

**Dual Involvement of Illinois Families in TANF and the Child Welfare
System:
Parents' Perceptions and Experiences**

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Executive Summary

There is little question that the sweeping changes in welfare policy initiated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193) (PRWORA) will have an impact on families involved in state child protection systems. The PRWORA eliminated the federal guarantee of a basic income support for all qualified families and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a programmatic combination of work requirements and sanctions for non-conforming behavior. Past research establishes an association between welfare receipt and involvement with the child protection system. Leaving welfare to enter the workforce, the primary goal of the PRWORA, carries with it both the potential for self-sufficiency and the uncertainty of a major life transition. Many welfare recipient families are likely to experience a number of potentially adverse life events, including transitions to work, economic strain, parental stress, and possibly sanctions, which make them more vulnerable to charges of child maltreatment. In addition, the new behavioral requirements imposed on parents receiving TANF are likely to affect the experiences of families that are concurrently involved with the child welfare system.

This paper presents the findings from a study of families who both received welfare and experienced involvement with the child welfare system – so-called “dual-system families” (Geen et al., 2001). We conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with a subset of sixteen dual-system parents drawn from the larger pool of families participating in the Illinois Families Study (IFS) (Lewis et al., 2000). The IFS tracks a random sample of 1,400 Illinois families who received welfare benefits in 1998 for a six-year period. Our goal is to examine the experiences of the families in the IFS who both receive TANF and are involved in the Illinois child welfare system.

Poverty, Public Assistance, and Work

Most of the parents we interviewed found public assistance to be extremely helpful, providing needed support in times of financial trouble or transition. Even those parents who had paid employment found it very difficult to pay the bills and meet their families’ needs. Every parent we interviewed received either Medicaid, Food Stamps, or both, and considered these programs to be essential to their survival. The cash assistance that TANF provides was less popular, in part because of the attendant requirements.

All of the parents we interviewed identified the need to work as the principal message of welfare reform. Most parents avoided sanctions by complying with TANF requirements. Although all of the parents we interviewed expressed a desire to work, they also noted several impediments to finding and maintaining employment. These impediments include lack of access to affordable housing, transportation, and childcare:

- **Housing**
A major impediment to paid employment is the unavailability of adequate and affordable housing. Of the sixteen parents we interviewed, seven reported substantial housing problems currently or in the recent past. Housing problems range from being evicted for not paying the rent, to shelter living, to homelessness.
- **Transportation**
Lack of adequate transportation also affects multiple aspects of these parents' lives, especially their ability to care for their children. Parents struggled to both transport their children to school or childcare and arrive at their jobs on time.
- **Childcare**
Respondents also reported that problems with transportation affect their ability to provide adequate childcare. A number of parents indicated that their inability to transport caregivers to their home, or their children to the caregiver, has resulted in sporadic childcare for their children, causing them to miss work.

Child Welfare Involvement

Most parents we interviewed became involved in the child welfare system because of environmental neglect, frequently connected to substance abuse. Parents criticized DCFS for unnecessarily and hastily removing children from their parents without sufficient investigation and for the high rate of caseworker turnover. Some parents stated that DCFS authorities have deliberately upset them with threats and disparaging statements. Parents were particularly concerned with the agency's broad reach into their lives. They reported that the ease with which DCFS is perceived to remove children has led to a pervasive fear of the agency. To address this fear, respondents suggested that DCFS make a greater effort to work with, rather than against, parents and to act in a preventive, rather than punitive, manner. Although the parents we interviewed maintained that DCFS practices should be improved, most also believed the agency to be necessary.

The interviews revealed the following core themes:

- **Drug Use**
An important common experience among the parents was the use of drugs. Ten of the sixteen parents mentioned drug use during their interview. Three of these women had children who were born exposed to drugs. At least two of the parents were living in halfway houses that serve as drug treatment centers at the time of the interview.

- **Neglect**
A settled principle in the child welfare system is that no child should be removed from home for “reasons of poverty alone” (Pelton, 1978; 1989). In practice, however, poverty is often difficult to disentangle from neglect (Frame, 1999; Pelton, 1978; 1989). This was true of our sample. Taking all child welfare cases in the study together, including both the indicated and unfounded instances of DCFS involvement, 63% concerned some form of environmental neglect. In contrast, all other forms of abuse and neglect, including medical neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, constituted only 37% of the cases.
- **Caseworker Involvement**
Parents had a dualistic view of child welfare caseworkers. On one hand, they expressed great appreciation for the abilities and actions of individual caseworkers who were competent and effective in helping them reunite with their children or meet their families’ material needs. However, they criticized others for being ineffective, and were especially critical of the high turnover rate among caseworkers, which resulted in problems with insufficient preparation and ineffectual assistance. Several parents also complained that caseworkers were overly anxious to remove children from their homes without adequate investigation or understanding of parents’ economic situations.
- **Requirements**
The most prevalent services required among the parents we interviewed are parenting classes and drug treatment. Every parent was required to attend parenting classes or family counseling at one time or another. The parents generally found these classes to be helpful but rather basic. Respondents who completed drug treatment programs credited the services with improving their lives and helping them regain custody of their children.

Connections between TANF & DCFS

The parents’ perceptions of the ties between the welfare system and the child welfare system were not at the forefront of their minds. Very few parents were able to explicitly identify the overlap between the two systems. However, during the course of the interviews, parents did communicate several important connections between these two systems:

- **Childcare and Work Requirements**
The availability of adequate childcare is critical for parents attempting to meet the demands of welfare reform. Parents without access to adequate childcare find it extremely difficult to simultaneously comply with the work requirements imposed under TANF and care for their children.

- **Child Removal and Termination of TANF Benefits**
When children are removed from the home, for any reason, the family's TANF benefits terminate after 45 days. The sudden end to welfare receipt can have devastating effects on the family and impede parents' efforts to comply with DCFS requirements.
- **Poverty**
The respondents perceived a connection between welfare and the child welfare system based on the assistance that two programs provided to poor parents. DCFS and TANF are the only sources of financial support that many poor parents have to provide for their children. Several parents reported that their DCFS caseworker allocated money for their children's beds or clothing.
- **Balancing Requirements**
Parents involved in both the welfare system and the child welfare system face a double-load of demands. Parents must comply with two distinct sets of rules, expectations, and time-consuming requirements. Many parents felt overwhelmed by the time consuming nature of the combined requirements imposed. The combined demands of both TANF and DCFS have more than a cumulative effect; rather, they place conflicting pressures on these parents. The competing demands of TANF and DCFS make it harder for these parents to conform to the expectations of either system.

I. Introduction

There is little question that the sweeping changes in welfare policy initiated by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193) (PRWORA) will have an impact on families involved in state child protection systems. The PRWORA ended the entitlement to federally supported financial assistance to poor families and replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) (Berrick, 1999). The TANF program embodies a new social welfare ideology that emphasizes work requirements for all able-bodied parents and introduces strict time limits for the receipt of welfare benefits. Unlike its predecessor AFDC, TANF secures compliance through real and immediate sanctions.

Although the PRWORA does not dramatically alter the funding of federal child protection programs, the law is likely to both directly and indirectly affect the financing and allocation of child welfare services. The new welfare rules may also contribute to an increase in the number of families involved with child protective services due to the negative effects of sanctions and time limits on family functioning. Because so many families in Illinois receive welfare, even a slight increase in the rate of child welfare involvement among this population can have a significant impact on Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) caseloads (Shook, 1999a). In addition, the new behavioral requirements imposed on parents receiving TANF are likely to affect the experiences of those families that are concurrently involved with the state child welfare system.

This paper presents the findings from a study of families who both received welfare and experienced involvement with the child welfare system – so-called “dual-

system families” (Geen et al., 2001). The sample of parents in this study was drawn from the larger pool of families participating in the Illinois Families Study (IFS) (Lewis et al., 2000). Under the direction of the University Consortium on Welfare Reform, the Illinois Families Study tracks a random sample of 1,400 Illinois families who received welfare benefits in 1998 for a six-year period. Our goal is to examine the impact of welfare reform on the experiences of the families in the IFS who are also involved in the Illinois child welfare system.

In Parts II and III, we discuss the 1996 welfare reform legislation, including its likely impact on families and child welfare involvement. In Part IV, we describe the data, the sample from which it is drawn, and our method of analysis. In Part V, we present both a statistical analysis of the sample’s demographic traits and the results of our qualitative interviews. We organize our discussion around seven themes that emerged from the interviews – daily routine, financial issues, paid employment, work impediments, TANF involvement, child welfare involvement, and TANF and child welfare connections. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the major findings from the study.

II. Welfare Reform: Its Impact on Families

A. HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WELFARE AND CHILD WELFARE

The Social Security Act of 1935 created Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), a social welfare program designed to ensure that the children of widows and orphaned youth would not grow up in poverty. ADC provided short-term minimum income support to mothers who had no other means to provide for their children. However, as

did the Mother's Pension statutes before it, ADC incorporated an implicit requirement of parental fitness into its eligibility requirements (Frame, 1999). Only mothers who were "deserving" of assistance were allowed to enroll in ADC (Gordon, 1994).

Determinations of deservingness were based on the moral framework of the era. Indeed, Congress explicitly enabled states to consider the "moral character" of the parent when determining aid for children under ADC. Women of color and women of "illegitimate" children were routinely denied support (Quadagno, 1994). These moral and racial requirements created an implicit "suitable home" restriction on ADC receipt that Congress formally enacted in 1940 (Frame, 1999). Although the restriction was eventually repealed in 1945, states continued to use birth status, moral character of the mother, and condition of the home as criteria for ADC grant decisions (Bell, 1965).

Due to the widespread denial of benefits to minority and single-parent families, in 1960 the Secretary of Health Education and Welfare issued a policy statement directing states to abandon the suitable home criteria for ADC receipt.¹ The following year, Congress amended Title IV of the Social Security Act to provide federal funds for children of unemployed parents and children in foster homes (Frame, 1999). These amendments established a conjunction between federal welfare programs and child protection programs that continues today.

¹ In 1968, the United States Supreme Court took the first step toward formally invalidating suitable homes provisions by nullifying "absent father" rules which denied benefits to AFDC recipients who cohabitate with a non-parental male (*King v. Smith*, 392 U.S. 309 (1968)). Subsequent case law reiterated and extended the *King* holding, effectively prohibiting states from assuming that non-legally responsible lodgers in an AFDC home contribute financially to the household (see e.g., *Lewis v. Martin*, 397 U.S. 552 (1970); *Van Lare v. Hurley*, 421 U.S. 338 (1975)).

B. WELFARE REFORM GOALS AND REQUIREMENTS

The new welfare law reflects the government's response to a public assistance program that was perceived as overly-generous and insufficiently supportive of core American values. Based on these perceptions, the PRWORA eliminated the federal guarantee of a basic income support for all qualified families and replaced it with TANF, a programmatic combination of work requirements and sanctions for non-conforming behavior.

1. Behavior Modification

Like the restrictions present in ADC of the past, the current welfare program imposes a set of behavioral requirements upon mothers as a condition of federal assistance. The eligibility conditions required by TANF leave less discretion to caseworkers than did ADC. Nevertheless, the modern welfare program addresses issues of parental fitness and moral character by using sanctions and benefit reductions to modify the behavior of recipients.

Prior to 1996 approximately half of the states had applied for "waivers" to depart from AFDC funding requirements and allow for the use of behavioral modification strategies. These states acted as early laboratories for federal welfare reform. Examples of state waiver plans that focused on modifying parental behavior and were incorporated into the federal legislation can be found in New Jersey (welfare, family caps), Wisconsin (workfare), and the laws of 20 other states. As TANF becomes more and more involved with the business of shaping parental character and behavior, the connections between welfare reform and child welfare are likely to grow (Frame, 1999).

For example, TANF permits states to implement child exclusion policies, or “family caps”, to reduce pregnancies among the recipient population. Somewhat akin to the ADC prohibition against single-mothers having sexual relations while receiving government assistance (Frame, 1999), family caps function as a loosely controlled behavioral deterrent. Under child exclusion policies, mothers who currently receive welfare benefits and give birth to a child (or children) do not receive an increase in the amount of their grant. Thus, the family cap acts as a form of punishment for unwanted conduct – pregnancy – as a means to deter that behavior. Although the effectiveness of family caps at deterring pregnancy is under study (Camasso et al., 1996; Lens, 1998; Rutgers University, 1998), it is clear that this policy reduces the amount of benefits for many children born to welfare-dependent families.

In addition, TANF attempts to curtail teenage recipients’ independence. Minors under the age of 18 may be denied cash assistance unless they agree to live with a parent, adult relative, or legal guardian (42 U.S.C. § 608(a)(5)(A)). If a responsible adult is not available, the minor must rely upon the welfare agency to locate one. Although the purpose of this provision is to avert teen-age pregnancies, the policy may also have the unintended consequence of increasing contact between young recipients and the child welfare system (Hardin, 1996). Child welfare agencies are better able to place young parents in supervised living arrangements and may also be asked to act as outside assessors of private placements (Hardin, 1996).

TANF also targets drug use among recipients. Individuals who are convicted of drug-related felonies after 1997 suffer a lifetime prohibition from receiving both TANF

and food stamp benefits, although states may opt out of or modify this prohibition (21 U.S.C. § 862a (1996)). Given the substantial proportion of child welfare cases either directly or indirectly related to parental drug use, the potential implications of this lifetime ban for state child protection agencies could be great (Hardin, 1996; Matthews, 1999). Substance-abusing parents who are permanently cut from the welfare rolls will find it more difficult to care for their children. What was conceived as an attempt to curb drug use among welfare-reliant parents could, therefore, result in increases in foster care caseloads.

2. Work Requirements and Time Limits

The centerpiece of TANF is the requirement that all able parents work in return for the government's financial support (Pavetti & Wemmerus, 1999). TANF is intended to provide only short-term assistance to families until the primary caregiver finds paid employment. In keeping with the emphasis on threatened punishment as a tool of behavioral modification, work is mandatory under TANF: non-compliance generates sanctions.

Welfare receipt under TANF is limited to a 5 year lifetime maximum. Further, all capable adults must find a job within twenty-four months of their initial receipt of federal aid or risk termination of benefits. To facilitate compliance, states may require recipients to engage in work-related activities or specific work-program mandates. The PRWORA allows states to modify federal requirements by obligating recipients to work within a shorter period of time. States may also exempt 20 percent of their caseloads from the

time limits and work requirements for extreme hardship, battery, or cruelty (Hardin, 1996).

These work-based requirements have important ramifications for child welfare. The goal of moving more families from public assistance to work might yield benefits for parents and children through gains in financial resources and self-esteem. These gains may help improve child protection outcomes and decrease the likelihood of child welfare involvement in the first place. On the other hand, some studies suggest that the TANF requirements will not only increase the number of children at risk for child protection intervention, but also affect the ability of families to meet permanency planning requirements (Shook, 1999b). By forcing recipients to work, welfare reform may exacerbate this problem by separating parents from their children for longer periods of time without adequate care. Alternatively, families that are forced off of welfare because of sanctions or time limits may face even more extreme poverty and an increased likelihood of child welfare involvement. These conflicts between welfare's behavioral modification methods and child welfare will be discussed at length below.

Underlying TANF's work requirements and time limits are a set of assumptions regarding the financial and cognitive benefits associated with work as opposed to welfare receipt. This position considers welfare receipt, in and of itself – that is, independent of economic and socio-demographic factors – as a negative force on family functioning and child development. According to this theory, welfare undermines recipients' motivation and self-esteem by discouraging work and reinforcing recipients' negative perceptions about their ability to provide for their children (Murray, 1984). In turn, this theory posited that the combined effects of less effective parenting and the absence of a positive

parental role model harmed the children of welfare recipients. Supporters of welfare reform contend that, by encouraging parents to work, TANF positively affects recipients' self-perception and confers cognitive and social benefits to their children.

The empirical literature provides some limited support for these assertions. For example, studies have found that, even after controlling for income and other demographic characteristics, welfare recipients provide less monitoring, parental supervision, and discipline for their children (Kalil & Eccles, 1998). Welfare recipients have also been found to provide less intellectual stimulation and emotional support to their children compared to low-income mothers who do work (Moore et al., 1995).

Despite these findings, a substantial body of evidence suggests that economic and demographic factors, rather than welfare alone, account for any negative effects of public assistance receipt (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Danziger et al. 2000; Duncan et al., 2001). Since the type of work that welfare recipients are able to secure is unlikely to raise them far above the poverty line, the distinction between work-effects and income effects is critical. Whether paid employment is independently beneficial to welfare recipients, regardless of the extent of additional income earned, is an open question in the literature.

3. Sanctions

Sanctions are used in TANF as a form of behavior modification to facilitate compliance with work requirements (Frame, 1999). Recipients who do not fully participate in a given state's job assistance program, called "Work First" in most states (Pavetti & Wemmerus, 1999), or who reach the 24-month limit for receipt without work,

are subject to sanctions. In addition to these work-based sanctions, the PRWORA mandates that states institute a lifetime ban on all TANF and food stamp benefits to any individual who is convicted of a felony involving a controlled substance (Geen & Waters, 1997). This mandatory sanction is especially significant to the child welfare programs in states with major cities like Illinois, where 40 percent of all child maltreatment reports involve drugs (Barth, 1996). Finally, sanctions may also be imposed by caseworkers for perceived uncooperativeness on the part of recipients (Brodkin, 1997).

