JPAM Classics Poverty, Welfare, and Public Policy

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Since its inception in 1981, the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (JPAM) has been one of the leading forums for the scientifically rigorous exploration of poverty and welfare. This almost three-decade period has certainly been a turbulent one for policy and programming toward low-income Americans. On JPAM's pages, one can see reflected the debate about the Reagan effort to reform welfare, followed by years of careful research (triggered in part by the modest Reagan-era changes that encouraged experimentation and evaluation) conducted by various individuals and organizations that slowly but surely expanded our understanding of poverty and welfare dependency, and, to a lesser degree, how to reduce both.

Taken together, the articles in JPAM demonstrate how an evolving body of high-quality research—performed over many years by many different individuals and organizations—can advance the understanding of hotly contested issues. One can see this time and again, as JPAM has published a sequence of articles on the same or parallel topics that illustrate how researchers can build on each other's work (often through disagreement) to enrich our understanding of poverty and welfare. Included are articles on poverty measurement, concentrated poverty, the relative merits of voluntary versus mandatory welfare-to-work policies (an issue that is likely to arise again in weak economic conditions), the nature and dynamics of welfare dependency, and the impact of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and various other social welfare programs.

Judith Gueron, former president of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), aptly describes this interactive process in her 2002 Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM) Presidential Address: "I once saw a rugby game that illustrates well the welfare research story: 15 people were moving forward down a field. At different times, different players carried the ball, but as they passed it, they kept moving forward . . . . In the real-world game of welfare research, this continuity and steady advance was crucial; it meant that people did not need to keep reinventing the wheel, since they were either part of the initial discovery or part of a group of people learning together" (Gueron, this volume, p. 309–310).

By rough count, JPAM has published over 230 articles on poverty and welfare, filling more than 3,000 pages of the journal. This volume contains only about a sixth of this rich body of research and analysis. To fit a collection of them into a single volume, we had to be much more selective than we would have liked (especially in regard to antipoverty programs and welfare-related services).

Hence, we looked beyond just the quality of individual articles, because there were far too many strong pieces for that to be the sole criterion for inclusion in this volume. Instead, we also aimed for articles that reflected, informed, and helped

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shape the major debates of the past thirty years, evidenced in many cases by the number of times the article has been cited in later research. In doing so, our goal was not only to elucidate some of the most important policy issues concerning poverty and welfare but, perhaps more importantly, to illustrate the collective learning process that has occurred.

Even so, we left out at least another entire volume's worth of strong JPAM articles on poverty and welfare. Where appropriate, we have tried to mention some of these fine articles within the context of those that are included. And, of course, this volume is also missing many influential articles that did not find their way into JPAM, including important work on the nature and consequences of poverty, poverty within particular groups such as the elderly, welfare spells and dynamics before and after TANF, welfare services and caseload demographics after TANF, and agency management practices.

This volume is divided into four parts and a conclusion. The first section covers poverty in the United States, how it is measured, and its demographics. The second section traces the research and policy developments leading up to TANF, while section three explores the impact of TANF and the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program on low-income families. The fourth section presents divergent reflections on the role of research—and of researchers—in poverty and welfare policymaking. The volume concludes with a more general essay on knowledge generation and diffusion.

1. AMERICAN POVERTY

Each year, the Census Bureau calculates an official poverty rate for the United States. The overall poverty rate has remained remarkably steady since the late 1960s, hovering around 12 percent since 1968. This overall figure, however, masks a substantial decline in elder poverty and an early and essentially sustained increase in child poverty. The official poverty measure, however, has been widely criticized, and there is general agreement that it does a poor job of tracking long-term trends in material hardship. As we will see, its weaknesses also complicate research on "the poor."

The Measure and Meaning of Poverty

As this volume was going to press, the U.S. government seemed poised to make the first major changes in the official poverty measure in more than forty years.[1] The official measure was initially formulated in 1963 by Mollie Orshansky of the Social Security Administration, who was "charged with putting together a measure of economic need to provide data useful to the War on Poverty initiatives" (Blank, p. 38). Orshansky created the poverty measure by multiplying the USDA's Economy Food Plan for a family of four by three (as the 1955 Household Food Consumption Survey showed that food made up one-third of the after-tax spending of a family of three or more). The Bureau of the Budget adopted this threshold as the official measure of poverty in the United States in 1969.

In her 2007 APPAM Presidential Address, "How to Improve Poverty Measurement in the United States," Rebecca Blank (2008) discusses the history of the U.S. official poverty measure, its flaws, the difficulties in changing it, and her own proposals for how to change it.

Blank gives two reasons why the current poverty measure should be updated. First, the threshold was originally a reflection of the place of food in a family's

[1] Besides adjustments for inflation, the last changes to the poverty measure were made in 1981, when the "farm" poverty threshold was eliminated and the largest family size category was increased from "seven persons or more" to "nine persons or more."

budget. Since the creation of the poverty measure, food as a percentage of a family's budget has declined from one-third to one-eighth, leading critics to charge that the measure does not reflect additional expenses in a family's budget that did not exist in 1963. (Of course, the cost of food has also declined.) Second, it does not accurately count all the financial resources available to families. The current measure does not count government tax credits (such as the Earned Income Tax Credit), nor in-kind near-cash government transfers (such as food stamps, WIC, housing subsidies, and subsidized school meals). It does not subtract state and local taxes, nor is it affected by additional expenses that might be considered necessary (such as work expenses, including transportation and child care, and out-of-pocket medical care). Despite the rapid growth in means-tested public spending, "our poverty statistics failed us," Blank laments, "and made it easy to claim that public spending on the poor had little effect" (Blank, pp. 42–43). (Others have noted that the income thresholds do not adequately account for inflation, geographic differences in the cost of living, or the number of adults and children in a family.)

Although the official measure's weaknesses have been well known for many years, reform has not been possible because, as Blank explains, changes in the reported number of people in poverty would be controversial, and, perhaps more important, many federal grant programs use poverty rates to allocate funding to states and localities, and many state and local programs use some multiple of the poverty thresholds to determine program eligibility.[2] The editors would also add two additional obstacles: The data for implementing many of the proposed changes are often incomplete, and the required estimation techniques are tentative and controversial.

Blank proposes four steps to improve the poverty measure: (1) assign the role of developing an alternate poverty measure to a statistical agency (that is, take the ultimate authority over the measure away from the Office of Management and Budget); (2) direct that the statistical agency create a definition of poverty that "produces both a credible and coherent poverty threshold and a consistent and appropriate resource measure" (Blank, p. 55); (3) continue to publish the current poverty measure and allow programs to continue to use this simpler definition; over time, program administrators can decide whether to apply the new or old poverty measure to the eligibility rules of specific programs; and (4) appoint a commission to create a list of other measures of deprivation beyond welfare poverty.

But is income the best way to estimate material poverty? Most scholars and researchers believe that measuring consumption more accurately reflects material hardship, because it reflects the goods and services available regardless of the vagaries of measuring income. Thus, a consumption measure is better able to capture the effects of consumption smoothing, that is, the use of savings or credit to maintain consumption levels over time despite temporary fluctuations in income. In addition, a consumption measure is more likely to reflect the ability of families to adjust for price differences by increasing purchases of substitutes.

To the consternation of many, the consumption trends reported over the years by the Consumer Expenditure Survey (CE) have told a somewhat different story about poverty rates and trends, essentially showing lower and declining levels of material hardship than the Census Bureau reports. In "Reconciliation of Income and Consumption Data in Poverty Measurement," Richard Bavier (2008) explains this inconsistency and also documents the weakness of the current official poverty measure.

Bavier uses data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to compare the official poverty rate to both (1) a poverty rate based on a more comprehensive measure of household income between 1984 and 2004 (counting the cash value of in-kind

[2] Technically, means-tested program eligibility would be based on the poverty guidelines. For an explanation of the differences between the official poverty measure and the poverty guidelines, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009).

food and housing benefits and net returns on home equity, subtracting direct taxes, and using an adjusted inflation measure), and (2) a poverty rate calculated using consumption data from CE consumer units. He finds that poverty rates calculated using his more comprehensive definition of income are considerably lower than the official poverty rates and are very similar in level and trends to those calculated using the consumption data in the CE.

Bavier writes, "Arguments that income is measured with more error than consumption at the bottom of the distribution are shown to be based upon inferior income data" (Bavier, p. 59). This leads him to support the continued use of a comprehensive income measure (rather than a consumption measure) within income to measure poverty, in part because income surveys are less expensive than expenditure surveys and so can have larger samples with more discriminating power.

