subemployed are poor. In 1987, for example, there were 8.4 million poor persons who worked at least part of the year. These are persons who actually were employed (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988, Table 18, p. 35). The numbers do not include the unemployed poor or the poor who are among the labor-force nonparticipants "who want a job now." The 8.4 million poor persons with work experience may represent as much as 66% of all involuntary part-time and FTYR3 workers, and 45% of all involuntary part-time and FTYR4 workers. Thus, according to our measures, roughly 35% to 55% of all involuntary part-time and FTYR workers were poor. In addition, there are some unknown percentages of the unemployed and nonparticipants who are also poor. And beyond these numbers, there are millions whose employment and/or family positions make them high risk candidates for poverty. They may be referred to as the potential poor. They include families with two low-wage workers, who would fall into poverty if either of the principal earners lost their jobs, and the millions of women and children who are at risk of being poor as a consequence of a divorce, separation, or death of a spouse (see Weitzman, 1985).

In short, subemployment is a major problem for tens of millions of workers and is significantly linked to poverty and potential poverty. The implication is that welfare reform must include a major jobs program if it is going to significantly reduce officially acknowledged poverty.

The Implications of Conservative Proposals

There cannot be meaningful welfare reform for AFDC parents, unless there are decent jobs available to them, a fact conservatives ignore. Furthermore, conservatives disregard the working poor as a problem altogether. As workfare reforms are currently conceived, they will tend to have two major effects. First, such reforms will intensify competition for low-wage jobs in the economy, and, second, they will transform the AFDC program into a program that is closer to General Relief, accompanied perhaps with the lowest-cost training options (e.g., job
search, make-work projects), few support services, and with an increasingly strict work requirement for those who remain on the rolls.

Given that women end up with a disproportionately large share of the low-wage, no-benefits jobs, welfare reform as envisioned by conservatives and moderates can only compound such problems. In some cases, those coming out of welfare training programs and into low-wage jobs will "displace" other women (Burtless, 1989, p. 127; Ellwood, 1989, p. 272).

Evaluation studies of workfare programs provide evidence to substantiate these dismal expectations. The Manpower Development Research Corporation (MDRC) of New York City had done one of the most widely cited evaluation studies of welfare employment initiatives (Burtless, 1989, 120). Their study focused on AFDC workfare participants in San Diego, Baltimore, Cook County (including Chicago), and multicounty areas in Arkansas, Virginia, and West Virginia (Gueron, 1988, p. 19). The MDRC study found that work programs have only modest impacts on reducing AFDC payments, AFDC participation, or AFDC expenditures (Gueron, 1988, p. 20). And they had even less of an effect on the employment or earnings of the participants (Gueron, 1988; Abramovitz, 1988a, p. 241; Cottingham, 1989, p. 4). With respect to gains in earnings, San Diego participants had the best results, but even there the participants earned only about $160 more a month than nonparticipants. The differences in earnings were lower in the other areas, where participants experienced 10% to 30% earnings gains over controls (Gueron, 1988). In West Virginia and Cook County, there were no increases either in employment or earnings among the participants compared to the controls (Gueron, 1988). And, even when there were increases in earnings, they were typically insufficient to raise the welfare recipients out of poverty. Abramovitz (1988a) points out that the MDRC found that, "on the average, welfare recipients in 1987 earned less than $4.14 an hour, or $4,000 below the poverty line for a family of four" (p. 240). A recent update, covering a longer period of time, reported that participants' earnings have increased only $300 to $500 a year" (Abramovitz, 1988a, p. 240). Further, in all cases the small earnings gains were partially offset by
losses in welfare benefits. "In San Diego, the short-term loss in welfare benefits was approximately 35% of the short-term gain in earnings" (Burtless, 1989, p. 124). In addition, there are further reductions for taxes. There is also some doubt over whether the small earnings gains will persist (Burtless 1989, 126).

Irwin Garfinkel (1988, p. 13) summarizes his review of what workfare evaluations studies have found:

Even if they were fully employed . . . , one-half of welfare mothers could earn no more than the amount of their annual welfare grant, and another quarter could earn only up to about $3,200 more. How many more could not earn enough to cover the costs of their Medicaid benefits has not been established. But surely the numbers are large. Finally, this estimate takes no account of the necessity of some of these mothers to work less than full time, full year.

There may be some exceptions. Wiseman (1988) describes the widely touted Massachusetts' Employment and Training Choices (ET) program, a multifaceted program to help AFDC recipients move off the rolls and into unsubsidized jobs. After the first two-and-half years of operation, the AFDC caseload had declined by 9.5%. Many recipients were also placed in jobs that paid wages that were high enough to remove them from poverty (Ellwood, 1989, p. 286). But much of the modest success of ET may be attributed to the unusually robust Massachusetts' economy, and also to the fact that ET is a voluntary program that concentrates on those who are most job-ready. Moreover, despite a high rate of economic growth in the mid-1980s, the AFDC caseload had only been reduced by 5% to 10% (Burtless, 1989, p. 127; Morris and Williamson, 1987).

What about those left on the rolls? Handler (1988) convincingly argues that increasing numbers of welfare recipients will be compelled to work off their benefits, much as General Relief recipients have always been required to do, and they will end up with fewer benefits. Handler (1988, p. 34) sees parallels with the deinstitutionalization experience of the "mentally ill," and writes:
From the late 1950s until mid-1970s, the liberals and conservatives united to remove the mentally ill from the institutions; this would save money, and would provide humane treatment in the community. The coalition fell apart when the mentally ill came home, and the community care never materialized. We are seeing another consensus now between liberals and conservatives. The conservatives will firmly place poor mothers in the employable category, and the liberals only have the promise of services and support. In time, the AFDC program will work itself pure again; a few of the clearly unemployable (the disabled) will be supported, and the rest will be back with the undeserving poor, primarily subject to the market work requirement.

One indication that Handler's expectations are sound is that "the governor of California has already reduced the GAIN [Greater Avenues for Independence] appropriation request by about 20% — but the work requirements will remain and become more stringent" (Handler, 1988, 33).

Conclusions

Given the evidence on state administered work programs, and the fact that participants typically end up in low-wage jobs with no medical, child-care or other benefits, women who participate in these programs are hardly going to be made more independent or removed from poverty. If welfare reform does raise the expectations of welfare mothers about the possibility of self-support and an improved standard of living, such expectations are sure to be dashed in the great majority of cases. The outcome is more likely to be that women are going to be forced into work-related programs and into situations in which they must leave their children in often dubious child-care situations (O'Connell and Bloom, 1987; Polsgrove, 1988). Given the dim outlook presented by widespread subemployment and a trend that indicates that subemployment has been higher in the 1980s than in the 1970s, there is little justification for the assumption that many low-wage workers or their children will be able to find jobs that will move them into the economic mainstream. If conservatives continue to dominate the debate and legislation
dealing with welfare, then certainly conservatives will have won — the poor will have lost. The present scenario suggests that welfare expenditures will be further reduced and AFDC parents will be made available for low-wage jobs or, while on the AFDC rolls, see benefits further eroded and work requirements increased. The long history of AFDC, and the mothers’ pensions programs that preceded it, are ominous reminders of what the future may hold (Abramovitz, 1988b). But, as in the past, the deprivations of poverty will extend far beyond the recipient population.

References


In 1988 the Family Support Act was passed into law requiring welfare recipients to participate in work experience programs to receive their welfare benefits. This paper questions the effectiveness of mandatory workfare programs in rural impoverished regions of the United States. The Appalachian counties of Ohio are used as a case example to demonstrate the problems in implementing workfare programs in economically distressed regions where limited job opportunities exist. Implications for policy are examined, alternatives to mandatory work programs are discussed, and further research to determine the utility of workfare programs is called for.

On October 13, 1988, President Reagan signed the Family Support Act into law. This welfare reform act requires that one adult in each two-parent household participate in job search and community work experience programs by 1994. Known as "Workfare," this law is intended to get people off welfare and into jobs (Bradshaw, 1988). The Family Support Act requires that each state operate jobs opportunities and basic skills programs that will provide education, training, and employment assistance for families receiving welfare. Welfare recipients with preschool children are required to participate and are to receive transportation and child care assistance. This push for employment assumes that the job market can provide employment for those who are to be educated and trained. There are no special provisions for economically distressed regions with limited employment opportunities such as those found in rural America.

This paper discusses the shortcomings of mandatory workfare programs in impoverished rural areas. In many instances
the establishment of workfare programs in rural areas has reduced welfare caseloads but has not created more than minimal employment for the working poor. This paper explores successes and failures of workfare programs in Ohio and in other parts of the country. Policy implications are discussed, alternatives to workfare programs are offered, and subsequent conclusions are examined in view of special problems of rural poverty.

The nation’s largest rural population is found in Appalachia. This mountainous region includes 397 counties in 13 states and extends from Alabama to New York (Appalachian Regional Commission, 1985). The state of Ohio provides a unique case example of a single state divided between urban and rural areas. Twenty-eight of the state’s 88 counties border the Ohio River and are designated as part of the Appalachian region. The Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965 called for a commission of governors in the region. This commission of governors was established “...to reduce or eliminate the social and economic problems that were perceived to be endemic in the area as a consequence of isolation and neglect” (Watts, 1983, p. 226). The Appalachian counties of Ohio are part of the more rural, less prosperous region of this highly populated state that is at the forefront of voluntary development of workfare programs.

Workfare in Ohio During 1980–1990

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981 gave states permission to develop alternative approaches to providing welfare assistance. In November, 1981, the Ohio legislature passed House Bill 694 allowing counties to establish work programs for employing recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Aid to Families with Dependent Children where the principal wage earner is unemployed (AFDC-U), or General Assistance (GA). In June of 1982, Ohio Senate Bill 530 established the Ohio Fair Works Program which was implemented on a demonstration basis in 5 counties in March of 1983. In December, 1982, legislation mandated the Ohio Department of Human Services to provide employment and training programs to welfare recipients throughout the state. Implementation began in 5 counties in 1983 on a phase-in basis. In October, 1988, 29 Ohio
Workfare counties had a mandatory work program, with one county being located in the state’s Appalachian region (Lowe, 1988). As a result of the Family Support Act’s creation of Job Opportunities and Basic Training Program (JOBS) for welfare recipients, the state of Ohio plans to have mandatory work programs, JOBS programs, in every county by January, 1991 (Bradshaw, 1988).

In Ohio, the early workfare program consisted of four primary components: community work experience, subsidized employment, job club, and education and training programs (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985). The heart of workfare programs across the country, as well as in Ohio, is the Community Work Experience Program (CWEP). Sixty percent of participants in CWEP in Ohio are employed by public agencies or private nonprofit corporations (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985). CWEP participants are not paid a wage and the number of hours that they are required to work each month is equal to the amount of their grant divided by the minimum wage. Subsidized Employment Program (SEP) participants are employed in full-time jobs by for-profit firms and are compensated at market wages. SEP participants’ grants are given to the employer as reimbursement for the cost of hiring and training welfare recipients and for paying participants through company payroll processes. In 1985, only 1% of the workfare participants in Ohio were in the SEP program.

In the Job Club Program, participants receive two weeks of classroom instruction in job seeking techniques and six weeks of supervised job search. In the education and training program they are assigned to a course of study that will increase their employment potential. Participation in education and training is limited to 2 years. Approximately 20% of workfare participants are in education and training programs and about 15% are in Job Club (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1988).

The Ohio Fair Work Program began on a demonstration basis in 5 nonrandomly selected counties. Two major evaluations of this demonstration project were completed through contractual agreements with external evaluators (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985, 1988). These evaluations are strikingly different in methodology and reported outcomes.
A summary of findings from the 1985 evaluation reports that: (a) Consistent with overall economic improvement, welfare caseloads leveled off throughout the state of Ohio between 1981 and 1983. Thus, "only a portion of the change in welfare dynamics in the demonstration counties can be credited to the work programs themselves" (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985, p. 6). (b) There was some success in putting welfare recipients into jobs and reducing welfare caseloads at least temporarily. (c) There was great diversity among programs administered at the local level, particularly in regards to the enforcement of mandatory participation in workfare programs. (d) Large numbers of welfare recipients eligible to participate in workfare programs were placed in a pending category due to a lack of appropriate work sites, lack of space in job club or training courses, and failure to complete the initial assessment. In the pending category, individuals had no programmatic responsibilities and often no contact with the program. It has been estimated that about 30% of welfare recipients are active workfare program participants (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1988). (e) CWEP was the mainstay of the program, 50% of active participants; SEP was virtually nonexistent, 1% of active participants. (f) Caseload declines varied between 8% and 15% with the cost savings from welfare caseload reduction offsetting workfare program costs by 50%. The researchers remarked in the report that the program will never be able to pay for itself. One estimate places the cost of the five-county demonstration project for 1983 and 1984 at $2,000,000 (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985). This is clearly an underestimate of cost associated with workfare in Ohio. State and federal dollars allocated for the demonstration counties in just the 1984 year totaled $2,409,983 (Office of the Budget, 1990). Similar data for 1983 are unavailable but can be conservatively estimated at $2,000,000 for program implementation in this initial year.

The second evaluation of the demonstration project included the period from 1983 through 1987 and reported the five-year period as positively contributing to cost savings in welfare caseloads. The findings of this evaluation conclude that: (a) There was a noted significant reduction in welfare caseloads in all
five demonstration counties. AFDC rolls were reduced by 7.9%; AFDC-U was reduced by 36.5%; and General Assistance was reduced by 30%. (b) The reduction in welfare caseloads saved Ohio approximately $20,000,000 (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1988).

It is apparent that the final reports of these two evaluation include conflictual findings. The 1985 evaluation looked at the rate of welfare applications and the rate of case terminations between counties with work programs and those without work programs. Hidden costs for future consideration were identified from workfare’s budgetary needs such as its impact on other state programs; administrative costs; additional staff; program planning assistance; development of a statewide funding formula; technical assistance and training; and ongoing program monitoring and evaluation (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1985).

The 1988 evaluation predicted welfare caseload trends and concluded from regression analysis that caseload reduction was cost effective. The data set used cross-sectional time series quarterly data. Factors used to predict caseload trends included unemployment rates, caseloads before workfare program implementation, population, poverty rate, rural population, population density, and percent of work force in manufacturing for each of the 5 demonstration counties; and statewide caseload statistics. “To calculate the welfare savings, the estimated caseload reductions are simply multiplied by the average monthly welfare benefit in Ohio during August 1987” (Potomac Institute for Economic Research, 1988, p. 26). This calculation does not include federal and state money spent in support of workfare in determining cost savings. Federal and state money allocated to the 5 demonstration counties during the 1984 to 1987 period, totals at least $9,110,542 (Office of the Budget, 1990). If the $2,000,000 allocation estimated by the authors for 1983 were included, the total of federal and state money allocated would be about $11 million. These federal and state funding allocations offset the $20 million savings claimed in the final report of the Potomac Institute for Economic Development (1988).

Several other important factors determining cost savings from work programs are missing from this evaluative study:
(a) data reporting the actual number of AFDC, AFDC-U, or GA recipients who were active participants in workfare programs; (b) distinction of welfare cases that closed in response to workfare program employment versus factors such as death, marriage, relocation, or employment without participation in the workfare program; (c) an accounting of expenses directly involved in delivery of workfare program opportunities; (d) inclusion of administrative, staff and office space costs carried by each county; and (e) caution in projecting findings from the nonrandom demonstration project to the entire state of Ohio. It must be noted that of the five counties involved, three are adjacent to major Ohio cities, one includes several small factory towns, and one is a central storage and processing location for a major oil company. None of the 5 counties are Appalachian or are among the 39 poorest counties in Ohio according to 1989 poverty indicators (Ohio Poverty Indicators, 1989).

Poverty in the Appalachian Region of Ohio: A Case for Workfare?