According to 1999 figures, 36 states impose “full-family sanctions” (the elimination of a family’s entire cash assistance grant) for initial or continued non-compliance with work programs (Pavetti & Wammerus, 1999). Fourteen of these states impose a full-family sanction as the initial penalty for noncompliance with state program requirements (Pavetti & Wammerus, 1999). Most states, however, use partial sanctions first. These states reduce the family grant or eliminate the adult portion of the TANF award as a warning to families that compliance is necessary to continue receiving benefits.

The incidence rate of state sanctioning is not well known. Sanctioning rates reflect the economic and employment conditions that differ state by state. One study of post-TANF recipients in Maryland found that, after 9 months of the program, only 4 percent of clients received a full-family sanction (Born, et al., 1998). In contrast, an examination of welfare reform in Delaware found that 50 percent of all recipients received some form of sanction after the implementation of TANF (Pavetti & Wammerus, 1999). Although it is not clear how many recipients have been sanctioned

under the TANF program, some of these families are likely to become involved in the child welfare system due in part to the loss of income.

4. Childcare

As more mothers are required to work, a commensurate increase in demand for adequate childcare is likely to emerge. Access to childcare is considered one of the primary barriers to welfare-to-work transitions (Gault et al., 1998). Welfare recipients have a special need for child care assistance because they are significantly more likely to have children with at least one chronic health condition (Heymann & Earle, 1999). Coupled with the work demands imposed by TANF, the special characteristics of welfare families make the availability of child care a crucial determinant of welfare reform's impact on children. Sanctions for non-compliance coupled with sparse child care services for compliant mothers makes it likely that the TANF work requirements may increase the incidence of abuse and, particularly, neglect (Shook, 1999a). The increased need for childcare, then, further links child protective services to welfare reform.

The drafters of the PRWORA did not ignore the need for childcare; they incorporated programs into the law that provide childcare assistance to poor mothers. The new Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) consolidates four federal child care programs into a single block grant. Because the CCDF eliminates administrative requirements previously imposed by AFDC, states are better able to cater their child care programs according to the characteristics of their population (Long et al., 1998). While the new funding structure gives states greater flexibility in allocating funds to both the welfare and non-welfare populations, at least 70 percent of CCDF funds must be

disbursed to families currently receiving welfare, transitioning off of welfare, or at risk of welfare involvement (Long et al., 1998). Poor families who work also receive financial assistance in the form the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit, which provides tax reductions for childcare expenses. In addition, the PRWORA does not allow states to impose TANF sanctions upon single parents with a child under the age of six who is unable to meet the work requirements due to a lack of available child care (P.L. 104-193).

Despite these programs, the Congressional Budget Office projects a shortfall of over \$1.8 billion in child care funds for low-income working families by 2002 (Courtney, 1997). Families in need of subsidized care far exceed the supply provided by federal reimbursement programs (Gault et al., 1998). Approximately one-third of welfare recipients currently below the poverty line would escape poverty if their child care costs were fully subsidized (Gault et al., 1998). The dearth of adequate childcare funds means that many welfare recipients will have a difficult time during the initial transition to work and will likely find it infeasible to maintain continuous employment for extended periods. As a result, it is questionable whether the stated goal of the PRWORA, to assist families in achieving self-sufficiency, can succeed without increases in federal childcare funding.

C. FUNDING

The federal programs for public assistance and child welfare are also connected, both in the present and historically, by their funding structure. Aid to Families with Dependent Children – the predecessor to TANF – was funded through Title IV-A of the Social Security Act. In 1980, the federal government created a separate foster care program under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, replacing the foster care aspect of

AFDC formerly administered under Title IV-A. Title IV-E provides states with funds for the bulk of child welfare services, including out-of-home care, casework services for child placement, adoption assistance, and caseworker training. In 1995, the federal government spent over \$3 billion on Title IV-E alone (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1996). Title IV-B of the Social Security Act provides funding for child welfare services that include family preservation and support. In contrast to the \$3 billion spent on child placement, the government spent under \$450 million on child welfare services in 1995 (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1996). As was true before the passage of TANF, both of these funding sources are restricted to families that meet the June 1, 1996 AFDC eligibility requirements (Courtney, 1998).²

The PRWORA replaced the programmatic funding of AFDC with a large, free-standing block grant under TANF. For example, the Emergency Assistance Program that had existed under Title IV-A was eliminated and its funds (\$1.6 billion in 1995) were rolled into the TANF block grant. The PRWORA also reduced the size of the second largest source of child welfare services funding, the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG or Title XX), by 15 percent. The 1995 federal expenditure on the SSBG was \$2.8 billion. Prior to the reductions mandated under the PRWORA, the SSBG provided states with discretionary funds for child welfare. The portion spent on family preservation and child maltreatment prevention likely exceeded the \$450 million directly allocated to these services under Title IV-B (Geen & Waters, 1997). Thus, the SSBG provided an

² It is important to note that these funds, indexed to 1996 AFDC standards, are not adjusted for inflation. Given that both incomes and the price of consumer goods inevitably rise with inflation, it is possible that fewer families will meet these requirements. Families that fail to meet eligibility standards for TANF support may risk contact with the child welfare system.

important source of discretionary funding for child protection and family preservation. Under TANF, states may continue to use the reduced SSBG funds, as well as the block grant of federal funds, for these services. However, the creation of a large pool of undirected funds dictates that there will be an increase in the competition for federal dollars that previously were applied to child welfare services (Geen & Waters, 1997). Because the TANF block grant is capped and Title IV-E funds for foster care are not, it is also possible that states have an incentive to shift expenditures away from child-only grants (covered under the TANF block grant) to kinship care grants (covered under Title IV-E).

III. Welfare Reform's Impact on the Child Welfare System

A. IMPACT OF TANF ON CHILD WELFARE CASELOADS

Due partly to the relatively recent enactment of welfare reform, there are few studies that examine the connection between the TANF program and child protection services. Prior studies do suggest, however, that children from families receiving AFDC were at risk for involvement with the child protection system (Goerge et al., 1996; Shook, 1998; Needell, et al., 1999). At this point, there is no evidence that welfare reform has led to dramatic increases in reports of child maltreatment or in states' foster care populations (Geen et al., 2001; Matthews, 1999). In fact, official data show a decline in IDCFS cases after TANF went into effect (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2000). A recently published *Assessing the New Federalism* report using data from 12 states also supports the conclusion that welfare reform has had an insignificant effect on overall child welfare caseloads (Geen et al., 2001). However, the full impact of

welfare reform reaches beyond simple caseload counts, which ignore the real-life struggles that families moving from welfare to work experience (Boo, 2001). In addition, TANF's true impact may have been temporarily mitigated by the favorable economic conditions that were common during the years following welfare reform (Geen et al., 2001; Matthews, 1999).

B. POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Welfare reform is certain to have an impact on state child welfare systems because a large proportion of families involved in these systems are welfare recipients. A recent analysis of state data found that approximately 50 percent of the families referred to the child welfare system receive welfare (TANF/AFDC) at the time of the referral (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2000). As the primary goal of the PRWORA, leaving welfare to enter the workforce carries with it both the potential for self-sufficiency and the uncertainty of a major life transition. At least in the short-term, these families are likely to experience a number of potentially adverse life events including transitions to work, economic strain, parental stress, and possibly sanctions. This section considers the impact of welfare reform on families' involvement with child welfare services.

1. Work

TANF's time limits and work requirements ensure that fewer families currently receiving assistance will be eligible for benefits in the future. The impact on child welfare depends largely on the availability of employment opportunities for welfare "leavers." It is likely that participation in welfare-to-work programs will help some families who become involved with child protective services to comply with agency

permanency plans. On the other hand, the new state and federal welfare policies may make it more difficult for some poor families to care for their children in several ways: they reduce the amount of cash assistance to families; they include deadlines for payments to families; and they require parents to work and to participate in job training, counseling, and other programs, often without adequate child care. Welfare-to-work programs appear to decrease the risk of involvement in child protective services only under certain conditions: “if participants find good jobs that significantly raise family income, families with children under one year old are exempted, and families with mental health problems, educational deficits, and other barriers to employment are given supportive services” (Matthews, 1999, p. 398).

Approximately 70 percent of the women who voluntarily leave the welfare rolls report increased income or a new job as the principal reason for their exit (Loprest, 1999). Researchers estimate that these women work between 68 and 88 percent of the year following their welfare exit (Danziger et al., 2000). Welfare leavers tend to find employment in the same types of jobs as poor and low-income mothers (Born et al., 1998; Loprest, 1997). However, compared to their non-welfare counterparts, these women work more hours, have shorter tenures at their jobs, and use public benefits (Medicaid, Food Stamps, etc.) at a greater rate (Loprest, 1999). Parents who leave welfare are also less likely than poor non-welfare recipients to have sick leave, paid vacation, or a schedule flexible enough to care for their children in the event of an illness (Heymann & Earle, 1999). Given that welfare mothers are more likely to have a child with at least one chronic illness (Heymann & Earle, 1999), the absence of these benefits may lead to declines in child well-being or in the loss of employment. Although

voluntary welfare leavers earn more money than the near-poor, this result has been found to be an artifact of individual level characteristics such as self-esteem and personal skills (Loprest, 1999). Controlling for these personal characteristics, voluntary welfare leavers earn the same wages as poor, non-welfare mothers (Loprest, 1999). In sum, women who voluntarily leave welfare fare no better than other low-income families in the types of jobs they secure, and fare worse on a number of important economic and work-based measures.

Involuntary welfare leavers – those who reach time-limits or are sanctioned – are at even greater risk for negative outcomes. In contrast to the 80 percent employment rate among voluntary leavers, only 50 percent of the women forced to exit welfare find work (Brauner & Loprest, 1999). Little is known about this population of parents (Zaslow & Emig, 1997). However, in the absence of employment or substantial government assistance, it is likely that women forced to exit welfare are faring considerably worse than either voluntary welfare leavers or low-income mothers.

There is an established connection between work, welfare receipt, and child welfare involvement. Families who leave welfare and do not find subsequent employment are 3 times more likely to become involved with the child protection system than unemployed families who receive welfare benefits (Shook, 1999a). Part-time employment is a likely effect of welfare reform that is also associated with an elevated risk of child welfare involvement. Families whose primary caregiver works part-time are 2.8 times as likely to have a child removed from the home compared to caregivers who work full-time (Lindsey, 1992). Indeed, unstable family income is considered the best predictor of child removal and foster care placement (Lindsey, 1992).

In contrast, the implications of maternal employment for child outcomes is less clear. Although employment itself does not seem to have a negative influence on childhood development (see e.g. Hoffman et al., 1999; Moore & Driscoll, 1997; Zaslow & Emig, 1997; Zaslow et al., 1998), the interaction between poverty and employment may. For example, children whose parents work full-time, but earn less than \$7.50 an hour, were found to have significantly elevated risk for behavioral problems (Moore & Driscoll, 1997). Children from homes with a single-parent and an inadequate income source are considerably more likely to experience foster care involvement (Lindsey, 1991). In addition, the effects of employment on child well-being may be different in situations where the caregiver chooses to work as compared to being forced to work – as some mothers are under TANF. These findings reinforce the importance of considering income in assessments of the connection between employment and child maltreatment (Geen & Waters, 1997).

2. Poverty

Families leaving welfare for work are unlikely to escape poverty entirely (Duncan, et al., 2001). Rather, welfare leavers are likely to experience continued income deficits and greater economic strain (Kalil & Eccles, 1998). Although a large proportion of past-TANF recipients work more than 30 hours a week in these jobs, their income is not sufficient to help them out of poverty (Brauner & Loprest, 1999). Perhaps due to the low salaries in the types of jobs they do obtain, the duration of employment spells for women leaving welfare is low. Approximately 20 to 40 percent of welfare leavers return to welfare within three months (Edelman, 1999).

In addition, it is important to note that not all welfare leavers find work. An estimated 30 to 50 percent of the women leaving welfare do not find jobs (Edelman, 1999). The loss of welfare support coupled with the absence of a replacement income source results in continued poverty. Former welfare recipients report significant problems providing enough food for their children, paying the utility bills, and paying the rent (Brauner & Loprest, 1999). Given these difficulties, it is not surprising that the declines in welfare caseloads since TANF was implemented has not been matched by equal reductions in poverty (Danziger et al., 2000).

3. Parental Mental Health

Many women who exit welfare experience not only continued poverty, but also financial strain. Unlike welfare, low-income work may be unstable. The financial strain that accompanies low-paying jobs and periods of unemployment is associated with parental stress, depression, and lower self-esteem (Conger et al., 1994). Each of these mental health factors is associated with a diminished capacity to care for children (McLoyd, 1990). In turn, children from families with stressful life events are more likely to become involved with the child welfare system (Geen et al., 2001; Shook, 1999a).

4. Sanctions

Although sanctions have long been part of public assistance, the reforms introduced by TANF make it more likely that a greater proportion of the welfare population will experience benefit reductions (Frame, 1999). Women who receive sanctions are more likely to experience a constellation of income-straining life events

(Shook, 1999a). These events include problems that affect the care of children such as the ability to provide food and pay for basic utility services (Shook, 1999a).

In Illinois, families who had their welfare grant terminated or reduced by greater than \$75 and found no subsequent employment experienced a significantly greater likelihood of child welfare involvement (Shook, 1999b). Children with sanctioned grants were twice as likely to be placed in foster care (Shook, 1998). Sanctioned families are also at an increased risk for allegations of neglect and risk of harm (Shook, 1998). The overall odds of a family experiencing a case opening or child placement is 53 percent higher for sanctioned grants compared to full grants (Shook, 1998). Across states, welfare benefits are negatively related to neglect (lower welfare benefits yield higher rates of neglect) and foster care involvement (Paxson & Waldfogel, 2000; Pelton, 1999). In sum, children from homes with sanctioned welfare grants are at a heightened risk for involvement with the child welfare system.

C. EXPERIENCES OF FAMILIES IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

In addition to the link between welfare reform and the risk of child welfare involvement, TANF regulations probably affect the *experiences* of families who are already involved with child welfare services, as well as the *outcomes* of their cases. For example, TANF terminates awards to parents whose children are removed from the home for more than 45 days (42 U.S.C. § 602(a)(10)). If reunification is not possible within this period, the resultant loss of benefits may lead to hardships such as eviction or termination of utilities that, in turn, interfere with the chances of reunification (Matthews,

1999; Hardin, 1996). It is also possible that the pressure to find work imposed by TANF may lead to speedier reunification.

In addition, these families must simultaneously comply with new rules that TANF imposes while attempting to remedy the circumstances that led to their referral to child protective services. Parents may experience conflicts between compliance with work, training, and counseling requirements mandated under TANF by welfare caseworkers and the permanency plan implemented by child welfare caseworkers (Matthews, 1999). Again, the pressure from both agencies to improve the family's situation may also have a beneficial impact.

IV. Methods

The majority of studies that address the impact of welfare reform on the child welfare system employ a survey-based methodology (Loprest, 1999; Needell et al. 1999; Paxson & Waldfogel, 2000). Such inquiries tend to overlook the individual experiences of these families in favor of a broad assessment of the child welfare system. As a result, few studies are able to report findings that demonstrate whether or how the personal lives of families are affected by the new rules imposed under TANF. While statistical analysis of the impact of welfare reform on child welfare caseloads and outcomes is important, only an in-depth study of the experiences of families managing both systems can shed light on the *reasons* for these outcomes.

The purpose of this study is to move beyond aggregate level welfare and child welfare statistics by focusing instead upon individual experiences. To accomplish this

goal, we selected a sample of dual-system families to interview. This section describes the selection of our sample and the methodology used to interview the respondents.

A. DATA

The sample for this study was drawn from the Illinois Families Study (IFS) conducted by the University Consortium on Welfare Reform (Lewis et al., 2000). The IFS is a longitudinal panel study that will track, over the course of 6 years, a random sample of 1,400 Illinois families who received welfare benefits in July, 1998. In addition to an annual panel survey, the IFS utilizes a data-linking methodology to access information from a number of state administrative agencies. As a result, the IFS is capable of tracking family outcomes over time using both self-reports and archival state agency data. The goal of the IFS is to assess the impact of welfare reform in Illinois.

The IFS utilizes a stratified random sampling design. Stratification for the study is based on two geographic areas: Cook County (containing the Chicago metropolitan area) and the remainder of Illinois. Within each stratum, a systematic sample with a random start was selected from the grantee populations (Lewis et al., 2000). In addition, sample members were selected using a three-month “rolling” sample strategy that helped to correct for the potential under-representation of families that temporarily had their benefits suspended. Together, these sampling strategies identified 1,899 eligible TANF grantees. Overall the sample response rate was 72% (Lewis et al., 2000), resulting in a sample size of 1,363.

We conducted in-depth, face-to-face interviews with a subset of these parents who both received a cash assistance grant (TANF) and were involved in the child welfare

system – dual-system families. Approximately ten percent of the 1,363 parents interviewed in the IFS had a child who was investigated for abuse or neglect subsequent to the sample date (Lewis et al., 2000).³ We focus specifically on the families who had an “indicated” allegation of abuse or neglect – an allegation that was substantiated by credible evidence. This group comprises five percent of all IFS cases, resulting in a potential sample of approximately 70 families. Our sample size fell to 40 cases because we could not include families who refused to grant the IFS access to their administrative data. Of these 40 cases, we were able to contact and interview 16 respondents and were unable to interview 24.⁴ Our qualitative analysis focuses on this sample of 16 respondents who were involved with both DCFS and the welfare system. Because our sample size is so small, the results that we report cannot be generalized to the population of dual-system families in Illinois.

B. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data for this study were obtained through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with these parents about their experiences with welfare reform and child protective services. Parents were asked open-ended questions about their perceptions of the two state agencies and the role the agencies play in their families’ lives (see [Appendix A](#)). Throughout the interviews, parents were encouraged to express their ideas and opinions about the two systems, particularly regarding any information that was not

³ This study selected families based on their involvement with child protection services beginning in July 1998, the start date for IFS interviews. A total of 14% of the IFS families had child protection involvement prior to the sample selection in 1998.

⁴ Although these families completed IFS surveys, their contact information had changed in the period between the survey and our interviews. As a result, they could not be located. All of the parents whom we were able to contact consented to be interviewed.

covered in the interview manual. The personal interviews allowed respondents to communicate information that extends beyond simple background characteristics, revealing a truly individual perspective on these two state-directed systems (Hochschild 1981). Coupled with the IFS survey, this qualitative research design provided detailed information about families' experiences and about the dynamics of the interaction of the child welfare and welfare systems in families' lives.

Interview sample members were informed of their selection into the qualitative study by a letter containing a description of the study and information about contacting the investigators with further questions. The letter informed sample members of the confidential nature of their involvement, of their right to refuse participation, and of the compensation they would receive if they choose to complete an interview. Interviews began in the Summer of 1999 and were completed that Fall. Most of the interviews were conducted in the home of the respondent. However, a small number were conducted at a local restaurant or library. Interviews lasted 45-60 minutes.

V. Results

A. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Descriptive information for our sample ($n=16$) is presented in [Table 1](#). Because our sample is really a subset of all dual-system families, this table also gives descriptive characteristics for the total number of known dual-system cases ($n=40$)⁵ and the IFS

⁵ As noted above, the predicted number of dual-system families was 70. Approximately thirty of these families did not give consent to examine their administrative records, so we could not include them in the study.

sample as a whole ($n=1,363$). [Table 1](#) displays the unweighted case counts, weighted means, and weighted standard deviations for the three groups.⁶

As would be expected from a sample of families receiving welfare, almost all of the individuals in our sample were women ($n = 15$). A disproportionate number of our respondents were Black ($n=12$) due to large Black populations in two of the sampling locations, Chicago and East St. Louis. The remaining 4 respondents were white. We had no Hispanic families in our sample. The largest number respondents had never been married ($n=7$), though a large minority were either currently married ($n=4$) or divorced/widowed ($n=5$). The average weighted age for respondents was 29 years old ($sd=5.59$). Chicago residents made up 43.8% of the interview sample ($n=7$), with the remaining 56.2% ($n=9$) living in East Louis and Peoria. While most respondents had an educational attainment of high school/GED or beyond ($n=9$), 43.8% of the respondents ($n=7$) had neither graduated high school nor earned the GED. The families in our sample averaged 5 children ($sd=2.20$). Six families had 4 children or less and 10 families had 5 or more children. The number of children per family was one of the two demographic variables that differed significantly ($p<.05$) between the interview sample($n=16$) and the non-interview sample ($n=24$). Families that were interviewed tended to have a greater number of children ($p<.05$).

In addition to the demographic characteristics of the interview sample, [Table 1](#) also presents information regarding the respondents' public assistance receipt. Almost all of the families in our sample received the three main benefits associated with welfare,

⁶ To determine whether the respondents we were able to interview differed significantly from the respondents who we could not interview, we conducted a series of bivariate analyses. Only two variables differed significantly between the two groups. The interview group had significantly more children ($p<.05$) and experienced homelessness more often than the non-interview group ($p<.05$).

measured as receipt in 1998. Specifically, 93.8% of the interview sample received Food Stamps ($n=15$), 81.3% of the sample received Medicaid ($n=13$), and 81.3% of the sample received cash assistance through TANF ($n=13$). Most respondents ($n=14$) had not been sanctioned by the TANF office in the year prior to their participation in the survey. We found no significant differences for public assistance receipt based on whether the respondent was interviewed or not.

Because all of the families in both the interview sample and the greater IFS sample are poor, we used homelessness and residential change to assess relative levels of poverty.⁷ As shown in [Table 1](#), 37.5% ($n=6$) of the interview sample respondents were homeless in the 12 months prior to their IFS survey. Homelessness did differ between the respondents who were interviewed and those who were not, with the interviewed parents significantly more likely to have been homeless ($p<.05$). In contrast, the number of times each respondent changed residences in the past year did not differ between the groups. In our sample of interviewed families, respondents tended to have moved less than 2 times ($n=14$), with 12.5% of the sample ($n=2$) having moved 3 times or more.

B. INTERVIEWS

Although these descriptive statistics provide useful information about our sample, a more in-depth investigation is needed to understand the impact that involvement with both the welfare system and child welfare system has on these families. Data from interviews with the 16 locatable dual-system families were analyzed using computer software (QSR NUD*IST) designed specifically for qualitative inquiries. This program

⁷ Although the IFS does include several income variables, the response rate for these questions was very low. As a result, we could not use actual income as an indication of poverty.

helped us to discern seven primary themes which shape our discussion of the interviews – daily routine, financial issues, work, work impediments, TANF involvement, child welfare involvement, and TANF and child welfare connections.

1. Daily Routine

The daily lives of the respondents are consumed with child care, housekeeping, and school or work. Respondents with school-age children described their daily lives through the lens of “a school day.” Each day starts early – between 5 and 6 a.m. – to allow enough time to clean, feed, and transport their children to school. Once the children leave the house, the respondents attend to their own personal responsibilities. For most of the parents interviewed, this involves either work or some form of schooling.

Of the four parents who were not working or attending school, the time when their children are at school is typically spent either looking for work, housing, or education opportunities.

Every day is pretty different for me... Right now I'm not working, so sometimes I might go to a friend's house, and then umm sometimes I go to different job fairs, or different [welfare offices] and stuff, just to see, you know, what I might like to look into, like schooling and stuff like that. (Vivian)⁸

These parents also indicated that some days are spent home alone, either cleaning the house or watching television. However, like the working parents, these women organize each day around their children's school attendance. At the end of the school day, most respondents return home to meet their children.

⁸ We use fictitious names for respondents in this discussion to protect their confidentiality

The ability to greet their children after school is a function of the part-time employment these parents had found. Most parents work in retail jobs or at nursing homes, which allow them to end their workdays in the early afternoon. Those working parents unable to return home at the end of the school day secure child-care assistance through family members or friends. The women who attend classes, most often to receive their GED, indicated relief that their classes allowed them to return home in unison with their children.

Once the children return home, respondents spend the rest of the day providing child-care, cleaning, assisting with homework, and preparing for the evening meal. During this time the children either complete their homework, or play with friends. Most parents reported that at the end of the day they relax with their children and watch television. Almost all of the parents report an early bedtime for both the children and themselves, around 8:30 or 9:00 in the evening.

2. Financial Issues

Not surprisingly, the parents we interviewed face tremendous financial pressures. Although the majority of the respondents reported some form of employment, the part-time nature of the work limits both the hours and the wages available. In addition, the types of retail and “pink collar” jobs that these parents secure are unlikely to provide important and costly benefits, such as medical care (Duncan et al., 2001; Needell et al., 1999). Of the parents we interviewed who were working, most work as part-time cashiers at retail stores or as tele-marketers. Several parents either work, or were in training for work, in nursing homes. For those respondents not working and receiving

cash assistance alone, the monthly benefits were often insufficient to pay both rent and utilities.

Brenda, a working single-mother who also receives supplementary cash assistance, finds that the money she receives from public aid is simply not enough to meet her own needs and those of her 5 children:

I just make do with what I have. The toughest part is paying the bills. When it comes to paying the bills and there's not enough money, you're looking at the kids and they want this and they want that and you can't get them what they want.

Paying bills and rent means that other needs go unmet. Brenda expressed deep concern with the costs associated with her children's schooling:

Me and a couple people at my job was talking, and we didn't understand why come when school getting ready to start, why come they don't give people allowances to buy school clothes. Because that's a lot especially when women are single and they have to buy school clothes. 'Cause all of mine are sitting up wondering where their school clothes at. They won't get none.... By the time I get done paying bills, I don't have no money to buy school clothes.... One month you might have to let all the bills go to have enough money to buy school clothes.

Although Brenda has a job, her cash assistance is cut each time she receives a raise in salary. As a result, over the past four years Brenda's monthly grant has been reduced from \$529 to \$340 to its current level – \$100. Like many of the respondents we interviewed, Brenda has trouble paying both the rent and her bills. “Once I pay the rent,” she confided, “I'm broke. I can't pay the whole [electricity] bill.”

Financial problems of this sort are echoed by all of the respondents, those working and those who are not. While public aid benefits such as Food Stamps and

Medicaid make an important contribution to their lives, the combined assistance – even coupled with paid employment – is not enough to raise these parents out of poverty. As a result, these parents face an ongoing struggle to provide for their children’s basic daily needs. After paying for rent, most parents we interviewed found providing enough food to be a daunting task.

Cynthia is a working mother with two children who receives Food Stamps and Medicaid, but no cash grant. Because she works, these benefits alone do not provide the level of support that she needs to feed her family.

Try feeding a teenager on \$140 a month. I don’t even make it through the month. I mean, they go through a gallon of milk every 2 days, a loaf of bread every day practically. Ya know. I mean I get [money on my link card⁹] on the first, and I buy....I usually spend it all. I get all my meals and everything, ‘cause I seem to get more if I do it that way than if I just get it everyday or whatever. Although I usually have enough meat and stuff to last me a month, but I run out of milk and bread and eggs and all that. There’s no money. Then I beg and borrow off of everybody. I mean, it’s terrible. I’m gonna get another job.

Like Cynthia, many of the respondents expressed concern about their ability to provide their children with adequate food. Other common child-rearing expenses, such as a trip to the movies, a bowling arena, or a skating rink, are considered prohibitive “luxuries” that “put a real damper on your pocket” (Beverly).

3. Paid Employment

Paid employment, either current or anticipated, is a major component of these parents’ lives. Every respondent indicated a preference for earning an income. Those respondents who were already working emphasized getting a better job with higher pay.

⁹ Link card refers to the commonly used name for Illinois’ food stamp program.

Those not working at the time of the interview expressed a desire for education and training in order to get a job.

Every parent we interviewed held out work as the single most important means to improve their lives. As Rhonda put it, “I wanna work! I wanna make me some money! I’m tired of sittin’ up getting a ‘Lord have mercy’ check every month—really, I am. I wanna be umm, self-sufficient,” her voice began to trail off, “and I’m gonna be real soon.” In addition to the financial benefits of employment, the parents we interviewed perceived work as a means to transition into the legitimate world. According to Angela, work represents normalcy. “And then I would see other people working and, you know, doing stuff like *normal* people do,” Angela said. “And I wanted to be a normal, productive member of society just like them.”

While the parents we interviewed consider paid employment to be a potential solution to their financial problems, it also holds much symbolic value. These parents view work as a way to achieve legitimacy and earn respect.

Decent jobs, however, are a scarce commodity among these parents. While part-time retail work is generally available, the kind of employment that can lift these families out of poverty is particularly difficult to secure. State and private job services do provide these parents with some of the assistance they need to find employment. Many of the parents expressed appreciation for job search programs funded by the state or provided by their TANF caseworker. Private support agencies, such as the YMCA and various church groups, also provide job training programs that helped some of these women acquire office skills. Despite generally positive appraisals of the state’s job search programs, a few respondents indicated that the job assistance programs are inadequate.

Vivian said that she repeatedly asked for information about job training programs and education, but received no help from her TANF caseworker. Michelle felt that the training programs forced too many parents into nursing home work, even if the parent preferred a different job.

Many parents who indicated a preference for work also expressed a concomitant fear that earning income would affect their cash benefits, Food Stamps, and medical coverage. As Michelle stated, “I personally want to work, but you can’t work and get the Food Stamps.” Michelle believed that the new TANF requirements dictate that if she reached a certain level of income, “they take everything...Food Stamps...they might even take the medical card.” Michelle has already spent the little cash she earns by the time she needs to buy food:

I mean come on, at least give them the Food Stamps. That’s the least. I mean help them feed their kids. It’s not like they’re making any money with their jobs. And then you gotta buy food off of that: That makes it hard for them to make it.

Michelle perceived work, while desirable, to have serious costs that make it difficult to provide food and medical care to her children. The level of income that Michelle would have to reach to entirely lose Food Stamps benefits, however, is well beyond her current earning potential (see Boo, 2001). This error illustrates a more general problem of recipients’ inadequate or faulty understanding of the welfare rules. As a result, some parents avoid work, or working too much, for fear of losing their benefits.

In addition, some parents who held jobs felt that they are worse off, financially and emotionally, than when they were receiving welfare. For example, Justin said that it is difficult not receiving cash assistance at this time in his life. All of the money he earns goes to pay rent, bills, and groceries. Justin worries about being able to pay the bills on a

consistent basis, a concern he did not have while on welfare. “I am scratching it paycheck by paycheck. It is kinda hard right here, but you got to make it work for yourself. So that’s what I’m doing.”

4. Work Impediments

Although all of the parents whom we interviewed expressed a desire to work, they also noted several impediments to finding and maintaining employment. These impediments include inadequate or unavailable housing, lack of access to transportation, and inaccessible child care. Work impediments can have individual and cumulative effects on a parent’s ability to find, secure, and maintain employment. Accordingly, these impediments help illustrate the difficulty of welfare to work transitions.

a. Housing

A major impediment to work is the unavailability of adequate and affordable housing. Of the 16 parents we interviewed, 7 reported substantial housing problems currently or in the recent past. Housing problems range from being evicted for not paying the rent, to shelter living, to homelessness. Three of these families are currently living in a shelter. Further, several respondents indicated that housing difficulties had hindered their ability to find a job.

For example, Rhonda identified housing as her number one priority. Rhonda needs a home so that she can maintain a job: “I need to find housing because I can’t work for nobody if I can’t be there on time.” Part of the problem, Rhonda noted, is that most landlords would prefer not to rent to someone with five children. This, coupled with the

fact that she was evicted from her home five years ago, has made it very difficult for her to find an apartment for herself and her children. Rhonda's housing insecurity has also led to problems with her children's schooling. Because she hasn't been able to find an apartment near school, her children are often tardy. For the two days before the interview, Rhonda watched as the public transportation bus drove right past them. "Why, I don't know," she added, "they waited outside for 48 minutes today and 37 minutes yesterday waiting for the next bus."

Other parents had difficulty finding employment because of their housing problems. Although Kelly has been looking for work recently and "a cleaning service [had] called, right now I've got to focus on getting us in a place." She shook her head and said that it seemed like "there is always something that keeps me from working." As a result, Kelly indicated that her "main focus" lately had been on finding housing, rather than a job.

Housing problems have a tendency to spread into other areas of the respondents' lives. Inadequate housing, or even frequent moves, can make it difficult to find and maintain employment, social services, and child care. In turn, these problems can lead to stress for the parent (McLoyd, 1990) and, at times, the appearance of child neglect. According to Christina, "many people stay in bad relationships with bad guys because they need him to pay rent." Christina also suggested that lack of housing "is why women get into drugs and prostitution so that they can make money to pay for rent and bills."

Sally provides a good example of the tendency for housing issues to snowball into larger problems. According to Sally:

A long time ago I had housing...I had a real nice apartment – 2 bedrooms. I had a car. I had a job. Everything was going real good for me for a few months. That was back in '96 or '97. Then I just turned 21. I went out drinking with a friend and got a DUI. So I had to sell my car to get out of jail, which was like \$300. Then I lost my job 'cause I sold my car. Then I lost my apartment 'cause I lost my job.

Sally's main goal is to find an affordable place to live. Over the last year, she has had three different roommates. She plans to move in with a new roommate, whom she will pay \$300 per month toward the rent. Although Sally would prefer to live alone in Section 8 housing,¹⁰ she decided not to apply because "there's such a long waiting list." Respondents who did find Section 8 housing were extremely grateful. Christina felt "lucky to discover Section 8. Otherwise, I couldn't pay the rent or the bills."

b. Transportation

Lack of adequate transportation also affects multiple aspects of these parents' lives, especially their ability to care for their children. Indeed, the issue of transportation was raised by almost all of the parents we interviewed. Many expressed gratitude that they had a car or lived near a bus line. Those without accessible transportation, however, highlighted the difficulty of finding a consistent means to get their children to school and themselves to work.

Rhonda's experiences illustrate the broad reach of transportation issues. In the summer of 1999, Rhonda participated in an intensive job training program. She enjoyed the classes and was doing well, but was eventually "dropped" from the class because she

¹⁰ "Section 8 housing" refers to the federal program that helps needy families pay rent for residences in the private sector. The Section 8 Housing Assistance Program allows a tenant to pay 30% of his or her annual income for rent by making up the difference in federal funds. In Illinois, the maximum income limits for Section 8 Housing range between \$19,550 for one person to \$36,850 for eight people.