This is not the place to do more than remind the reader that the weaknesses of the official poverty measure distort many research studies, as demonstrated by Bavier's results when he uses a more comprehensive measure of income. Many of the studies described as follows found it useful to construct more valid measures of income and poverty. Those that fail to do so are frequently criticized (Wiseman, 2001).

Just as counting total income from all sources is essential to measuring material hardship, so too is the duration of poverty. In "The Relationship Between Income and Material Hardship," James X. Sullivan, Lesley Turner, and Sheldon Danziger (2008) explore whether current income is a predictor of material hardship.

The authors use data from the Women's Employment Study for a sample of current and former welfare recipients to examine material hardships such as whether a woman experienced food insufficiency, whether her utilities were shut off, whether she had been evicted, and whether she had been homeless. Using a fixed effects model to control for "time-invariant characteristics that might be correlated with both income and hardship" (Sullivan, Turner, & Danziger, p. 91), they find that current income was not a strong predictor of material hardship, that is, that "the relationship between transitory changes in income and hardship is weak" (p. 91). By contrast, long-run income, measured as average income over six years, is associated with hardship. Other factors that are more associated with hardship include mental health, being married, and having a checking or savings account.

Based on these results, Sullivan, Turner, and Danziger conclude, "social programs might better target benefits at those facing the greatest risk of hardship by considering factors associated with low long-run income" (Sullivan, Turner, & Danziger, p. 96). Essentially, that is the message of the next article in the volume.

In "The Occurrence of Poverty Across the Life Cycle: Evidence from the PSID," Mark Rank and Thomas Hirschl (2001) explore the incidence, severity, and duration of poverty for various age groups. Essentially, they adopt a "life cycle" approach to determining the prevalence and duration of poverty.

Using twenty-five waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) from 1968 to 1992, they examine these three aspects of poverty in early adulthood (ages 20–40), middle adulthood (ages 40–60), and late adulthood (ages 60–80). They find that about 36 percent of the sample experienced at least one bout of poverty in early adulthood, 23 percent in middle adulthood, and 29 percent in late adulthood. Only about 4 percent of the sample, however, experienced continuous spells of poverty that lasted five or more years in early adulthood, about 2 percent in middle adulthood, and about 2 percent in late adulthood.[3]

These findings lead Rank and Hirschl to assert that poverty "is a clear economic risk across the life cycle" (Rank & Hirschl, p. 112) and is not just limited to an

[3] They use the official poverty measure; a more comprehensive definition of income would probably result in lower levels and shorter bouts of poverty (Wiseman, 2001).

"underclass" of American society. They write, "Understanding that the majority of Americans will encounter economic vulnerability at some point during their lives can facilitate a fundamental shift in terms of how poverty is perceived and acted upon at the policy level" (p. 114). Nevertheless, given the greater negative impact of long-term poverty, it is somewhat reassuring that many of those counted as poor suffer only short periods of poverty. Here is how the authors put it: "Although poverty's reach is quite wide, its grip tends to be moderately weak" (p.112).

Some demographic groups, unfortunately, suffer much more than these averages indicate. Using life tables derived from logit regression models that "simultaneously assess the influence of race, education, and gender upon the cumulative risk of poverty" (Rank & Hirschl, p. 110), the authors report substantial differences in the probability of being in poverty for one or more years across the life cycle. White males with more than twelve years of education were the least likely to experience a bout of poverty across the life cycle (about 26 percent experienced at least one bout of poverty in early adulthood, about 16 percent in middle adulthood, and about 14 percent in late adulthood). In contrast, black females with less than twelve years of education were the most likely to experience a bout of poverty across the life cycle (about 79 percent experienced at least one bout of poverty in early adulthood, about 58 percent in middle adulthood, and 80 percent in late adulthood).

And, of course, it is the long-term poor who have most concerned researchers and policymakers.

An embarrassment to many Americans, poverty seems so much worse in the U.S. than in other wealthy nations. But a number of researchers have documented that much of the difference is a function of how (and what) income is measured, and whether in-kind benefits programs are included. In "A Re-Examination of Welfare States and Inequality in Rich Nations: How In-Kind Transfers and Indirect Taxes Change the Story," Irwin Garfinkel, Lee Rainwater, and Timothy Smeeding (2006) show how differences in "welfare state transfers" and tax regimes distort cross-national comparisons of social welfare spending and income inequality, understating U.S. social welfare spending and overstating U.S. income inequality.

The authors use 2001 data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Luxembourg Income Study to compare social welfare spending and income inequality using two measures of household economic resources. The first is "disposable income," which includes all earned income, cash and near-cash government benefits (including food assistance and housing assistance), and also takes into account all taxes, direct and indirect (including the EITC). The second measure is a "full income" measure that adds to disposable income health and education benefits while subtracting indirect taxes. Using disposable income, compared to other wealthy countries, the U.S. spends the least on social welfare as a percentage of GDP. Using full income, however, the overall gap between the U.S. and other wealthy countries declines considerably.

The story is much the same when it comes to income inequality. "Counting in-kind benefits at government cost and accounting for the indirect taxes used to finance transfers substantially reduces cross-national differences in inequality at the bottom of the income distribution" (Garfinkel, Rainwater, & Smeeding, p. 117). The authors compare the disposable and full income of "poor" households (the income at which 10 percent of households are poorer and 90 percent are richer) to "middle income" households (the income at which 50 percent of households are poorer and 50 percent are richer) and "rich" households (the income at which 90 percent of households are poorer and 10 percent are richer).

As with social welfare spending, the authors find that the U.S. ranks lowest when using disposable income to perform cross-national comparisons of the ratio of poor households' income to middle-income households' income (10/50 ratio), with poor households' income only at about 39 percent that of middle-income households compared to the average of 51 percent across all comparison countries, and a high of 57 percent in Sweden and Finland. When using full income, however, the difference across nations declines considerably. The United States's 10/50 ratio increases to 53 percent, compared to an average of 55 percent across all comparison countries, and a high of 67 percent in the Netherlands.

"What distinguishes the United States from other rich nations," they conclude, "is not so much our overall level of spending or the degree of inequality of total resources at the bottom of the income distribution, but rather the kinds of resources being transferred. Comparatively speaking, United States spending is very low on cash benefits and early childhood education, relatively high on education, and very high on health care. The United States spends enough on health care transfers to reduce the economic distance between low-income families and average-income families nearly as much as do other rich nations" (Garfinkel, Rainwater, & Smeeding, p. 132).

Consequently, Garfinkel, Rainwater, and Smeeding then ask: "Would the country as a whole be better off with a different mixture of cash and in-kind benefits?" (Garfinkel, Rainwater, & Smeeding, p. 132). The authors quickly conclude that education spending has "well-documented high returns" (p. 133), but they express great uncertainty about health care spending in the United States, which is considerably higher than in the other comparison countries and, they say, is "buying little if any excess benefits" (p. 133). Though they caution that some researchers find very high returns to medical spending, they cite research suggesting that this excess spending could generate higher returns if spent in other areas, such as old-age benefits and early childhood education, and that health care spending is displacing funding for other social welfare services.

The Demographics of Poverty

As elder poverty has declined (mainly because of rising incomes and Social Security payments), special attention has focused on two groups hit hard by poverty: children and African Americans. In 2007, about 18 percent of American children lived in poverty, and the poverty rate for African Americans was about 24.5 percent. Race and childhood combine to make the poverty rate of African American children about 34.5 percent.

Although a fuller accounting of noncash government benefits (see Bavier; Garfinkel, Rainwater, & Smeeding, this volume) would show a somewhat lower poverty rate, child poverty is a deeply troubling social problem. In "For Richer or for Poorer: Marriage as an Anti-Poverty Strategy," Adam Thomas and Isabel Sawhill (2002) examine the impact on the 1998 child poverty rate of more than 25 years of marriage declines, which, of course, disproportionately affected African Americans.

Thomas and Sawhill use a microsimulation model of data from the Current Population Survey that matches unmarried females with unmarried males who were of similar race, sex, and age to estimate what the poverty rate would have been if the proportion of children in female-headed households was the same as in 1970. The simulation showed that if the percent of female-headed households had remained at the 1970 level, then the child poverty rate in 1998 would have been 3.4 percentage points lower (about a 20 percent decline). The decline in poverty for children whose mothers were in the simulated marriages was much greater, about 25 percentage points (or about 65 percent) lower.[4]

[4] The authors find that the marriage simulation lowered white child poverty more than black child poverty (about 26 percent vs. about 16 percent), but they believe the latter is probably an understatement caused by the underreporting of blacks in the CPS and sampling error, and could also be attributed to the lack of eligible black males through high mortality or incarceration rates.

