

*We're a bit late with this issue, but for a good reason. We're producing a second "best of P&R" volume, given the success of our 1997 collection, Double Exposure: Poverty & Race in America (still available from us). The manuscript had to be delivered to the publisher (M.E. Sharpe, which put out our earlier book) by June 23 if the book is to come out this year, and so our energies were diverted to the many time-consuming tasks of selecting which articles and symposia to include, organizing the book, contacting authors for updating and permission forms, putting everything in the electronic format the publisher requires, and many other tasks. Most fortunately, our Mickey Leland Hunger Fellow, Jana Rumminger, was available as my partner in this project, and she did a bang-up job. You'll of course be hearing from us when the book comes out. — CH*

## The Outcomes of Welfare Reform for Women

by Barbara Gault and Annisah Um'rani

More than 90% of welfare recipient household heads are women, yet few policymakers recognize that discussions of welfare reform are by nature discussions of women's issues. Sex-based inequalities such as occupational segregation, unequal pay, insufficient family supports for workers, and elevated exposure to physical abuse and sexual harassment take a particularly hard toll on low-income and minority women. Debates on welfare policies and cost-benefit analyses of social supports for welfare recipients must take these realities into account.

The outcomes of welfare reform for women are mixed. New welfare policies have led to higher rates of work for current and former welfare recipients, but the jobs that women obtain are unstable, pay poor wages, and lack growth potential and benefits. At the same time, federal restrictions on job training diminish women's human capital development opportunities, and

reduce their potential to achieve long-term economic well-being. Welfare caseloads have dropped and employment rates have increased, but evidence suggests that hardship has increased for a significant proportion of women who leave welfare. While states have more funds and freedom to provide support services, most have failed to utilize available funds to make meaningful social investments in a timely fashion. African American and Latina women, as well as women from other underrepresented groups, are faring particularly poorly following welfare reform.

### Poor Quality Jobs

Former welfare recipients typically find jobs with low wages and few benefits. Analyses by the Urban Institute, based on 1997 survey data, found that 61% of welfare recipients were employed after leaving welfare, and 21% of current welfare recipients were

working. Those who left welfare were earning a median wage of \$6.61 per hour, and less than a quarter received employer-provided health benefits. Another study found that current and former welfare recipients were very

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unlikely to receive employer-provided benefits. Between 41% and 59% of welfare recipients did not have paid sick leave, and 26-41% did not receive paid vacation time. Between 20% and 32% collected neither benefit. State-level welfare leaver studies indicate that most women obtain jobs in retail sales, fast food or other service occupations.

## Increased Poverty and Hardship

According to an analysis of Current Population Survey (CPS) data, the poorest women became poorer following welfare reform. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that while single mothers in the lowest earnings quintile experienced significant increases in earnings from 1993-95, from 1995-97 they experienced a 10.7% decrease in earnings and a 6.7% decrease in disposable income. These results suggest that the economic growth and declines in reciprocity rates following passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) may not bring greater well-being to the most disadvantaged welfare recipients.

Several studies suggest that Black and Latina women have fared particu-

larly poorly following welfare reform, though little research has focused specifically on their experiences. Overall, Black and Latina women are more vulnerable to poverty than White women. While the overall poverty rate among single mothers in 1998 was 30%, 41% of Black, and 44% of Hispanic single mothers lived in poverty. In May 2000, the unemployment rate for the entire U.S. population was 4.1%, while the rate was 8.0% for African Americans and 5.8% for Hispanics. Educational disadvantages among minority women likely play a strong role in the higher poverty and unemployment rates experienced by this population.

Research suggests that Hispanic women have more difficulty finding jobs and may experience greater hardship than other welfare recipients. An analysis of the National Survey of America's Families found that adults

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## African-American and Latina women are faring particularly poorly following welfare reform.

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remaining on welfare are more likely to be Hispanic and less likely to be White, compared to those who leave welfare. A 1999 survey conducted at soup kitchens and other emergency service locations found that Latinos are less likely than other welfare recipients to hold a non-workfare job (17% of Latinos versus 24% of Blacks and 24% of Whites).

Welfare reform has reduced some women's access to basic living necessities. In the 1997 National Survey of America's Families, approximately 34% of current and former welfare recipients said they were having difficulty providing their families with enough food. Those who left welfare were significantly more likely to report difficulty getting food and paying rent than other low-income women. Some food-related hardship may be explained by the rapid decline in food

stamp use, even among former welfare recipients who are still eligible for the benefits, likely due to confusion among recipients as to eligibility requirements.