“was the only one comin’ from a distance.” Rhonda was late to almost every class because the earliest bus in her area left at 5:55 a.m. and she had to drop her five children at two different locations. She missed her last job training meeting because she was simply too tired. Coupled with her full-time work schedule, the extensive traveling “is wearing me out.” She is considering shifting to a part-time job.

Other respondents echo the sentiment that inadequate transportation negatively affects their ability to keep a job. Christina has always struggled to find money for, and a method of, transportation to work. When she informed her welfare office that she didn’t have any way to get to her job, the caseworker gave her a bus card with ten free rides on it. Christina explained that ten rides hardly helped her at all. “I mean you have to be there every day.....it was a joke.” Christina sees a close connection between her transportation needs with her past job troubles.

I don’t know how many jobs I’ve had. I’ve had to leave the job cause there’s no sitter, or not enough money, or transportation. I just got my car only....2 years ago. And my church gave me my car. Well, I say that God gave me my car through church.....cause only God knew. I was like, “I can’t even take it anymore. I can’t get to work, I can’t....” And then public aid’s pressuring me to get to work. And if I don’t get to work then come down there, sit in their office for 8 hours a day until I find a job. How ya goin find a job sittin in an office 8 hours a day?

Although the public assistance office recognized Christina’s transportation problems, it offered only a short-term solution. Respondents consider transportation to be a necessary component of finding and maintaining a job, but find the assistance that welfare offices provide to be inadequate and short-sighted.

c. Childcare

Respondents reported that problems with transportation can affect their ability to provide adequate child care, as well as their ability to get to work. A number of parents indicated that their inability to transport caregivers to their home, or their children to the caregiver, has resulted in sporadic childcare for their children, causing them to miss work. Thus, transportation has both a direct and an indirect effect on workforce participation.

For single parents, childcare is a necessary component of full-time employment. Poor parents face considerable obstacles obtaining childcare because they often live in less desirable neighborhoods and have limited means to pay its cost. Transportation problems add yet another obstacle for poor parents who seek childcare. When asked about her experiences finding childcare, Sally replied “it’s hard ‘cause I don’t have any way to get [my son] to [the center].” Sally also tried to find a private caregiver, but none she contacted provided their own transportation. As a result, Sally had trouble holding a job and currently is not working. Without the ability to transport themselves and their children to and from childcare, parents must sometimes subordinate their need to work to the stronger need to secure their child’s well-being. Sally stated that her son is “number one. But then my job’s [also] number one, because I got to have a job to take care of him.”

5. TANF Involvement

a. Benefit Levels

Families that received public assistance nonetheless remain well below the poverty level. The highest monthly grant for the parents we interviewed was \$570 for a family of six children. The lowest monthly grant among those receiving cash assistance was \$100. At the time of our interviews, half of the parents no longer received TANF benefits (see [Table 2](#)). Among those who continued to receive cash assistance, many reported a substantial reduction in the monthly grant over the past four years. All but one of the parents were both receiving Food Stamps and participating in the Medicaid program.¹¹

b. Requirements

As discussed in Part II, an integral component of the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation was the implementation of behavioral requirements to receive assistance. In order to continue receiving federal funding in the form of block grants, states were required to implement strict work and schooling requirements. The time limits imposed by the PRWORA are tolled only if the recipient is working or engaged in a federally approved “school activity.” According to Angela, the requirements dictate that “I just maintain my job to be eligible for the TANF. That’s all I got to do is just don’t quit my job, don’t get fired. And just that’s it. Just maintain my job. And so far I’ve been doing it.” Parents who do not meet the work requirements risk sanctions.

¹¹ Because our interviews were conducted during the Summer of 1999, these numbers differ somewhat from those presented in Table 1.

All of the parents we interviewed identified the need to work as the principal message of welfare reform. The parents experienced this message in a variety of ways. Beverly is required to submit a “quarterly report form” to her public aid office. While this form may be mailed in to the aid office, Beverly hand delivers it for fear that “they will say it was lost in the mail.” She is also required to participate in the Illinois Job Search program, where she must turn in ten to twenty job applications per month, each signed by the potential employer. Justin was working eighteen hours a week, but his caseworker said that he needed to work forty hours or risk losing his benefits. Like other respondents, Justin explained that if he could not find a job with enough hours, he was required to work in the TANF office forty hours a week.

These strict work requirements are supplemented by school attendance requirements in cases where jobs are unlikely at the recipient’s current education level. To keep receiving assistance, Shirley is required to attend GED classes. Although she would like to earn her GED, she is concerned that if she misses classes, “they will sanction me, you know.” In addition to her school requirements, Shirley must obtain ten signatures from potential employers. “They give these lists where we gotta go out and look for jobs, and get the paper signed—like ten signatures saying that you was out there lookin’ for one.” Shirley is optimistic about her job opportunities once she completes her GED. When she informed one employer that she was in the process of getting her GED she was told to come back in eight weeks and re-apply. She stressed that she will go back there because it was a nursing home and she was genuinely interested in that type of employment.

While time limits coupled with work and school requirements have proved effective in forcing families off of welfare (Geen et al., 2001), they often present conflicts with other aspects of recipients' lives. Michelle has a child under age one. Under the TANF regulations, she is not required to work during her child's first year. However, she said that her TANF caseworker continues to pressure her to work. Although Dolores is unsure how much longer she will be allowed to receive cash assistance, she is afraid that she has less than a year left. Dolores has medical problems that make it difficult for her to work, and should qualify her for an exemption from the employment requirements.

As evidenced by the experiences of Michelle and Dolores, there is considerable confusion among caseworkers about the implementation of the new welfare rules. Many respondents are being forced to work even though they qualify for one of the program's exemptions.

In addition, a number of the parents did not understand the TANF requirements. Christina was not sure whether she had to comply with a 30 hour a week job requirement to receive Medicaid and Food Stamps alone. Other parents, such as Dolores, indicated that she did not have to meet any requirements to receive cash assistance.

Many respondents viewed the public assistance office as a troublesome bureaucracy. Though she believed she was not required to fulfill any requirements, Dolores still considered welfare to be "a hassle." Despite her level of need, she indicated that the small amount of money she received from the program was "not worth it" for her to go through the tangle of administrative procedures. Indeed, discouraging parents from seeking public aid appeared to be part of the government's motivation for imposing so many requirements on them. After experiencing the conflicts between work requirements,

child care, and transportation, Dolores was fed up. “That’s when I just told ‘em to just cut me off cash assistance,” Dolores reported. “‘Cause there’s too much pressures and too much conditions for you being on cash assistance.” This sentiment was echoed throughout the interviews of those parents who had stopped seeking cash benefits. As Beverly explained:

A lot of us look at this like that. If you still receiving medical assistance and Food Stamps and you constantly gotta fill out these report forms and this and that and come in and take the abuse from them – you still on public aid. That’s how a lot of us look at it.

c. Sanctions

In addition to confusing and, at times, conflicting requirements, the welfare reform law imposes sanctions intended to elicit compliance with TANF rules and to change recipients’ behavior. For example, Justin immediately began to seek employment when his TANF caseworker told him that his benefits would be terminated. Most of the parents we interviewed acted similarly: they had avoided sanctions through compliance. As a result, actual sanctions were not a significant problem for the parents in our sample. However, the threat of sanctions exerted a very real influence on their actions and behaviors.

Shirley has never been sanctioned and does her best to avoid the possibility. “I’ve did everything that they asked me. And I can’t really afford to be sanctioned by me having eight kids, you know.” To avoid sanctions she fills out job search forms, forwards copies of her rent receipts to the TANF office, and arrives on time for all of her TANF office appointments. “If you’re not there on time and stuff... don’t expect for the check or the stamps to be on your link card ‘cause they won’t. They hurry up and cut you fast!”

Shirley continued, “say you probably just forgot about the appointment. They ain’t tryin’ ta hear that. They just cut you off.”

d. Work Assistance

Despite their severe criticisms of the administrative difficulties imposed by TANF, the parents we interviewed, both employed and unemployed, offered generally favorable appraisals of the work transition programs. For example, Angela praised the TANF work requirements and job programs because she believed that they gave her the incentive and tools to find employment.

You know what made me go out and get a job? It’s because I was tired of living like I was living. I was tired of always wanting to do something for me. I was tired. And I just started to do something for myself. And then welfare, they did kind of give me like a little push, too, because they was having job seminars and stuff.

This finding supports the conclusion reached by other researchers that welfare recipients do value work, but are hampered by obstacles to finding employment and child care (Zaslow & Emig, 1997).

Although the desire to work ran high among the parents we interviewed, they nevertheless had difficulty finding well-paid employment. Several respondents were pleased that the TANF program allowed them to remain on welfare while they attended school. The parents who were engaged in educational or vocational training considered it an opportunity to obtain a better job.

Some parents, however, criticized the type of training available. One major concern was that too many welfare recipients were being trained to become nurses’

assistants. The frequency with which this concern was voiced suggests that this type of work may be too strongly emphasized in the work training programs.

e. Food Stamps/Medical Assistance

Our interviews confirmed that Food Stamps and Medicaid provide invaluable assistance to poor families. Every parent we interviewed received either Medicaid, Food Stamps, or both. Parents universally commended these two programs as crucial to the economic and physical survival of their families.

The most important benefit of Food Stamps that parents cited is the ability to use the money saved on groceries to pay rent and bills. Gloria has seven children, “growing kids who love eatin’.” Gloria stated that she could not afford to feed her children without Food Stamps. “Now, I understand that if they find me a job, I can go to work to pay my rent and pay my bills, right? But what about the food situation?,” she asked. “If they cut your money, they should still have funds with the food. The food benefit is really good.” Almost every parent found Food Stamps crucial to their economic survival.

The parents considered the Medicaid program equally indispensable. Pamela, who no longer receives cash assistance, stated that Medicaid is necessary for her family to “get to the doctor.” Gloria believed that paid employment was the preferred source of family income, but was concerned because she heard that Medicaid benefits might be cut back. “I understand that they want you to work for your money.” But, “alotta people can’t afford it, to go to the doctor, to pay those high bills.” Dolores also felt that the medical card had been a great help to her family. In addition to paying for general

medical expenses, her medical coverage provided her son's expensive prescriptions that she could not obtain otherwise. Dolores described Medicaid as "a dream come true."

Nevertheless, some respondents expressed concern about the availability of services under Medicaid. Although Beverly felt that "the medical card" helped her family, she noted that her children also need to go to the dentist. According to Beverly, there are no dentists in her area who accept Medicaid. Other parents questioned the level of care provided by free clinics. Tonya said, "if you're not actually paying, they don't give you the same quality of care – because they feel like there isn't anybody paying them." Although Tonya credited the Medicaid program with protecting the health of her family, she believed "you can go into them free hospitals and be left to die."

f. Caseworkers

Public aid caseworkers are the main conduit through which recipients experience welfare reform, providing the only interpersonal contact that most of these parents have with the TANF program. While the parents we interviewed identified several important structural problems with the TANF system, they praised caseworkers who were both competent and consistently available.

Unfortunately, caseworker consistency was not the norm among these parents' experiences. Indeed, the principal complaint issued by the parents we interviewed was an extremely high turnover rate among caseworkers. For instance, Kimberly indicated that she has had between sixteen to eighteen different caseworkers during her involvement with welfare. Beverly echoed this complaint: "Every time I go in there I got a different

caseworker for some strange reason. It's like...basically every time I get a quarterly report form I have a different caseworker.”

By disrupting the relationship with recipients, caseworker turnover frustrates the goal of helping parents to find work. Parents are forced to repeatedly educate new caseworkers about their situation. As Brenda explained:

Sometimes...[it] confuses you. Because then you have to go back and tell them everything you've explained to the other caseworker. They'll tell you, 'Well I'm not familiar with your case.' Then you have to explain what it is. When you've had a caseworker for so long, when you call, they can help you right off. They'll remember.

Worse, any bond between parent and caseworker is broken and becomes more difficult to rebuild with each subsequent change. Because of high turnover rates, Cynthia said that she doesn't really know her caseworkers any more. “I'd like to have the same caseworker all the time, instead of having different people,” Cynthia confided. “That way they could get to know me and I could get to know them.”

The parents we interviewed also found it disturbing that caseworker changes occur without any notification. Because her caseworker has changed without warning so often, Brenda no longer expects to speak with the same person when she contacts the public aid office. “Now when I call, I just say ‘let me talk to my caseworker.’ And if they ask me who my caseworker is, I just say ‘I don't know, you all tell me. Every time I call, I get a different caseworker.’” Without continuity, or even notification that a change is going to occur, many parents devalued their relationship with caseworkers.

The parents also identified, with considerably less frequency, other problems with caseworkers, such as poor overall attitude, condescension, and poor punctuality. These

criticisms tended to focus on a single caseworker with whom the parent had a negative experience.

Positive appraisals of caseworkers tended to focus on the concrete benefits that the caseworkers offered. When caseworkers performed their tasks in a timely and helpful manner, the parents felt that they had a partner in the system. Christina said that her caseworker is “kind” and that they “work well together.” The caseworker listens to her when she speaks to him and she sees him as a supporter. Parents also praised caseworkers who performed their work quickly. For example, Shirley described her caseworker as “pretty reasonable. He gets his clients right away from the waiting area if he knows they’re there.”

g. General Appraisals

Most parents found public assistance to be extremely helpful, providing needed support in times of financial trouble or transition. As noted above, the parents considered Food Stamps and Medicaid to be essential to their survival. The cash assistance that TANF provides was less popular, in part because of the attendant requirements. Additionally, many of the parents had jobs and, therefore, had a less pressing need for cash. Angela identified the benefits of Food Stamps and Medicaid for parents transitioning from welfare to work:

It’s helped us...It’s helped us a lot. Because with the Food Stamps. ‘Cause it really might be tough for me to pay cash right now, you know, because I have a part time job. The medical [is helpful] just ‘cause...I’m not able to pay the medical [bills] right now ‘cause I’ve only been working for, like, four months.

Parents' appreciation for the TANF program did not mean that that they enjoyed receiving public aid. As Dolores succinctly stated, "it sucks." Most parents emphatically agreed that they would prefer to be "self-sufficient," and are working toward that goal. For example, Rhonda stated, "I'm not gonna tell them where to go — but I'm gonna tell them that I no longer need their services... in a *very* nice way! I'm very grateful for them, you know, providing me with the services they have. I really am, cause I don't know where I'd be today — but I will tell them in a nice way 'I no longer need your services'."

h. Welfare Reform

As a whole, the parents we interviewed expressed an ambivalent attitude about welfare reform. On the one hand, most parents agreed with TANF's goal of self-sufficiency and supported the time limits and work requirements that TANF imposes. On the other hand, parents felt that cash assistance, Food Stamps, and Medicaid were vital to their families' well being. They indicated that work, while preferable, is not always available. Even parents who found jobs suggested that their cash grants were reduced too drastically by the income they earned.

According to Kelly, time limits are important because "people get used to the check, they been getting it for so long." Although Kelly agreed with the principle behind time limits, she also stated that it was a good idea to exempt "people who need it." Dolores also believed that, absent time limits, some parents become too dependent on public assistance. She suggested that AFDC had hurt her family because it "made [her] lazy." Dolores stated that time limits helped her to reverse the damage done by

“becoming comfortable with being on public aid and having enough money to get by.” While it is difficult to disentangle personal beliefs from the welfare reform rhetoric, it seems that Dolores has come to internalize the premises that underlie TANF.

Angela felt that TANF is “a good system” because it allows recipients to keep some benefits while earning wages. She believed that, before welfare reform, many people failed to look for work out of fear that they would lose their benefits. Angela stated that when she relied on AFDC, she was “complacent and didn’t feel the need to do anything” and “didn’t know how to enjoy life.”

Even respondents who supported TANF’s work requirements, however, had doubts about the way in which they were implemented. For example, parents questioned the wisdom of cutting cash benefits too soon after the transition from welfare to work. Instead, they suggested that a brief period of continuing aid would ease this transition and help to ensure that fewer parents return to the welfare rolls.

In addition, some parents expressed concern that the reduction in their cash assistance that occurred when they worked at part-time jobs or received a raise was too great. In the past, the benefit reduction rate for working parents was “dollar for dollar”: each dollar they earned at work reduced their cash grant by a dollar. The 1996 welfare reform incorporated economists’ concerns that this scheme created a disincentive to work.¹² In Illinois, the current benefit reduction rate is legislatively mandated to be, at most, one third of the recipients earned income (305 ILCS 5/4-1.6a). Although this rate

¹² According to the Illinois General Assembly, “the current process of calculating earned income for purposes of determining the amount of aid under this article is complicated and must be changed to provide an understandable incentive for clients to maintain or obtain employment and transition off of welfare. The current policy provides no meaningful incentive for clients to obtain employment. As a result of this complicated earned income budgeting process, many clients under this Article find that they are financially better off to remain on welfare and that there is actually no incentive to find employment.” 305 ILCS 5/4-1.6a.

is lower than in the past, Brenda felt that it should be even lower. From her perspective, “they (legislators) ain’t thinking, because for me to make enough to pay the bills I have to try to work an extra day or something.” But while working more hours will increase her wages, “it don’t do me no good because when I send the paper (pay receipt) to you all, you all gonna cut [my benefits]. So I’ll be back in the same spot.” Perhaps because of the lowered benefit reduction rate mandated by Illinois law, few parents expressed this complaint.