Of course, as the authors caution, their results do not take into account behavioral changes after marriage (such as changes in labor force participation or fertility), are limited to the economic effects of marriage (and do not include the broader range of outcomes affecting child welfare), and do not factor in the limited ability of social policy to influence marriage patterns. Nevertheless, they conclude that "assuming that one could craft policies with meaningful implications for family formation, this analysis suggests that such initiatives could have a large impact on child well-being" (Thomas & Sawhill, p. 149).

The problem, as Thomas and Sawhill suggest, is that writing a check to fund an income transfer is much simpler than developing and operating successful policies to strengthen families. And so far, despite the rhetoric about strengthening families, no one has proposed a credible strategy for achieving either stronger families or fewer nonmarital births.[5]

In addition to low marriage rates and high nonmarital birth rates, the high unemployment rate of African American men also contributes heavily to poverty in the black community. In "Black Employment Problems: New Evidence, Old Questions," Harry Holzer (1994) summarizes research on the causes of the low employment and low earnings of young black males in the 1980s, exploring the impact of skills and spatial mismatch, crime, discrimination, and immigration.[6]

Holzer points to two major lines of argument in the literature. On the one hand are those, like William Julius Wilson, who emphasize reduced labor demand as the driving cause of black unemployment. (Wilson points to the overall decline in the industries that employ low-skilled blacks, such as manufacturing.) On the other hand are those, like Lawrence Mead, who instead emphasize that black labor supply is elastic and that blacks are less willing to work at lower wage rates. (Mead points to immigrants and other groups whose employment rates did not decline during the 1980s despite being employed in sectors of the economy similar to low-wage blacks.)

Holzer concludes that both views have merit, writing that "both shifts in demand (that is, employers and jobs) and the characteristics and responses in supply (that is, workers) in the labor market appear to be responsible for recent trends in employment and earnings among young blacks" (Holzer, p. 153). If so, then, according to Holzer, the options are:

1. Improve overall job availability for blacks through new job creation.
2. Improve both job availability and wage offers for blacks by increasing their access (or "matches") to available jobs.
3. Induce blacks to accept available offers at low wages.
4. Acquiesce in their high rates of nonemployment. (Holzer, p. 164)

Holzer cautions that there is considerable uncertainty in understanding how to move from recognizing the problems of both labor demand and supply for African American males to creating policies that will help alleviate the problem. He describes a research agenda that would provide: "(1) Clearer evidence on the demand side of the labor market, especially regarding employer skill needs, racial attitudes, and locational decisions in major metropolitan areas; and (2) clearer evidence from the supply side on worker efforts (or lack thereof) to adjust to demand shifts in terms of skill acquisition, geographic mobility, and the like" (Holzer, p. 167).

In a later JPAM article, "Declining Employment Among Young Black Less-Educated Men: The Role of Incarceration and Child Support," Harry Holzer, Paul Offner, and Elaine Sorensen (2005) expand this analysis to consider the impact of

[5] See, for example, Amato (2007) and Furstenberg (2007).
[6] For a further discussion of the effect of spatial mismatch on black employment, see also Stoll, Holzer, and Ihlanfeldt (2000).

rising incarceration rates and tightening child support payments as possible causes to declines in employment and earnings for young black males in the 1980s and 1990s. Over this period, the incarceration rate for black males more than doubled, rising from about 2 percent to more than 5 percent, and almost all states toughened their child support policies by including, for example, provisions that continued the accumulation of child support obligations during periods of unemployment and incarceration and that made it difficult to vacate arrears.

Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen describe how most ex-offenders have difficulty finding employment, and those that are employed receive relatively low wages, and how high levels of child support arrearages often lead judges to garnish a higher percent of earnings, further increasing their marginal tax rates. Using both an ordinary least squares and a difference-in-differences model to control for a number of individual and metropolitan-level characteristics, and data from the Current Population Survey, the authors find that both of these variables are strongly and negatively associated with employment and earnings. For black males ages 25–34, their "results imply that past incarceration and child support can account for most of the declines over time in labor force activity for this age group" (Holzer, Offner, & Sorensen, p. 189).

Among the "barriers to employment" that the authors recommend that states consider eliminating are state revocations of driver's licenses for ex-offenders and bans on occupational licensing for those with criminal records, state restrictions on inmate labor to encourage the development of work skills, and rules that prevent the forgiveness of arrearages (especially if the father keeps up with current child support payments). "Regarding child support, states should be encouraged and assisted in efforts to review the practices by which child support orders are developed for low-income men—often without any direct evidence of their potential earnings" (Holzer, Offner, & Sorensen, p. 190). These ideas have taken on greater importance as child support enforcement activities have intensified and as the U.S. has entered a period when hundreds of thousands of ex-offenders are released from prison each year.

Many observers blame inner-city neighborhood conditions for exacerbating the poverty and socially dysfunctional behaviors of low-income individuals. Thus, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, JPAM published five important articles that explored the nature and extent of concentrated poverty, what some called "underclass neighborhoods" (see Box 1). Interestingly, JPAM has not published any articles on the major policy response, community development programs, perhaps because the limited rigorous research on the subject suggests disappointing results.

Box 1. JPAM Articles on Concentrated Poverty and the "Underclass"

Corcoran, M. E., Duncan, G. J., Gurin, G., & Gurin, P. (1985). Myth and reality: The causes and persistence of poverty. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 4, 516–536.

Gramlich, E. M., Laren, D., & Sealand, N. (1992). Moving into and out of poor urban areas. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 11, 273–287.

Hughes, M. A. (1989). Concentrated deviance and the "underclass" hypothesis. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 274–281.

Jargowsky, P. A. (1994). Ghetto poverty among blacks in the 1980s. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 13, 288–310.

Ricketts, E. R., & Sawhill, I. V. (1988). Defining and measuring the underclass. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 7, 316–325.

Another approach, perhaps more important for what it suggests about the strength of neighborhood effects than as a viable long-term strategy, is to move poor families out of such neighborhoods. In "Labor Market Experiences of Low-Income Black Women in Middle-Class Suburbs: Evidence from a Survey of Gautreaux Program Participants," Susan Popkin, James Rosenbaum, and Patricia Meaden (1993) provide an early assessment of the impact of Chicago's Gautreaux housing program on lower-income African American mothers.

Operating between 1976 and 1998, the Gautreaux program was created under a court order issued by the U.S. District Court to remedy past housing discrimination by the Chicago Housing Authority. The court ordered that 7,000 Section 8 slots be used to provide housing either in a different part of the city or in the surrounding suburbs—with the proviso that the new location be either less than 30 percent black or considered a revitalized majority black area.

To compare what happened to those who moved to the suburbs to those who moved to another location in the city,[7] the authors use a logit model to control for "human capital, family circumstances, family background, education, and the number of years since the move" (Popkin, Rosenbaum, & Meaden, p. 203). Their analysis indicates that recipients who moved to other parts of Chicago were 23 percent less likely to be employed than those who moved to the suburbs (60 percent vs. 78 percent), but among all employed recipients, there was no difference in the wage rate or in the number of hours worked.[8] The authors conclude:

> The Gautreaux program offers an alternative to welfare-to-work initiatives that holds much promise. It indicates that relocation assistance and a housing subsidy can help long-term public housing residents to move into the labor force and become at least partially self-supporting. It is difficult to know exactly what it is about the move to the suburbs that caused these changes—whether it is the effect of role models or improved access to jobs or some combination. This question certainly merits further research. However, the suburban movers clearly experience improved employment and earnings, even though the program provided no job training or placement services. A program that provided such support might produce even more encouraging results. (Popkin, Rosenbaum, & Meaden, p. 207)

Gautreaux's promising results, unfortunately, were not repeated in an attempted replication of the Gautreaux program. Initiated in 1994, the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) program was a ten-year, randomized experiment conducted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in five cities (Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City). About 3,100 families who lived in public housing or private subsidized housing in neighborhoods with poverty above 40 percent were divided into two program groups (one of which received housing vouchers that could only be used in areas with poverty below 10 percent, and the other group that received Section 8 housing vouchers that could be used for housing of their choice within the normal constraints of the program) and a control group that received no housing aid.

MTO's interim study results are disappointing. At between four and seven years from the initial move, there were no statistically significant differences in parents' earnings, employment, welfare receipt, household income, and food security, or on children's educational attainment. Boys in both program groups were significantly

[7] There was no comparison to those who did not move, as the program did not have information about them.

[8] A later article by James Rosenbaum reports roughly similar results for the mothers, but also includes impacts on their children. Children who moved to the suburbs were substantially less likely to drop out of high school and substantially more likely to have been on a college track in high school, to have attended college, to have graduated college, to have been employed full time if they did not attend college, and to have had better paying jobs after high school (Rosenbaum, 1995).

more likely to have been arrested, while girls in the Section 8 group were significantly less likely to have been arrested for a violent crime, but there were no other significant effects on crime, so it is difficult to interpret this result (Orr et al., 2003).

