IWPR Welfare Reform Network News
A Newsletter of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research

The Institute for Women’s Policy Research’s Welfare Monitoring Project

In the summer of 1995, it was unclear what the final form of the welfare bill would be, and IWPR had heard a great deal of uncertainty from researchers and advocates in the field about the potential effects of welfare reform on poor families. The passage of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) on August 22, 1996 has created new uncertainties about what the states and recipients can and will do under block grants, such as: the ability of the low-wage labor market to absorb former recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the impact on groups which are no longer eligible for benefits under TANF, the ability of service providers to meet the increasing needs of poor families, the link between welfare recipiency and domestic violence and homelessness, and the role of advocacy groups in the policy debate as the structure of welfare continues to change. Many have voiced their concern over how these changes are going to be evaluated.

Last year, the Institute issued a call for research partnerships as the first step in its monitoring project. The goal of establishing this network was to link researchers, advocates, and women’s groups and to produce a blue-print that suggests ways in which the effects of welfare devolution on the well-being of poor women and their children might be analyzed. Judging from what IWPR has heard from researchers and advocates in the field and from its members, there is concern that without an IWPR-coordinated effort, research on poverty and welfare issues may not reflect issues of critical concern to women. Further, researchers working in isolation run the risk of producing conflicting results, a situation that could be prevented by a concerted effort to develop common indicators and other appropriate units of analysis.

Currently, we have 116 researchers, advocates, policymakers, and service providers representing 30 states in our database. We are in the process of interviewing individuals who are on our database to get a better sense of the types of welfare research that are taking place and to gauge what their research and advocacy needs are. Thanks to all of you who took the time to update us on your welfare monitoring work. If you did not receive a telephone call, we would love to hear from you. Contact information for IWPR’s project can be found at the end of this update. This newsletter summarizes the information we have gathered to date. We have included telephone numbers wherever possible.

IWPR’s Welfare Monitoring Listserv

As part of the project to coordinate welfare research, IWPR has set up a listserv (electronic bulletin board) which is devoted to the discussion of welfare reform. You can subscribe to the list by sending the following command to the listserv address, at Tel: (202) 785-5100 • Fax: (202) 833-4362 • Web: http://www.iwpr.org
listserv@american.edu:

SUBSCRIBE WELFAREM-L Full Name

When you sign up you will receive a welcome message which will provide further instructions for the listserv. IWPR’s welfare reform newsletters will be disseminated through the listserv as well as by mail and stored in the archive files of the WELFAREM-L listserv. This listserv offers the opportunity to share with other interested, like-minded scholars your research and questions on welfare and welfare reform in individual states and at the national level. Discussion can also be related to other issues, such as domestic violence or health. Other information such as calls for papers, conference information, factsheets, and legislative updates are also welcome. For more information on the listserv, please contact IWPR.

Summary of Welfare Monitoring Activity in the States

The interviews that IWPR has conducted show a great deal of welfare monitoring activity around the country. This update is meant to facilitate greater communication and brief you on the kinds of projects currently underway and the challenges that researchers have in common. In the future, we hope to use this space to present research findings and other perspectives on welfare reform. This is the beginning of IWPR’s efforts to bring together the ideas and energy of researchers, advocates, and others who have a stake in welfare reform.

Welfare devolution is of interest to researchers and advocates in many different ways. While many of these interests overlap in certain areas, it is clear that welfare reform presents more questions than it answers. Included are examples of research that has been described to IWPR staff in telephone interviews.

Labor Market

A major goal of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 is to move people from welfare to work quickly. Virtually all the legislation is designed with this as an objective, although it remains unclear what the impact of welfare reform will be on the low-wage labor market. A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute suggests that moving nearly one million welfare recipients into the work force would lead to a 12 percent fall in the wages of low-wage workers.

Researchers in the IWPR network are pursuing projects to both track the impact of and collect data surrounding the policy objective of quickly moving people from welfare to work. It is clear that many aspects of the new Federal legislation are based on the assumption that there are enough jobs for "able-bodied" low-wage workers. Paul Kleppner at the Office for Social Policy Research at Northern Illinois University has completed the first phase of a "job gap" study, which focuses on Illinois, entitled Are There Enough Jobs? Welfare Reform and Labor Market Reality. The next phase of this study is a regional...
assessment of jobs in the low-wage labor market. For more information, please call the Office for Social Policy Research at (815)753-1309.