Similarly, few respondents discussed the child exclusion policy, or “family cap.” As discussed in Part II, this provision is a behavioral modification technique designed to discourage women from having additional children while on welfare (Barksdale, 1995; Williams, 1992). While this provision has garnered widespread support among politicians, the decision to bear children is likely more complex than the simple cost-benefit analysis family cap proponents assume (Luker, 1996; Musick, 1993). Rhonda’s description reflects the complexity of women’s decision making:

And I don’t think it’s fair that...they don’t give you cash benefits for newborn babies. I don’t think that’s fair. It’s not stopping the problem of women having babies. See, because there’s a lot of people in different situations. And there’s a lot of times people have been down for so many years just by being in relationships, or just adjusting to living a certain type of way in poverty, or however you may put it, and then they don’t have the self-esteem or the ability...or have enough pride to say that I want to change. You know... a lot of people have a lot of issues. You know, and they need to see that... like a lot of people need to be counseled from, you know, being raped for years, or having loss or grievances, you know loss of a loved one—a baby, a husband, or whatever. It’s a lot. People can have mental... incapability’s. [Welfare reformers] don’t know. And they need to find out first before they be quick to say ‘well, you’ve been on this for this amount of time and we’re gonna...’ [cut you off]. They should really look into things like that. ‘Cause there’s a lot of people that need help that don’t know how to get it!

Rhonda's observations are supported by empirical studies that consistently find no relationship between the level of welfare benefits and out-of-wedlock births (Duncan & Hoffman, 1990; Luker, 1996). Further, it is interesting to note that, despite the political popularity of the family cap provision, Rhonda was the only respondent who mentioned it. This suggests that family caps do not influence recipients' decisions about childbearing to the extent that legislators predicted.

6. *Child Welfare Involvement*

All of the parents we interviewed were involved with both the welfare system and the child welfare system. As indicated in [Table 3](#) the extent of child welfare involvement varied greatly among respondents. Although the majority of parents had only a few interactions with the child welfare system, a substantial minority had more than five indicated reports.

a. Drug Use

An important common theme among the parents was the use of drugs. Ten of the sixteen parents mentioned drug use during their interview.¹³ Three of these women had children who were born drug exposed to drugs. At least two of the parents were living in halfway houses that serve as drug treatment centers at the time of the interview.

Rhonda's addiction to drugs led to her DCFS involvement, when the father of her children reported her. While initially she was ordered only to take parenting classes, Rhonda said that she "knew I needed more than just parenting. I knew I had a problem."

¹³ Eight parents related information regarding their own drug problems. One spoke of the problems that her mother had. One discussed her son's drug-related problems.

Her experience with DCFS was positive, in part because she recognized her drug problem and was glad to overcome it. She no longer uses drugs and has had no further referrals to DCFS.

Like Rhonda, Kelly had a close relative, her sister, contact DCFS regarding her drug addiction. Kelly admits to having a serious drug problem and to having “taken the kids with me to drug houses.” Prior to her sister’s intervention, her life was controlled by drugs. “I lived to use. That’s all I wanted was the drugs. Nothin’ was on my mind except how I’m goin’ to get a bag. That’s it.” In order to regain custody of her children, Kelly was required to complete a 7-day detoxification program. She now lives in a drug treatment facility with her children. Although at first she was mad at her sister, now Kelly is grateful: “I’m grateful that it got me where I’m at today. I wouldn’t sit down. I wasn’t listening. If she wouldn’t have, no tellin’ where I would be now. She just had to really let me know that I could lose my kids. My kids are my world.”

All of the parents who discussed their drug problems expressed appreciation for the intervention of DCFS and the drug treatment programs the agency provided. When Dolores went to court after she completed drug treatment, she “thanked them for taking the kids. In treatment I had to do my steps, you know, and I thanked (them) for helping me get on the right track.” Parents did criticize the scarcity of available drug treatment programs and the conflicts that periodic drug tests introduced into their schedules. The two parents who did not mention drugs, but had an indicated report on their DCFS records, may have harbored a more negative appraisal of the system. However, parents’ appraisals of DCFS drug interventions were generally positive.

One reason for the positive response may be the success the parents we interviewed had in fighting their addiction; none of the parents had their children removed for extended periods of time as a result of drug use. They were able to control their drug problem and to regain custody of their children. Their experiences show that effective drug treatment programs can play an important role both in recovery and in reunifying families.

b. Neglect

There is a documented connection between poverty and neglect (Pelton, 1994). A settled principle in the child welfare system is that no child should be removed from home for “reasons of poverty alone” (Pelton, 1978; 1989). In practice, however, poverty is often difficult to disentangle from neglect (Frame, 1999; Pelton, 1978; 1989). Indeed, critics of the child welfare system charge that poor parents are often subject to state intervention solely on account of their poverty status. Child welfare categories such as “environmental neglect, inadequate supervision, inadequate food, inadequate shelter, inadequate clothing” (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2000) clearly overlap with the consequences of poverty. This overlap was also prominent in our sample.

Taking all child welfare cases in the study together, including both the indicated and unfounded instances of DCFS involvement, 63% involved some form of environmental neglect (see [Table 3](#)). In contrast, the other 37% of cases were comprised of all other forms of abuse and neglect, including medical neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. Our interviews revealed that welfare receipt alone is insufficient to help

families out of poverty and, by extension, to avoid neglect allegations by child welfare authorities.

Some parents sensed that their poverty made them unfairly vulnerable to neglect charges. As Michelle stated, “the system is all messed up. I feel like the reason they took my kids is that I’m black and I’m poor and I ain’t got nothing. I’m not working so what can I give the kids: That’s what they think.” The parents were well aware of the tendency for child protective services to remove children for conditions associated with poverty (Pelton, 1984). They articulated the argument that child welfare researchers and advocates have posited for decades: children should not be removed from their parents for reasons of poverty alone (Pelton, 1984).

c. Caseworker Involvement

Caseworkers, employed by either DCFS or private agencies, play an enormously important role in the lives of families involved with child protective services. Caseworkers determine whether a report of child maltreatment is unfounded or indicated. Their opinions influence judges’ decisions about parental fitness and progress toward reunification. Caseworkers are responsible for monitoring parents’ conformity with court requirements. Caseworkers also make key decisions about services that can help reunite families and prevent subsequent child maltreatment.

The parents we interviewed expressed great appreciation for the abilities and actions of individual caseworkers who were helpful and competent. However, they criticized many caseworkers for being ineffective, as well as frequent caseworker

turnover. Many parents also felt that the DCFS was too quick to remove children from their homes.

For example, although Vivian retained custody of her children, her experiences with DCFS left her with the impression that the agency is “real, real quick to try to get your kids.” She suggested that DCFS should “do a little more research as far as the different cases go” before removing children from their parents. She also felt that DCFS failed to distinguish between disciplining and abusing children. “Before they jump to conclusions they need to do more research and find out, you know, what’s really going on because everybody’s not abusing their kids. You know and it’s a difference between discipline and abuse. It’s a big difference.” Many parents echoed Vivian’s concern that DCFS separated children from their parents without adequate investigation.

As in the case of TANF caseworkers, parents were extremely unhappy with the high rate of turnover among child welfare caseworkers. Turnover among these workers and its detrimental impact on families’ reunification efforts are well documented (Duquette et al., 1997; Hasenfeld, 2000). Michelle reported that during her most recent court appearance, she had a new caseworker, a new children’s attorney, and a new state’s attorney. None of them was familiar with her case. “They don’t know the case as well as they would if the old people were there,” Michelle told us. As a result, her caseworker requested that she complete an array of services, which she “had the certificate that I’d already finished.” Though the judge eventually realized that the additional services were not needed, Michelle was frustrated by the caseworker’s ignorance of her case.

These criticisms suggest that the child welfare system’s structural deficiencies can hinder individual caseworkers’ efforts to assist families, making it more difficult for

parents to navigate the child welfare system and delaying the return of their children. For example, Rhonda's caseworker from a private agency was unprepared for a hearing before a judge. Rhonda said that the caseworker "wasn't doin' his job as far as presentin' the evidence while I'm doin' services. The judge even told him!" Michelle similarly complained that a private agency was "playin around and preventing me from getting my kids back. A friend told me that the longer they keep the kids, the more money they get." Finally, Brenda described an antagonistic relationship with her caseworker's supervisor at DCFS, stating that he was "out to get [her]":

Every time I call, he gets smart with me.... He tells me he will see to them taking my kids from me. I told him, I didn't ask you all for no help... You all told me you all would help me. But every time I talk to you all, you get smart with me.

Despite these criticisms, respondents praised caseworkers who were helpful and effective. Michelle indicated that her relationship with the caseworker, in contrast to the agency, was "cool" and that the caseworker was helping her to get her children back. Sally appreciated her caseworker's assistance in her legal battles with her former boyfriend over custody of their son. "You know a lot of people think they're there to take my child away, but they were on my side," Sally said. "And they have paperwork showing that if I ever have any problems with his father...they'll help me." Similarly, Gloria said that she considered her caseworker "a friend" with whom she "keeps no secrets."

When her children were removed from the home, Angela met with her caseworker to discuss the situation. The caseworker asked her to consider which was more important – her children or getting high? Angela said that this conversation "was

so instrumental in just my thinking. Just to make me think different.” Working with the caseworker, Angela was able to enter a drug treatment program and quickly regain custody of her children.

Kelly also said that she has a very good relationship with her caseworker who has "really stuck by her.” Kelly explained that it was her caseworker’s loyalty that helped her to understand that her problems were manageable.

[When I went to court] my worker was there...and she told them I'm a good mother, that I just need counseling because I didn't know how to deal with things. I guess, just being with a husband for 10 years then ending up leavin' him because he didn't want to change and then getting' in another relationship I didn't know how to deal with that.

Kelly suggested that, without her caseworker, her court experience might have been too much to handle because she lacked the confidence to deal effectively with the judge and attorneys

In addition, some caseworkers offered parents increased access to financial resources. For example, a caseworker helped Sally to find housing and transportation assistance and bought Sally’s son Christmas presents that Sally couldn’t afford. Rhonda’s caseworker helped her to acquire “Norman Funds.” As Rhonda explained, “they try to do whatever it is necessary to try to keep families together...Norman funds is when they pay your first months rent and security [deposit]. If you have monies left over, then they pay your outstanding utility bills. And then they help you get furnishings for your home.”

Justin stated that his caseworker tried to help him find a job that paid more money. A caseworker directed Brenda to an intergovernmental grant program to help

pay the electricity bill. When Kimberly had a house-fire, her caseworker helped her to find a program that provided cash assistance for emergencies.

Overall, parents had a dualistic view of child welfare caseworkers. Several parents complained that caseworkers were overly anxious to remove children from their homes without adequate investigation or understanding of parents' economic situations. Parents also criticized the high turnover rates among caseworkers, and the resulting problem of insufficient preparation and ineffective assistance. On the other hand, parents praised individual caseworkers who were both competent and effective in helping them reunite with their children or meet their families' material needs.

d. Requirements

Parents with indicated cases of child abuse or neglect are typically required to comply with a service plan. Judges order these "services" as a means for parents both to improve their parenting skills and to demonstrate their desire to rectify the problem that led to their system involvement. Unlike TANF's federally mandated requirements, child welfare judges and caseworkers have discretion to cater services to an individual parent's problems. Nonetheless, parents must complete the court-ordered services plan to have their cases closed.

Service requirements may include participation in parenting classes, psychological evaluation and counseling, and drug rehabilitation programs. Parents with substance abuse problems are usually required to provide the court with periodic drug tests or "drops." Parents are often required to enroll in multiple services. A judge's requirement of particular services does not mean that those services are readily available.

Drug treatment programs, especially those that allow children to reside with their mothers, have extensive waiting lists (Gordon, 1999; Herring, 2000). In addition, the meeting times of the service programs may conflict with the childcare or work schedules of the parent.

All of these obstacles have the potential to delay case closings or children's return to their families. A number of parents stated that it was ver difficult to abide by all the requirements imposed by the court. For example, Michelle felt that the requirements in her plan are too numerous and, due to transportation problems, too hard to complete. She believes the service requirements are causing a delay in her reunification with her children. "Walking in my shoes is a motherfer," Michelle said. "Especially when you have done everything in your power to do what you can for those kids, and then they snatch them. That's a hurt feeling. My life was my kids. I'm gonna do what I have to to get them back."

The most prevalent services required among the parents we interviewed are parenting classes and drug treatment. Every parent was required to attend parenting classes or family counseling at one time or another. The parents found these classes to be helpful but rather basic. Kimberly learned how to make a budget and clean. Vivian found that the programs provided useful video tapes on parenting, as well as crayons and coloring books for her children. Gloria believed that family counseling helped her children. She said that they used to be angry, but they're "good now. They behave real good." She and her children especially enjoy family night, which they have every Friday. "(On family night) we read out of the bible, make dinner, make cookies, pies, bake something. We'll make pizza, tacos. And we'll sit down...and put the big TV (from my

bedroom in the living room) and we'll sit down and watch movies. They get up there and they do a group dance, a play, a puppet show. We go in the kitchen and cook and bake . . . they love that.”

Drug treatment was also a common required service among our sample of parents. As noted above, ten of the sixteen parents we interviewed were involved with drugs in some way. At the time of her interview, Kelly had just completed inpatient drug treatment and started an outpatient program. In addition, Kelly must provide “drops” every week and attend parenting classes, individual counseling, and family counseling with her children. She attributed her past inability to stop using drugs to living with her children’s father who was a heavy drug user. Although she had completed drug treatment programs before, she had always returned to her husband, who had not sought help for his addiction, hampering her recovery. Through weekly meetings with her caseworker and her therapist, Kelly identified this cycle as a problem and has taken steps to address it.

Respondents who completed drug treatment programs tended to credit the services with general improvements in their life. Gloria stated that her program “help[ed] me get my life together.” She attended an outpatient program for a year, during which time she provided urine samples for drug testing three times a week. The program worked for Gloria: she was reunited with her children. Other parents agreed that, while difficult to complete given the number of simultaneous services courts require, drug treatment programs are a necessary means to their goal of closing their cases.

e. Comments on the Child Welfare System

At the conclusion of the interview, we asked each parent to comment on the child welfare system and to suggest ways to improve it. The most frequent comment parents made was that DCFS acted too quickly to remove children from their parents' home. Many parents suggested that DCFS "jump[s] to conclusions" without "do[ing] enough investigating" (Dolores).

The ease with which DCFS is perceived to remove children has led to a pervasive fear of the agency. According to Brenda, "You can't hardly breathe, 'cause the first time you say the wrong thing, the Children and Family Services will be at your door talking about taking your kids." Some parents stated that DCFS authorities have deliberately upset them with threats and disparaging statements. As a consequence, many parents expressed fear of the agency's broad reach into their lives.

This fear has led some parents to avoid contact with service providers who are required to report child abuse and neglect. This deterrent effect is particularly troubling in the context of health care. Parents who fear that any injury to their child will result in a DCFS report are less likely to seek proper medical attention. As Brenda explained:

Like say, you take one of your kids to the hospital, they'll call Children and Family Services. Even if they know it's not your fault or nothing that could be helped, they will still call...If a child falls and hurt themselves, the first thing they'll want to do is call Children and Family Services...It happens all the time. Every time you go to the hospital, someone comes in with a little baby or their child is sick, they don't care what the circumstances was or anything. That's the first thing that comes out their mouth – call Children and Family Services.

Several parents expressed similar apprehensions. Their responses suggest that this avoidance behavior is common among the respondents' friends and family. Thus, the

fear of potential DCFS involvement appears to create a real barrier to needed health care services.

To address this fear, respondents suggested that DCFS make a greater effort to work with, rather than against, parents, especially during the initial stages of a case. Michelle said that DCFS should “at least work with the parent before taking the kid.” This sentiment was seconded by Brenda: “[DCFS] should “try to support [families] more and find programs to help them. Don’t make them feel bad all the time. Sit down and talk to them and find out what’s going on with them. Before I would judge them, I would try to help them.” In part, this problem may be a function of DCFS’ failure to provide extensive preventive services. Instead, the department is organized primarily to respond to family crises after abuse or neglect has occurred (Hardin, 1996).

Parents wondered what “could have been” had DCFS acted in a preventive, rather than punitive, manner. Christina provided insight into the need for additional preventive measures:

I still think it’s kinda unfair when you have maybe a single mom who has a few kids or somethin’, and [DCFS] be sayin, ‘Well, you shoulda done this an that.’ Well, maybe help the mom manage her stress, her anger a little more or somethin or...You know, not just take her kids from her forever.... That’s not fair either. Cause I’m sure she loved ‘em. She just didn’t know how to handle the situation she was in maybe, ya know. She said that it would be better if they would offer classes on coping strategies or stress and anger management.

As Christina’s comments suggest, parental stress is a correlate of poverty that is strongly associated with diminished parenting behaviors (McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd et al. 1994).

Barring any preventive intervention, parents who face multiple stressors, such as poverty,

employment problems, and single-parenthood, are at an increased risk for DCFS involvement.