Why the difference? On the one hand, MTO was a well-run randomized experiment that should make its findings more reliable than those of Gautreaux. On the other hand, MTO was a somewhat weaker intervention: MTO had looser screening criteria for program participants than did Gautreaux, which only selected those potential recipients that had good rent records, low debt, and who did not have records of causing property damage; MTO did not require recipients to move to a nonminority area and was less prescriptive in choosing where recipients moved, whereas Gautreaux restricted recipients from moving to areas that seemed more likely to become poorer (84 percent of MTO moves were less than ten miles compared to only 10 percent of Gautreaux moves; also, only 10 percent of the new schools of the MTO program group were considered above average compared to 88 percent of the new schools of the Gautreaux program group); and the MTO program group was required to stay in the new housing for only one year.

Programs like Gautreux and MTO were conceptualized on the assumption that poor people living in disadvantaged and troubled neighborhoods had little means of escape. In "Moving into and out of Poor Urban Areas," Edward Gramlich, Deborah Laren, and Naomi Sealand (1992) conclude that, in the early 1980s, residents of poor urban areas were much more mobile than was commonly appreciated. Subsequent developments seem to have borne out their findings.

Defining a poor urban area as a metropolitan census tract where the nonelderly adult poverty rate exceeds 30 percent[9] and using data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, the authors find that "it is clearly wrong to think that because poor urban areas change their shape slowly, the same people are living there year after year" (Gramlich, Laren, & Sealand, p. 222). About 27 percent of low-income white adults with children left poor urban areas after a year. The figure was lower for black families, only about 10 percent. (However, over a much longer period, the MTO evaluation later confirmed this general finding, but with higher moving rates for African Americans—about 70 percent of the MTO control group also having moved, about half to neighborhoods with poverty below 30 percent.)

In any event, the turnover among blacks was high enough "to shed doubt on the entrapment hypothesis" (Gramlich, Laren, & Sealand, p. 216). This reflects sharp "changes for particular individuals, with as many as one quarter of certain groups leaving or joining these tracts in a particular year. In the past, similar relationships have also been observed for people's income, employment, and family status. Apparently, when it comes to the longitudinal status of an individual, nothing is very stable—not income, employment, family status, or even place of residence" (Gramlich, Laren, & Sealand, p. 221).

"Despite the great degree of geographical churning, poor urban areas gradually [became] poorer, blacker, and the home of a larger share of black families with children" (Gramlich, Laren, & Sealand, p. 210). Between 1979 and 1984, the population in poor urban areas declined by 10 percent, but the poverty rate increased from 27 to 32 percent, the portion of the population that was black increased from 70 to 75 percent, and the portion of black children living in poor urban areas increased from 26 percent to 29 percent. The authors comment:

> These numbers raise a series of questions for researchers and policymakers alike. For researchers, the questions involve explaining the transition probabilities, the sharp racial differences, and the role of a person's environment in shaping behavior. Other

[9] In contrast to approaches that measure "underclass neighborhoods" or concentrated poverty by including behavioral factors, Gramlich, Laren, and Sealand (1992) use a definition that only considers income. See also William Julius Wilson (30–40 percent) (Wilson, 1987) and Paul Jargowsky and Mary Jo Bane (40 percent) (Jargowsky & Bane, 1991).

> questions involve whether geographic movements are beneficial, associated with a rise in income prospects, or harmful. For policymakers, the numbers raise the old question of whether public policy should be focused on poor people or poor places. The high emigration rates reported here would seem to favor aiding people and not places, because people do not seem to be very tied to places. But when one works out the deeper implications, such as the potentially adverse implications of this high degree of mobility for public school education, even these conclusions might be tentative. (Gramlich, Laren, & Sealand, p. 221–222)

Inner-city poverty seems to have lost some of its urgency as so many cities have experienced revitalization ("gentrification") brought about by various social and economic forces. Still, those left behind deserve our renewed and sustained attention.

2. THE ROAD TO WELFARE REFORM

One of the most chronicled topics in JPAM is the multi-decade research effort to understand and reform welfare. From its inception, JPAM has featured a wide-ranging selection of articles on such topics as the effects of welfare recipiency, the extent of intergenerational welfare dependency, the size of work incentives and disincentives built into the program, and, of course, the impact of welfare-to-work and other programs under the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA), the Family Support Act of 1988, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996—which created the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Welfare Dependency

Neither liberals nor conservatives particularly liked the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program—liberals because they tended to think that benefits were too low (and varied considerably across states), were conditioned on strict eligibility requirements (such as asset tests), created financial disincentives to work, and provided limited funding for education and training that could help recipients obtain "good" jobs. Conservatives were hostile to AFDC because they tended to think it weakened family structures and "subsidized" illegitimacy, perpetuated the "culture of poverty" (discouraging work and breeding dependency on government and other dysfunctional behaviors), gave too much power to the federal government at the cost of state discretion, cost too much, and was rife with fraud and abuse.

Both sides had a point, of course, and the fact that cause and effect were frequently difficult to separate only heightened the emotions surrounding this political and scholarly debate. The greatest controversies involved cash welfare's impact on unwed teen births, marriage, and employment. This volume includes only three of a number of JPAM articles that seek to explore these issues (see Box 2).

Did young, unmarried women have babies in order to go on welfare? In "Determinants of Initial Entry onto Welfare by Young Women," Marieka Klawitter, Robert D. Plotnick, and Mark Evan Edwards (2000) use the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to follow young women (who were between the ages of 14 and 16 in 1979) for thirteen years to estimate the impact of state welfare policies and personal characteristics on initial entry onto welfare (AFDC).

Using ordinary least squares and discrete logit hazard models that include a state dummy variable to control "for unobservable state-level differences in welfare norms and administration" (Klawitter, Plotnick, & Edwards, p. 229), they find that women were most likely to first enroll in AFDC between the ages of 18 and 24, and to do so within the first three years of having given birth and, thus, not necessarily immediately after the child's birth. (The mothers were followed for only thirteen

Box 2. JPAM Articles on "Welfare Dependency"

Acs, G., & Loprest, P. (1999). The effect of disabilities on exits from AFDC. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 18, 28–49

Bassi, L. J., & Lerman, R. I. (1996). Reducing the child support welfare disincentive problem. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 15, 89–96.

Blumenberg, E., & Ong, P. (1998). Job accessibility and welfare usage: Evidence from Los Angeles. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 17, 639–657.

Fairlie, R. W., & London, R. A. (1997). The effect of incremental benefit levels on births to AFDC recipients. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 16, 575–597.

Gottschalk, P. (1992). The intergenerational transmission of welfare participation: Facts and possible causes. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 11, 254–272.

Kaestner, R. (1998). Drug use and AFDC participation. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 17, 495–520.

Klawitter, M., Plotnick, R. D., & Edwards, M. E. (2000). Determinants of initial entry onto welfare by young women. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 19, 527–546.

Loeb, S., & Corcoran, M. E. (2001). Welfare, work experience, and economic self-sufficiency. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 20, 1–20.

London, R. M. (2000). The interaction between single mothers' living arrangements and welfare participation. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 19, 93–117.

Lopoo, L. M. (2005). Maternal employment and teenage childbearing: Evidence from the PSID. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 24, 23–46.

Moffitt, R. A. (1996). The effect of employment and training on entry and exit from the welfare caseload. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 15, 32–50.

Pavetti, L., & Acs, G. (2001). Moving up, moving out, or going nowhere? A study of the employment patterns of young women and the implications for welfare mothers. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 20, 721–736.

Winkler, A. E. (1995). Does AFDC-UP encourage two-parent families? Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 14, 4–24.

years, until they were 27 to 29 years old, but that should not seriously affect the findings.)

Significantly, Klawitter, Plotnick, and Edwards find "little support for the idea that higher welfare benefits encourage earlier entry to welfare directly or indirectly by affecting incentives for childbearing" (Klawitter, Plotnick, & Edwards, p. 234). This suggests to the editors either that welfare was not an operative factor or that the existence of welfare and not its particular amount was the operative factor. (One plausible hypothesis that would be consistent with both explanations is that young women have babies for other reasons or without intending to do so, and that welfare becomes an important option sometime after the child's birth.) The existence of a state-funded "medically needy" insurance program, however, had a negative impact on AFDC enrollment, suggesting that it allowed young mothers to receive health insurance without going on welfare.

Demographic characteristics and behavioral variables seem to have had a greater impact on whether a young woman will begin receiving AFDC. The mother's education status, living in a two-parent family, higher academic achievement, and having positive attitudes about school all made a young woman's going on welfare less likely, while being poor at fourteen, black, or Hispanic made it more likely.