Other researchers are looking at workfare programs and the ability of state programs to move welfare recipients into work. Meghan Cope of the State University of New York at Buffalo is in the planning stages of a monitoring project that will examine the new workfare laws and their effect on the low-wage job market in urban, suburban, and rural areas around Buffalo. Heather Boushey of the New School for Social Research is working on the impact of the workfare program on wages and employment in the low-wage labor market in New York City. Researchers Jane Isher and Mimi Salloum from the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Southern Mississippi conducted a study of the experiences of women in the "Work First Program," a pilot workfare program in six Mississippi counties. A major obstacle in their research was gaining access to participants in the workfare program, because "the Department of Human Services and its contracted agencies did not agree to refer participants to the researchers for interview." Despite the lack of assistance from the state, these researchers have developed a useful survey instrument and data for understanding the lives of participants in this program.

Research shows that the majority of the temporary and part-time labor force is composed of women, who typically earn low wages and receive few benefits. Dorie Seavey of the Center for Research on Women at Wellesley College has done research on temporary work as a significant aspect of the low-wage labor market and is interested in the way low-wage labor markets are changing in relation to welfare reform.

Additional research is looking more closely at the everyday realities that welfare recipients face. Social workers who are traditionally on the front lines of welfare program implementation are very active in developing research strategies that put a human face on data and research findings regarding welfare recipients. Professor Emeritus Marcia Bok and graduate student researchers at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work have completed the first phase of their study The Effects of Recent Welfare Changes on AFDC Recipients. The purpose of phase one of the project was to "document the changes that were occurring in the lives of welfare recipients as welfare reform was implemented." The project was based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with 113 participants. Phase two of the project will "extend throughout the state and focus on the job search and initial experiences in obtaining and sustaining employment." For more information on this project, please contact Marcia Bok at (860)232-2473.

Mary Secret from the University of Kentucky's School of Social Work is interested in finding out what happens to mothers who leave welfare because their children "age off" of welfare. She is particularly interested in developing a research methodology that would train these women to participate in the policy process as more than subjects of research, a method she believes would empower them. Dr. Secret is also involved with the county Department of Social Services welfare monitoring efforts.
Homelessness

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (NLCHP) is in the initial stages of monitoring the impact of the new welfare law on homelessness. If you or your organization are working in the area of welfare and homelessness, please contact Laurel Weir at the NLCHP at (202)638-2535 or at HN0749@handsnet.org.

Human Rights

Victoria Steinitz, project director for the Welfare and Human Rights Project at the College of Public and Community Service of the University of Massachusetts in Boston, is using participant action research methodologies to document human rights violations against welfare recipients. This project is supported by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. The interim report shows that welfare recipients’ human rights are violated in numerous ways, including not taking domestic violence into account when assessing a welfare case. Domestic violence against women and other issues that complicate a woman’s ability to comply with regulations are often left to the case worker to assess and review. The resulting decision often violates the woman’s human rights by denying her benefits without taking into consideration the issue of domestic violence or other mitigating factors. Welfare and Human Rights, a Massachusetts study, will be replicated in other states. For more information, please contact Victoria Steinitz at (617)864-5211.

Other Monitoring Projects

One theme that emerged repeatedly during IWPR’s interviews is the need to coordinate research and advocacy efforts within states, thus enabling research teams to cover a wider range of topics and geographies more effectively. Bringing in expertise from a variety of disciplines, methodologies, and interests helps to increase the breadth and depth of the monitoring effort. Researchers and advocates in Montana, where the state welfare legislation is a near replica of the Federal legislation, have developed such a monitoring strategy. Under the leadership of Judy Smith from Women’s Opportunity and Resource Development, researchers at the University of Montana and Montana State University are working with local communities on two ambitious and comprehensive efforts to monitor the implementation of welfare reform. The first focuses on Missoula County’s "Families Achieving Independence in Montana" (FAIM) and is developing measures to assess how individuals and organizations in Missoula County will be affected by the new welfare laws. Preliminary results of this study show "great confusion among welfare recipients and service providers" regarding the changes wrought by the cuts in benefits. This project will also document what categories of recipients are falling through the cracks. The second project is a statewide effort called Coping with Block Grants which uses "community activators" who work in targeted counties to help identify what works and does not with welfare reform.