Although the parents we interviewed maintained that DCFS could and should be improved, most also believed the agency to be necessary. In particular, Angela stated that when a parent “actually” abuses their children, DCFS intervention “serves a purpose in society.” When “people get caught up in what they doin’, and don’t take care of themselves or their children...[then] DCFS is necessary.” Michelle felt that “a lot of people don’t deserve to have their kids snatched away from them. And it’s a shame that [DCFS has] the power to do that.” But she also stated that “those parents who *actually* beat the child should not have the kid remain in the home.”

7. Connections between TANF & DCFS

The connection between welfare receipt and involvement in the child welfare system is not necessarily apparent. Although the majority of parents involved with DCFS are poor, the reverse is not true: most poor parents do not become involved with the child welfare system (Lewis et al., 2000). Because we selected our sample of parents based on their experience with both welfare systems, we anticipated that they would provide unique insight into this connection. While this certainly was the case, the parents’ perceptions of the ties between the welfare system and the child welfare system were not at the forefront of their minds. Very few parents were able to explicitly identify the overlap between the two systems. However, during the course of the interviews, parents began to identify several important connections between these two systems.

a. Childcare and Work Requirements

The availability of adequate childcare is critical for parents attempting to meet the demands of welfare reform. Parents without access to adequate childcare find it extremely difficult to simultaneously comply with the work requirements imposed under TANF and care for their children. Parents receiving welfare must secure child care or risk sanctions and possible involvement with the child welfare system. Indeed, the parents we interviewed indicated that lack of childcare was the main reason why they were unable to exit the welfare rolls.

The initial problem that many parents have with childcare is locating a trusted provider. Christina recently found a job that she enjoyed and that helped her to leave public assistance. Because she was unable to find help caring for her children, however, Christina eventually missed several days of work. As a result, she lost her job and is again receiving welfare. Christina cites childcare as the principal deterrent to her ability to maintain employment. Her “consistent problem” with getting off of welfare has been “being able to hold down a job while raising kids.” Similarly, Kimberly was told by her public aid worker to find a job, but could not find a babysitter because “everyone works.” She is only able to look for work while her children are at school

Finding childcare is especially difficult for parents who have housing problems. Shelters, for example, often do not provide this service. Because families that lack adequate housing may be forced to relocate on a daily basis, they cannot secure a regular child care arrangement. Angela she needs to hire a babysitter so she can increase the hours at her job. “But I just moved here. I don’t know many people,” she reported.

Angela now plans to wait until her oldest daughter is able to care for the younger children before she transitions to full-time employment.

Like many parents, Angela rejected the child care workers provided by the public aid office. “I’m really not trusting in the Department of Public Aid’s babysitters so I have to find one,” she explained. “I just don’t trust the people that they pick. They have a list of people that they, like, want to pick from, but I want to find my own sitter.”

Even if a parent is able to find a trustworthy child care provider, there are often problems with the state’s payments for this care. Several parents mentioned that their TANF grant provided cash assistance for childcare. However, this money is not disbursed at the same time the service is provided. According to Kelly, the public assistance childcare program is problematic because it “takes so long to get [the babysitters] their money-like 2 or 3 months. They want their money right then and there.” Beverly also found that it was very difficult to obtain childcare because the public assistance system takes so long to pay the providers. She said that she had to pay out of her pocket until the system started paying. Further, Beverly explained that childcare providers must navigate an extensive application process to qualify for TANF funds. She believed this deters many providers from signing up with the public assistance program. Beverly experienced other delays with the public aid office, such as the time it sent a form back to her three times because they could not read her signature.

b. Child Removal and Termination of TANF Benefits

The PRWORA mandates that children must live in the recipient’s home for a parent to receive TANF benefits. When children are removed from the home, for any

reason, the TANF benefits terminate after 45 days. Although most parents involved with DCFS retain custody of their children (Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, 2000), parents whose children are removed from the home face the termination of their welfare benefits. The sudden end to welfare receipt can have devastating effects. Gloria lost all of her TANF benefits when her children were taken into DCFS custody. “I felt like my life fell apart when they took my kids,” she recalled. Gloria’s TANF termination raised substantial direct and indirect barriers to her ability to cope with the loss of her children. Because public aid terminated her cash grant, Gloria also lost her home and became homeless. In desperation, she turned to drugs for solace. Two years elapsed before Gloria was able to quit using drugs, find a new home, and regain custody of her children.

Like Gloria, Rhonda was receiving welfare at the time of the DCFS report. Although her children were placed in the custody of her father, the public aid office terminated her TANF benefits. Her father had to contact the public aid office and have the children’s grants transferred into him while he was taking care of the children. He did not begin to receive the children’s cash assistance for two weeks. Rhonda lost benefits for one month. Justin also had all of his welfare benefits terminated after his children were removed and is unable to pay his medical bills. He suggested that the public aid office should let parents keep their medical benefits.

c. Poverty

The respondents also perceived a connection between welfare and the child welfare system based on the assistance that two programs provided to poor parents.

DCFS and TANF are the only sources of financial support that many poor parents have to provide for their children. Although TANF is the program typically associated with cash grants, DCFS has discretionary funds available to help parents meet their family's material needs (Hardin, 1996). Several parents reported that their DCFS caseworker allocated money for their children's beds or clothing. These funds were unrelated to their TANF cash grant and represented assistance that their public aid caseworker did not provide.

Client poverty binds the two programs in other ways. Parents without the resources to provide important necessities for their family face the risk of a child welfare report for neglect. As already noted, neglect charges constitute the majority of the DCFS caseload and are intimately connected to poverty. Brenda had to meet only one requirement to close her DCFS case – pay her electricity bill. Though Brenda both works and receives a cash grant, she cannot afford to pay her utility bills, preventing her from complying with DCFS demands.

d. Balancing Requirements

Parents involved in both the welfare system and the child welfare system face a double-load of demands. Parents must comply with two distinct sets of rules, expectations, and time-consuming requirements. They must balance the requirement to work or obtain schooling imposed by TANF, coupled with the requirement to attend parenting classes, family counseling, and drug treatment imposed by DCFS, against the demands of raising their children. Many parents felt overwhelmed by the time consuming nature of the combined requirements imposed by TANF and DCFS, and

found it difficult to comply with both sets of requirements. In addition, parents indicated that the combination of DCFS and TANF requirements interfere with the demands of raising children. The conflict between DCFS requirements and TANF work requirements are evident in Brenda's response to her DCFS caseworker's request that she meet additional requirements: "I work five days a week, just like you do. What you want me to do – take off from my job to do certain things? I told you I can only do it after hours."

Michelle also stated that the services (counseling, parenting classes, etc.) that DCFS requires make it difficult for her to both work and get her children back. She felt that she is being forced to choose between these two competing goals. Child welfare services seem to consume all of her time. DCFS requires her to participate in parenting classes, substance abuse classes, counseling – "you name it. As you go, they make up stuff [for you to take]." These service requirements demand so much time that Michelle has not been able to maintain employment.

Michelle's experiences illustrate how the time demands of DCFS requirements can conflict with the work requirements imposed by TANF. She felt torn between the two systems because she must attend the DCFS meetings and services to regain custody of her children. "I have to go to the meetings with my kids and the services," Michelle said. "They inhibit me from working. I have to go to the meeting with my kids rather than work because if I don't, they (the caseworkers) will make it seem like I don't love my kids. They can say anything they want....I have no say so, I'm just standing there [in court]." Although she makes her children her top priority, Michelle recognizes that this focus may have long-term implications for her TANF benefits. If she does not find employment because of her compliance with DCFS requirements, she risks reaching the

time limit for receipt of her cash grant. Without this cash assistance, reunification with her children could be compromised by inadequate housing or inability to provide adequate food and clothing.

Thus, the conflict between TANF requirements and DCFS requirements may create a cyclical pattern of failure. Each program's requirements may force a behavioral compromise, such as forgoing work to attend parenting classes or vice versa, that could eventually result in the loss of TANF benefits or child custody. Despite this possibility, the emphasis on caring for their children over the potential loss of TANF benefits was common among the parents we interviewed. The desire to keep or regain custody of their children controls these parents' decisions. Indeed, some parents failed to perceive clear conflicts between TANF and DCFS requirements because the drive to care for their children made the TANF requirements seem insignificant.

For example, Gloria responded to a question about the conflicts between the two systems by stating that there were none: "My children are most important." This response was particularly surprising given that Gloria has had problems meeting her TANF requirements since she became involved with DCFS. The child welfare service requirements have forced her to miss several appointments with her TANF caseworker. She noted that "if you are late or miss an appointment they take your whole benefits out. Then you be like late on rent and everything." Gloria felt that this sanction was unfair because the only appointments that she ever missed were due to services required by DCFS. She was willing to sacrifice her welfare benefits to perform the tasks that the child welfare system required. This strategy, however, may have negative long-term

consequences if the loss of TANF benefits reduces her ability to provide necessities to her children, thereby making her family vulnerable to further DCFS intervention.

In addition, parents living with their children indicated that it was difficult to balance the general requirements of raising children with the TANF requirements. Shirley noted that she “doesn’t have much time for anything.” Angela also feels that she has too much to balance, especially since she has to ride the bus. She tries to coordinate her public aid appointments with her work schedule. Because she works in the evening, she tries to make all of her appointments with her caseworker in the late morning after she helps her children get to school. By default, the requirements end up “balanc[ing] [them]selves,” since she can only work during those times when she isn’t caring for her children or meeting with her caseworker. Sally also had difficulty balancing the demands of caring for her son and paid work. “I’ve got a lot of things to do. Like right now, getting [my son] involved in school, getting his school supplies, he’s got doctor’s appointments, and all that stuff. If I would be working right now, that would interfere in my work. So, yeah, sometimes [public aid] would help out.”

e. Family Assistance

An important source of support for these parents is family, both immediate and extended. Family members most often helped with childcare responsibilities. For example, Vivian “fortunately” garners “a lot of support” from her family and her children’s father’s family. “That’s a big one right there,” she said. It helps her to set aside some personal time that she believes essential to her well being. Kimberly also

utilizes a family network that surrounds her in the neighborhood where she lives to help make her other tasks more manageable.

Parents turned to family members as sources of financial support in difficult times. Cynthia stated that when she has to “beg and borrow,” her aunt, her sister-in-law, her mother and father-in law, and her father are always able to help her out. Although she hates “bumming off” of her family members, she considers their support to be an unfortunate necessity.

Across the interviews, parents described a tremendous range of helping activities performed by family members. In addition to childcare and financial support, family members helped respondents find employment, contact a trusted babysitter, locate temporary and permanent housing, and acquire transportation. Several parents credited the help provided by relatives with their ability to deal effectively with the daily stress that they face.

Besides day to day child care assistance, many parents reported that family members served as foster parents when their children were removed from the home. This arrangement, called “kinship care,” is a form of foster care generally favored by DCFS. Parents praised this form of foster care as it made the separation from their children less traumatic. Kinship care gave parents the security of knowing the quality of care their children received.

Family assistance was not limited to adult providers. Older children helped their parents maintain the home and care for their younger siblings. Shirley reported that she receives a lot of help from her 12 and 14 year old children. “My 14 year old she know how to cook, bake, clean, wash, everything—and my 12 year old too.” Older children

also help their younger siblings with schoolwork and provide needed child care. A number of parents reported that their teenage children provided babysitting services after school, allowing them to work longer hours.

VI. Conclusion

Our interviews with families involved in both the welfare and child welfare systems provided insight into how some of the most vulnerable families are faring under welfare reform.

These parents relied on cash grants, Medicaid, and Food Stamps to provide shelter, medical care, and food for their children. Even those who had jobs stated that they needed public assistance to care for their children and pay the bills. But most parents found the current level of public assistance, even when coupled with paid employment, to be insufficient to meet their families' needs. Although the parents expressed a preference for work and self-sufficiency, they feared that welfare reform requirements would reduce too drastically the benefits they needed. They also faced a number of impediments to finding and keeping a job, especially the unavailability of affordable housing, childcare, and transportation. Parents who are sanctioned with termination of benefits for failing to find a job are at greater risk of being charged with neglect. If child protective authorities remove children from the home, the families' cash grant will be reduced, making it more difficult for parents to comply with child welfare requirements.

The parents we interviewed appreciated caseworkers from both systems who effectively assisted them in providing for their children. However, they strongly

criticized systemic flaws, especially frequent caseworker turnover, that hindered their ability to find jobs and address family problems. Many parents also believed that, while child protective services were necessary, DCFS often removed children from their parents without adequate investigation or understanding of family circumstances. They suggested that fear of unwarranted DCFS intervention deters some parents from seeking medical attention for their children. Nevertheless, some parents credited DCFS with providing drug treatment programs that helped them to overcome substance abuse and to regain custody of their children.

The findings of this study also confirm that families involved in the child welfare system experience welfare reform in a unique way. These parents must comply with the requirements laid out by child welfare caseworkers and judges, including parenting classes, counseling, and drug treatment programs. In addition, parents who receive TANF benefits must either work full-time or participate in job training. Failure to comply with these welfare reform rules is sanctioned by loss of benefits. The combined demands of both TANF and child protective services have more than a cumulative impact on dual-system families. Rather, the two sets of requirements place conflicting pressures on these parents and force them to make what they perceive as a choice between work requirements and their children. The unquestioned priority of all the parents we interviewed was to take care of, or seek reunification with, their children. They also recognized, however, that losing public assistance jeopardized their ability to provide for their children. Thus, the competing demands of TANF and DCFS made it harder for these parents to conform to the expectations of either system.

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Table 1: Unweighted Case Counts and Weighted Means and Standard Deviations for Sample

	Interviewed			Not Interviewed			Total		
	<u>N</u> = 16	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u> = 40	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u> = 1,363	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
<i>Demographic</i>									
Age		29.31	5.59		30.61	5.75		31.55	8.03
18-20	0			0			16		
20-29	6			19			641		
30-39	8			17			493		
40-50	2			4			213		
Gender		.99	.12		.94	.23		.97	.18
Male	1			2			39		
Female	15			38			1,324		
Race		.95	.23		.90	.30		.97	.36
White	4			10			249		
Black	12			30			1,054		
Hispanic	0			0			42		
Marital Status		.98	1.25		.77	1.22		.77	1.15
Never Married	7			23			747		
Married	4			9			412		
Divorced	4			7			185		
Widow	1			1			14		
Education		11.66	.91		11.55	1.33		11.67	1.83
Below High School	4			18			540		
High School or GED	7			14			522		
Any College	2			8			288		
College Graduate	0			0			5		
Chicago Residence		.88	.33		.77	.42		.79	.41
No	9			25			775		
Yes	7			15			587		

Number of Children		* 5.21	2.20		* 4.51	1.83		3.11	1.87
1	1			4			244		
2	2			5			353		
3	1			5			297		
4	2			10			219		
5	4			5			128		
More than 5	6			11			113		
<i>Public Assistance</i>									
Food Stamps in 1998		.99	.12		.89	.31		.87	.33
No	1			3			163		
Yes	15			37			1,191		
Medicaid in 1998		.81	.40		.82	.39		.91	.28
No	3			8			107		
Yes	13			32			1,012		
TANF in 1998		.85	.37		.82	.39		.77	.42
No	3			8			352		
Yes	13			32			993		
<i>TANF Sanctions</i>									
Partial Sanction Past Year		.14	.36		.22	.42		.25	.43
No	14			34			1,016		
Yes	2			6			340		
<i>Housing</i>									
Homelessness Past Year		*.39	.50		*.22	.42		.07	.25
No	12			34			1,285		
Yes	4			6			78		
Times Residence Changed Past 12 Months		2.17	1.48		1.74	1.13		1.29	.59
1	9			23			1,022		
2	5			11			281		
3	0			4			29		
Over 3 Times	2			2			13		

Note: * = significantly different at the $p < .05$ level

Table 2 - Public Assistance Benefit Levels and Receipt at Time of Personal Interview

	Cash Grant	Food Stamps	Medical Assistance
1	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	No	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	No	No	No
8	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	No	Yes	Yes
11	No	Yes	Yes
12	No	Yes	Yes
13	No	Yes	Yes
14	No	Yes	Yes
15	No	Yes	Yes
16	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 3 – Drug Use and IDCFS Report Type for the Interview Sample

	Drug Use	Unfounded Reports	Indicated Reports	Environmental Neglect	Times Children were Removed	Number of Children Removed
1	Yes	0	2	No	1	1
2	No	6	9	Yes	0	0
3	Yes	1	1	No	0	0
4	Yes	0	7	Yes	4	2
5	No	1	1	Yes	2	10
6	Yes	12	10	Yes	4	2
7	Yes	2	2	No	0	0
8	No	2	1	Yes	2	1
9	No	0	2	Yes	0	0
10	Yes	0	2	No	2	2
11	Yes	12	20	Yes	15	4
12	No	5	6	Yes	1	1
13	Yes	0	2	No	2	1
14	No	0	1	Yes	0	0
15	Yes	2	8	No	3	2
16	Yes	0	6	Yes	2	2

**Impact of Welfare Reform on
Experiences of Families in Child
Protective Services,
A Component of The Illinois Families Study**

**Dorothy Roberts, Principal Investigator
Morgan B. Ward Doran, Project Director
Lisa Altenbernd, Buffy Gorenz, Emily Gorenz,
Marla McDaniel, and Amber Stitzel, Interviewers**

**Northwestern University
Summer 2000**

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I. Background

In 1996, Federal legislators ended long-term welfare dependence with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Welfare reform policies, including those for the state of Illinois, promote job preparedness, work, and marriage. Increased work incentives, time limitations and stringent requirements for families attempt to decrease the number of families receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Since 1996, the TANF caseload in the state of Illinois has diminished significantly. Although the number of TANF recipients has been reduced, caseload numbers reveal little about the condition of families that have recently left the welfare rolls or are currently receiving TANF benefits.