## Lack of Job Training and Educational Opportunities

Welfare reform legislation related to education has had a chilling effect on states' ability to provide meaningful job training. Restrictions in the law seem antithetical to consistent evidence demonstrating the relationship between job training, education and long-term economic well-being. Federal welfare regulations permit no more than 30% of the caseload to count vocational education toward the first 20 hours of work activity. Vocational education can count as a work activity for a maximum of 12 months. GED training, basic education and college education may be counted as work only if women are engaged in some other work activity for 20 hours a week, making it necessary for many women to drop out of school.

Following implementation of the welfare reform law, the U.S. General Accounting Office reported immediate drops in the proportion of welfare recipients receiving job training. Declines in welfare recipients' college enrollment have exceeded caseload declines. In addition, research indicates that welfare recipients who work outside of school are much more likely to be dropouts.

## Lack of Child Care and Other Supports

Child care expenses and lack of available child care continue to place giant financial and logistical burdens on welfare recipients, despite an influx of child care dollars through the Child Care and Development Block grant. The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund found that 55% of welfare recipients surveyed in New York City reported that they had re-

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ceived no help from case managers in securing child care. A 1999 review of welfare leaver studies by the Center for Law and Social Policy found that fewer than 50% of families studied were receiving child care subsidies. Given consistent findings that low-income mothers spend a far larger portion of their incomes on child care compared to better-off families, it is clear that a large proportion of women's child care needs are still going unmet. Similarly, while 32 states have adopted the Family Violence Option and have policies and procedures in place to address domestic violence among welfare recipients, dozens of states are currently reported to have inadequate domestic violence screening procedures.

## Access to Jobs

Forty-four percent of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients in the 1997 National Survey of America's Families reported two or more obstacles to work, including lack of education and transportation. The relatively high level of unemployment among African Americans may also be due in part to a lack of jobs in urban areas where African Americans are primarily concentrated. Studies in Massachusetts and Atlanta found that less than half of entry-level positions were accessible by public transportation, and in Michigan over 50% of available entry-level positions were located in the suburbs. As a consequence, African American welfare recipients may experience lack of transportation as a barrier to ongoing employment more frequently than other portions of the welfare population.

## Immigrants and Welfare Reform

Immigrants are particularly susceptible to poverty and hardship, because PRWORA limited their ability to receive public assistance, and language barriers limit their access to services. A study of Mexican and Vietnamese

welfare recipients in California by Equal Rights Advocates (ERA) found that immigrant women are more likely to live in overcrowded homes: Mexican welfare recipients in California reported an average household size of 6.3, about twice the average household size of Californian welfare recipients. Many of the positions immigrant women found were low-wage, temporary positions with no benefits, which contributed to their poverty status.

Although federal rules allow legal immigrants to receive non-cash benefits such as food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance and child care subsidies without risk of deportation, misinformation and language barriers likely prevent immigrants from receiving the full benefits to which they are entitled. A 1999 ERA study found that immigrant women receive few services through CalWORKs, California's post-PRWORA welfare system. Many respondents were confused about program requirements and were unaware of the time limits, the exemptions from work requirements, and/or the family cap. Limited English skills and limited education present a significant barrier to the respondents: 86% of the Vietnamese women and 46% of the Mexican women had a poor understanding of English. Only about 30% of Vietnamese women and 9% of Mexican women had completed high school.

## Conclusion

While welfare reform has created new openings for programmatic innovation, in many cases women have reached their welfare time limits or have been sanctioned before needed support services are in place. Particular attention is needed to create incentives for states to encourage meaningful human capital development for women. Advocates should push for new policies to encourage training for higher-paying jobs with career paths and benefits, as well as policies that will stop the welfare clock when sufficient supports are lacking. Policymakers can look to successful programs such as the Minnesota Fam-

ily Independence Program for replication in many more states. New welfare policies are necessary to address particular needs of women of color that often follow years of cumulative disadvantage.

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## Edith Witt Internship

In the May/June issue, we reported that PRRAC was asked to administer a new internship program, honoring the memory of Edith Witt, a former staff member of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission. It is designed to provide a grant to "help develop a new generation of community activists." This will be an annual award, available anywhere in the US, but for this first year we felt it was appropriate to limit it to Bay Area applicants.

We're happy to report that the initial award went to the Women of Color Resource Center in Berkeley and their intern, Jackie Henderson, who will be carrying out interviews with former welfare recipients, service providers and advocates. Contact us for more information on the award. PRRAC will be happy to administer similar funds honoring the work and memory of other progressive activists.