To the authors, this suggests that: "Although the most efficient path of policy intervention is not clear, the timing is. Most young women go on AFDC for the first time between ages 18 and 25 and do so in the first few years after the birth of their first baby" (Klawitter, Plotnick, & Edwards, p. 239). Other researchers have come to the same conclusion. Unfortunately, after the sharp decline in welfare caseloads, there was little interest in mounting the research and demonstration effort needed to test the idea.

Although factors beyond welfare payment, *per se*, seem to be powerful determinants of unwed parenthood, its availability certainly seems to shape the living patterns of low-income, single mothers. In "The Interaction between Single Mothers' Living Arrangements and Welfare Participation," Rebecca London (2000) examines the extent to which, in the early 1990s, single mothers lived with other adults (parents, cohabitors, or others), whether they received AFDC, and whether benefit reductions (through sanctions or time limits) affected their living arrangements.

Using data from the 1990 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation in a two-stage, weighted least-squares instrumental variable model that includes controls for housing costs, unemployment rate, and state means-tested program benefit policies, London finds that a reduction in benefits because of a partial sanction lowered the proportion of mothers on AFDC by about 14 percent, while also reducing the number living independently by about 6 percent (which included a reduction of about 11 percent in cohabitation and increases in those living with their parents by about 30 percent and with other adults by about 3 percent). A full-family sanction or a complete benefits termination due to time limits had an even greater impact: It "reduces the share of mothers living independently by 22 percent, reduces the share of mothers cohabiting by 48 percent, reduces the share of mothers living with others by 16 percent," while increasing the share of mothers living with their parents by more than 135 percent[10] (London, p. 258).

London observes, thus, that reducing or terminating benefits might be undermining the self-sufficiency of welfare recipients if they are no longer able to maintain independent households.[11] London's findings illustrate the interaction between government benefits and behavior—regardless of the income of the recipient, we would add. But the impact seems greater among the less well off, presumably because they have fewer independent choices.

Limited earning capacity is, of course, a major reason why low-income mothers have constrained choices about their living arrangements. In "Moving Up, Moving Out, or Going Nowhere? A Study of the Employment Patterns of Young Women and the Implications for Welfare Mothers," LaDonna Pavetti and Gregory Acs (2001) provide a disheartening estimate of the long-term earning capacity of young women who have been on welfare.

As Pavetti and Acs describe: "Conventional wisdom holds that women on welfare will be better off in the long run if they take a job, even if it means initially having less money to spend on their and their children's needs. Underlying this thinking is the belief that women who take low-paying jobs will eventually move up to higher paying jobs either with their current employer or by changing employers" (Pavetti & Acs, p. 264).

The authors use data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth to follow young women (who have never been on welfare) from the ages of 18 to 27 (between 1979 and 1993) to develop a competing risk model that estimates how various characteristics affect the quarterly probability of young, non-welfare women moving from one employment state to another employment state over the ten-year period.

[10] Author's correction. The published article mistakenly reports the increase in the proportion of mothers living with their parents from 15.5 percent to 36.7 percent as a 58 percent increase.
[11] In effect, she defines self-sufficiency, however, as being financially independent of other adults, including parents, as well as government (an extreme position that many might not share).

The employment states are having no job, having a "bad job" (making less than $9.50 an hour or working part time), and having a "good job" (making more than $9.50 an hour and working full time). Applying these characteristics-based probabilities to women on welfare,[12] the authors estimate that "one-quarter of young women who received welfare could be firmly established in jobs paying more than $9.50 an hour by ages 26 and 27. An additional 40 percent would work steadily but in low-paying jobs, and more than one-third would work only sporadically" (Pavetti & Acs, p. 264).

Thus, "the prospect of the majority of welfare recipients becoming completely self-supporting in a short period of time does not seem promising" (Pavetti & Acs, p. 276). "More discouraging" are the prospects for women moving from welfare to work with characteristics associated with long-term welfare receipt—no high school diploma (only about 15 percent would get a good job), three or more children (only about 13 percent), and first birth before age eighteen (only about 18 percent) (Pavetti & Acs, p. 276). (The authors do not present an estimate for women with all three characteristics.)

These findings have immense significance in deciding how much low-skilled, young mothers can earn if they leave or avoid welfare, a key issue underlying policy debates in the post-welfare reform world—an issue at the heart of the interchanges below about whether it "pays" to leave welfare under TANF.

Mandatory vs. Voluntary Programs

In 1988, Congress passed the Family Support Act (FSA), whose centerpiece was the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program. Replacing the Work Incentive (WIN) program, JOBS required states to provide work activities for AFDC recipients and emphasized education and training to a much greater degree than earlier welfare-to-work programs.[13] (Funding provisions encouraged states to target families at greatest risk of long-term dependency.) Nevertheless, the participation requirements were modest: States were only required to serve 20 percent of the nonexempt caseload by 1995, and about half the caseload remained exempt from work requirements altogether, primarily because they were single mothers caring for young children.

Nevertheless, JOBS brought to the forefront a long-standing debate about whether participation in such programs should be mandatory or voluntary. JPAM published a series of often sharply divergent papers on the subject (see Box 3). This volume contains three representatives of the competing viewpoints.

In "Welfare Reform and Mandatory Versus Voluntary Work: Policy Issue or Management Problem?" Mary Jo Bane (1989) argues in favor of voluntary programs—because they are more likely to be well run and therefore to be successful. Bane characterizes this debate as largely "ideological, between those who believe that the 'right' to welfare ought not to be constrained by work or other requirements, and those who believe that welfare receipt carries with it a social obligation to work or prepare for work" (Bane, p. 279). She takes a different approach, asking "whether one or another program is more effective in achieving what everyone is presumably seeking: the movement of clients from welfare to self-sufficiency" (Bane, p. 279).

[12] The authors are careful to highlight two risks to their study's validity: "First, because this group of women who never received welfare includes women who are 'voluntarily' jobless or underemployed, they may make fewer and slower transitions than women attempting to leave TANF. Second, women who avoided welfare may differ in unobservable ways from women on welfare and may be more likely to make a positive transition" (Pavetti & Acs, p. 273).
[13] Other FSA provisions required all states to provide cash assistance to two-parent families (a state option up to that point), strengthened child support collection programs, and expanded access to child care and Medicaid, particularly for families transitioning from welfare to work.

Box 3. JPAM Symposium on "The Craft of Public Management"

Bane, M. J. (1989). Welfare reform and mandatory versus voluntary work: Policy issue or management problem? Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 285–289.

Garner, L. H. (1989). Mandatory or voluntary work programs? It depends on power. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 289–293.

Leone, R. A. & O'Hare, M. (1989). Welfare reform and work. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 293–298.

Lynn, L. E. (1989). In designing public welfare programs, should participation in work and training be voluntary or mandatory? Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 284–285.

Lynn, L. E. (1989). Reflections on the symposium. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 303–306.

Lynn, L. E. (1990). Rejoinder to Mead. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 9, 405–408.

Mead, L. M. (1990). Should workfare be mandatory? What research says. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 9, 400–404.

Rosenthal, S. R. (1989). Mandatory or voluntary work for welfare recipients? Operations management perspectives. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 8, 298–303.

According to Bane, mandatory programs require more resources than voluntary programs and establish expectations that both workers and clients must fulfill. However, they also can lead to "nominal compliance," create adversarial relationships between clients and workers, and lead to "worker laziness" that results in "either blaming or excusing clients" (Bane, p. 281). Voluntary programs, on the other hand, can be perceived as being less serious and generate less demand for resources. They can encourage workers to work only with those clients who are easy to serve and can discourage clients from taking an active role in looking for work. As a result, they may lower expectations and foster an attitude in which clients wait for the program to come to them rather than taking a more active role in pursuing work activities.

Balancing these considerations, Bane concludes that creating an effective organizational culture in welfare offices supercedes the debate of mandatory versus voluntary welfare-to-work programs—because a successful program depends more on how well a welfare office is run. "The dangers of slipping into those bad management practices characteristic of mandatory programs are probably greater than of falling into the pitfalls of voluntary programs" (Bane, p. 281). One should note, however, that Bane favored voluntary programs in the first place, partly because success depends on the ability of workers to sell the program, and, in voluntary programs, "they are likely to convey a strong impression that success is possible, that jobs can be found, and that clients can capably fill them" (Bane, p. 281).

Bane's article was part of a symposium in which "public management scholars [were invited] to use general principles to decide on the relative merits of mandatory and voluntary workfare" (Lynn, p. 287). As such, the symposium did not address the emerging research on welfare-to-work programs, but as Lawrence Mead (Mead, 1990) points out in "Should Workfare be Mandatory? What Research Says," research conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) and by Mead himself had already begun to answer the question about voluntary versus mandatory programs.