Between 1980 and 1987, poverty has increased in the Appalachian region of Ohio from 15.6% to 19.6%. In 1987 the poverty rate in the 28 Appalachian counties was above the rate of the 10 largest urban areas in Ohio (14.3%), and above the remainder of the state as well (10.8%) (Ohio Poverty Indicators, 1987). “During the 1970s, poverty rates in Appalachia declined significantly. This improvement was entirely erased in the 1980s, and Appalachian poverty is now more severe than it was 17 years ago” (Ohio Poverty Indicators, 1987, p. 47). All of the 15 Ohio counties with the highest 1987 poverty rates are from the Appalachian region with poverty encompassing as much as 36.8% of the population. The poverty rate has increased by more than 90% between 1980 and 1987 in many Appalachian counties (Ohio Poverty Indicators, 1987).

In Ohio’s 28 Appalachian Counties, there are approximately 249,000 people living below the poverty level. As a means of identifying the near poor, a poverty rate of 125% was projected for 1987 (Ohio Poverty Indicators, 1987). Seventeen of the top twenty counties with 125% or greater poverty rates are from the Appalachian region. In four Appalachian counties, 40% of the
population have incomes below 125% of the poverty level. There are other indicators that poverty continues to be a way of life for residents of Appalachian counties in Ohio. With the decline of manufacturing and coal mining industries unemployment continues to be high. There are few labor intensive industries left in southeastern Ohio. Any increase in jobs has been in the service area which offers salaries to employees. Unemployment rates continue to be higher in Appalachian Ohio than in the rest of the state. Appalachian counties had an unemployment rate of 13.4% in 1985, as compared to 9.3% for the non-Appalachian counties (Ohio Department of Development, 1985). Appalachian counties had higher unemployment in 1987 than non-Appalachian counties, 10.32% as compared to 7.32%. All of the Appalachian counties were above the statewide unemployment rate of 7.0%. Five counties with unemployment rates above 13% were located in the Appalachian region of the state (Ohio Labor Market Information, 1987). These unemployment figures underestimate the actual occurrence of unemployment as many workers in this region have become discouraged and are no longer seeking employment. There is a large amount of underemployment evidenced by a substantial proportion of working poor who are not included in the official unemployment figures.

Limitations of Mandatory Work Programs in Reducing Poverty

It is proposed that the implementation of the Ohio Fair Work Program will be much more difficult in Appalachian counties than in other parts of Ohio. In May of 1987 the first workfare program was implemented in one Appalachian county in southeastern Ohio. The following factors make finding jobs for welfare recipients difficult: (a) high unemployment rates, (b) high poverty rates, (c) scarcity of adequately paying jobs, and (d) rural isolation.

West Virginia, a state adjacent to Ohio, has a nondiversified economy similar to that of the Appalachian region of Ohio. "The West Virginia Work experience program failed to raise either earnings or employment rates, nor was there a reduction in welfare dependency. The rural nature of the state and high
unemployment was thought to limit job opportunities and the success of the program..." (Interagency Low Income Opportunity Advisory Board, 1988, p. 76–68). These are the same kinds of pragmatic problems that confront workfare programs in Appalachian Ohio and other similarly impoverished rural-break areas.

David Ellwood (1988) argues that most workfare programs do not address the real problems for welfare recipients, i.e., the need for an improved job market, adequate wages and more secure jobs. Ellwood (1988) believes that the goals should be "...to replace welfare with something that gives people real options, a real chance to be independent, and a real reason to work. Mixing work and welfare is not the answer. We need a new direction" (p. 154).

There is a strong belief among legislators that individually-oriented programs such as workfare can move people off welfare. However, research findings do not support this belief. "Enhanced job search skills and mandatory work requirements will do little if employment prospects are dim" (Nichols-Casebolt and McClure, 1989, p. 78).

Despite these findings, victims of poverty continue to be blamed for their situation. Kane (1987) has stated that the causes of poverty have traditionally fluctuated between structural and attitudinal factors. He says that one side of this argument is that poverty is caused by a lack of jobs, education, or job skills, i.e., structural causes beyond the control of the individual. The other side states that people are poor and jobless because of personal pathology that causes them to devalue education and middle class values. These antieducation and antimiddle class values are passed on intergenerationally resulting in a self-perpetuating situation. This attitudinal view, better known as the culture of poverty view, was first postulated by Oscar Lewis (1966) and has been the dominant understanding of poverty and policy development. Goodwin (1983) states that research findings consistently show that the workfare concept is based on faulty assumptions that welfare dependency is caused by a preference for welfare and that there are jobs available in the private sector that would allow welfare recipients to adequately support their families. Murray (1984) argues that the high welfare
benefit levels created by the War on Poverty have actually promoted welfare dependency, rather than self-sufficiency among the poor. This culture of poverty model has been utilized consistently by conservatives to argue for cutting welfare benefits (Kane, 1987).

Policy Implications

Goodwin's research (1983) should prompt us to reassess the effectiveness of workfare programs and to question the validity of success claims such as those cited by the Potomac Institute for Economic Research (1988). Goodwin refers to a study conducted in Massachusetts where 1,000 ADC fathers were found to be eligible for workfare and were randomly assigned to either the workfare experiment or to a control group. In the experimental group, 63% of the fathers had unsubsidized employment during the program as compared to 57% of those with unsubsidized employment in the control group. There was no discernable difference between workfare participants and nonparticipants. It appears that most of the experimental group would have found employment with or without the assistance of the workfare program (Goodwin, 1983).

Another study reports similar difficulties with work program outcomes.

For the AFDC-U applicants — primarily men from two-parent households — the results are mixed. Both programs substantially reduced welfare costs but did not increase employment significantly, with the result that taxpayers gained but the welfare applicants did not. A final judgement on the programs' effectiveness for this group depends on the relative weight given to these outcomes... the findings offer valuable evidence on the potential and limits of job search and work experience in increasing employment and reducing welfare dependency. (Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1986, p. vii)

Rein (1982) states that workfare "provides poor work situations, and no salaries; and although the program is supposed to prepare recipients for labor-market jobs, it is difficult to see
how, under these conditions, it can provide either training or motivation" (p. 225). If we assume that community work experience (workfare) only provides poor work situations, no financial incentive and little training, then why is the program flourishing at this point in time? The additional burdens of high unemployment and high poverty rates in Appalachian counties act as barriers to the operation of a successful workfare program. If the program is not providing the participants with job skills and employment, it can be questioned whether workfare functions to foster discouragement of welfare applications and under-utilization of welfare benefits (Goodwin, 1983).

Nancy Goodban (1985) assessed the psychological impact of welfare dependence and raised the issue of stigmatization of those individuals who are devalued for being poor and on the public dole. The concern is raised that the welfare system induces guilt, shame, and stigmatization. If so, workfare without long-term employment will most likely force people to either not apply for welfare or leave the system prematurely.

Alternatives to Mandatory Work Programs in Impoverished Rural Areas

Appalachian counties in Ohio typify many rural areas found throughout the country. Widespread unemployment, underemployment, inadequate social and economic supports for private sector growth, substandard housing, inadequate educational systems, and extensive poverty can be found in many isolated, sparsely populated areas. Social welfare policies and programs that support systemic development of social and economic structures, including private sector job development, must be put into place. Blaming the unemployed as "unemployable" perpetuates structural deficits and faults the victim rather than the system. The working poor, those difficult to place in employment and those who are unemployed, need to be helped by federally assisted programs designed to reverse the long-term poverty in rural areas. Specific policies and programs need to be developed to enable individuals to find adequate employment. The following recommendations modify mandatory work programs and have both short-term and long-term benefits.
Job Development Program

Real jobs need to be developed in rural regions such as Appalachia. A minimum wage job can provide pay for real work and reduce welfare dependence and unemployment. Providing minimum wage jobs will restore a sense of self-worth and dignity to workers. In many rural areas, initial attention must be given to the inadequacy of social and economic support systems that underpin local economies. A comprehensive, economic development plan that goes beyond cosmetic road building and sewage system installation is called for to meet the basic needs of those individuals living in rural areas. Tax incentives could be expanded to include wage supplements for a one-year period payable to new industries that recruit and hire 90% of their workforce from the local population. Enforcement of requirements to hire "trainees" or those hired on supplemental funds must be implemented in order for employment efforts to be effective. In addition to tax incentives, rural areas need to be marketed as rich in natural and human resources.

One means of marketing local resources is through cooperatives of local people. Task forces comprised of community leaders, consumers and public representatives need to be developed to assess resources and needs and to build local cooperative organizations for producing and marketing goods. Increasing capital availability in rural counties and small towns is a priority. Minimum wage floor compliance by employers, ethical employment practices and retention of newly developed jobs could be addressed through such task forces.

Supporting Real Employment

One requirement of private sector industry is that knowledge and skills of local populations be adequate to support both labor-intensive operations and technical functions in manufacturing or service industries. Government subsidy of educational programs in impoverished rural areas is called for in order to upgrade local populace knowledge and skill levels for employability in private sector industry. The problem of illiteracy affects at least 20 million adults in the United States, many of whom live in rural areas. Of rural illiterate individuals, 13% live below
the poverty line (Levitan and Shapiro, 1987). Special programs need to be developed to promote the retention and graduation of high school students. Students between ages of 14 and 21 who are enrolled in high schools or vocational programs could receive funding to encourage education and skill development. This type of subsidy would provide students with the experience of earning a wage and building confidence in their ability to be meaningfully employed. Affordable day care, dental care and medical care need to be provided to those living at or near the poverty level.

**Governmentally Funded Jobs Programs**

The preservation of natural resources in rural areas is crucial to the well-being of present and future generations. Therefore, job development in long-term restoration of forests, waterways, wildlife, soil crop development and resource utilization is appropriate in protecting the environment while providing meaningful employment for many.

**Quality of Life Supports**

Opportunities for emotional, educational, and personal growth should be realities for all people, not just those who can afford such "privileges." Education concerning family living — health, child care, parenting and marriage needs to be woven throughout K-12 curricula. Support programs need to be established to provide high school students with the necessary competence, knowledge, and skills to encourage their attendance and completion of post-secondary education. Housing starts, trade schools, cultural and recreational activities are important in retaining youth in rural areas.

**Support Those in Transition**

Job development, employment, governmental subsidies and quality of life supports are all important in launching both young people and previously unemployed or working poor into meaningful job patterns. Ellwood (1988) wisely proposes a transitional system of support and recommends five significant
welfare reforms: (a) ensure that everyone has medical protection; (b) make work pay so that working families are not poor, raise the minimum wage, expand the earned income tax credit, and make the child care tax credit refundable; (c) adopt a uniform child support assurance system and make absent fathers pay for child support; (d) convert welfare into a transitional system designed to provide short-term financial, educational, and social support for people who are trying to cope with a temporary setback; and (e) provide minimum-wage jobs to persons who have exhausted their transitional support. Ellwood (1988) believes that these five recommendations will provide the necessary support to working poor and single parent families, assist people having temporary difficulties and offer hope to all people that they can find employment if they are willing to work. He believes that these five recommendations, while not new, can encourage individuals to seek employment and can make employment experience rewarding.

Conclusions

The future of workfare policy can only be influenced by empirical observation and utilization of research methods to test the current success of workfare programs. A strong research effort is needed to address some important questions about workfare programs in impoverished rural regions in the United States. Quantitative and qualitative studies need to address several questions. (a) Can welfare dependency and inadequate social and economic supports be separated? (b) To what extent do workfare programs reduce welfare dependency in rural impoverished areas? Of those who find jobs through a workfare program, how many would have found employment without the help of such a program? Does the employment of workfare participants take jobs away from others in the community who are not on workfare? How effective will this program be once the most employable participants are employed and the program is extended to all welfare recipients across the state? (c) What are the social and economic values of the community service work performed by the participants? (d) How cost-effective is the workfare program? What are the additional costs incurred by other departments outside the welfare department as
a result of the implementation of workfare programs? (e) What is the level of community support for the program? (f) How do participants in the program "really" feel? How effective is workfare in increasing their employability and improving their skills? How effective is workfare in producing new jobs that are "real" jobs? (g) How might Ellwood's suggested programs impact poverty in rural areas such as Ohio's Appalachian region? (h) What is a feasible and more equitable way to approach the problem of poverty and welfare dependency?

These are some of the many research questions that need to be addressed. Social welfare policy makers need to be provided with empirically based analysis of work programs if they are to reconsider workfare programs from an informed perspective. If education, training, and work programs are proven to be effective, voluntary participation will occur. If not, these programs need to be made more effective. In making programs mandatory, clients are not empowered to solve their own problems. Without research based advocacy, there is a strong likelihood that the people of impoverished rural America will continue to have little voice in the workfare programs in which they are forced to participate.

References


Family Ties During Imprisonment: Important to Whom and For What?*

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This paper reviews research on the social functions of prisoner-family ties. Three areas are examined: the preservation of marital units and parent-child bonds; the individual well-being of prisoners, children and other family members; and the prisoner's post-release success. The literature indicates that the maintenance of family ties during imprisonment is desirable, but difficult. Benefits suggested by empirical findings include decreased rates of recidivism following imprisonment, improved mental health of inmates and other family members, and an increased probability of reunification of the family household following imprisonment. The paper concludes with the identification of an agenda to guide future policy and program-oriented research.

Prisoners' family relationships and social networks outside the prison are emerging as a major corrections and social services issue. The strengthening of family ties is being promoted as a correctional treatment strategy (Bloom, 1987; Flanagan, 1982; Mustin, 1984; Policy Recommendations on Families of Adult Criminal Offenders, 1986; Showalter and Jones, 1980) and major changes in corrections communications policies support movement in that direction. Family-oriented services, almost nonexistent a decade ago, are developing in institutional and community settings (Family Resource Coalition, 1985; Fishman and Cassin, 1981; Hairston and Lockett, 1987; Howser and McDonald, 1982) and a range of services including children’s centers in prison, private family visits, and visitors' hospitality houses, are being advocated. Families of prisoners (there are over 500,000 on any given day) are organizing to assure that the ability to communicate with imprisoned kin is enhanced.

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and protected and that their rights as individuals and families are respected (Policy Recommendations on Families of Adult Criminal Offenders, 1986).

This paper reports the findings of a review of the scholarly literature undertaken to determine the empirical foundation for views about the importance of family ties during imprisonment. It contributes to the development of a knowledge base on families and corrections by specifying and integrating the findings of diverse research studies in three major areas. The purposes that prisoner family ties serve are presented and relevant research findings are examined. The paper concludes with the identification of key research questions to guide future study.

The Functions of Family Ties

Family ties during imprisonment serve three important functions including the maintenance of the family unit, the enhancement of the well-being of individual family members, and the facilitation of the prisoner’s post-release success. Although seldom the specific foci of research inquiry, these three functions often emerged from data gathered for other purposes. There are, no doubt, other purposes that are served by communication between prisoners and the world outside the prison. Communication between prisoners and outsiders provides, for example, for the flow of material goods, money, and information into and out of the prison. The presence of prison visitors, particularly members of the opposite sex, also normalizes the prison environment. These latter functions were rarely identified, however, as important reasons for strengthening prisoners’ family ties.

The Dissolution and Preservation of Family Units

Research indicates that both marital and parental relationships are particularly vulnerable during incarceration. Personal testimonies of couples separated by incarceration (Hedin, 1986) and empirical studies conducted by Bloom and Cohen (1981) Daniel and Barrett (1981), and Koenig (1985) support the view that incarceration places severe stress and strain on marriage. Marital couples are usually denied sexual intimacy and are
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unable to engage in the day-to-day interactions, experiences, and sharing which sustain a marital relationship. Loneliness and missing each other repeatedly emerged as an issue in exploratory studies of prisoners' spouses done by Bloom and Cohen (1981) and Koenig (1985) and was cited as a problem by 90% of the couples studied by Daniel and Barrett (1981).