Researchers and advocates anticipate that the new welfare laws will have far reaching consequences for the lives of welfare recipients. Researchers and advocates who have not
Education and Training

In many of the interviews we conducted with individuals in IWPR’s welfare monitoring network, the issue of reductions in education and training as a result of the new welfare legislation was raised. The law will no longer include higher education of any sort (including GED and ESL programs, community college, and associate as well as four year degree programs) under its parameters of "work activity." With the passage of the new law, states must have 25 percent of families receiving benefits (with the exception of exempted families) participating in work activities in 1997 in order to avoid financial penalties. The proportion of families who must be participating in work activities increases each year by five percent until it reaches 50 percent in 2002. Only certain activities will count towards work participation rates: paid or unpaid employment, education for teen parents, on-the-job training, participating in or providing child care to individuals in community service activities, attending vocational training, or participating in job search assistance. Additionally, adult welfare recipients must engage in work (as defined by the state) or be cut off from assistance after two years. Adult welfare recipients will be required to participate in these work activities 20 hours per week (unless they are exempted), and going to school will become an additional activity that many do not have the time, energy, or money to do.

While research has shown that education and training are critical for women to move out of poverty, it is not clear how the TANF law will change the ability of poor women to build their human capital. Researchers at the City University of New York’s Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center, headed by Director Marilyn Gittell, are in an ongoing research effort to assess the impact of post-secondary education on AFDC recipients in five states. Researchers at the center also released a study in January 1996 entitled Creating Social Capital at CUNY: A Comparison of Higher Education Programs for AFDC Recipients. For more information, please contact Marilyn Gittell at (212)642-2974.

Domestic Violence

Many believe that the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996 may increase domestic violence against women and cause more women and families to become homeless. Research by Jody Raphael of the Taylor Institute in Chicago shows that an alarmingly high percentage of welfare recipients experience domestic violence in their adult years. The NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (NOW LDEF) in New York City supported a study by Catherine T. Kenney and Karen R. Brown, Report from the Front Lines: The Impact of Violence on Poor Women. The preliminary results of this study also show that "high proportions of women in welfare-to-work programs are being abused by their partners." Domestic violence is also prevalent among workfare recipients, which has significant negative repercussions on their work lives. For information on NOW LDEF’s work, call (212)925-6635. Other researchers continue to look at the connection between welfare and domestic violence. Mary Jane Taylor and graduate student researchers at the University of Utah School of Social Work are incorporating questions about domestic violence into their study on the barriers to welfare benefits.
been active in the welfare policy debates are being brought in on issues such as mental health. For example, the Department of Health and Epidemiology at the University of Florida recently held a conference to begin the process of monitoring welfare reform. Cheryl Amey of the Department of Health and Epidemiology is planning a public health monitoring effort that will examine mental health issues and welfare reform.

Long-standing anti-poverty research groups such as the Center for Urban Poverty and Social Change at Case Western Reserve University are also studying the implementation of the new welfare law. In a project headed by Claudia Coulton, the Center has completed a pre-reform baseline study that will be used to equip advocates and service providers to study implementation of new welfare laws. The data used for the project came from county level sources. The Center for Urban Policy and Social Change is working in partnership with the Federation for Community Planning to ensure that advocacy groups and service providers can use the data. The second phase of this project will study Medicaid under managed care.

Many researchers, advocates, policymakers, and service providers have convened conferences in their state or region to identify areas of concern in terms of welfare monitoring and welfare reform. One such conference in Massachusetts was coordinated by Action for Boston, an organization that facilitates poverty programs in Boston and receives Block Grant money for various services. The goal of the conference was to develop an inventory of Boston area welfare monitoring projects.

Other Welfare Resources

Many groups are working either in coalition or individually to monitor changes in service provision and are keeping up-to-date information on legislative activity. These groups include:

- The National Association of Child Advocates, Washington, D.C.
  Tel. (202)289-0777 (children and service provision)

  Tel. (202)628-8787 (children and families), or contact Arloc Sherman regarding CDF’s welfare monitoring project at (202)288-3537.

  Tel. (202)628-5790 (technical assistance), or find them on the web at http://www.welfareinfo.org.