While acknowledging that evaluations of voluntary and mandatory programs were reporting similar impacts on recipient income and employment, Mead argues that mandatory programs are "markedly superior" in raising participation in workfare programs, which, he posits, is their main purpose. He cites interim findings of voluntary programs in Massachusetts (Employment and Training Choices program—ET) and six counties in California (Greater Avenues for Independence—GAIN) (evaluated by the Urban Institute and MDRC, respectively) that indicate that the programs were able to reach only the top one-third of the caseload, that is, the most employable recipients. In contrast, the Saturation Work Initiative Model (SWIM), a mandatory program in San Diego, California (also evaluated by MDRC), substantially increased work activity participation of the more disadvantaged "second third" of the welfare caseload and also had larger impacts on earnings and employment for AFDC recipients compared to previous MDRC WIN demonstration evaluations (Hamilton & Friedlander, 1989).

Mead asserts: "In the history of workfare, participation has been the main issue. Welfare recipients seldom work or look for work consistently, even when they are employable, and the public resents that." Hence, "The distinctive purpose of workfare is to raise work effort among the dependent" (Mead, pp. 283–284). Thus, concludes Mead, for welfare-to-work programs to be effective, they must be mandatory. If they are not, "too many dependent adults would fail to take work programs seriously, often to their own detriment" (Mead, p. 286).

Nevertheless, according to Mead, the most effective mandatory programs "look quite similar on the inside to voluntary ones" (Mead, p. 285). They "immerse clients in job preparation activities in which work expectations are conveyed more informally, through relationships with staff and other recipients. Formal authority is held in reserve, and few clients are sanctioned (denied welfare) for noncooperation."

But is the purpose of welfare reform primarily "to raise work effort among the dependent," as Mead asserts? In his "Rejoinder to Mead," Laurence Lynn (1990), who was the editor of the symposium, criticizes Mead for changing the criterion of success to mere participation in a welfare-to-work program, arguing that the link between program participation and the movement to self-sufficiency "is not at all clearly established" (Lynn, p. 289). Lynn's criticism may have been valid at the time, but Mead's argument was the one that prevailed in the 1996 welfare reform law.

Although not a randomized experiment, one welfare demonstration helped settle the "mandatory versus voluntary" debate, at least temporarily. In "Can a Voluntary Welfare Program Change the Behavior of Welfare Recipients? New Evidence from Washington State's Family Independence Program (FIP)," Duane Leigh (1995) examines the impact of FIP on participation in employment and training activities, welfare recipiency, and employment and earnings.

FIP was a five-year, *voluntary*, welfare-to-work welfare waiver demonstration program implemented in mid-1988 that provided financial incentives for work, a cash-out of food stamp benefits, expanded support services, and a more "client-centered environment." The program was implemented at a time when the "national debate on welfare reform centered on whether welfare-to-work (or 'workfare') programs should be voluntary with incentives or compulsory with penalties, and whether they should focus on rapid labor market entry or on delayed entry with human capital investments in education and training" (Leigh, p. 291).

FIP had earlier been evaluated by the Urban Institute using a quasi-experimental matched-pair design comparing counties that offered the FIP program to demographically similar counties that did not offer the program. In contrast, Leigh uses data from a longitudinal survey of welfare recipients (the Family Income Study, or FIS) and both a two-step instrumental variable logit and an ordinary least squares model to control for selection bias, program implementation, and household characteristics.

Although the Urban Institute had found a negligible difference in the participation in employment and training activities of recipients in FIP compared to non-FIP recipients (Long et al., 1994), Leigh finds a 33 to 44 percent increase. His findings for employment and earnings, however, mirror those of the Urban Institute: FIP had a negligible effect on employment and earnings, and substantially increased welfare receipt (by 12 percentage points and 10 percentage points in the final two years of the study, or 17 and 18 percent, respectively) and welfare benefits paid (by $1,571 and $841 in the final two years of the study, or 33 percent and 10 percent, respectively) compared to recipients who are not in the program.

Together with the findings of other welfare-to-work demonstrations, FIP helped establish the case for mandatory programs that seek to encourage recipients to find immediate employment rather than provide job training. Thus, after modeling the results of various mandatory and voluntary employment and training programs, Moffitt concludes:

> Mandatory E&T [employment and training] programs that have relatively heavy time and participation requirements are likely to reduce entry onto AFDC or increase the rate of exit from the rolls prior to completion of the program. . . . However, voluntary E&T programs are likely to increase the caseload, as are programs which have earnings payoffs significantly in excess of those available from private-sector work, for both make the AFDC program more attractive (or less unattractive) than it had been before. (Moffitt, 1996, p. 48)

Four Decades of Experimentation

Modern welfare reform research can be said to have started with the Negative Income Tax experiments of the late 1960s. What followed was a steady progression in policy-focused interventions coupled with advances in evaluation techniques and administration. An abbreviated litany includes the National Supported Work Demonstration in the late 1970s, the WIN Demos in the 1980s, California's state-funded Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) program in the late 1980s, the AFDC Homemaker–Home Health Aide demonstration in the mid-1980s, followed by the Minority Female Single Parent Demonstration, the JOBS/NEWWS Evaluation after the passage of the 1988 Family Support Act, the welfare waiver evaluations leading to the passage of TANF in 1996, and a continuing stream of high-quality research since then.

These projects were far from perfect, and some have criticized the direction they took toward mandatory work-first policies (instead of, for example, programs to increase human capital). Nevertheless, it is impossible not to admire this four-decade record of sustained intellectual, institutional, and policy-relevant accomplishment. One wishes other areas of social policy were similarly blessed with such a strong underpinning of research and evaluation.

Remarkably, this stream of research was sustained through the administrations of Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, and by governors as different as Mario Cuomo and Tommy Thompson. In her 2002 APPAM Presidential Address, "Fostering Research Excellence and Impacting Policy and Practice: The Welfare Reform Story," Judith Gueron (2003) seeks to explain the "why and how" of this striking and unprecedented achievement.

As someone who was an active participant and leader through much of this period (including having been president of MDRC), Gueron speaks with particular authority. Among the factors she cites are the nature of welfare as a national program that is rife with normative and political controversies; the unplanned combination of flexible research authority in various federal laws; the interest of states in program reform that often compensated for lesser federal interest; continuing methodological advances (described below); and "a fortuitous continuity and dedication among the key actors" (Gueron, p. 309). She kindly adds that "APPAM played a role in creating and nurturing that community" (p. 310). Most would also credit the scientific and project administration contributions of MDRC and its sister firms, especially Abt Associates, Inc. and Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.

Gueron continues with a sweeping summary of the major milestones in this forty-year process. Given her special vantage point at MDRC, she has firsthand experience with which to assess the dramatic advances in research methods though this period. As she notes:

> the story about the use of random assignment in welfare studies is one of successive leaps forward and increasing ambition. . . . All of this seems routine now, but at that time, lodging random assignment in real world programs was a revolutionary idea. Most people doubted that program staff could be persuaded to use a lottery to determine who would be served, thinking instead that they would react like doctors being told to deny a patient a known benefit and refuse to participate in the study. (Gueron, p. 315)

Gueron describes other methodological breakthroughs, including the use of administrative records instead of surveys; the use of complex, multi-group random assignment to assess the impact of various program components; and randomly assigning sites or groups when individual random assignment is not feasible or appropriate, and more recent efforts to use "quantitative and qualitative efforts to get inside the 'black box' and understand what features of program management, implementation, or the local context contributed to the success and replicability of the model" (Gueron, p. 316).

Gueron's address is both inspiring and depressing: inspiring because it describes a great coming together of people and events to achieve an important social goal, depressing because the coming together seems so accidental and unlikely to be repeated. (This last point, and how to deal with it, is discussed in the last reading in this collection.)

No better example of the seemingly accidental nature of this story is the welfare waiver authority that proved so pivotal in the pre-TANF period. As Gueron explains, in 1962, the Congress "added a fortuitous few words to the Social Security Act. . . . This obscure new provision of the law, Section 1115, gave federal officials the authority to allow states to waive provisions of the act to test welfare reform ideas likely to promote the law's objectives" (Gueron, pp. 310–311).

Starting in 1987, the Reagan administration began encouraging states to use this authority to experiment in how they provided welfare—through waivers from AFDC's often rigid rules. (To a lesser extent, states also obtained waivers from food stamp and Medicaid rules.) The idea was that states and communities were best positioned to find solutions to welfare dependency and, perhaps more important, to provide an alternate avenue to program reform. (Call it an end run around the Democratic Congress.)