The extent of marital break-up during, or immediately following, incarceration is not known. There are no national statistics on changes in marital status during imprisonment, a fact that is not surprising given the general absence of family characteristics data in major criminal justice statistical documents. The Source Book of Criminal Justice Statistics - 1986, for example, does not report either the marital or parental status of prison inmates.

The available statistics do indicate a high divorce rate among imprisoned persons. Hairston (1987) reports that 31% of her sample of imprisoned males was divorced as compared to 16% married. Corresponding percentages for other male populations were 30 and 20 for Lanier (1987) and 20 and 20 for jail inmates as reported in the Report to the Nation on Crime and Justice (1985). It is not known how many of these divorces occurred after arrest and incarceration. There is evidence, however, that a substantial number of marital breakups are prison-related. Hairston (1987) found among a sample of participants in an in-prison related family program that 75% of the men who were married at the time of arrest were divorced by the time of the study.

A few studies provide some understanding of the phenomenon of marital break-up during imprisonment. When researchers have posed the question of whether couples plan to resume living together upon release of the imprisoned spouse, a substantial number reply in the affirmative. Swan (1981) reports that the maintenance of family ties and family unity was a matter of grave concern and interest to the women and men he studied. When the wives of 169 Black mail prisoners incarcerated in Tennessee and Alabama prisons were interviewed, 75% stated they expected to resume a shared relationship with the prisoner upon his release. Seventy-one percent indicated that they would be happy when the man returned home and another 5% stated that they wanted the man to return home
primarily for the children’s sake. Ninety percent of the significant women (wives, mothers, lovers of inmates) interviewed by Curtis and Schulman (1984) similarly indicated that they looked forward to the inmate’s return home.

Three of the seven prisoners’ wives interviewed by Bakker, Morris and Janus (1978) were committed to maintaining their marriage; two had filed for divorce at the time of the study and two expressed ambivalence. All of the 20 women who participated in Koenig’s (1985) study were maintaining their relationship with their husband/partner. Most had long-term relationships lasting three or more years. Some of the women indicated, however, they would feel torn in deciding whether or not to stay with their husbands during any other possible prison sentence they might incur.

Despite couples’ good intentions to maintain their marriages, researchers have observed indicators of deteriorating marriages over the period of incarceration. Holt and Miller (1972) observed that only 53% of the married men who had served more than two years had wives who visited them compared with 79% of those who had served two years or less. Sapsford, as reported by Walker (1983), also observed a decline in the visiting patterns of wives of long-term prisoners and reported that by the seventh year wives, in contrast to other relatives, had ceased visiting and writing letters.

Using clinical assessments of taped inmate-family visits and correspondence, Brodsky (1975) found considerable deterioration in marital relationships over the first six months of confinement. He concluded that prisoners’ relationships with wives and girlfriends were the most changeable and wrote, “Spouses showed a pattern of getting very close or very distant. Maintenance of the marriage on the same level was apparently difficult.”

Although researchers have expressed interest in the general topic of family stability during imprisonment, (Brodsky, 1975; Schneller, 1976; Swan, 1981) and family contact during imprisonment is advocated as a method for preserving family units (Homer, 1979) the impact that prison visiting has on plans for reunification, or actual reunification, has been investigated by only one researcher. Burstein (1976) studied 20 prisoners who
had private overnight family visits while incarcerated and 20 who had visits in the regular prison visiting room. Twenty-two percent of the couples who had overnight family visits allowing privacy as well as sexual intimacy were divorced or experiencing serious marital difficulties one year after Burstein's initial interviews. This number compared with 64 percent of the men who had visits only in the regular prison visiting room.

There is little evidence that visiting between spouses during imprisonment is the critical factor that sustains marriages as the topic has seldom been studied. There is, on the other hand, evidence that many couples desire to maintain their marriages and live together as husband and wife upon release. These marriages are subject to severe stress, however, and the effort involved in maintaining relationships through visiting deteriorates over time.

Parent-Child Relationships

Advocates for parenting programs in prison argue that imprisonment is deleterious to parent-child relationships and that the impact of separation can be lessened by efforts undertaken to strengthen communication between parents and children during this period (Barry, 1985; Fishman, 1982). They view such on-going communication as vital in maintaining parent-child attachment and in enabling mothers and fathers to maintain their parental roles and carry out their parental responsibilities and commitments.

The impact of communication between imprisoned parents and their children on parent-child attachment or family reunification after imprisonment has seldom been studied. Koban's (1983) comparative study of the effects of incarceration on men and women housed in Kentucky prisons is the only identified study comparing parent-child visiting during imprisonment and reunification. Koban asked subjects whether or not they planned to reunite with their children. She reports that frequency of visits was one of the most relevant factors in predicting whether a resident planned to reunite with his or her children. She failed, however, to provide the supporting data.

Koban's findings are supported by studies of visitation between separated parents and their children in cases of foster care
and divorce. After an extensive review of research on parental visiting of children in foster care, Hess (1987) wrote, "A statistically significant association has consistently been found between the frequency of parental visiting and the children's eventual discharge from care." One might reasonably assume that visiting is no less important for parents and children separated because of incarceration.

Most imprisoned mothers want to see their children and plan to regain custody upon release from prison. Baunach (1985) reports that 88% of her sample, 34% of the inmate mothers studied by Zalba (1964), two-thirds of those studied by Bonfanti (1974), and 78% of those studied by McGowan and Blumenthal (1978), planned to reunite with their children upon release.

Mothers find, however, that arranging visits for their children is problematic and depends on factors beyond their control. Fewer than one-half of Baunach's sample saw their children at least once a month. Most cited distance of the prison from the child's hometown as a major factor inhibiting visits. A third of Koban's (1983) mothers never saw their children. Distance from the prison and the prisoner's relationship with the child's caretaker was most often cited as the reasons for infrequent or no visits.

Studies by Lanier (1987) and Hairston (1987) indicate that fathers desire to maintain parent-child bonds but, like mothers, experience difficulty in seeing their children on a regular basis. Hairston (1987) studied 115 men incarcerated in a southeastern maximum security prison. Although most were serving long sentences of ten years or more, they expressed interest in family affairs and in improving their parenting knowledge and skills. Of the men who had children under the age of 18, only 38% saw their children regularly. Visitation was dependent on the prisoner's legal status with the child's mother. Sixty-two percent of the married fathers saw their children regularly as compared with 42% of the divorced or separated fathers and 20% of the single fathers.

Lanier (1987) interviewed 184 men incarcerated in a Northeastern maximum security prison. He reported that large numbers of the fathers were unable to maintain contact with their
children either through nonproximal or proximal means of communication. Reasons for noncontact included lack of transportation, distance of child’s home from the prison, no telephone, or insufficient funds for visiting. However, interferences from the children’s mothers was most often reported as a major factor in that 35% of the fathers said that the mother would not allow the children to see them under any conditions. Fifty percent said the mother would not allow the children to write to them.

Koban (1983) found that 54% of the fathers she surveyed never saw their children. Unlike the mothers in her study who attributed this to the caretakers, and unlike Lanier’s sample, the majority (87%) of these fathers indicated that it was their choice that the child not visit.

Given the problems with visitation, the potential that plans for reunification will materialize does not appear to be nearly as positive as parents’ plans. Twenty-one states consider failure to visit or communicate with children in foster care a basis for termination of parental rights (Smith, 1985). Parental rights may also be terminated solely on the basis of incarceration or because the nature of a crime is judged to prove a mother or father unfit to be a parent. Depending on state laws, child welfare agency practices (which promote or encourage visitation between the children in their care and imprisoned parents), and the actions of children’s caretakers, incarceration may lead to permanent separation of parent and child. The numbers of incarcerated parents who lose permanent custody of their children is not known, though attorneys representing parents in prison report that such cases are common (Barry and Lennon, 1977). What is known is that there is a legal basis for the permanent severance of families and households and that a parent’s maintenance of contact with children during imprisonment is critically important.

Individual Well-being

The well-being of individual family members including the prisoner and his/her children, as well, is cited as a primary purpose for maintaining family ties during imprisonment. Several studies suggest the prisoner’s mental health is dependent
on his contact with the outside world. Richards (1978) reports that as early as 1940 Donald Clemmer reasoned that the degree of prisonization the prisoner experienced depended on external ties. While one might reason that the concern with external ties decreases with the amount of time spent in prison, recent research shows this not to be the case. Based on a study of long-term prisoners' own experience of psychological stresses, Richards (1978) concludes that the preservation and development of communications with the outside is a central element in the management of the mental health of long-term prisoners. The problems of one group of men with life sentences who had served fewer than 18 months and another who had served at least eight years were quite similar. Both groups rated, as most severe, problems related to the deprivation of relationships with the outside. "Missing somebody" ranked as the most severe problem of both groups.

Flanagan's (1981) interviews with 59 long-term male inmates also identified the maintenance of family and other extraprison relationships as a principal deprivation. Inmates expressed fear that their family and friends would not "wait" for them and could not be expected to keep coming to see them forever. This did not make the loss any easier to sustain, particularly for prisoners with young children. There was great concern over the fact that these relationships with children would be irrevocably lost. The concern over maintaining contact with children was also noted by Harrison (1987) in her study of family relationships of fathers serving long prison sentences.

Stress related to external relationships are experienced by women as well as men. Fox (1982) identified separation from and concerns about their children as a common stress producing experience and circumstance among the imprisoned women he interviewed. He observed that such separation involved many painful feelings. Mothers described their inability to visit with their children as one of the most difficult and demoralizing experiences of confinement and viewed the loss of legal custody of one's children as a cause of depression, not only for the particular mother, but for other mothers imprisoned at the facility. Both McGowan and Blumenthal (1978), based on a national mail survey of women confined in 74 facilities, and Koban (1983),
based on interviews with women confined in a Kentucky facility, concluded that being stripped of the mother role was one of the most traumatic factors in women's adjustment to institutionalization.

The impact of the incarceration of a parent on his or her children has not been examined extensively. The studies which have been done, however, have concluded that children are deeply affected by the imprisonment of a parent. Among the problems found among children of imprisoned parents are poor school performance (Friedman and Esseltyn, 1965; Lowenstein, 1986; Stanton, 1980), aggressiveness and "acting-out" behavior (Lowenstein, 1986; Sacks, Seidler and Thomas, 1976), and emotional and interactional problems such as excessive crying and withdrawal (Koban, 1983; Lowenstein, 1986; Swan, 1980). Consistent with the shortcomings of studies of children of divorce, these studies focus on the parent's absence per se and fail, by and large, to look at parent-child relationships either before or during the parent's imprisonment.

When Swan (1981) examined parent-child relationships, he found a significant correlation between the amount of time the incarcerated father spent with the child prior to incarceration and the effect of incarceration on the child as judged by the mother. Those children who had spent the most time with their fathers prior to imprisonment were the ones most negatively impacted by the father's incarceration. Sack's (1977) research also indicates the importance of the parent-child relationship and the ability of the child to maintain that relationship as an important variable. He reports that the behavior of the children he was seeing in therapy improved considerably after they visited their father in prison. Sack's finding is consistent with studies of visiting in foster care and divorce which also show a relationship between a child's visiting with the noncustodial parent and the child's well-being (Hess, 1987).

The research on children and incarcerated parents indicates that children want and need to see their parents. Fifty-six of the 93 wives in Schneller's (1976) study indicated that their children were lonely as a result of their father's incarceration. Swan (1981) reports that the children he studied longed to see their father. Based on a review of studies conducted by former
students, Walker (1983) concluded likewise and Baunach (1985) also reached this conclusion following interviews with inmate mothers, prison officials, and foster parents. Sacks (1977) and Stanton (1981) report that the children they studied worried about their parents and how they were being treated. Sacks notes that children feel rejected when they are unable to see the imprisoned parent and the parent makes no effort to communicate with them. He reasoned that seeing the parent assures them that the parent is okay and that he/she still loves the child irrespective of the criminal act that was committed. This view that children want to see their imprisoned parents is supported by children of men with life sentences who were allowed to speak freely about their relationships with their parents and by the observations of volunteers working with prisoners' children. Jamie's (ten year old son of a prison inmate) comments are revealing.

When I day dream, I think how it could be with my father home. We need him around the house...If I had a chance to really talk to my father I would say how bad and terrible it is what I'm going through...I never have a chance to really talk to him (Children's Express, 1986).

There are, at the same time, reported negative findings with regard to children visiting their parents in prison. Baunach (1985) reports that several foster parents caring for imprisoned mothers' children indicated that the visits were disruptive and that the children misbehaved, were unruly, and hostile following a prison visit. The comments made by one child of a prison inmate also indicates some troubling aspects of the visit. The child stated, "After the visit is over, on the way home we feel sad because we are leaving our father at the prison" (Children's Express, 1986).

The well-being of family members other than children has also been found to be associated with communication with an imprisoned relative. Inability to communicate creates great worry and stress among family members (Hedin, 1986; Koenig, 1986; Schneller, 1976). They do not know and understand the criminal justice process, are concerned about the prisoner's
treatment, and find it difficult to obtain information about what is going on. Ferraro, Johnson, Gorgensen and Bolton (1983) report that 66% of parents and 80% of spouses listed inability to obtain information from the corrections department as one of the major problems experienced as a result of incarceration of a family member. Eighty-three percent of the wives and 74% of the parents also reported concern and uncertainty about the inmate’s treatment as a moderate to severe problem. Women who saw their imprisoned spouses at least twice a week, however, did not experience this same level of anxiety and stress. Koenig (1985) also reported extreme worry among spouses about how their imprisoned relatives are faring and major problems in obtaining information from prison officials.

No doubt, some family members could not care less that a relative is in prison and others experience relief that they have little or no contact with the inmate. In some cases, there are probably social costs in maintaining ties that exceed social benefits and the family’s stress level is heightened rather than lessened by prison visits and letters. Wives who had poor relationships with husbands prior to confinement sometimes state these feelings (Bakker, Morris and Janus, 1978). For individuals who do care about their imprisoned relatives, however, restricted communication produces fear and anxiety and generates a great sense of stress.

Post-Release Success

The development of family-centered programs in corrections is advocated on the basis of the family’s positive role in preventing recidivism (Bloom, 1987; FCN, 1986; Fishman and Cosseh, 1987; Homer, 1979; Mustin, 1984). Holt and Miller’s (1972) research is used most often as the empirical basis for the family ties-recidivism argument. These researchers conducted a post-release follow-up study of 412 men who had been paroled from the California Southern Conservation Center for at least 12 months. Parole outcomes were compared with the number of different visitors the offender had had during the last year of imprisonment. Two percent of the men who had three or more different visitors during the year prior to parole were returned to prison within one year of their parole. This number
contrasts with 12 percent of those who had no contact with family or friends and the difference was statistically significant. When measures of post-release success other than recidivism were used, the influences of social ties on post-release success were more pronounced. Fifty percent of those who had no contacts with family or friends had no difficulties on parole as compared with 70% of those with three or more visitors.

Studies by Ohlin as cited in Glaser (1969), and Adams and Fischer (1976) also provide evidence of a positive relationship between the maintenance of family ties during imprisonment and post-release success. Each of these studies shows a correlation between frequency of visits or number of visitors during imprisonment and post-release arrests or reimprisonment. The higher the number of visits/visitors, the lower the number of arrests or reimprisonments.

Studies of family oriented programs also report a positive impact of family ties on recidivism. Howser and MacDonald (1982) and Leclair (1978) found a lower rate of recidivism among those who participated in family programs such as overnight family visits and temporary release when compared with releasees who did not participate in such programs. Burstein (1977) found no difference in the reimprisonment rate of overnight family visit participants and regular visit participants, but a noticeable difference in the general success rates of the two groups. Twenty-one percent of his sample who had participated in overnight family visits had parole problems (arrest and/or reimprisonment) as compared with 36% of the comparison groups.