The Illinois Families Study (IFS) will provide a long-term view of what has happened to TANF families in the wake of welfare reform. Its 1500 participants will be interviewed annually to try to understand the current situation of each family. The interview focuses on four areas: job retention and progression, workforce attachment, child well-being and family stability. The data will reveal the ways in which new welfare policies have impacted families who have struggled to live independently from government aid. The IFS will quantitatively identify significant trends describing the aftermath of new welfare reform.

The Impact of Welfare Reform on Experiences of Families in Child Protective Services Study will select a subsample of families from the IFS who have been involved in both the TANF and Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) systems. Scholars interested in the relationship between poverty and child welfare have predicted that new welfare laws will have a significant effect on both the well-being of poor children and the outcomes of child protective services. The goal of welfare reform is to move more families from public assistance to work, which might improve child protection outcomes and decrease the likelihood of child welfare involvement in the first place. On the other hand, some studies suggest that regulations governing TANF will not only increase the number of children at risk for child protection intervention, but also affect the ability of families to meet permanency planning requirements. Little empirical research has been conducted, however, that investigates the actual experiences of families who fall within both systems. The goal of this study is to better understand the effect of welfare regulations on families and caseworkers in their efforts to further permanency planning.

Specifically, the study will examine the impact of TANF rules on such factors as: whether the family receives intact services or out-of-home placement; timing and type of services received; type of substitute care; parents' ability to comply with the child welfare service plan; experiences of conflicting requirements from welfare and child welfare caseworkers; length of stay in substitute care; outcomes such as reunification and termination of parental rights. Rather than employing a single methodological approach, the project will draw upon the strengths of both qualitative data and quantitative data to assess the connection between welfare receipt and the child welfare system. Qualitative data will be gathered through in-depth interviews with families. This aspect of the study allows respondents to communicate information that extends beyond simple background characteristics, revealing a truly individual perspective of these two state-directed systems. The study will also make use of IFS survey data as well as administrative records to assess the outcomes of cases.

General Information

- Timing: The Impact of Welfare Reform on Experiences of Families in Child Protective Services Study will commence in spring of 2000
- The sample: Respondents from the Illinois Families Study who are involved in both TANF and DCFS systems and consent to release of administrative data
- Location: Cook County, Peoria, East St. Louis
- Data Collection: Relies solely upon one-on-one interviewing and may include observation of the participants in their daily setting
- Data: Ethnographic field notes compiled by researcher, statistical support data from the main IFS study

II. Pre-Interview Preparation

1. Researcher will create a file for each participant containing **initial** documents:
 - * copy of the participant's IFS profile
 - * communication log with contact information (see Appendix GG)
 - * MCIC contact information

1. The following documents will periodically be added to each participant's file as they are completed:
 - * copies of field notes
 - * Qualitative Research Protocol (see Appendix B)

2. Before initiating contact with a participant, the researcher must investigate the participant's community and possible meeting places. The researcher will suggest a mutually accessible location local restaurant, community center, park, etc.—to participant during first conversation. Information on different communities within Chicago is kept in the IFS office and should be read prior to the first interview. Designated members of the research team will go into the field and prepare information on each community using the community profile form (see Appendix JJ).

3. The researcher will send out an introductory letter explaining the Study two weeks prior to the desired interview date. The letter will include the study office number (847) 467-3042 where respondents can call to schedule a date, location, or time (see Appendix CC).

4. One week after the letter has been mailed, the researcher will call the participant to schedule the date, time and location of the interview. During this phone call the researcher should follow a scripted phone introduction reiterating information included in the letter and how this interview will differ from previous IFS interviews. (see Appendix DD).

5. In the event that the respondent cannot be reached by phone, a letter should be immediately sent specifying the date, time, and location of the interview. The letter will instruct the respondent to call the study office number and leave a message detailing their intent to take part in the study. (see Appendix KK)

6. The day before the interview the researcher will call the participant to confirm the interview.

7. Field notes should be written on all phone conversations and placed in the participant's file. Field notes pertinent to the scheduling of an interview should accompany the final field notes for that interview.

8. Researcher must have supplies in order before the interview:
 - * Participant's complete contact information
 - * Participant's abbreviated profile
 - * Copy of household roster
 - * Paper
 - * Writing utensils
 - * Brochure describing study
 - * Money order for \$30
 - * A small amount of cash (to buy respondent coffee/beverage if interview is at a restaurant)
 - * Cell phone, if you have one
 - * Schedule of other researchers' interviews for the day/week
 - * Contact information of research team
 - * City map
 - * Directions to interview site

- * Qualitative Research Protocol (see Appendix B)
- * Copy of DCFS Interview Protocol (see Appendix A)
- * 2 copies of consent form (see Appendix EE)
- * Receipt book
- * Resource Sheet (see Appendix H)
- * This manual
- * A tape recorder

III. Interview Logistics

1. Researcher arrives 10 minutes early to planned meeting site.
2. Researcher should arrange support materials on the desk/table in plain sight so that the participant sees everything from the outset. There should be no surprises.

Researchers should dress down for the interview: no visible name brands; jeans/pants, tennis shoes or loafers, and a shirt. Trying as hard as possible not to draw unnecessary attention to herself or himself, the researcher should conduct the interview sans jewelry, watch, etc. Focus should always be on the participant; the researcher should do everything possible to ensure that she is not detracting from that goal.

Upon encountering participant for the first time, she should be greeted warmly and confidently. Creating a safe-space for exchange begins the moment she walks in the door. She will undoubtedly be suspicious, quiet, or cautious—expect this. Ask her to please have a seat, exchange pleasantries, and then begin by explaining the study.

Give an explanation of the study using the introduction provided in Appendix DD. Clearly state the role of the interviewer and respondent.

The interviewer should review the consent form with the respondent. It is necessary for the interviewer to briefly explain each section. After the consent form is briefly discussed the interviewer should then ask the respondent if she would like the interviewer to read it to her or if the respondent would like to read it herself. **When the interviewee has no questions she should sign two consent forms, one for her records and one for IFS records.** It is then appropriate to hand the money order to the respondent. **Respondent should then sign the receipt book. Interviewer gives respondent the yellow copy of the receipt, and keeps the original white copy in the receipt book.**

Check the personal data (phone number, last 4 digits of SS#, birthdate, address, etc.) with the respondent. Phone numbers and addresses will change frequently; it is important to have our information as up to date as possible. The SS# and birthdate will ensure that we have the correct respondent.

Ask the respondent if it is okay to tape record the interview. If the respondent objects to being recorded, explain that it is the best way to ensure her thoughts are accurately represented. If she still objects, proceed with the interview making certain to capture direct quotes in your notes.

Once the interview is completed, the Qualitative Research Protocol form should be filled out as quickly as possible (see Appendix BB).

When the interviewer completes an interview and exits the field he or she must call and check in with designated person on the research team.

QUICK-VIEW ORDER OF OPERATIONS:

Interviewer explains study to respondent
Interviewer reviews consent form with respondent
Respondent signs consent form
Interviewer gives respondent money *or*
Respondent signs receipt and keeps yellow copy of receipt
Interviewer checks respondent's personal data
Interviewer asks permission to tape record the interview
Interview commences

IV. Administration of the Interview

Interviewer attitude—*The interviewer must possess a positive attitude towards the interviewee, and acknowledge appreciation for her willingness to participate.*

- Interviewer must present intentions clearly: to gain honest and in-depth information from respondent
- Remind participant that project is not affiliated with any government agency—all information is kept in strict confidence
- Take great care not to patronize respondent—be honest, open and accommodating

Responsiveness—*The interviewer's primary role is one of facilitation, creating an open environment for the free exchange of information.*

- Interviewer should be responsive to all of the respondent's questions or fears about the interview
- Assuage fear or apprehension by restating the respondent's anonymity and our neutrality
- Interviewer is encouraged to share a bit of personal information in an effort at creating a open, honest conversation

Affirmation of interviewee—*A respondent wants to feel that they are being listened to and understood. For this reason, it is crucial to affirm what they are saying.*

- Interviewer should be visibly attentive and vocally engaged in what the respondent says, indicating understanding by using "...mm-hmm's" or "...I see, I understand"
- Interviewer must simultaneously be a neutral researcher and sympathetic listener without patronizing participant

Probing techniques—*To gain a richer, in-depth understanding of the respondent's situation, the interviewer must skillfully probe into areas of interest.*

- Interviewer should rely on 5 W's—Who, What, When, Where, and Why—when probing respondent
- Questions should be phrased in an open-ended manner to avoid yes/no responses from participant
- Although the respondent may provide broad answers to questions, the interviewer should always ask for concrete examples of topics at hand
- If participant seems reluctant to elaborate, it may be helpful to ask what their friends think, or how she (the respondent) believes that her friends would respond to the same question

Maintaining focus, staying on topic—*The interviewer's role is that of a guide, leading the interview efficiently and maximizing the short time available for conversation.*

- Interviewer should not hesitate to politely cut off tangential conversation by saying, "You were saying before that . . . , could you talk a little more about that?" or "this is very interesting. Do you think we could return to . . . for one moment more?"
- Interviewer should be very familiar with the purpose of each section of the interview protocol, and guide conversation to ensure effective use of time

Handling hostile environments—*A researcher should always trust his or her intuition if a situation feels hostile or unsafe and leave immediately.*

- If, in any way, physical harm might be done to the researcher, he or she should leave the situation immediately without stopping to apologize or waiting for a polite opportunity to exit
- If the conversation between interviewer and respondent grows hostile, the researcher should politely back away from the volatile topic at hand, always remembering that a participant's well-being is important to the establishment of a good rapport for future interviews
- If environmental factors (neighborhood safety, physical health of respondent) are questionable, the interviewer should try to accommodate the situation (changing location of interview, rescheduling for a different time)

Note taking and tape recording—*Throughout the interviews, make sure to be taking notes on all relevant information, including location, respondent attitude and **specific quotes**.*

- Interviewer should take detailed field notes
- Interviewer should use tape recording to augment detailed field notes, not in lieu of field notes
- The field notes should be typed up on the same day as the interview, or as soon as possible thereafter.
- The Qualitative Research Protocol should also be typed up and stapled to the front page of the field note (see Appendix BB)
- The tape should be labeled with the respondent's ID#, the date of the interview, and the interviewer's last name. **Example: A1234 08/01/00 Altenbernd**

Interview Protocol: See Appendix AA

Post Interview Suggestions

Immediately after the interview fill out a Qualitative Research Protocol sheet. If the respondent has left, stay at your location and fill it out. Or, fill it out on your way home or as soon as you arrive home.

Do not do another interview before filling it out. (see Appendix BB)

V. Field Notes

Jottings during the interview can be taken in any style that the interviewer prefers. However, it may be beneficial for the interviewer to denote personal thoughts, comments, observations, etc., in brackets. Field notes should be written up the same day as the interview. The following format should be used to write jottings into uniform field notes:

- Double-spaced, two-inch margins on the left, one-inch on the right, in 11-point Arial font.
- Interviewer name, respondent name and ID, date, location, time and duration of interview should be in the top left hand corner of the field notes.
- The beginning of each set of field notes should describe the physical surroundings, including a description of the neighborhood and interview setting (home, drop-in center, etc.) and the participant's appearance. The interviewer should draw a picture of the physical environment in which interview was conducted. It is important to detail the seating arrangement of the interviewer and respondent as well as any other individuals that may have been present at the location.
- The field notes should begin with any jottings taken during phone conversations with the respondents.
- The interviewer should utilize the topic areas (daily routine, experiences with welfare, DCFS involvement, work and family—see Appendix AA) as a way to recreate the progression of the conversation. To do this the interviewer will write the topic areas in **bold letters**. This will provide readers of the field notes with a format that is easily scanned for general topic areas. Any statements, thoughts, observations or notable questions on the part of the interviewer should be italicized within the body of the field note. Respondents' words should be written in plain font. (See example below of field notes and completed Qualitative Research Protocol.)

When the field notes are completed they should be distributed and saved in the following manner:

- * E-mailed to Dorothy Roberts at d-roberts@law.northwestern.edu
- * E-mailed to Morgan Doran at mdoran@law.northwestern.edu to be saved on a zip disk
- * A hard copy brought to the staff meeting to be put in a three-ring binder

Interviewer should make a copy of the receipt to keep in the respondent's file. Once the interviewer's receipt book is full it should be given to Morgan.

Within one week a thank you note should be sent to the respondent (see Appendix FF).

VI. Example of Field Notes and a Completed Qualitative Research Protocol

DCFS Interview Protocol

Researcher Name: full name here
Date: 6/16/00
Time: 2:10 – 3:20 pm
Place: Progressive Church 14 West 47th Street
Type of Activity: Interview – Peggy Smith
Respondent’s IFS ID#: A1234
Purpose of Activity: Initial Qualitative Interview
Persons Present: Peggy Smith, grandsons Reggie and Otis Smith, abc

Notes:

Prior phone conversations:

Spoke with R yesterday to confirm meeting and she stated that she was feeling a bit under the weather, but would consent to meeting with me. Stated that meeting would have to end by 3:30 pm because she was taking her grandsons to a birthday party for a friend of theirs that attends their church.

Summary of Environment:

I arrived at the church just before 2 pm. Rainy day and no cars or people on the street. Standing at the entrance of the church were two African American male children around the age of 3. They were well dressed wearing matching blue slacks and white shiny shoes that buckled on the side. Each boy also had on matching white short sleeved. They were peeking in the door of the church and talking to each other about how they wanted their grandma to hurry her meeting with the Reverend so that they could go to a friend’s birthday party. They moved aside as I approached them and asked if I was there to see “Momma Peggy.” I told them I thought so and they entered the church with me.

Description of Respondent:

Peggy was a slender woman about 5’4” and 120 pounds...

Daily Routine:

R stated that her day began at 6:30 am when her daughter rang her apartment buzzer to drop off her two sons for the day. R says she became a grandmother early and that her daughter is only 17. Her daughter—Jennifer, had the two boys at the age of 14 and although she uses her mother’s address to receive her mail and for public aid purposes, her daughter has been living with the children’s father Ed,

for the past 14 months. The daughter and boyfriend want to get married. R thinks they are too young and suggested they live together to see if it will work. R mumbles under her breath that she hopes the relationship will not last. *She mumbles this as she turns away from me and fumbles in her purse on the floor for candy for the boys, so I am not sure that this is an issue she would feel comfortable with me probing about so early in the interview. I leave the issue alone for now, but would like to return to speak with her about it.*

After the boys arrive R fixes them a breakfast of oatmeal and toast. She says the boys would rather have “junk” for breakfast like cookies, but she thinks....

On the weekend R says she spends her Saturdays cleaning up and preparing for the next week by.... On Sundays she goes to Park Manor Church.... *I ask R what kind of role church plays in helping her to deal with issues she faces on a daily basis.*

Experiences With Welfare:

DCFS Involvement:

Relationship Between Involvement With DCFS and TANF:

Work and Family:

Issues Not Addressed/Follow-Up

General Themes:

Analytic Note:

VII. Office Procedures

The following instructions pertain to logistical elements of the research process: message taking, interview scheduling, accounting, and tracking the status of the project. Included in this manual are three forms for office use. It is imperative that these procedures be followed carefully; please read the instructions below.

Communication Log: This form will be kept in each respondent's file. It contains basic contact information and a written history of all communication. INSTRUCTIONS: If researcher speaks to a respondent in person or over the phone, an entry should be made (containing date, time, initials, etc.) on the log. PURPOSE: The communication log allows us to see, in print, a history of contact with an individual respondent within the hard file (see Appendix HH).

Scheduling: Each researcher should email Morgan (mdoran@law.northwestern.edu) her schedule (date, time of interview location) for the following week. Each researcher should also write each of her scheduled interviews on the calendar in the office.

APPENDIX AA: Interview Protocol

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTRODUCTION:

I'd like us to speak today about a few topics that we hope will provide an in-depth look at some of the ways the individuals in our study manage, cope, survive and thrive given the recent changes in the welfare system. As we talk, I just want you to know that everything you say will remain confidential, meaning that your name will not be used in connection with your statements. Please know that your participation in this part of the study is not mandatory and should you decide at any time during the conversation that you would not like to continue, that decision will not affect your involvement in the overall Illinois Families Study.

This conversation is about you, and I would like you to speak about yourself in your own words. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just here to find out what is happening in your life. Do you have any questions before we begin?

DAILY ROUTINE:

I would like to begin with asking you about your daily routine. *[Spend up to 5 minutes on this section.]*

Thinking back over the past month, what has a typical weekday been like for you? *[Alt.: Do you have a daily routine? What's it like?]*

[Remember to probe when the respondent touches on issues related to the welfare and child welfare systems. We are not interested in the routine per se, but in using the routine as a strategy to get R to talk about her involvement in the two systems.]

[Possible transition to the next section: What you've told me is very interesting. I have a number of questions to ask, so I'm going to go ahead and move on. If we have time, we can talk more about _____ later in the interview.]