The Reagan administration established three main criteria by which state proposals would be judged: (1) consistency with the president's policy goals to reduce dependency; (2) rigorous evaluation; and (3) cost-neutrality with respect to the federal government not just for AFDC, but also for Medicaid and food stamps (because all three programs were open-ended entitlements to the states).

Interestingly, it was the last requirement—cost neutrality—that advanced the cause of randomized experiments while also having probably the most impact on the shape of later welfare reforms. In "Demonstration Evaluations and Cost Neutrality: Using Caseload Models to Determine the Federal Cost Neutrality of New Jersey's REACH Demonstration," Steven Garasky and Burt Barnow (1992) describe how the unreliability of nonexperimental estimates of program costs—needed to enforce cost neutrality—led the Bush administration to insist that nearly all approved waiver requests include a random assignment evaluation design to determine program impact and cost neutrality.

Garasky and Barnow describe three approaches for estimating cost neutrality: (1) an experimental design in which the costs of the experimental group could be compared to that of the control group; (2) a quasi-experimental approach with the creation of nonrandom comparison groups with statistical adjustments to compare costs; and (3) an econometric or time series model used to predict costs in the absence of the demonstration, which could be compared to the actual costs.

New Jersey developed econometric models to evaluate the impact of REACH and to ascertain cost neutrality because it wanted to implement REACH statewide and did not wish to exclude those in a control group from the intervention. The state models, developed by a contractor (one of the authors was part of the team) and approved by federal and state officials, estimated a $19 million savings in each of the project's first two years. The federal government, however, considered these estimates "too large to be feasible" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 326). The caseload decline, for example, had begun before any serious implementation of the program, and there were similar declines in non-REACH counties during the phase-in period of the demonstration.[14]

The authors explain how this early experience with REACH helped alter the course of the process. "The federal government recognized the limitations of the caseload forecasting technique, and most of the subsequent waiver projects were based on experimental designs. If properly implemented, experimental designs are less subject to structural biases than nonexperimental methods" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 327).

Although OMB had indicated in November 1987 that random assignment experiments were the "preferred option" for evaluating state waivers (Office of Management and Budget, 1987), REACH and similar experiences in other programs prompted the federal government to require that random assignment experiments be part of almost all approved waivers, with the control group representing the counterfactual for both program impact and cost neutrality purposes.[15] According to Garasky and Barnow, "The New Jersey experience with REACH clearly demonstrates the limitations of caseload modeling for assessing cost neutrality. In retrospect, too much might have been asked of a fairly crude forecasting technique. If carefully designed, experiments can provide better information on participant impacts and cost neutrality, although different experimental designs are preferred for estimating participant impacts than for estimating cost neutrality or overall impacts" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 320).[16]

As we will see, the putative reliability of randomized experiments (a direct outgrowth of the cost neutrality rule), gave the results of the waivers great persuasiveness. At the same time, however, the strictness of the cost neutrality rule (originally

[14] Howard Rolston, Abt Associates, Inc., e-mail message to the author, March 29, 2009. New Jersey countered that "by announcing the implementation of REACH, some would-be AFDC applicants did not apply for the program. Thus, caseload reductions in counties where REACH had not yet started could still have been the result of REACH. The federal government considered the estimated savings likely to be spurious because the demonstration was slower than anticipated in getting started and the caseload reductions appeared much too large considering the small number of counties actually implementing REACH" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 325).

[15] In recognition of state concerns about the practical and political issues associated with statewide control groups, states were permitted to limit the assignment of a control group to a few geographically limited areas and to limit the overall size of the group. Some were as small as 1,500 cases in states with 10,000 families on welfare, and as small as 1 percent of the statewide caseload in large states. In practice, the size of the control group depended on a variety of factors, including the size of the state's caseload, the scope of the intervention being tested, and the need to have a sample size large enough to assure that the findings would not be the result of chance variation.

[16] As the authors suggest, most random assignment experiments fail to capture deterrent effects that reduce the number of welfare applicants ("entry effects"). To do so, randomization by program site or caseload modeling may be needed.

from year to year) served to limit the ideas that states could test—because it "limited the ability of states to test promising approaches that require more resources" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 326). This would include "investments" in activities like education and training, child care expansions, and post-employment services that involve up-front costs with the expected payoff several years later, when, if successful, they would help participants increase their earnings and, hence, reduce their need for welfare.

In 1994, the Clinton Administration changed the cost neutrality criterion from a year-to-year basis to the life of a demonstration, thus giving states more flexibility to implement demonstrations with up-front costs. But by then, so many year-to-year cost-neutral waivers had been issued that the work-first die had been cast. We will never know what a different rule would have produced.

The reliability and precision of cost estimates derived from randomized experiments open the door to sophisticated comparisons of program costs. In "The Budgetary Implications of Welfare Reform: Lessons from Four State Initiatives," David Long (1988) assesses the five-year budgetary impacts on federal, state, and local governments of mandatory welfare-to-work programs (using administrative data for the first six to ten quarters and projections for the remainder of the five-year period).

Long's analysis is based on MDRC evaluations of mandatory welfare-to-work WIN demonstrations in four states (Little Rock and Pine Bluff, Arkansas; San Diego, California; Baltimore, Maryland; and nine urban and rural counties in Virginia).[17] In three of these states (California, Virginia, and Arkansas), the programs produced budget gains for all levels of government, although the magnitude of those effects varied by state. In Maryland, where the program was aimed at increasing longer-term employability (largely through education and training), costs exceeded savings because of high initial program costs and small impacts on increased tax payments and reduced welfare benefits. In addition, he finds that it can take some time (even years) before real savings are achieved—as costs were typically incurred in the first year of the program, but the budget gains were spread out over the entire follow-up period.

Hence, Long's study illustrates the ability of welfare-to-work programs to reduce welfare costs and possibly to reduce caseloads, but only when the program is sufficiently effective and is relatively inexpensive. The favorable budgetary impacts of these early welfare-to-work programs were used by proponents of welfare reform to support work requirements in federal and state welfare reform efforts.

Foreshadowing the importance of the incentive structure embedded in the TANF block grant, Long notes that: "The costs and gains, however, are shared unevenly by the three levels, which encourages disparities in the programs states and localities choose to implement" (Long, p. 332). That is, the federal government saved more from caseload declines than state or local governments because it provided 90 percent of the direct cost for the WIN demonstrations and between 50 and 78 percent of the costs of AFDC payments (depending on the state). Under TANF, it is the states that benefit more from caseload declines. The TANF block grant provides a fixed amount of federal dollars regardless of changes to the state's caseload; hence, states receive 100 percent of any savings from a caseload decline, two to five times more than under AFDC.

3. TANF AND ITS AFTERMATH

Passed with great trepidation on the left, and high expectations on the right, the 1996 welfare reform law, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), replaced the nation's sixty-year-old welfare program

[17] The San Diego and Arkansas programs required recipients to first participate in job search and, if unsuccessful at finding a job, to participate in a work experience ("workfare") program. The Virginia program was similar, but recipients unsuccessful at finding a job could also select a training or education program. The Baltimore program gave recipients much more freedom; from the beginning, they could choose among job search, workfare, job training, or education.

with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Among its most important changes, TANF "ended the legal entitlement to benefits, mandated that a large percentage of recipients work, and imposed a five-year time limit on the receipt of federally funded benefits" (Besharov, 2003, p. 4).

After hitting an all-time high of about five million families in 1994, welfare caseloads fell to about 2.2 million in 2001, drifting slightly lower (by another 500,000) over the next six years, leading supporters to proclaim the law a great success. But because the caseload decline began in 1994, two years before the passage of TANF, let alone its implementation, most careful observers credit many causes for the decline, particularly a strong economy and other social assistance programs such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). As one of the authors has written:

> Looking across all the studies, and discounting the weakest ones, the most reasonable conclusion is that, although welfare reform was an important factor in reducing caseloads (accounting for 25 to 35 percent of the decline), the economy was probably more important (35 to 45 percent of the decline), and expanded aid to low-income, working families (primarily through the EITC) was almost as important as welfare reform (20 to 30 percent). (Besharov, 2003, p. 9)

Of more pressing concern, however, has been whether low-income children and families are better off—or worse off—after welfare reform.

Did Welfare Reform "Succeed"?

Determining whether TANF has been a success depends on the measure used for success. Conservatives often point to the dramatic decline in welfare caseloads since 1994 and the increase in the number of employed single mothers. Liberals point to the often low wages of single mothers, the large decline in the proportion of TANF-eligible families participating in the program, and the increase in the number of women who report neither receiving welfare nor working (see Besharov, 2004).