Although the strength of the reported associations has been weak to modest, the family ties - lower recidivism relationship has been consistent across study populations, different periods of time, and different methodological procedures. In addition, results have held without regard to the perceived desirability of the visitors and without any attempts to alter negative family functioning through counseling, therapy, or education. More importantly, no study showing a negative influence of family ties on post-release behavior is reported in the scholarly literature. This is not to imply that some families do not have
Family Ties

a negative influence on their members but rather that, on the whole, prison inmates with family ties during imprisonment do better on release than those without them.

The family status and post-prison family environment has seldom been the focus of recidivism studies. This situation is somewhat surprising given the emphasis that criminal justice scholars (Fox, 1981) state is placed on the family environment in parole decisions. Limited research which has been done indicates that family variables influence post-release behavior and success. Married men do better than single men (Clarke and Crum, 1985; Glaser, 1969; Holt, 1986; NIJ, 1987). Men who live with their wives and children do better than those who live with their parents or alone (Curtis and Schulman, 1984). Those who experience marital harmony in the post-prison environment do better than those experiencing serious marital discord (Burstein, 1977; Fishman, 1986) and those who have warm, supportive wives do better than those who do not have such wives (Fishman, 1986).

It is reasoned that family ties during imprisonment influence the nature of family ties and support available to the inmate upon release and this, in turn, impacts recidivism. There has not been, however, a direct investigation of this causal link. Burstein (1977) observed that overnight family visiting participants had less serious marital difficulties in the post-release period than regular visiting participants and that they also had fewer difficulties on parole. He failed, however, to take his analysis a step further and examine the causal relationship between family ties during imprisonment, marital conflict after imprisonment and recidivism.

A Future Research Agenda

There is, as has been demonstrated here, a developing body of knowledge on prison-family relationships. There are, however, many gaps in knowledge and a need for increased understanding of several key issues. These key areas for future research are discussed here.

First of all, basic research on the nature, structure, and functions of prisoners’ family ties and social networks outside the prison is needed. This literature review demonstrates that there
is little understanding of prisoners' family characteristics or relationships. Even basic statistical information such as marital status is not routinely collected and reported. Questions abound. What are the characteristics of prisoners' support systems and do they vary according to key variables such as race, age, sex and nature of the crime committed? What are prisoners' roles in these networks? How do prisoners' personal and family relationships develop and operate over the period of incarceration and post incarceration? The answers to these very basic questions are central to the development of a knowledge base that can inform the development of family-centered correctional policies.

Second, investigations should focus on the perceived and actual positive and negative effects of family contact during and after imprisonment on the prisoner and other family members. The areas addressed here have been the focus of only limited research and, consequently, much more understanding of the social functions of family ties is needed. In addition, answers to the basic question of the social, emotional, and material costs associated with maintaining family ties would provide a foundation for understanding deteriorating family relationships despite desires to maintain them. Given the controversial issues surrounding parent-child communication, the recent efforts to expand programs in this area specifically (Boudouris, 1985), this topic should be given priority. It is paramount to know under what conditions it is advisable or ill advised for children of incarcerated parents to maintain contact with their parents. It is equally important to determine the short and long-term effects of visiting or not visiting an incarcerated parent on children's development and well-being and on family reunification following imprisonment.

Third, studies should examine policies and programs designed to strengthen family ties and should assess organizational barriers to the maintenance of family bonds. There is a critical need for sound assessments of different prison visiting policies and practices, and scientific evaluations of current and new family-oriented programs such as in-prison family counseling services and parenting education activities. Studies should build on program assessments already conducted and should
be expanded to identify program elements and organizational factors that promote or inhibit the maintenance of family ties and functioning of family units and the subsequent impact on recidivism. Detailed documentation of program and policy implementation is necessary to enhance understanding of relevant variables and to guide future program intervention.

Fourth, research which employs the basic Holt and Miller (1970) approach of comparing communication patterns during imprisonment with recidivism should be carried out in several settings. The data should be comprehensive to allow comparisons among racial groups, age groups, institutional security levels, nature of the crime committed and length of sentence. Studies which build on this design should also be undertaken. These studies would assess the quality and meaning of family relationships as well as the quantity of family contacts. Additionally, they would explore the relationship between preprison, in-prison, and postprison family environment and relationships and the causal link with recidivism. Central to this area of research would be theoretical model which are either tested through empirical study or generated on the basis of the findings of empirical data. An understanding of why strong family ties during imprisonment is related to lower recidivism may identify areas for prevention as well as control of crime.

In summary, the maintenance of family relationships during imprisonment is important to family units, to individual family members, including the inmate and children, and to the general public. Family ties are instrumental in reducing the stress felt by individuals separated from their loved ones, in assuring families that their imprisoned relative is all right, in promoting the prisoner's mental health, in maintaining family bonds, in decreasing recidivism and increasing public safety. How and why family relationships are instrumental in these ways is not fully understood. How families can be used as an effective correctional resource is also not well defined. What is obvious, however, is that imprisonment affects more than the prisoner and includes his or her family as well. What is also understood is that family relationships cannot be overlooked either in the treatment of the individual or in a more fundamental look at the role and function of corrections. Concern about prisoner-family
relationships is gaining momentum and may become, if not a major correctional treatment strategy, one of the most pressing problems ever encountered in corrections.

References


Self-Empowerment among Adults with Severe Physical Disability: A Case Study

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An independent living residential setting for severely physically disabled adults was studied through overt observation methods for twenty-two months. The purpose was observation of residents' council actions and expressions of group interests. The council displayed several phases of political structure and behavior. These phases were related to staff and administrative considerations as well as the residents emerging demonstrations of self-empowerment at the group level. The capacity for self-advocacy emerges as a dynamic enterprise which is clearly related to the structure and interests of the service agency.

Like other minorities, people with disabilities have often been inhibited from exercising political self-determination. Given the many constraints of disability, lack of experience with democracy is not surprising. The combined effects of physical, communicative or emotional impairments, social stigma, and, very often, isolation, are substantial obstacles to overcome on the path to self-determination (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970). Furthermore, having experienced at least some degree of dependency upon others, adults who have disabling conditions may tend to perceive themselves as more subordinate than autonomous and therefore choose not to assert themselves in political processes (Sussman, 1977). What are the possibilities, then, of people with disabilities acquiring the appropriate skills, experience, and self-image which will allow them greater opportunity to participate in decision making? If democracy is defined as "the opportunity of members of the society to participate freely in the decisions, in whatever realm of life, which affect their lives individually and collectively" (Gould, 1964), then how many people with disabilities gain access to the skills and experience which will facilitate their participation in these activities?
This study examines the evolutionary process of self-empowerment experienced by adults with severe physical disabilities in an independent living residential program. Development of a residents' council and selected actions taken by service providers supportive to the functioning of the council are described. In an effort to document how collective self-empowerment actually occurs for a seriously disadvantaged group that is supported by a service agency, detailed qualitative observations are reported.

Guidelines proposed by DeJong characterize the independent living environment as a fertile ground for self-empowerment of people with severe disabilities. He argues that collective actions taken by consumers toward obtaining rights and entitlements as well as the striving for barrier removal to adult life resources are essential features of independent living (DeJong, 1979, p. 443). By addressing shared concerns about policies and regulations, people with disabilities are constructing a new role that demonstrates advocacy, self-determination, and construction of shared expectations for living arrangements. Consumers and service providers jointly work toward the ultimate goal of community integration in the political arena through consumer education in group functioning and skill acquisition for exercising power. Because many persons with disabilities have not seen themselves as decision makers for themselves or others, changes at the self level occur and can be observed as the group addresses political concerns (Frank, 1988, p. 112). Until a window is opened on the collective perspective, however, willingness and skills for holding group responsibilities are likely to emerge slowly.

Independent living settings provide many such windows for enabling the processes of self-empowerment. Persons with severe disabilities that impede mobility and communication can utilize these settings for the personal and social development that leads to group and community practices of self-determination. Like other socially stigmatized categories, people with severe disabilities are likely to find in the self-empowerment process a new set of experiences from which to gain the tools needed to confront social and physical obstacles (Solomon, 1976, p. 22). In so doing, people with disability benefit from
empowerment that teaches fundamental political processes such as creating alliances, building coalitions, overcoming organizational barriers, and engaging in political action (Pinderhughes, 1983, p. 334).

According to Charles Horton Cooley, people in general have allegiance to the community ideal, and "would devote themselves to it with some ardor and sacrifice if they saw clearly how they could do so with effect" (Cooley, 1911, p. 52). This encouraging description is challenged by consistent observations that in most societies some groups are less likely than others to participate in community matters. Groups with low community involvement are those which are likely to experience problems in acquiring necessary skills and access to collective processes (Dahl, 1956, p. 71).

The physically disabled population is one such group. However, an important social movement, the Independent Living (IL) movement, has brought substantial changes to the thinking and procedures that link persons with disability to the general community (DeJong, 1983). The IL movement has clear political goals for altering community integration patterns with populations that have disabilities. Fundamentally a civil rights movement, IL efforts have been directed toward achieving acceptance into community political processes and greater access to community decision-making systems. What makes the IL movement a distinct social and political challenge is its demand for incorporating the disabled person's physiological characteristics and life experiences into the existing system that is designed for ordinary people. Thus, the demand for wheelchair ramps, braille reading materials, and signing interpreters is a call for recognizing the particular ways physically different people communicate and meet with others, actions fundamental to interaction and shared decision making.

The emergence of environments conducive to self-empowerment as enacted by adults with severe physical disabilities is one aspect of recent changes in the social meanings given to disability. Scotch sees a significant modification in new views which perceive the source of disability-related issues as social problems rather than as individual traumas. Although he observes that general social change is extremely slow in this area,
he proposes that a new "mind set" is evolving that views activism appropriately suited to people with disabilities. However, Scotch does note that activism is rare among persons in organized residential settings (Scotch, 1988, p. 161). It is here that principles of self-empowerment are engaged to grasp the process of confronting the very environments that sustain dependency (Pinderhughes, 1983).

As people with disabilities develop toward full community cooperation and participation, they are utilizing various formats to assist them. One of these arrangements is the supported residential environment. This setting serves much as the settlement house did for immigrants; it provides some services (such as education and transportation) at the same time that it offers training in group relations and collective decision making (Deegan, 1986, chaps. 10, 11). Like excluded groups before them, people with disabilities must work to remove barriers to their social participation. The goal is reduction of a socially devalued ascribed status so that disabled people can develop potentially more positive achieved status in the general community. The mechanisms of education, improved communication, and democratic methods are being used to alter social inequalities.

Independent Living Movement

The independent living movement arose during the late 1970s, demanding greater independence and broader social participation for disabled persons. Along with accessible housing, supporting services, and assistive devices, a greater degree of self-determination was sought as a move away from dependency. Crewe states, "Independent living develops individual power, both as process and as an outcome," and she proposes that individual responsibility as well as personal goals will be furthered by the movement (Crewe, 1979, p. 433). The attainment of self-determination is an especially significant goal for the IL (Independent Living) movement since severely disabled individuals are specifically included in its aims, both in concept and in law (P.L. 95-602). to consider severely disabled persons as actively controlling their own lives and perhaps the lives of
Self-Empowerment

others through democratic processes is to be introduced to the depth and scope of the IL concept.

The IL concept provides a new perception of people with disabilities. In contrast to the more passive images given disability by the medical and rehabilitation models, the IL concept presents disabled persons as capable of political advocacy, self-help, and consumer control of services (Stoddard, 1978). As such, the IL concept has formed the basis for many consumer-directed environments (DeJong, 1983). While each independent living setting is comprised of its own particular arrangement of services to disabled people, a basic philosophy is noted by Humphreys as the “disabled citizen’s right to share fully in community life and the responsibility to contribute to that community” (Humphreys, 1978). Independent living means more than a barrier-free environment; it also means consumer initiative and potential consumer control over adapted living environments and support services. IL settings are potential testing grounds for skills of group organization, group decision making, and delegation of representatives.

The Independent Living movement also recognizes that disabled persons need to learn how to utilize the democratic system. Because many people with disabilities have led isolated, protected lives, they may lack group-participation skills and observations of groups that have attempted the democratic system. Since an IL residential environment offers opportunities for developing democratic skills among a politically marginal group, it is appropriate to study evolving self-government within a residential facility emphasizing IL aims for physically disabled adults.

The purpose of this investigation was to observe the changing structure and functions of a residents’ council as members acquired skill in group organization and democratic procedures. Also, the study examined the relationship between residents’ representatives and the sponsoring management and how residents practiced democratic processes within a planned, structured residential setting which is administered not by residents but by a sponsoring agency. Specifically, the following report addresses the role of resident representation to management which is not consumer-controlled, but which does attempt to
train disabled individuals for greater independence. These observations offer insight into other dependent groups' efforts to alter their devalued positions in favor of more responsible places in the general community.

Setting and Method

Sociological investigation of two residential settings for physically disabled adults was conducted over a period of twenty months. Both facilities were located in Wichita, Kansas, and were managed by Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation of Kansas. The population in both facilities consisted of young adults having a wide range of disabling conditions such as cerebral palsy or spinal cord injury. A high proportion of residents had severe developmental disabilities and had previously lived in institutions, nursing homes, or highly protective family environments. During the first eight months of the study, research occurred at the Urban Residential Center (Urban). The Urban then was closed and merged with The Timbers, a new and larger facility. The Urban consisted of two one-story four-plex apartments located in a working-class apartment neighborhood, and it housed 27 persons at the time this study began. When The Timbers opened, 24 Urban residents moved to the 100-person complex of one-story four-plexes, six-plexes and congregate area located tangentially to a middle class, single-family neighborhood. In addition to its increased size, The Timbers is different from The Urban, having numerous design adaptations for its disabled residents and receiving considerable local celebrity. The Timbers complex is located on a ten-acre site and is arranged in roughly concentric circles around the congregate building. Residents with the most severe disabilities live in apartments attached to or nearby the congregate area, and those with less severe disabilities live in the outer apartments. Residents receive services such as transportation, cooking, and personal care in a similar recognition of need.

Both facilities were operated by the same administration and provided the same services: housing, personal care, some cooking, transportation, and independence training. Also, both Urban and Timbers facilities were affiliated with the Wichita
State University Rehabilitation Engineering Center and Center Industries Corporation, a competitive industry for disabled and able-bodied persons. Through this combination of services, the Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation expresses its aim of assisting residents, many severely disabled, to reach their full potential in a community environment.

Throughout the twenty-month period, participant-observation methods of overt observation and interview were utilized, as the investigator and research assistants attended open meetings and council meetings. Nearly all council meetings and open meetings were attended for twelve months, and selected meetings were attended the last eight months. Interviews with council members and administrative personnel who had ongoing relationships with the Council were conducted at the conclusion of the observations. Since the research activities were conducted overtly, they allowed consumers and staff to clarify any uncertainties quickly. Although subjects understood that the direct observation could have been stopped at any time for reasons of confidentiality, such a request never occurred.

After collecting field notes, minutes, interviews, and written products of the Council (such as bylaws), the data were organized into the following areas: (a) how was the residents' council constructed? (b) what topics did the council consider? (c) what actions did the council take? and (d) how were the structure and functions of the council affected by service providers and the sponsoring agency? The following report summarizes research findings within the framework of four evolutionary stages which were characterized by distinct patterns of Council structure and function.

The Residents' Council was initiated by administrators and staff members of the sponsoring agency. Their intentions were to assist residents in discovering residents' interests and then represent those interests to management. Another aim was to teach basic parliamentary procedures and group-participation behaviors. Most residents had not had collective involvement previously and needed guidance in learning to see themselves as group members.
The Evolution of Decision Making

The Residents' Council consisted of five members elected at-large who then elected a president and determined committee chairpersons within the Council.