II. EXPERIENCES WITH WELFARE:

One of the aims of this part of the study is to understand how mothers and their families have been affected by public assistance or welfare. We are really interested in hearing your thoughts about public assistance and experiences you have had with the welfare system.

- 2. At the time of your last interview, were you receiving public assistance through TANF? Were you working?** *[If R asks what TANF is, explain that it used to be AFDC—Aid to Families with Dependent Children.]*

Has anything changed since that interview?

If R mentions a change in welfare status, What caused that change?

3. If R is currently receiving benefits

Tell me about your current participation with welfare programs and any requirements you have to meet to continue to receive assistance.

How do you balance welfare program requirements, your personal needs, taking care of your children and other demands in your life? [*Probe about child care if R does not mention.*]

4. If R is currently off welfare

How has your life changed since you stopped receiving benefits?

How do you balance [*Researcher refers to whatever has changed in R's life*] **your personal needs, taking care of your children and other demands in your life?** [*Probe about child care if R does not mention.*]

5. **In what ways has your current or past involvement with TANF or welfare helped or hurt your family?**

III. EXPERIENCES WITH CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM/DCFS:

Another system that some participants have told us that they've had to deal with is the Department of Children and Family Services (known as DCFS)—either when their children were much younger or more recently. We are asking about their experiences or those of people they know, because we are wondering what it's like to be involved with both TANF and the DCFS systems at the same time. We understand that both welfare and DCFS use caseworkers and service plans, and require families to follow certain rules, which may be different. However, we don't know how following these different sets of rules may affect how families manage and cope.

6. **Have you, or someone you know, ever had an experience with DCFS?**
If yes, Was it you or someone you know?

If R has had experience, When was that?

If within the past 3 years, proceed to Q7.

If more than 3 years ago, How did the case get closed? What was the resulting action—what happened in your case?

If R has NOT had experience, skip to Q11 [questions about children].

If a friend of R, Are they receiving TANF? If yes, Do you think they would be interested in talking to us about their experiences? [Note: At the end of the interview, give R card with project phone number to give to friend.]

7. **DCFS involvement story**

How did your family come to be involved with DCFS?

Questions to elicit story

How was the report made?

What was happening in your life during the time of the DCFS report? [*Probe for story—who, what, where, when, why, how. Listen for feelings and probe.*]

Were you working at the time?

Where are children now, how often do you see them?

What does your DCFS service plan require you to do? [*Probe for meetings, classes, counseling, etc.*]

[Try to ascertain whether this was an abuse/neglect case or did parent decide to relinquish custody.]

8. **Relationship with caseworker/DCFS/ court system**

Caseworker

How many caseworkers do you have currently? [*Find out whether works for DCFS or other agency.*]

How many caseworkers have you had in the past three years?

How would you describe your relationship with your caseworker(s)?

What kinds of things does/did caseworker(s) ask you to do?

What do you like or dislike about caseworker(s)?

What services/support/help do you receive from caseworker(s)?

Court system

Have you ever had to go to court on your case?

If yes, **What was the hearing about?**

What did the judge rule?

How do you feel about DCFS (*and the court system*) and the decisions they make about you and your children?

9. **How involvement affects life**

Were you receiving welfare at the time of DCFS involvement?

If yes, **Did anything happen to your welfare benefits/case after involvement began?**

Do you think (*what happened*) led to your DCFS involvement?

If no, **Did your welfare status change at some point before or after DCFS involvement began? In what ways?**

IV. QUESTIONS ABOUT JOINT IMPACTS OF BOTH SYSTEMS

You told me about your TANF and DCFS “requirements.” How do you go about coordinating or balancing the requirements of both systems?

How do you fit or balance being a parent with your TANF and DCFS requirements? [Alt.: How has your family’s involvement with TANF and DCFS affected your relationship with your child(ren)?]

Are there things you’ve done to fulfill your TANF requirements that were helpful or not so helpful with your DCFS requirements?

Were there things you’ve had to do for DCFS that were helpful or not so helpful with your TANF requirements?

Do your DCFS and TANF caseworkers interact, or coordinate with each other?

Do you share the same information about what is going on in your life with caseworkers from both systems?

If no, What information might you not share with TANF/DCFS?

10. Overall feelings about being involved in both systems/suggestions for improvement

We have talked about your experiences with TANF and DCFS.

What are your overall feelings about being involved in both systems?

What would you change to improve the way they work?

[Skip to conclusion.]

11. Questions for respondents who state no DCFS experience:

Children

How are your children doing?

What are some positive things going on with your children right now? What is going well?

Do you have any concerns about your children?

V. CONCLUSION:

I just want you to know that we might be contacting you again in the future to do another interview like this—is that okay with you?

Well, that’s all the questions I have for now. Do you have any other comments or questions for me? It was a pleasure speaking with you. Thank you so much for your time.

APPENDIX BB: Qualitative Research Protocol

This form will be filled out two times: (1) by hand directly after the interview; and (2) typed up in more detail and attached to the cover of the hard copy of field notes brought to the weekly staff meeting.

Researcher name: _____

Date of interview: _____

Time/duration of interview: _____

Location of interview: _____

Respondent's name: _____

Respondent's IFS ID# : _____

1. Description & drawing of environment:

Description of respondent:

Changes in subject's vital information:

Daily routine:

5. Experiences with welfare:

6. DCFS involvement:

7. Work and family:

Issues not addressed/follow-up:

General themes:

Analytic Note:

APPENDIX CC: Introductory Letter to Respondent

This letter will be sent to the respondent before any other contact is made.

Date

Dear _____:

Recently, you completed an interview for the Illinois Families Study about work and welfare. As you might remember, the study is looking at the effects of changes in laws dealing with welfare and work in Illinois.

To obtain the most accurate information about the lives of families in our study, we are interested in talking to you to learn more about your life. This interview will be a little different from the first. It will be more of a conversation about the things going on in your life that are most important to you. Instead of choosing answers, you will be able to talk freely about your life in your own words. The interview will last about one hour. For your time and participation, you will receive \$30 in the form of a money order.

Please call us toll free at (866) 866-8631 to schedule an interview time. If we do not hear from you, we will contact you within the next week to schedule the date, time, and place of the interview.

If you have any questions or comments, please call the study office toll free at (866) 866-8631. I thank you very much for your participation.

Sincerely,

Dorothy E. Roberts
Illinois Families Study
Northwestern University

enclosure

APPENDIX DD: Standard Introduction to the Study

This will be used in first phone call to participant. Researcher should not read this verbatim to the respondent, but should make sure to present the study and entailing obligations.

Hello! May I please speak with *(interviewee's first and last name)*? Hi, *(interviewee's name)* my name is *(interviewer's first name)*. I work with the Illinois Families Study that you recently participated in. We sent you a letter last week about interviewing you for a different part of the study. This part is taking a more in-depth look at the ways in which participants in our study manage work and family responsibilities. Unlike your last interview, we want to hear about your daily life experiences in your own words. You will receive \$30 for your time. Are you able to meet for an interview? [**Schedule interview**] I am looking forward to seeing you (**give date and location**). Goodbye.

APPENDIX EE: Consent Form

Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research

Consent Form

Title of protocol: **The Illinois Families Study: Qualitative Component**
Principal Investigator: **Dan Lewis, Northwestern University**
 Dorothy Roberts, Northwestern University
Sponsor: **The Child and Family Research Center - UI**
 The Searle Fund

INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE:

You are being asked to participate in a research study to learn about how families experience their involvement with several state programs, including welfare, work and training, child care, and child welfare programs. You are one of 200 people selected to be interviewed a second time by researchers from Northwestern University, as part of the University Consortium on Welfare Reform's Illinois Families Study. You were selected either by chance or because of your recent involvement with one of the above programs. The purpose of this research is to learn additional information about your experiences with these programs, so that they can be improved to better meet the needs of families.

PROCEDURES:

As a participant in this study you will be interviewed for approximately one hour in person, in your home or a location near your home that is convenient for you. During the interview you will be asked to explain, in your own words, how your involvement with various programs in Illinois affects your life in positive or negative ways. Trained graduate students from Northwestern University will conduct these interviews.

RISKS:

Your participation in this study may involve the following risk. You may feel uncomfortable talking about your experiences with various programs. If you feel uncomfortable talking about a topic at any point in the interview, just say so and we will skip to another topic. Please be informed that Illinois state law requires that any evidence of current intentional harm to a child disclosed to or witnessed by an interviewer must be reported to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. This would include things like hitting or slapping a child in the presence of an interviewer, or leaving a child unattended in a potentially dangerous situation.

BENEFITS:

There may be no direct benefit to you by your participation in this research study. The potential benefits to you from participation in this study may include contributing to an improved understanding of the positive and negative experiences families have with state programs, and

you will be given the opportunity to give your thought about what would make these programs better for families.

ALTERNATIVES:

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

If you choose to participate in this study, you will not incur any costs. You will be paid \$30 in the form of a money order at the time of the interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Your answers to the survey questions will be strictly confidential. They will be combined with the answers of other people who have been interviewed for the study. Your name will not be used in any reports about the survey. In fact, no information that could identify you will be released to any individuals or agencies (including the Illinois Department of Human Services, work and training programs, child care centers, and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services). Everything you tell us during this interview will be kept strictly confidential.

SUBJECT’S RIGHTS:

The decision of whether or not to participate in this study is entirely up to you. If you choose to take part in the study, you may withdraw from it at any time. Your decision to participate or to withdraw is entirely confidential and will not affect any services you are receiving now or that you may receive in the future. It will also have no effect on your future participation in the University Consortium on Welfare Reform Study.

CONTACT PERSONS:

If you have any questions concerning this research study please contact our interviewers at Northwestern University, toll free at (866) 866-8631, or Kristen Shook, the Research Project Director of the Illinois Families Study, at (847) 491-5889. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant please contact The Office for the Protection of Research Subjects of Northwestern University at (312) 503-9338.

I agree to participate in the research study described above. A copy of this consent form will be given to me. (Please sign and date your signature below).

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

APPENDIX FF: Thank You Letter

This letter should be sent to respondent within one week after interview is completed

Date

Dear _____:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me as part of the Illinois Families Study. I enjoyed talking with you and hearing about your life. The information you gave me is very valuable and will help my coworkers and me to better understand how social service programs affect the lives of families and children.

I want to reassure you that everything you told me during our conversation will remain confidential. The information you shared will not be connected with your name.

Once again, thank you for speaking with me. You have made a huge difference by sharing your story. Hopefully, your information will have a positive affect on the delivery of social services in Illinois.

If you have any questions or comments please call Morgan Doran, project director, toll free at (866) 866-8631. I sincerely hope to have the opportunity to speak with you in the future.

Best wishes,

Interviewer Name

Illinois Families Study
Northwestern University

APPENDIX HH: Resource Sheet

This list is given to any respondent who asks for assistance.

Resource and Referral Numbers Cook County, June 2000

Crisis Intervention Services

Crisis Intervention Hotline	708.748.5672
C4 Crisis Line (everything from child abuse to Schizophrenia)	773.769.0205

Domestic Violence Services

Friends of Battered Women and Children (counseling services for women and children)	800.603.4357
DV Hotline (City of Chicago) (referral services)	877.863.6338
Horizons DV Hotline (gay and lesbian community)	773.871.2273
DCFS Child Abuse Hotline	800.252.2873

Domestic Violence Shelters

Apna Ghar (Northside)	773.334.4663
House of Good Shepherd (Northside)	773.935.3434
Rainbow House; crisis line and shelter (Pilsen)	773.762.6611
Family Rescue (Southside)	773.375.8400
Neapolitan Lighthouse (west of Loop)	773.722.0005
Friends of Battered Women and Children	800.603.4357

Sexual Assault Services

Quetzal (C4) Services for Survivors of Sexual Assault	773.506.2525
Rape Victim Advocates	312.663.6303
Rape Hotline (City of Chicago; toll-free)	888.293.2080
Rape Victim 24-hour hotline (via DHS)	312.744.8418

Emergency Numbers

American Red Cross (food, shelter, disaster services)	773.238.3057
Emergency food, shelter, etc. (through Chicago DHS)	312.744.5000

Homelessness

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless	312.435.4548
Goldie's Place (multiple services for homeless people)	773.274.1212
Teen National Runaway Switchboard	800.621.4000

Health Services

University of Illinois Hospital	312.996.7000
Chicago Women's Health Center	773.935.6127
HelpMeGrow Hotline (State Health Dept.; questions regarding WID, Prenatal, Doctor referrals, KidCare, etc.)	800.323.4769

AIDS/HIV Hotline	800.243.2437
Healthcare Alternative Systems (HAS; for AIDS/HIV)	773.292.4881
Northwestern Crisis Hotline (Psychiatry)	312.926.8100
KidCare (transitional Medicaid for Children)	217.782.2570

Assistance Programs

Food Stamps Hotline (IDPA)	800.252.8635
SSI Coalition (training for welfare guidelines, advocacy)	312.223.9600
Chicago Department of Aging (senior services)	312.744.4016
Mayor’s Office—General Inquiry	312.744.5000
Department of Human Service (food, formula, shelter, GED)	312.744.0814

Substance Abuse Services

Healthcare Alternative Systems	
Male Outpatient Program	773.252.3100
Men’s Residential Program for Spanish Speakers	773.252. 2666
Women’s Outpatient/Aftercare Program (with daycare)	773.292.4242
Women’s Treatment Center (residential services)	312.850.0050
HelpMeGrow Hotline (State Health Department)	800.323.4769

Legal Assistance Services

ACLU	312.201.9740
Legal Assistance Foundation	312.341.1070
Mandel Legal Aid Clinic	773.702.9611

Resources for the Disabled

Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities	312.744.6673
Access Living	312.226.5900

Miscellaneous

United Way Information and Referral Service	312.876.1142
YWCA Incest Survivor Hotline	708.754.0486
Horizons Hotline (gay and lesbian community)	773.929.4357

APPENDIX II: Summer Staff Phone List

Summer Staff Phone List

Kristi Shook

Office: 847.491.5889

Home: 773.989.0045

Madison: 608.222.7811

k-shook@northwestern.edu

April Payton Bernard

Home: 773.684.1976

Work: 312.341.4336

NU Office: 847.491.8734

Pager: 312.851.3449

aprilpb@hotmail.com

Lisa Altenbernd

847.425.1072

NU Office: 847-467-3042

800 Number: 866-866-8631

Cell Phone: 847-902-7968

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Irene Carvalho

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Morgan Doran

773.477.9886

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Marla McDaniel

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Dan Lewis in SF

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dlewis@northwestern.edu

Dorothy Roberts

Office: 312.503.0397

d-roberts@law.northwestern.edu

Ayelish McGarvey

847.864.8323

Emergency: 847.624.6118

NU Office: 847.467.7144

a-mcgarvey@northwestern.edu

Nichole Munoz

847.778.0503

NU Office: 847.467.7144

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Bruce Nelson

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Deanna Pihos

847.864.8323

NU Office: 847.467.7144

Emergency: 630.267.8921

d-pihos@northwestern.edu

Amber Stitzel

773.772.9109

NU Office: 847.467.3042

800 Number: 866-866-8631

Cell Phone: 847-902-0026

astitzel@northwestern.edu

Appendix JJ: Community Profile Form

This form will be used by designated research team members to explore communities in which respondents live. The information will be reviewed by everyone before entering the field.

*Illinois Families Study: Qualitative Component
Community Profile*

Community Name:

Community Number:

Community Boundaries:

Date:

Time:

Initials:

General Description of Community:

Key Community Sites as Identified by Chicago Community Fact Book: *list specific street locations, names of businesses*

Housing: *single family, multi-family units, condition, concentrations*

Community Institutions: *schools, public social services, police department, library*

Community Resources: *private schools, neighborhood organizations, churches*

Activities of Persons Present: *number, gender, ethnicity, age, street location*

Comments: *identify 3–5 potential interview sites and any additional comments*

Appendix KK: Letter to Respondent without Phone

This letter should be sent to a respondent as soon as interviewer discovers that he or she cannot be reached by phone

Date

Dear _____:

Recently, you received a letter asking you to participate in a second interview for the Illinois Families Study. My name is _____ and I would like to talk to you about what is currently going on in your life. If you are available, I would really like to meet with you. Please call me toll free at (866) 866-8631 as soon as possible to set up a time to meet. If I am not there to receive your phone call please leave a message on the recording telling me the best way to reach you. For taking the time to speak with me, you will receive \$30 in the form of a money order at the time of the interview.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Interviewer Name
Illinois Families Study
Northwestern University
847-467-3042

Appendix LL: Refusal Letter

This letter should be sent to Respondents who refuse to schedule an interview within a week after the refusal.

Date

Dear _____:

I recently contacted you to set up a second interview for the Illinois Families Study. At the time you indicated that you were not interested in meeting for another interview.

I would like to tell you a little bit more about why it is important for you to participate in this study. This second interview is an opportunity for you to talk about your life experiences, in your own words. Your opinion is very important to understanding how welfare policies and transitions between work and welfare affect families in Illinois.

I understand that your time is valuable. For this reason, I would like to schedule the interview at a time and location convenient for you. You will receive \$30 at the time of the interview for taking the time to speak with me.

Please call me toll free at (866) 866-8631 to set up an interview. I greatly appreciate your past participation in this study and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Interviewer Name
Illinois Families Study
Northwestern University