- The Coalition on Human Needs, Washington, D.C.
  Tel. (202)338-1856 (welfare information clearinghouse)

- National Coalition for the Homeless, Washington, D.C.
  Tel. (202)783-5140 (welfare, immigration, and housing)
Top Five Concerns

All of the researchers we contacted were asked about their information needs and research and advocacy challenges. Five common concerns surfaced repeatedly. We summarize these concerns in the hope of facilitating sharing strategies to address them.

1. As is typically the case in social research, there are more ideas than funding opportunities. While some of the projects described during the interviews have substantial funding, in many states welfare monitoring efforts are progressing without funding.

2. Many researchers are working directly with welfare recipients and agencies that serve them. In this capacity, researchers are grappling with how to use information that is politically explosive and potentially harmful to welfare recipients.

3. As anticipated by IWPR, the issues of developing appropriate indicators and standardizing measurement are of immediate importance to researchers surveyed. The goal of these researchers is to use research methodologies that are comparable across states.

4. Other technical difficulties are creating research obstacles for some of the researchers in the sample. These problems range from not being allowed access to existing data (including welfare recipients themselves) to state or county collection errors that make it difficult to assess baseline data.

5. There was great enthusiasm expressed at the prospect of increasing coordination between researchers, advocates, service providers and policymakers. Support for this goal is based on the common need to know what other concerned parties are doing and how they are confronting the challenges of welfare monitoring.

IWPR's Next Steps

As stated in IWPR's initial outreach to those of you interested in welfare monitoring, IWPR is planning to work with researchers in the states to develop a consistent set of indicators that can be used across state programs. Among the other goals of this project are:

- To produce an overview of welfare devolution from the perspective of feminist researchers.

- To develop a set of research designs, protocols, and guidelines for conducting a multi-year coordinated assessment of welfare reform.
- To develop user-friendly materials that educate and convince, such as state-level report cards on issues including non-traditional training and quality of jobs for poor women.

- To promote on-going dialogue among researchers, advocates, and policymakers. In addition to developing and disseminating this newsletter on a regular basis, we have initiated an WELFARE-L listserv (electronic bulletin board) which is devoted to discussion of welfare monitoring (see page 1 of this newsletter for information about subscribing to the list). We are also exploring possibilities for working papers.

- To link researchers, advocates, and policymakers together through access to our database and through on-going working group meetings. IWPR is continuing to update the database and will make it accessible through the WELFARE-L listserv archives so that individuals can access information in an on-going manner. However, if you would like specific information on the database, please call IWPR at (202)785-1921, or send an e-mail message to chu@www.iwpr.org.

We Invite Your Suggestions and Comments

In the future, we would like to present research findings and use this space in ways that would be most helpful to you. If you have specific issues that you are interested in seeing addressed or have questions about the project, please contact the Institute at

If you would like to become a member of our welfare reform research network, please return the following form. This step is not necessary for those who have already spoken with us by telephone. If you prefer to respond by e-mail, send a message to iwpr@www.iwpr.org to receive an e-mail version of this form.

1. Name:
2. Affiliation:
3. Address:
4. Tel/Fax:
5. E-mail:

6. How would you categorize the work you do?
   ___ Research ___ Advocacy
   ___ Service Provider ___ Policymaker

7. Are you currently working on a project to monitor changes in the welfare system?
   ___ yes ___ no   If yes, please describe.
   a. Are you collecting data? If so, what types of methods are you using? On what issues do you focus?
b. Are you analyzing data? If so, what type of data are you using (administrative data, survey data, data from service providers, etc)?

c. Are you looking at particular demographic groups (low-income families, children, women, women of color, etc)?

d. Are you doing work specifically related to women?

8. Are there particular welfare related issues stemming from state or national reform efforts that are of concern to you and/or your project (i.e., family caps, time limits, work requirements, the low-wage labor market, sanctions against immigrants, reproductive rights, domestic violence, and access to health care and Medicaid)?

9. Are you disseminating any data, reports, or public education materials? Please list or describe.

10. What information would be helpful for your project on welfare monitoring?

11. Can we share your name and information on your project with others?

   ___ yes     ___ no

12. What types of monitoring efforts are taking place in your state whether or not you are working on a welfare project of your own?

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