There was substantial consistency in the membership of the Residents' Council over the twenty-month period observed. The same individual was Council president throughout the study, and only two members resigned during their terms of office and were replaced by special elections. One general election was held during the study, when four new members were elected, along with reelection of the previous president. All Council members were severely or moderately disabled. Extent of disability was not observed to be a factor affecting influence in group decision making, as Council members listened and interacted with each other according to personal forcefulness regardless of delays in speaking or difficulties with handling written materials. Therefore, description of group processes can be viewed as analysis of a developing social unit rather than a study of disabling conditions. The four observed developmental phases were (a) the Initial Stage, (b) the Transitional Stage, (c) the Experimental Stage, and (d) the Plateau Stage.

Initial Stage

When the Residents' Council was initiated by staff members, it began its responsibility very slowly. Council members appeared not to have had earlier experience with committees or groups that made decisions intended to affect many people. The result was almost an internship period for Council and staff members while new roles were created.

At this initial stage, one staff member of the Urban Residential Center attended each biweekly meeting of the five-member Council and contributed substantially to the content and organization of the meetings. Meetings consisted of unstructured committee reports and discussion of topics introduced by the staff member.

Although the Council committees were arranged to deal with collective issues such as transportation, food, personal care aides, and recreation, actual functions tended to be directed
toward residents' personal complaints or the planning of recreational activities, resulting in little practice of group determination in the residential facility. When the attending staff member presented items of group concern, Council members rarely responded to the opportunity for making recommendations pertaining to group management. At this point, the Council functioned chiefly as a social collectivity, with more time given to personal topics than to group concerns. Critical events tended to be seen as the management's concern, including preparation for the move to The Timbers and reorganization of living arrangements after a fire destroyed two apartments and injured two severely disabled residents.

However, the foundation for group decision making was established here as the staff trained Council members in meeting procedures, suggested divisions of labor, and supported Council efforts in recreational arrangements.

**Transitional Stage: May-October**

The reconstituted Residents' Council faced the two basic tasks of reorganizing itself from its earlier format and addressing heated issues raised by residents. These tasks were accomplished even as staff began taking a more peripheral role in Council activities and responsibilities.

When the residents moved into The Timbers, the Urban Residents' Council was retained for three months, after which the first general election was held. This interim was an emotional period for the many residents who had never lived independently before, and discussion of the upcoming general election was intense. When the first open meeting occurred to establish election procedures and candidates, over eighty residents attended, and many contributed heatedly to disorderly discussions. Although the meeting was chaired by the Urban Council's president of two years, he was not able to control a large meeting in which few participants understood parliamentary procedure. As a group, residents demonstrated little comprehension of standard procedures for determining candidates, deciding terms of office or establishing the Council's purpose as a representative body. Compounding residents' lack of knowledge was the prevalence of severe disabilities. For example, votes were
finally cast by voice because "at least everybody can make a sound." Only the president from the earlier form, the Urban Residents' Council, became a candidate; and the new council also elected him president.

Staff members attended council meetings less regularly at The Timbers, becoming more auxiliary. An early distinction arose between severely disabled residents having apartments near the congregate area and less disabled residents whose apartments were some distance away. "Outsiders" gradually tended to perceive the Council as a representative unit for "the severes," although two council members lived in outside apartments. During the Transitional Stage, the initial interest of outside apartments residents in the Council declined. Structure and functions came to reflect interests of the residents with more severe disability.

Primary functions at this stage included: defining the Council with bylaws and regular procedures, hearing complaints from residents, and addressing the need for a crosswalk and crossing light across a wide, busy street to the nearest shopping area. The latter function both attracted residents' interests in the council and introduced its members to the workings of city government. A petition was written, signatures collected, testimony gathered, and appearances made before necessary city officials. As a first attempt at community advocacy, the Council established a successful precedent, as the crosswalk request was accepted and was scheduled ahead of several other requests.

The crosswalk issue described above occurred at the same time that other emotion-laden concerns came to the Council, such as the contention by some residents that alcoholic beverages and loud parties should not be permitted in the congregate area and that residents should not "loiter" around the congregate-building entrance, "making this look like a nursing home." These two demands occasioned formulation of the first two Council rules: no drinking in the congregate area except at general parties and no loitering around the entrance. Criticism of the Council followed, and residents' high expectations for Council accomplishments began to decline.

It is important to note that the Council members were not entirely alone in this period. Staff members contributed books
on parliamentary procedure, suggested appointment of a ser-
geant-at-arms to keep order at Open Meetings, and held two
open classes on parliamentary procedure (abandoned thereafter
for lack of interest).

Experimental Stage: October-February

Routine functions having been established, the Council now
experimented with new representative arrangements. At the
same time, management was redistributing its own responsi-
bilities. Uncertainty characterized this experimental period.

In October, Council members recommended in Open Meet-
ing that the Council structure be modified to include seven
representatives who would be elected by apartment district. The
suggestion was approved, and the experiment with a larger,
more complex Council began: the five-member Council met
weekly, the Council and district representatives met biweekly,
and Open Meetings were held once a month. At this time, the
group’s name was modified, becoming the Residents’ Advisory
Council, as a reflection of the intermediary role played between
management and residents. Also, staff members withdrew from
attending meetings, and the Council president began to conduct
more controlled meetings by agenda.

Council functions were also changing, primarily in response
to funding problems experienced by The Timbers. Because of
reductions in funding for food and personal care, major reor-
ganization and restriction of services was occurring. It was at
this point that the Council began to work actively as an inter-
mediary between residents and management. Council members
began to request information from management and to com-
municate concerns of residents about programs and services.
In Open meetings, the council attempted to explain the fund-
ing constraints faced by The Timbers and elicit cooperation from
residents. Furthermore, the overall confusion regarding funding
affected Timbers staff as well as residents. While the Council
experimented with communication to the management, man-
germent was reconstructing its own organization. The resulting
structure not only responded to the pressures of funding and
administrative needs, but also provided new channels for Res-
idents’ Council effectiveness in the larger system.
Plateau Stage: February-July

The Council achieved consistent procedures and expectations both vis-a-vis residents and toward management. Ironically, as the Council achieved more responsibility respecting both residents and management, resident interest and involvement dwindled.

Following the upheavals of the winter months, spring Council activities were observably more structured and purposeful and tended to carry out a more advisory function to the management. Regular meetings with administrators were scheduled in which staff and Council members exchanged information and discussed current issues. These meetings represented an opening of information channels, since the management's initial understanding of residents' needs for information had been protective, not collaborative. Likewise, Council members acquired more understanding of management's working procedures.

Further expansion of Council members' development was observed as the president exercised more effective leadership skills and as Council members encouraged other residents to take part in larger community problems related to people with disabilities. During this time, the Council achieved financial stability, largely due to its own efforts, and organized the second Council election. However, the gains in organization skills were not complete. Staff was required to rescue a Council-planned street sale because members "really didn't know what a committee was" (staff comment), and necessary arrangements were not accomplished by residents. And, prior to the election, three Council members reported having received negative comments from residents to the effect that "since the Council doesn't do anything, there's no need to vote." Having accomplished a year of self-definition and expanding communication with management apparently did not arouse absolute support from residents.

Acquiring Group-Organization Skills

To summarize, the evolution of the Urban-Timbers Residents' Council was characterized by observable changes in structure and decision-making functions. At the Urban, staff members both initiated and directed the five-member Council;
during the transition to the larger Timbers facility, the Council tended to deal with personal and controversial matters concerning residents; when The Timbers facility was affected by a funding reduction, the Council expanded and began an experimental intermediary relationship between management and residents. As The Timbers management settled into a new structure in the Plateau phase, procedures for implementing residents' representation were institutionalized.

Although circumstances such as an overall funding reduction stimulated much Council skill-learning, direct training by staff provided the foundation for developing abilities such as planning agendas, conducting meetings, writing bylaws, and appearing at community hearings. Just as important to this evolution was the development of administrative responsiveness to the Council. If the management had not opened channels for communication and negotiation with the Council, the development of Council structure and functions would have had less meaning for self-determination. Staff training efforts and administrative modifications did, however, facilitate self-determination. Staff training efforts and administrative modifications did, however, facilitate self-determination. Not unlike attempts to organize other American minorities during the 1960s (Alinsky, 1969), these actions at The Timbers contributed to disabled residents' opportunities for influencing the very organization upon which they depended for basic services. The Council members, district representatives, and interested residents have confronted shared problems and, through the assistance of staff and the push of external demands, developed a sense of political process. These are the beginnings of participatory democracy (Bennello, 1971).

The detailed observations reported here underscore the length of time required for seriously disadvantaged people to acquire collective perspectives and the necessary skills for meeting group needs. When the disadvantaged group has had only minimal opportunities for practicing group awareness and responsibility, self-empowerment begins with small steps. Those steps include utilizing the participation and support of service providers. Nevertheless, the empowerment process has been observed here to function for people with severe disabilities in the
sense defined by Pinderhughes: gaining "the capacity to cope constructively with the forces that undermine and hinder coping" (Pinderhughes, 1983, p. 344). Although the process was far from complete during the time of observation, important collective perspectives and structures were initiated in the name of independent living.

But the evolutionary process continues. A formal means exists for management and Council communication, although the question of Council capability to enforce its decisions upon either management or residents remains. This is the crux of the problem. Within an agency-managed residential setting, can a residents' council actively exercise power, or will a council function primarily as a symbol of residents' interests?

Conclusions

A residents' council within an agency-sponsored residential setting may fulfill an advisory role to the management by communicating residents' needs and negotiating for administrative decisions favorable to residents. Because many persons with disability lack experience with group processes, very gradual development of representative democratic skills is likely. Such evolution of group-organization skills is appropriate to residents' transitional status in settings such as The Timbers which provide training for more extensive independent living. In these launching stations to greater community participation, the process of learning democratic skills parallels other practice with independent living skills.

Resources for training persons with disability in self-advocacy are available (Woodyard, 1980; Bowe, 1978) and can be supplemented with literature from the self-help movement (Zola, 1979). Specific training is required, because individuals who have been isolated from group decision making may begin their participation at the level of the first Hans Knudsen Pladsen residents' council in Copenhagen, whose initial interests were "to have more sugar in the tea" (Hoybe-Mortenson, 1979). Merely having shared living arrangements does not guarantee having shared political concerns. As an adjunct to independent living aims, then, learning to perceive group interests and to act on behalf of others is an advance toward broader social participation.
Although agency-managed residential facilities may not conform to an ideal model of the Independent Living concept (Maluccio, 1979), they provide the group context for skills to be exercised following transition to greater social involvement. Since many community-based living environments are sponsor-managed rather than peer-managed (Laurie, 1977), a realistic assumption based on the Urban/Timbers observations would be to predict that group self-determination skills can be taught and practiced in residential settings and included as elements in the Independent Living skills tool kit.

Since the U.S. political system is highly decentralized, it requires endless bargaining and negotiation, even at local levels. Yet Dahl argues that this characteristic allows any active and legitimate group to make itself heard at some point in decision making (Dahl, 1956, p. 150). The Timbers Residents' Council case study shows that other factors as well as desire for participation must be addressed when a politically marginal group seeks involvement. Not only must skills for bargaining and negotiation be acquired, but also the ordinary means for voting, communicating with peers and representatives, and group assembly may require modification. Furthermore, groups which have been systematically excluded from decision-making processes must have the opportunity to obtain social training in the norms of political process (Dahl, 1956, p. 135). Certain other emerging political minorities, such as children, the frail elderly, and the mentally ill, share the protected yet devalued status that is ascribed to physically disabled adults. Perhaps the Independent Living movement will contribute ideas and momentum to integration of these groups.

References


The content of the Introduction to Social Welfare course in 168 bachelor of social work (BSW) programs is analyzed including major concepts presented, research results and statistical data presented or assigned, theoretical perspectives used, and the perceived importance of, and methods used to develop values. Several problems with the introductory course are identified: no set body of content, minimal support by research and statistical data, frequent lack of explicit theoretical content, and an overriding emphasis on developing values. More uniformity in content is necessary in order to facilitate the development of good teaching materials and to provide a firm foundation upon which to build the rest of the curriculum.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is the body recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA) as the accreditation agency for professional education for social work. CSWE has recognized and accredited bachelor of social work (BSW) programs since 1974. The accreditation standards developed by CSWE contain rather specific information on the content to be covered in the five professional foundation areas—human behavior and the social environment, social welfare policy and service, social work practice, research, and field practicum. The standards are silent, however, on what content should be included in the introductory course, or courses, and how this should be organized. The survey reported here seeks to ascertain how bachelor of social work programs handle the introduction to social welfare course.

Purpose and Literature Review

The introduction to social welfare course has been given very little attention in the literature. Periodically there has been
a major study, or studies, of social work education that have included attention to the undergraduate curriculum. In 1951 there was the Hollis-Taylor study that included a chapter on undergraduate education (Chapter IV:155–209). The 1959 Council on Social Work Education Curriculum Study included a volume on undergraduate education (Bisno, 1959). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when it became obvious that undergraduate programs were going to be recognized by CSWE, a whole spate of practical books and monographs on the undergraduate curriculum emerged (CSWE, 1969a; CSWE, 1969b; Feldstein, 1972; Glick, 1972; McPheeters, 1971; McPheeters & Ryan, 1971; Ryan & Reynolds, 1970). The Report of the Undergraduate Social Work Curriculum Development Project was published in 1978 (Baer & Federico). Most of these studies briefly mention the introductory course(s) but in only one instance is it discussed in any detail (Schwartz in Ryan & Reynolds, 1970). In addition, there has been one study of the introductory course as it is taught in Australia (Jones, 1982).

This lack of attention to the content and structure of the introduction to social welfare course constitutes a serious gap in the knowledge base of social work educators. It can be argued that for several reasons the introductory course is one of the most important in the social work curriculum. First, the introductory course is the one upon which the rest of the social work curriculum is built. It is so obvious that it really does not bear elaboration, that if the introductory course is weak and poorly thought out the rest of the curriculum is not going to come together as a unified whole. Second, the introductory course serves as the gateway to the social work profession for many students. A good introductory course will provide students with a sound basis on which to make the decision of whether or not social work is the career for them. Providing students with a basis for a negative decision is as valuable, if not more so, than providing them with the basis for a positive decision. A familiar figure in the social work profession is the disillusioned public welfare supervisor who entered social work because early in his or her education someone portrayed social work as a slightly different type of psychiatry. Finally, the introductory course is taken by a large number of persons who
go on to other careers, and this provides social work educators with the opportunity to sensitive them to social welfare concerns and to educate them in the perspective of the social work profession. More than 30 years ago Hollis and Taylor (1951) remarked that:

The neglect of this basic educational responsibility by the social work profession has been an important factor in the production of a generation of city and county officials, legislators, governors, educators, doctors, businessmen, lawyers, labor leaders, and citizens in hundreds of other occupations who do not have enough understanding of the purpose and operation of public and private welfare programs to give them the support commonly accorded health and education activities. (p. 161–162).

The purpose of the study reported here is to gain information on how the introductory social welfare material is handled in baccalaureate social work programs. The specific questions addressed are: (1) What are the major concepts presented and how much do these vary between programs? (b) To what extent are the concepts explicitly placed in theoretical context and what theories are applied? (c) To what extent are the concepts backed up by research and other types of data? (d) What is the role and importance of the study of values and in what ways are they presented?

Method

A questionnaire and a self-addressed envelope were mailed to all 360 BSW programs accredited by CSWE. The questionnaire asked for responses to 20 items designed to provide a description of the introductory social welfare course. Twelve of the items were closed ended and requested descriptive information such as number of introductory courses, number and classification of students, text used, and so forth. Six of the items asked for lists of major and secondary concepts presented, theories discussed, research presented or assigned in readings, other types of data presented, and methods used to present material on values. Two Likert scale items asked for instructors' satisfaction
with the textbook used and perception of the importance of students developing "appropriate" values. One hundred seventy-three questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 48%. Of those returned, 140 were completely usable, 28 partially usable, and 5 were not usable. In addition to the questionnaire, respondents were requested to provide course outlines. Ninety-seven respondents (27%) included course outlines.

The open ended items on the questionnaire and the course material were analyzed by content analysis. Manifest content categories were set up and the occurrence of category units were counted. Content analyzed were major concepts covered in the class, theories used to analyze and explain the concepts presented, research and other data presented related to the concepts, and methods used to develop values.

Results

Organization of Introductory Content

A literature review indicated that originally most BSW programs organized the introductory content into two courses (Lyndon, 1969: 11; Sarnoff, 1969: 34; Schwartz, 1970: 2; Witte, 1970: 67). Generally, the content in one of these courses was introductory to the social work profession and dealt with things like settings in which social workers are employed (corrections, public welfare, etc.), methods used by social workers in these settings (direct practice with individuals, community organization, etc.), and social worker roles (broker, advocate, etc.). The content in the other course was introductory to the social welfare institution and dealt with topics such as social problems, the social welfare system, social welfare history, etc. In order to determine how the introductory content is currently organized the questionnaire began with several items regarding the number of introductory courses in the respondents curriculum, the title of the courses, and where the content regarding the social welfare institution is located. In addition the ninety-seven course outlines submitted were analyzed.

The initial purpose of this study was to look at the organization and content of the social welfare institution course. However, the responses to the questionnaire indicate that the
majority of programs (63%) have collapsed all of the content into one course. An examination of the course materials indicates that this has not been done on any systematic basis. Courses with the title “Introduction to Social Welfare” at different institutions may be very different depending on whether the focus is on the social work profession or on the social welfare institution. Thus, rather than looking at just the introduction to social welfare course as was originally intended, this study looks at this course plus courses with combined content.

Study Sample

The enrollment in the introductory course was fairly small for most of the respondents. Fifty-eight percent of the programs responding enrolled 50 or fewer students in this course each year, 29% enrolled between 51 and 100, and only 21% enrolled over 100 students. On the average 65% of students enrolled in the introductory course were social work majors and 35% were majoring in other areas. The most common majors other than social work were psychology, sociology, and criminal justice. It is not possible to directly check now representative these figures are because no other figures are available specifically on introductory course enrollment. However, these figures correspond to CSWE data on overall BSW program enrollment that reports that programs have a median of 32.3 junior/senior majors, an average of 70.3 majors in all levels, and that 64% of students enrolled in classes are social work majors (Rubin, 1983).

Major Course Content

The results of the content analysis of the two open ended questionnaire items on concepts presented, the statements of objectives in course materials returned with the questionnaire, and of the course outlines returned is summarized in Table 1. The results indicate a good deal of similarity between courses but little uniformity. Even with the very general categories used in this analysis only 5 out of 12 content areas are evidenced in more than half of the courses. Of these 5, only historical content comes close to being universally included. In addition to the course content included in the categories, there
### Table 1

**Major Content Areas Presented**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Emphasis</th>
<th>Questionnaire Response (N=142)</th>
<th>Course Objectives (N=90)</th>
<th>Course Outline (N=88)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Programs</td>
<td>% of Programs</td>
<td>Number of Programs</td>
<td>% of Programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>36.62</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18.31</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
<td>54.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues/</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.53</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fields of/ Practice</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20.42</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.63</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work Profession</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality/Power/Oppression</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22.53</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Values &amp; Social Welfare</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.08</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.04</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism/Sexism Agism</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Approach</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Welfare As Social</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptions of Social Behavior</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Human/Needs/Worth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were literally dozens of additional topics that were included in only a few courses; for example, international social welfare, comparative political systems, parens patriae, and professional-bureaucratic conflict.

Research and Data

Considering the emphasis that has been present for the past decade on social work becoming a research based profession, the results regarding research and statistical data are disappointing. Only 30 respondents (21.1%) indicated that they present, or assign as readings, any research whatsoever. The content analysis of course materials was a little more positive with 46.5% of the course material showing some evidence of research content, although in most cases it was slight. Several respondents indicated that because this is an introductory course they think research is not appropriate. Of those few who do present research findings or require that the student read research articles the material is varied. Several require that students read and report on research articles of their choice, some present "poverty studies," several presented the St. Paul Multi-Problem Family studies, and a few discussed Hollingshead and Redlich's work on social class and mental illness. Other than these, research used was unique to the respondent's course.

In a similar fashion less than one quarter of the respondents indicated that they presented other types of data in the introductory course. Thirty-four programs (23.9%) listed other types of data. The most common data presented came from state and federal data bases and include welfare program and social security statistics, poverty data, and income distribution data. Nongovernmental sources mentioned included American Humane Association child abuse and neglect data, League of Women Voters public assistance data, and National Organization for Women Reagonomics data. City, state, and federal budgets were also used.

Theory

The findings regarding the inclusion of theory in the introductory course indicate that more attention is paid to this
than to research results and statistical data, but the findings are disappointing nonetheless. More than one-third of the respondents indicated that they do not explicitly include any theoretical content in their courses. A number responded to the question with a statement to the effect that the course was descriptive, not theoretical, and that theory would come later in the curriculum. Further, from the responses of the 61% who do include theoretical content it is apparent that many social work faculty do not think of theory in traditional social science terms, as systematic intellectual frameworks which guide knowledge building and practice. A number of items were listed by respondents as theories which would be more accurately described as observations about the American character (blaming the victim, protestant ethic), political or management strategies (Reaganomics, welfare capitalism), or approaches to practice (generalist, eclectic, person-in situation). Table 2 summarizes theories presented in the introductory course as reported by the respondents.

Table 2

Theories Presented in Introduction to Social Welfare

Number of Programs Teaching any Theory = 86

% of Programs = 60.56

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic theories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laissez-Faire</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Reaganomics&quot;</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: Trickle down</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Determinism</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply Side</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare Capitalism</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Theory</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Programs Teaching Economic Theory = 36

% of Programs = 25.35
Social Theories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Darwinism</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Blaming the Victim”</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labeling</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Economy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of Poverty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Interaction</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Ethic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Theory</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: Malthus (3), Social Change (3), Exchange (3), Organizational (2), Subcultural (2), Individualism (2), Differential Association (1), Social Control (1), Political Ideology (1).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Programs Teaching Social Theories = 62
% of Programs = 43.66

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological theories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rational Emotive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maslow Hierarchy of Needs</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freudian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ego Psychology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Programs Teaching Psychological Theory = 30
% of Programs = 21.13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social work theories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psycho-Social</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others: Socio-behavioral (3), Eclectic (2), Life Model (2), Person-in-Situation (2), &quot;Various Casework&quot; (1).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Programs Teaching Social Work Theory = 26
% of Programs = 18.31
The one area in which the respondents were consistently in agreement is that of the importance of students developing an "appropriate" value system as an objective for the introductory course. The item on the questionnaire gave no indication of what this value system might be, assuming that respondents would know what was meant. This assumption was borne out by the fact that only 2 of the 140 respondents indicated any feeling of ambiguity about the item. On a 7-point scale with 1 indicating most important and 7 indicating little importance, the mean response was 1.7. The distribution of responses is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

"How important do you think it is for students to begin to develop an appropriate value system in this course?"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
N = 140 \\
\bar{X} = 1.7
\]
The means faculty employ to help students develop an appropriate value system are so diverse as to almost defy categorization. What categorization was possible is presented in Table 4. The "other" category is comprised of a number of methods like a "value auction," autobiographical sketch, reading articles authored by persons with differing political perspectives, and "myth debunking."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Programs</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value clarification exercises</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiential exercises</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective class experiences</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study of NASW and/or NABSW Code of Ethics</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role playing</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group discussion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of case examples</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[N = 140\]

Note: Number of Programs exceeds N and percent exceeds 100 due to programs listing more than one method.

Discussion

The results of this survey of the introductory course in the social work curriculum are troubling. What emerges is a picture of a course with no set body of content, minimally supported by research or other statistical data, often with no explicit theoretical perspective, with an emphasis on developing values. A recent analysis of the social policy curriculum, in which introduction to social welfare is generally considered the
first course, resulted in similar findings, the author concluding that "a laissez-faire doctrine seems to prevail" (Seipel, 1980, p. 53).

The fact that the course has no uniform body of content can be explained as a result of three factors. The first is historical. When the baccalaureate social work curriculum was first envisioned, the recommendation was for two introductory courses. One was introductory to the social work profession and was related to the sequence of courses designed to teach methods of social work practice, the other was introductory to the social welfare institution and was related to the sequence of courses designed to familiarize students with social welfare policy. Over the years two thirds of the programs have collapsed this material into one course. Sometimes this one course is the same as the social work course and sometimes as the social welfare course, most often it is a varied mix of concepts from both. The second factor accounting for the lack of uniform content in the introductory course is that this reflects the state of the profession. Social work has never had a uniform view of itself, and the debate regarding what social work is continues to rage. The final reason is what may be called benign neglect. Over the last 15 years there has been only one article published dealing with the introductory course, and that was published in Australia (Jones, 1982). The result of this neglect has been that each BSW program has developed the course almost entirely on its own.

The miscellaneous jumble of content in the introductory course reflects, or is reflected by, the textbooks available. Jones (1982) notes:

In other fields of study there tends to be more agreement on content and approach. Introductory textbooks in established subjects such as economics, psychology, Australian politics, and sociology tend to follow common themes... However, amongst those involved in teaching social welfare there is less agreement on basic content. A review of recent North American or Australian texts... shows a remarkable diversity of approach and content. (p. 10)

A quick review of texts used by respondents found that some take a social problems approach (Johnson, 1986; Zastrow,
1986); some take an introduction to the social work curriculum approach (Federico, 1984; Morales and Sheafor, 1983) some take a sociology and economics welfare approach (Bell, 1983; Dolgoff & Feldstein, 1984); and one is basically a history of social welfare (Compton, 1980).

It can be argued that the lack of uniformity in the introductory course is not a problem. What is important is the whole curriculum and that all of the material specified in the CSWE accreditation standards is covered somewhere in the curriculum. There are several problems with this argument. The first, and probably least important, is the matter of student transfers. Most programs will have students transferring in and out each year. It creates problems for both faculty and students when transfer students get to advanced courses and find they have not had necessary prerequisite material. The second reason lack of uniformity is a problem is that it makes the task of textbook and teaching material development very difficult. Social workers need to come to some agreement as a profession and an academic discipline on what content should be in the introductory course so they can systematically develop texts and supporting material. Finally, the lack of uniformity in the introductory course reflects a lack of agreement in the profession about who social workers are and what they are about. In the author's opinion, this is the issue in the profession today and one that needs to be resolved. The first course in the series seems to be a good place to start.

In a similar fashion it can be argued that the lack of research and descriptive data about the social welfare institution in the introductory course is not a problem. We are currently witnessing a reaction to the empirical emphasis in social work that has been present for the past 15 or so years (for example, see Davis, 1985, & Heineman, 1981). The argument, admittedly oversimplified here, is that social work has overemphasized empirical knowledge and underemphasized intuitive knowledge. Although this argument may have some merit in certain areas of social work knowledge, it is not applicable to the introductory course. For a beginning understanding of social welfare, students need facts. They need to know poverty rates; relationships between poverty and other variables such as race and sex;
correlates of mental illness, child placement, unemployment, drug usage; data regarding effectiveness of intervention; the list goes on and on. The argument presented here is not that empirical research is the only road to knowledge, but that it is a necessary starting place.

There is also an argument that the lack of explicit theoretical content in 40% of the courses does not constitute a problem. Several of the respondents summarized this on the questionnaire by stating that the course is descriptive, not theoretical. Hoover (1980) lists the uses of theory as: (a) Theory provides patterns for the interpretation of data; (b) Theory links one study with another; (c) Theories supply frameworks within which concepts and variables acquire special significance; (d) Theory allows us to interpret the larger meaning of our findings for ourselves and others. (p. 39) Facts, or descriptions, without theory have little meaning. If a student is not exposed to patterns, links, frameworks, and the larger meaning of material presented in introduction to social welfare, the course will have little lasting value.

The one area in which the courses are clearly in agreement is the emphasis on study and development of appropriate social work values. Even this can be viewed as a problem. Meinert (1980), for example, has said:

Deeply embedded in the profession is the belief that institutionalized social work is based on a trinity of identifiable knowledge, values, and skills. Certainly a shared body of knowledge and skills exists in social work. This article strongly questions, however, whether a system of values is truly present. It argues that values in social work are nonexistent; they are a myth, a myth we can live without. If social workers do possess any “values,” they are not unique ones, but only preference patterns shared by the general population. (p. 5)

Meinert concludes that:

...the most prudent and realistic position would be for social work education and practice to eliminate values completely from public statements and emphasize only its knowledge and skill components. (p. 5)
Meinert's conclusions may be a bit drastic. However, they do serve to emphasize that if social workers are going to place values in the central position in the introductory course, they need to devote time and effort to clearly specifying what values to pass on, what the basis is for them, and how to communicate them.

The CSWE accreditation standards do specify that social work values are to be clearly dealt with in the curriculum, although they do not specify exactly where this is to occur. It appears that most programs have identified the introductory course as the appropriate location for at least part of this content.

Conclusion

The introductory course in the social work curriculum has been ignored by the profession. The result has been that programs have developed the course more or less independently of one another with the result of little uniformity or, in some cases, even little similarity between one course and another. Each individual professor in each individual program presents whatever material he or she considers applicable in whatever manner they think effective. The two exceptions are that programs appear to generally include content in the introductory course on history and at least part of the CSWE mandated content on values. Other than the wide diversity of content, the major shortcoming of the introductory course as it is currently taught in most programs is that it is generally atheoretical and lacking in research content.

The Council on Social Work Education asserts that it is concerned that minimum content be included in the curriculum somewhere, not with exactly how programs organize their curriculum to provide the required content. This is a good policy and the author is not advocating for more intrusive accreditation standards. The problem, rather, is one of the state of social work as an academic discipline. Sociology, for example, has no accreditation at all, yet sociologists have reached agreement about the content and organization of their curriculum material and this is reflected in the organization of the introductory course. A debate needs to begin in the social work profession
regarding what constitutes basic organization and content of the introductory course and this debate needs to continue until the issue is resolved.

References


The Impact of DRGs on Social Workers in a University-Affiliated, Teaching Hospital System

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The impact of DRGs on social workers in four social work departments located in one Northeast State was assessed by interviews with all social work staff and administrators. The impact of DRGs was determined to be substantial. Implications for social work education and practice are considered.

Planning effective social work services for patients in acute health care settings in a timely, collaborative, and systematic way has challenged social workers since their introduction into this setting at the beginning of this century (Lubove, 1973; Bracht, 1978). As established members of the health care team in many hospitals, social workers have broadened their roles as hospitals have expanded their available services through new technology and increased funding. But any change in funding, whether more or less, alters a complex system, creating both opportunities and problems.

Fuchs (1986) notes that the first two revolutions in health care financing in the United States, resulted in greater accessibility to health care, especially for the elderly and the poor. But the costs of health care, despite the gains of accessibility, were seen as too great. Concerned with the upward spiral in the cost of health care throughout the 1970s, the increase in federal spending on health, and the growing federal deficit, Congress set in motion the third revolution in health care financing by mandating a prospective pricing system for Medicare,
effective for most states in October of 1983 (Joseph, Sandrick & Shannon, 1983).

In the new system, hospitals are reimbursed for care on the basis of the patient's assigned Diagnosis Related Group (DRG), which is determined by principal diagnosis, secondary diagnosis and up to three procedures (Steinwold & Dammit, 1989). Several authors (Fuchs, 1986; Reamer, 1985) suggest that the emphasis of the federal government on cost, and the resulting deemphasis on access and health, have created a crisis in the entire health care system. Because social work, as a profession, is concerned with providing for basic needs of clients including health care, how has the radical change in health care financing affected social work and social workers? Studies of the impact of DRGs on social work departments, using social work directors as sources of data, indicate that they view the new financing system more positively than negatively (Patchner & Wattenberg, 1985; Dinerman, Seaton & Schlesinger, 1986; Survey Reveals, 1987), and the overall effect on staff and staffing patterns has been low (Survey Reveals, 1987).

To date, however, no research has focused on the impact of DRGs on the front line social worker. Although directors have been surveyed, their distance from direct care and their management role may give them a different perspective than that of their staff (Bailis, 1987). And recent research indicates that urban and teaching hospitals, in particular, have been disproportionately affected by DRGs due to their service to patients who are sicker and more medically complicated (Horn, Sharkey, Chambers & Horn, 1985; Sheingold, 1986). A detailed study of one urban teaching hospital system affected by DRGs might indicate some of the particular problems faced by social workers in similar settings and provide some implications for practice and education.

Description of the Study

Methodology

In 1985, two years after the implementation of DRGs, the authors planned an in-depth study of the impact of this new policy on social work departments and social workers in the
one teaching hospital system located in a Northeast state. Four hospitals, of the eight clinical facilities, were affected by DRGs and, thus, the social work departments in these four facilities were studied. The largest hospital in the system has 719 beds and 35 employed professional social work staff. The other hospitals have bed sizes of 306, 247, and 238 with social work staff positions of 10, 5, and 9 respectively.

Data collection began in August 1985 and concluded in May 1986. A total of 56 social workers and social work administrators were interviewed by the principal investigator. The interview was made up of closed ended questions and open-ended questions. Interviews lasted from 2 to 4 hours. The response rate was 100%.

Study Population Characteristics

The study population was made up of 4 directors (7.1%), one assistant director (1.8%), 4 chiefs of service (7.1%), 29 MSW level social workers (51.8%), 17 social work assistants, BA, or BSW level (30.4%), and one transfer coordinator (1.8%).

Social workers provided direct services in the following areas: Medical/Surgical (54.9%), Pediatrics (19.6%), Psychiatry (7.8%), Specialty Area (9.8%), all hospital referrals (3.9%), and nursing home placements only (3.9%). Most respondents were MSWs (66%), with a much smaller number of BSWs (16.1%), BAs (12.5%) and other degreed workers (5.4%).

Nineteen social workers (34%) had been employed by their respective hospital social service department for less than 2 years. The remaining 37 social workers (66%) had been employed from 2 to 16 years. Thus the majority of respondents had worked in a hospital prior to and during the implementation of DRGs.

Forty-six (82.1%) of the interviewed social workers were female, 10 were male (17.9%). Sixty six percent of the administrators were males. The average 1985 salary of the responding MSW nonadministrator social workers was $21,600; the average salary of the responding BA/BSW social workers was $18,800.
Findings

The Social Workers Responses

When asked "What has been the impact of DRGs on the work that you do?" 47.8% responded that DRGs had created more pressure and increased their caseloads. Several respondents (14.6%) reported that there was more of a focus on discharge planning, 6.3% discussed their perception that social work values were in conflict with the hospital bureaucracy, and 31.3% said they experienced no change in their work (N=48). Although more than two-thirds of the respondents reported a change, close to one-third did not.

Many respondents discussed particular changes that they had experienced in medical settings since DRGs. One worker said:

I feel I can manage and handle the intensity — it's manageable — theoretically it's copable. I think it is fast moving; it's a fast moving environment. It almost becomes impersonal. That's what really bothers me — the human element is diminishing. It's quick. For example, someone needs to leave today, and needs oxygen. The task will be completed, but without the human contact. Five years ago, we'd go and talk to the patient about the oxygen. It may not be that way today, depending on the day of the social worker.

Many social workers commented on bureaucratic control that affected their autonomy as professionals. An MSW commented: "In 1983, I decided who I was going to pick up; I was more in control. Now I feel as though someone else is defining my work for me." Another MSW reflected: "There is conflict here — I realize that the hospital is under financial pressure and the hospital pays you. Or is your responsibility to the patient who should be advocated for? It's a perpetual bind we all feel."

When asked, "What aspects of patient care, with which you have worked directly, have changed as a result of DRGs?", 62.5% responded with a combination of the following: less time to work, more tasks to do, patients are leaving sicker, the work is less thorough. Another 4.2% felt that there was less autonomy to evaluate situations and 33.3% saw no change (N=48).
The open ended comments of the workers revealed additional details. A worker commented: "It seems like right now we're just pushing bodies around and we're not treating people as people."

Another worker reflected on time and tasks:

"I feel really good about what I do, but my dissatisfaction about what I don't get to do outweighs it. I do a good job but I don't have enough time to really utilize my skills and develop them — if you don't use them you lose them. Occasionally I have a good day. Overall I'm being underutilized, I'm not underachieving. Personally, I think that's unhealthy for me professionally."

Social Workers' Views of DRG Impact on other Professionals

Because DRGs have had a system wide impact on many professionals, the social workers were asked, "What differences have you seen on the part of physicians with whom you interact as a result of DRGs?" Thirty four percent reported that physicians were more aware of the need for discharge planning, 30% said there was no change, 26% said they perceived that physicians felt out of control, were frightened, angry or frustrated. Six percent felt that doctors were documenting more in the charts while only four percent said that doctors were discharging patients early (N=50).

Nurses appeared to be less directly affected by DRGs. Most of the responding social workers (56.6%) saw no change in nurses, 22.6% reported that nurses were affected by shorter stays of sicker patients, 18.9% said that nurses were more interested in discharge planning, and 1.9% saw interprofessional conflict between nurses and social workers (N=53).

A new or restructured division had emerged in most of the hospitals to deal with the implementation of DRGs. Staffed by nurses, and referred to by such titles as quality assurance or utilization review coordination, this unit was charged with assisting in assignment of the appropriate diagnosis and, consequently, determining the length of stay a patient would have in the hospital (In one hospital in the study, the size of this division had increased 300% since 1983).
When asked about changes social workers had seen in the quality assurance/utilization review staff, the modal response was that there was "more monitoring of social workers" by the utilization review staff (38.7%), followed by "no change" (31.8%). A smaller percentage (11.4%) perceived that quality assurance/utilization personnel were referring more patients to social workers, the same percentage (11.4%) felt that there was more collaboration between the two departments. The remainder (6.8%) reported that more quality assurance staff now covered smaller areas of the hospital (N=44).

Overall Changes Due to DRGs

When asked what differences they saw in their respective departments due to DRGs, the most frequent response included more pressure/stress/decreased job satisfaction (69.2%). Other differences were: the department was more concerned with discharge planning (10.9%), that more staff had been added (3.6%) and that there was conflict with quality assurance (3.6%). Only 12.7% of the respondents said that there had been no change in their department (N=55). Thus, almost 90% of the respondents perceived that change had occurred in their respective departments due to DRGs.

An MSW worker reflected on job satisfaction and impersonality.

People's satisfaction with their jobs has decreased; they tell you that they feel like they can't sit down in a room. They need to make an exit instead of a comprehensive assessment. They don't feel that they've had an interaction with a person. Two months later, when the patient is readmitted, they don't remember the patient.

Increasingly, social workers discussed the change in the patient population and the more complicated needs of patients.

Although the census is down here, due to the private physicians who see their patients privately (and outside the hospital), the smaller number of people who come here are more complex in their needs. The psychosocial needs are more
Impact of DRGs

complex. So there is a greater need for social work services although the numbers are fewer.

Finally, many workers reflected on their overall satisfaction with their work. An MSW commented:

Generally, I enjoy hospital social work. I enjoy the stimulation of dealing not only with the patient population but a diverse group of other professionals. There are times I enjoy the stimulation of the pace, but there is a very thin line between optimism and stimulation and enjoyment, and being overwhelmed, overstimulated and harassed. It’s like being on a pinnacle and falling down one side or the other. It’s hard to maintain a balance.

The Departments

Since the implementation of DRGs in 1983, two of the four departments reported a 25% increase in caseloads, coupled with a drop in the average length of stay for Medicare patients. The other two departments reported no substantial change in caseload size or length of stay.

A very important finding was the increase in the average number of staff sick days: 4.8 in 1983, 5.7 in 1984 and 7.1 in 1985. In computing the average number of sick days, outliers were excluded. Although there were no significant differences between 1983 and 1985, the increase in the number of sick days was identified by several social workers as a source of concern in their respective departments.

One administrator, commenting on the overall impact of DRGs stated, “The stress and tension have caused demoralization and powerlessness. The demand and expectations from the DRGs are sometimes different than what we were trained to do.” Every administrator noted that his/her staff was experiencing additional stress.

Conclusions

The findings of this study contrast sharply with the research to date on DRGs and social work departments. Available research, which has relied on the responses of hospital social
work directors, indicates that the impact of DRGs on social work departments has been low (Survey Reveals, 1987; Patchner & Wattenberg, 1985; Dinerman, Seaton, and Schlesinger, 1986). There are several reasons for these research results to be so different from those of prior researchers. It is possible that this teaching hospital system may be unrepresentative of such institutions and/or that the responses of the staff are atypical. Alternatively, it may be that hospital social service directors have a very different perspective than that of the front line social worker. Further research is necessary to determine if this is an isolated or more general finding.

In the present study, however, the impact of DRGs seems substantial, both on a person level for the social workers directly affected by DRGs and, particularly, on a department level. Workers reported that they experienced additional stress in their own workload and in their departments in general with the implementation of DRGs. Another possible indicator of stress, the average number of staff sick days, showed a clear increase from 1983 to 1985. Interestingly, several respondents had independently discussed their own perceptions of increased sickness in their departments, which affected the caseloads of other workers.

Another important finding, more often discussed in the open ended interviews, was the issue of the bureaucratic/professional conflict and the influence of that conflict on work satisfaction. This conflict is not new; social workers have always had to deal with this, particularly in health care settings. But the intensity of this conflict appears to be heightened by DRGs which tend to focus so much on cases, that quality and humaneness may be comprised, a concern of other social work authors (Reamer, 1985; Dinerman et al., 1986). Concurrent with the heightened awareness of the bureaucratic/professional conflict is the issue of autonomy. There appears to be an erosion of the autonomy that workers perceive that they enjoyed in the pre-DRG era. In addition, there is a problem of balance; balance between dealing with emotional and tangible needs,
balance between doing a comprehensive job and an adequate job. Workers care about those differences and they worry about them. Ultimately, these factors may influence work satisfaction, professional challenge and, finally, job turnover.

Another concern was the issue of severity of illness and the need for more services. The medical literature is beginning to address the issue of severity of illness and how that factor is not adequately reflected in the present DRG system (Horn, Sharkey, Chambers, and Horn, 1985; Sheingold, 1986). Severity of illness also affects the work social workers do and the plans which are formulated with a patient. It seems critical that recording systems should reflect social work interventions which are different from the number of patients/clients in a caseload (Coulton, 1984) (A word of caution is necessary here. The most significant area of job dislike was paperwork/documentation/statistics, thus recording systems need to be streamlined, nonduplicative and useful, while meeting the need for accountability).

Although mentioned only occasionally by the direct service providers, all of the administrators discussed the increase in interdisciplinary rivalry which they had observed since the implementation of DRGs. As resources contracted, they reported the need to be well-positioned politically to defend their budgets and staffing. All the directors of social work discussed the necessity of defending their own departments against the perceptions of their respective utilization review staffs, the hospital unit with power directly related to the determination of diagnoses and, ultimately, hospital reimbursement. When the direct service providers were aware of interdisciplinary rivalry, it was with nurses, typically utilization review/quality assurance nurses.

The findings of this study, though different from prior research, are not surprising. If, as Victor Fuchs (1986) suggests, the health care system of the United States is undergoing a "revolution" and DRGs have created "...the most fare reaching" (Vladeck, 1984) change since the creation of Medicare in 1965, the effect on direct providers of health care services, including social workers, should be substantial.
Implications for Practice & Education

Given the findings of this research, that substantial change has taken place in these hospital social service departments since 1983, what can be learned from this study that has more general utility for other social workers in health care systems?

First, the comprehensive needs of patients and their families must guide practice. With shorter in-patient stays and shorter recovery time, patients are leaving “quicker and sicker” (Grady, 1986; Wallis, 1986). As a result, high risk screening is essential along with extensive use of outside resources, ranging from skilled nursing facilities to in-home support programs. Recent research (Semke, VanDerWeele, and Weatherly, 1989) indicates that a critical variable in discharge delay is the lack of post-hospital beds, a systems problem that an individual social worker is unable to address.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon social workers and social work departments, in collaboration with hospital administrators, to deal with the impact of DRGs on state and national levels, particularly at the level of policy formation. The particular knowledge of the front line social worker is essential to addressing and providing humane solutions in the creation of health care policy which equalizes the weighting of access, health and cost. As care for patients moves outside the acute care hospital, social workers must also be involved in leadership positions in planning services for the complex needs of patients and families.

A particularly disturbing finding of the research was the increase in interdisciplinary rivalry, noted by all the directors of the departments surveyed. With the pressures to cut costs, all hospital departments find themselves involved in a zero-sum game (Thurow, 1980); if one department receives a benefit, it is likely to be at some cost to another. Social work departments must seek out allies in this difficult climate while continuing to demonstrate the importance of their own role in service provision for patients and families.

A second issue relates to the education of social workers for practice in such a changing environment. Knowledge of high risk screening is essential, as well as rapid assessment skills. Utilization of community resources and close working relation-
 ships with home care services are other areas in which social workers must maintain their expertise. Patients/clients must also be informed of their rights, an important educational role that the social worker needs to assume during the shorter hospital length of stay (Mizrahi, 1988).

A closer look should be given to the skills and tasks required in the specific area of discharge planning. Careful consideration should also be given to the use of entry level professionals who might make up a team, or share cases with experienced, advanced level practitioners.

While the post-hospital needs of patients discharged expeditiously are likely to be tied to community resources, the social worker's critical contribution is "...enhancing the participation of patient and family" (Kerson & Zelinka, 1989, p. 199) in the entire planning process. Social work has a central role to play in the planning and delivery of health care services. It is our responsibility, as a profession, to advocate for accessible, as well as affordable, health care.

References


The Privatization of Housing in a Declining Economy: The Case of Stepping Stone Housing*

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The demand for housing for poor people in the United States has grown significantly in recent years. In response to the crisis, the federal government has recommended that housing policy should move in the direction of privatization, thereby removing the responsibility for housing from the federal government to the private sector. Stepping Stone Housing is a new program that is an example of privatization. Public housing residents who had been targeted by the program were surveyed and several problems with Stepping Stone Housing were discovered. The findings suggest that privatization may hurt poor people.

The housing crisis is an important issue in the U.S., especially for medium and low income households. "Since 1980 the aggregate supply of low income housing declined by approximately 2.5 million units" (Committee on Health Care for Homeless People (CHCHP), 1988, p. 25). As a result, the gap between demand and supply of affordable housing for poor people more than doubled between 1980 and 1985. By 1986, only half of the nation's 8.1 million low income households were living in housing they could afford, compared to three quarters in 1980 (Fireman, 1986). The number of homeless continues to escalate (CHCHP, 1988; Hopper, 1985; Reyes & Waxman, 1986; Snow, Baker, Anderson, & Martin, 1986). Several interrelated factors have contributed to this problem: housing costs have increased more rapidly than wages (Angotti, 1986); the proportion of the people who are poor has increased (Democratic Staff, 1986); the government has made cuts in housing subsidies (Nenno, 1985; *This research was partially funded by the Charlotte Housing Authority. I would like to thank Anne Lance, Carolyn Pesakis, McRae Benson, and John Hayes for their work in data collection.
1986; U.S. Congress, 1987); low income housing has been destroyed by arson, demolition, and gentrification (Kasnitz, 1986; Mapes, 1985; Stegman, 1986).

As the gap between the demand for and supply of affordable housing grows, people look to government public housing agencies for shelter. In response to the growing pressure, governmental agencies are making a major shift in housing policy to privatization. The push toward privatization of housing has been most dramatic in Britain (Van Vleit, 1987; Forrest & Murie, 1988), and in the U.S., policy makers are seriously considering privatization as an answer to the housing crisis (President’s Commission on Privatization (PCP), 1988).

The research reported here is based on a case study of one privatization policy for housing that has recently been developed—Stepping Stone Housing (SSH). SSH was conceived in Charlotte, North Carolina and in 1987 Congress approved it as a model solution to the national housing crisis. The program was initiated in Charlotte in August, 1988. This paper discusses privatization, Stepping Stone Housing, and the problems it may create for participants in the program.

Privatization

Contemporary political policy is increasingly directed toward replacing public programs with resources from the private sector. Public officials have called for a transfer of responsibility for taking care of needs such as education, mental health care, social services and housing, from the tax supported, governmental agencies to the marketplace (Stoesz, 1987). In September 1987, by Executive Order 12607, Ronald Reagan created a commission to examine and propose revisions of the “appropriate division of responsibilities between the federal government and the private sector” in nine areas, the first of which was low-income housing.

The Commission’s report was issued in March 1988 and made six recommendations about low-income housing. Like all privatization plans, the recommendations called for the Federal “...Government to divest itself of its welfare responsibility to the extent possible. Second, private sector substitutes should be sought as a basis for welfare provisions” (Stoesz, 1987, p. 3).
Privatization of Housing

Those people currently living in public housing who, according to the federal government, could afford to enter the private housing market should be made to do so. Those who cannot afford to move into private housing should receive financial support from the government (for example, in the form of vouchers) to allow them to purchase housing in the private market.

The Commission argues that "...the impact of the privatization movement, broadly understood, is only beginning to be felt. Privatization in this broad sense may well be seen by future historians as one of the most important developments in American political and economic life of the late 20th Century" (PCP, 1988, p. 251).

The creation of this commission was an important step toward reversing the role of government in providing housing for poor Americans. However, the federal government did not wait for the Commission to make its report before it had already begun to implement the policy of privatization by cutting housing support. From 1976 to 1986, funding for Housing and Urban Development dropped 83% while federally funded construction of new low income housing declined in this same period by 90% (Nenno, 1986). The budget for the 1987 fiscal year called for no new housing subsidies and attempted to rescind funds and terminate a number of programs including Community Development Action Grants, Section 8 Existing Housing Certificates, and Section 202 Elderly Housing (Angotti, 1986). Although Congress denied many of the requested cutbacks, the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings Act mandated a cut of $32.7 million in Housing and Urban Development.¹

Stepping Stone Housing

Replacement programs are being proposed to move people who currently live in public housing² into the private market. Stepping Stone Housing (SSH) is an example of such a program. SSH will enlist people who are living in public housing, who according to the criteria of the program, have sufficient income to allow them to move into the private housing market. Households with an income of $12,500 or more are targeted for participation.
The program gives participants seven years in which to make the transition. During the first two years, rent is kept low to enable them to save money. Rents are set at $250 for a two bedroom apartment and $300 for a three bedroom apartment. During the first two years, participants are required to undergo job counseling and attend meetings to prepare them to be home owners. During the last five year segment of participation in the program, rent would be raised to 30% of the participant’s income. Depending on the size of the apartment, $250 to $300 is paid to the Housing Authority for rent, and the balance is placed in a savings account which participants can claim at the end of the seven year period to use as first and last payment for a rental, or preferably as a down payment on a house. Charlotte’s Public Housing Authority estimates that the savings plus interest will amount to more than $2,700 at the end of the seven years (Martin, 1988).

Methodology

The data for this study were collected prior to the implementation of the program to determine problems inherent in SSH and to insure that the people being targeted for this program would be heard. Since SSH was a new program of the Housing Authority and not well known, I could not ask people what they thought about SSH because nearly all would respond that they had never heard it. As a way of finding out what their opinion would be of a program like SSH, I asked them to talk about why they did not move out of public housing and the problems they anticipate if they move out. I assumed that their reluctance to leave Public Housing (even though they could, according to the Housing Authority, move out) would be the basis of their resistance to the Stepping Stone program.

This research was carried out in two steps. A group discussion with twelve public housing residents in Charlotte was videotaped. Then a questionnaire was developed to conduct a phone survey of 124 households. The subjects were randomly selected from a list of persons the Housing Authority had designated as targets for the Stepping Stone Project.
Findings: Barriers to Leaving Public Housing

Videotaped Discussions

During the videotaped discussion respondents were asked to talk about the reasons for staying in public housing. It was anticipated that their reasons for not wanting to move would center on two issues: money and friendships. During the videotaped discussion economic issues emerged as an important consideration; friendships were described as secondary.

People expressed concern about several economic issues: income, changing needs, job stability, housing costs, difficulty of saving, and housing maintenance costs. One woman stated that she and her family wanted to move out of public housing but when they assessed their finances they determined they could not afford it.

My children were pressuring me to move, but I set them down and showed them what my check was, all the little charges and things I had to buy to make them look half way decent when they go to school. I couldn’t afford it.

Others were concerned that unexpected expenses might come up in their families. Even if they were doing relatively well, they expected or feared that their economic situation would deteriorate in the future. One woman said, “If I’m living here [in public housing] I know my rent will not be over $300. I can afford a house today but I don’t know what my daughter will be needing—doctors and dentists.”

Another had gone so far as to look for other housing but was afraid to take the chance of moving.

I was looking for a house and I found one I could afford but then I looked at my paycheck and said: ‘Oh! What if my little girl gets sick?’ Then I thought about the lights and gas and the water and then I thought about the shoes I want to wear so I say its cheaper to stay. Like my mama had to go to the emergency room and I could do it but I can’t afford a house too. Being in the project it helps you a lot.

Fear that their income might decrease was another concern. One woman said:
You may go to work tomorrow and you may not have a job. What I’ve thought about—the house payment I don’t worry about—it’s the added bills: lights, water and if something breaks you have to get that fixed, all that extra stuff is what’s scared me off.

Another woman felt that illness might interfere with her ability to earn her present wages.

If you get sick now [while in public housing] you don’t have to pay the rent [because it is based on a sliding scale based on income]. But if you get sick in a home you still have got to make those mortgage payments. Common sense is going to tell you to stay there.

Respondents so reflected on their past economic difficulties as a hindrance to being able to really afford private housing, regardless of their present income. One pointed out:

One of the biggest drawbacks of moving that I’ve thought about is none of us have made the kind of money to let us put some away each time we got paid so that we could have a nest egg for emergencies or to make a down payment, without making us set aside another bill and put that bill further behind.

Age was another factor people took into consideration as a possible barrier to being able to remain in the private housing market. One person in her 40s said:

A house would have been fine if I had gotten it years ago when I was younger but now I see these things happen you don’t have enough to maintain it and pay taxes and the gas. I’m all for my children getting a house but I don’t see it for me.

Housing maintenance was also a consideration for people who saw themselves as growing older and their abilities changing. One woman explained:

And as I get older I’ve thought about that like when my sister’s husband passed. He did most of the yard work and
plumbing and that kind of thing. But [now] she can't afford to pay the bills and the grass is knee deep and I said 'A house is for the birds,' because my yard [in a public housing project] isn't very big and somebody else takes care of it.

These public housing residents report that they had consciously chosen to stay in public housing, even though they might be able to afford better private housing, because they saw it as a kind of pension plan. Social science literature has sometimes described poor people as more impulsive or less likely to plan for their future. In a classic statement of this assessment Banfield (1974, p. 53) argues:

The lower class individual lives from moment to moment. If he has any awareness of a future, it is something fixed, fated beyond his control: things happen to him, he does not make them happen. Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident. Whatever he cannot consume immediately he considers valueless.

The videotaped discussion suggests that poor people plan for the future, although they may do so in different ways and rely on different resources than upper income people do. A space in public housing serves as insurance against an unknown economic future.

The competition for public housing is intense. People who rely on it must be careful in making decisions to move out because it is likely they will never be able to move back, regardless of how bad their economic situation might become. Anyone who chooses to leave public housing cannot move back without getting on a waiting list. There are enormous waiting lists of people trying to get into public housing. The Mayors' Report (Reyes and Waxman, 1986) found that 61% of the cities they surveyed have frozen their waiting lists for public housing applicants. Charlotte has a waiting list of 2000 households that has been closed to new applicants for four years. Stepping Stone Housing stipulates that a resident who agrees to become involved in the program has agreed to leave public housing.
Once a resident has made the decision to be in the Stepping Stone program, his/her household cannot change its decision and remain in public housing.

**Telephone Survey**

The data from the telephone survey highlight several discrepancies between the Stepping Stone program and the perceived needs of the respondents.

On the average, families in the telephone survey had been living in public housing for 9.4 years. The number of years spent in public housing is an important question because the Stepping Stone Program places a limit of 7 years on residence in public housing. Many of these families had already exceeded the limit. The years already spent in public housing would not be counted against them when they entered Stepping Stone. If the length of time people currently live in public housing reflects their assessment of how long they need support, it indicates a potential conflict between the residents' needs and the program. The program may attempt to push them out before they are ready to do so.

In order to be targeted for participation in the SSH program, households must have an annual income of at least $12,500. The average income for the families in this survey was $16,097. The average monthly rent for a two bedroom apartment in Charlotte is $415 (Charlotte Apartment Association, 1988). If families find an average priced apartment, their housing costs (excluding utilities or any other expenses associated with housing) will equal almost one third of their annual family income. It is important to point out that the problem in Charlotte is not the availability of housing, but the availability of affordable housing for low and moderate income families. In 1989 there were 5000 units vacant because they were too expensive for those who wanted to rent (McClain, 1989).

Buying a house, not renting an apartment, is the stated goal for SSH. The goal of buying a house is probably unrealistic. SSH participants are supposed to save at least $2,700 dollars in seven years to use as a down payment, but the average price of a house in Charlotte is $104,633 (Metropolitan Listing Association, 1988). Finding an affordable house with even a $15,000 down
payment and an annual income of about $16,000 is not likely. In spite of these economic barriers, 57% of the people had thought about moving.

During one part of the telephone survey respondents were asked: "What do you like best about living in public housing?"

The two most frequent responses were "nothing" (20%) and "neighbors" (19%). Location, cost, and quiet were each mentioned by (13%) of the respondents, and space, privacy, being close to work, cleanliness, and other factors were each mentioned by fewer than 10% of those surveyed.

When asked about advantages of private housing 44% identified privacy, 16% cost, 13% quiet, 11% better quality, and the remainder identified safety, maintenance, or image. Public housing may be a necessity for many people, but they would welcome some way of getting into the private market. Fifty-three percent of the respondents thought that they could afford to move into private housing. Some think that they could afford housing in the private market, but they are not sure how long their income or housing costs will remain steady.

One of the issues discovered in the video interviews was the fear of economic decline because family income was partly based on a contribution by a son or daughter in the home who was earning an income. For example, one woman explained, "I have a daughter who will be going to college this year and next year I have another daughter who will be moving out and that will drop my income by 25%." This finding was supported by the data from the telephone survey (see Table 1).

Table 1

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<th>Family type</th>
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<td>%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married without children*</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married with children</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single without children*</td>
<td>67</td>
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<tr>
<td>Single with children</td>
<td>54</td>
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*under 18 years old
Another question in the telephone survey that relates to the issue of financial ability was: "Do you worry about the future?" The 69% who said they did were asked what they worried about most. They were most likely to worry about money and bills.

Conclusion and Discussion
The Current Economic Crisis
and The Debate over Privatization

The goal of SSH is to encourage public housing residents to move into housing in the private sector. The government is trying to get people out of public housing to reduce federal spending in this area. In a critique of privatization, Stoesz (1987, p. 4) states that "... privatization is unlikely to promote the general welfare. Instead it is more likely to be a ploy to strip government of its mandated responsibility to care for the needy."

The residents surveyed in this research are not entirely happy with public housing, but they describe a number of problems they associate with moving out. Respondents believe that their economic situation does not allow them to leave government subsidized housing. Kivisto (1987, p. 14) argues that their hesitancy is justified. "... there is an implicit assumption that housing trickles down to the lower class after the middle class has left it for new housing. However, a host of factors including location and cost serve to suggest that this does not occur." He insists that privatization as well as other recent changes in housing policy in "the immediate future would seem to signal a leaner and meaner welfare state" (1987, p. 15).

Fifty years ago, "the Wagner-Steagall bill, the Housing Act of 1937, established the essential basis for the public housing program" (Kivisto, 1987, p. 3). For 50 years the American government developed a program of public housing and in the past 8 years it has attempted to dismantle it. Why is this change occurring now? Why is the government abandoning poor people when they need the help the most? The answer lies in a changing economic situation in the United States. The American economy which grew steadily after WWII until the mid-70s began to decline in the last decade and is now in a severe crisis.
William VanVliet (1987) argues that housing policy that included governmental involvement was part of an expanding economy. "The structures of housing provision that arose during the postwar era were predicated on continuing economic growth, full employment and the maintenance of welfarist policies." The period from 1945 to 1975 was characterized by such an expanding economy and welfare state.

For 30 years after 1945, economic growth, rising real incomes, and the ascension to power of welfare-oriented political parties in the advanced capitalist countries laid the basis for the most sustained improvements in popular access to good housing ever experienced.

The forces that make politicians lean and mean today, are the same forces that make it more and more difficult to survive without government subsidies. "...In the 1950s U.S. business and industry produced 52% of the world's goods and services. The U.S. share of the world market dropped to 30% by 1970 and fell to 22% by 1984" (Fishman 1987, p. 523). Berberoglu (1988) also documents this decline. Capacity utilization in manufacturing went from 89.5% in 1965 to 70% in 1982. Durable goods production went from 86% in 1971 to 67% in 1982. From 1974 to 1984, American workers showed a net loss of 16% in real income. Trade deficits increased from $9.5 billion in 1976 to $124 billion in 1985. And most astoundingly, the total federal debt grew from $709 billion in 1977 to $2.1 trillion in 1986. These statistics paint a picture of an economic system that no longer can take care of the people living within it.

The economic crisis has forced political leaders to make choices. An era of affluence in the U.S. prior to the 1970s allowed policy makers to offer reforms to many Americans but the economic crisis is now so severe that there is not enough capital left to allow both the levels of profitability necessary to compete in the capitalist world, and to provide housing for all of its citizens.

The intensifying economic crisis led the capitalist class and its political representatives in Congress to begin the process of dismantling the welfare state...The capitalists, when
forced to choose between their profits and policies that would assure them, and policies that would support a decent standard of living for the workers, opted for their profits. (Fishman 1987, p. 524; see also Bluestone and Harrison, 1988)

The decisions made by policy makers to initiate programs like the privatization of housing will hurt many poor people because it forces them out of the protection of the government and the evidence indicates that the private market will not provide them with affordable shelter. For poor people and their advocates, decisions to privatize public housing and to force public housing residents into the streets are the wrong ones. The economic crisis that policy makers face, however, is real. If we are to resolve the housing problem we will need to go further than condemning lean and mean politicians. We must begin to question an economic system that cannot provide basic human necessities like food and shelter to a growing number of people.

References


Notes

1. Parallel trends occurred in the United Kingdom where the Thatcher government rapidly sold Council Housing. There are important differences between the U.K. and the U.S., however. The U.K.'s stock of public housing is much
larger and in fact constitutes a major part of the assets of the government (Forrest and Murie, 1988).

2. Public housing residents are defined in this paper as those people who are living in government owned buildings and who pay rent based on their income. This includes large apartment projects and scattered sites.

3. A few problems with data collection emerged. The vulnerability of respondents was one problem. The Housing Authority is an essential to the survival of the respondents. The videotape was done at the Housing Authority offices and the phone survey included questions about the respondents' knowledge of Stepping Stone Housing. The fact that so powerful an agency was asking questions of so vulnerable a group of people may have influenced responses.
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