In "Alternative Measures of Economic Success among TANF Participants: Avoiding Poverty, Hardship, and Dependence on Public Assistance," Maria Cancian and Daniel Meyer (2004) describe how there are various measures of welfare reform's success (or failure) and how the selection of a measure is ultimately subjective and can result in substantially different results.

Cancian and Meyer set forth three measures of welfare reform's impact—"independence," less "poverty," and less "economic hardship"—and then use administrative and survey data from Wisconsin to assess how TANF recipients in the late 1990s fared under each measure. Their main objective is to "illustrate the sensitivity of conclusions to alternative ways of measuring each indicator" (Cancian & Meyer, p. 341).

Their first measure, "independence," is defined as receiving less than $1,000 a year in benefits from TANF, SSI, and food stamps. By this measure, only 26 percent of the sample of TANF recipients or leavers were independent. Their second measure, "poverty," is measured using a broad definition of family income (including that of cohabitors) that included earnings, the Earned Income Tax Credit, the cash value of food stamps, and any other form of cash income (such as child support, welfare, or disability). By this measure, about 56 percent of recipients or leavers were not poor. Their third measure, "economic hardship," was based on food and shelter hardships.[18] By this measure, about 59 percent of

[18] A family is considered to have suffered a food hardship if it reported that it "often" or "sometimes" did not have enough food to eat in the past year. A family is considered to have experienced a shelter hardship if it had its utilities cut off, had to move in with others because it could not afford the rent, lived in a shelter, or reported being homeless in the past year.

recipients or leavers had avoided either hardship over the last year. However, "only 16 percent of women were successful by all three measures" (Cancian & Meyer, p. 350).

Thus, write Cancian and Meyer, "debates about the success of TANF reforms have been obscured by the use of inconsistent indicators of success, as well as by measurement difficulties associated with alternative indicators" (Cancian & Meyer, p. 341). The next readings demonstrate how "one's evaluation of the success of recent welfare reforms may be strongly influenced by the chosen measure of success" (Cancian & Meyer, p. 351).

In 2007, JPAM's Point/CounterPoint section published an exchange on TANF's impact. In "Why Welfare Reform Succeeded," Lawrence Mead (2007a) credits welfare reform in the late 1980s and the 1990s as the result of a grand compromise: "liberals abandoned entitlement, the idea that aid should be given based on need without demanding work, while conservatives abandoned downsizing government. Rather, both sides focused on promoting work" (Mead, p. 359). But it was an "incomplete triumph" (p. 357).

According to Mead, welfare reform reduced dependency and moved families from welfare to work. There were sharp increases in work among welfare recipients and in employment among single mothers, as well as a more than 60 percent decline in the national welfare caseload between 1994 and 2001. Welfare reform, however, apparently did not promote marriage (as some of its proponents had forecast) and did not eradicate poverty (although poverty reduction was not an explicit goal of welfare reform in 1996). Most welfare leavers remained poor and even many of those who did escape poverty still made use of the EITC and food stamps.

Looking to the future, Mead says that welfare reform may have changed the politics of support for low-income families. Providing assistance to the working poor is now more politically popular than it was under the old AFDC regime. There is considerable pressure to continue to raise benefits for the working poor and to increase the minimum wage, all of which would be "unimaginable if 5 million families still lived on welfare without work expectations" (Mead, p. 360).

Many would disagree with Mead. In "TANF's Results Are More Mixed Than Is Often Understood," Sharon Parrott and Arloc Sherman (2007a) argue that welfare reform has not been as successful as portrayed by some of its supporters. They say that the increases in employment rates among single mothers, the decline in the welfare rolls, and the drop in child poverty rates in the aftermath of welfare reform were due as much or more to the strong economy and expansions in aid to low-income working families ("making work pay"). Moreover, these positive trends reversed after 2000 and the "safety net for the poorest families with children has weakened dramatically" (Parrott & Sherman, p. 362).

Parrott and Sherman point out that the proportion of eligible families participating in welfare fell from more than 80 percent in the early 1990s to only about 46 percent in 2003, and they worry that the 2006 reauthorization of TANF will only exacerbate these problems because it toughens state work requirements without providing additional resources, something they believe may "further encourage states to keep caseloads low" (Parrott & Sherman, p. 367).

For Parrott and Sherman, the real test of welfare reform in the future will be "whether states and the federal government can find ways to improve on three fronts simultaneously: providing needed income support to the poorest children, helping those with the greatest problems find jobs, and helping those at the bottom rungs of the labor market find desperately needed skills" (Parrott & Sherman, p. 368). On this and other points, they are not as sanguine as Mead.

In his "Response to Parrott and Sherman," Mead (2007b) counters that there is no research that shows that those families that left welfare without work are actually suffering additional hardship. He also disagrees with their assertion that the barriers faced by welfare recipients make them unemployable and contends that Parrott and Sherman fail "to anticipate how much more recipients could work once government seriously expected and assisted them to do so" (Mead, p. 370).

Significantly, Mead does not advocate increased efforts to move welfare mothers into work. He believes that "government has done enough to move nonworking mothers into jobs" (Mead, p. 370); instead, he calls for greater attention to policies that focus on how to help families after they obtain work.

In their "Response to Mead," Parrott and Sherman (2007b) say that Mead ignores the plight of those who left TANF but are not working, and they challenge his assertion that welfare reform has made aid to (working) single mothers more politically attractive. (They cite congressional attempts to cut Medicaid and child support in 2006 and the tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 that did little to assist the working poor.) They conclude, however, that "there appears to be growing unease from across the political spectrum about worsening income inequality" (Parrott & Sherman, p. 374) and that "if this unease grows into a willingness to revisit our budget priorities and invest in supports for low-income families, perhaps Mead's optimism will be proven well-founded" (Parrott & Sherman, p. 374).

Developments since this interchange, perhaps fueled by recession and the election of Barack Obama, seem to have proven Mead correct about the expansion of aid to the working poor.

Welfare vs. Work

Most observers attribute the decline of welfare caseloads to many factors beyond simply "welfare reform," especially a strong entry-level economy. But while there is disagreement about the relative contribution of specific factors, most experts agree that, at bottom, the mechanism that propelled the decline was the perception among low-income mothers that they were better off leaving welfare or not going on it in the first place.

In "Incentives, Challenges, and Dilemmas of TANF: A Case Study," Barbara Wolfe (2002) traces how, in the late 1990s, Wisconsin increased the financial incentives (and disincentives) for work—at least for relatively low-income families—embedded in its welfare program ("Wisconsin Works" or "W-2"). She points out that, under AFDC, a typical welfare family (a mother and two children) with earnings between \$0 and \$8,500 (the earnings at which the family no longer qualified for AFDC) faced marginal tax rates of as high as 90 percent. The family faced marginal tax rates of between 31 and 36 percent when earnings were between \$8,500 and \$12,000, roughly the earnings of part-time employment. If a mother moved from part-time to full-time employment (and earnings rose to between \$12,000 and \$20,000), however, the reduction of other means-tested benefits (such as food stamps, EITC, Medicaid, and child care) created, in effect, a tax on these additional earnings of between 79 and 117 percent. In comparison, when earnings were between \$20,000 and \$30,000, the marginal tax rates were only about 65 percent.

According to Wolfe, Wisconsin Works reduced marginal tax rates in the \$12,000 to \$20,000 income range, but only by raising them in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range. Adopted in 1997, Wisconsin Works made welfare leavers eligible for more benefits—including expanded child care assistance, a state EITC, and Medicaid up to 185 percent of poverty—to help "make work pay." While this reduced marginal tax rates for those entering full-time employment, Wolfe notes that this pushed the high marginal tax rates further up the income scale—making them even higher than they were under the AFDC model, with marginal tax rates of about 132 percent in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range.

Hence, she concludes, under current policies, "high MTRs do not discourage work, but they do discourage workers from working harder or longer" (Wolfe, p. 381). Moreover, they catch even more low-skilled women (and not just leavers) in the poverty trap—because there are so many in the $20,000 to $30,000 range. Other studies affirm her conclusion.[19]

The next three articles demonstrate the importance of aid to the working poor in order to make work pay for welfare leavers, but also, if Wolfe's findings are applicable, how the resulting high marginal tax rates for those with somewhat higher earnings discourage work (or reporting earnings).

One can see the income incentives Wolfe documents at work in the next two studies—which also illustrate the importance of income from other sources, especially family and household members. In "Does It Pay to Move from Welfare to Work?" Sheldon Danziger, Colleen M. Heflin, Mary E. Corcoran, Elizabeth Oltmans, and Hui-Chen Wang (2002) explore the impact of leaving welfare for work on low-income women in Michigan in the late 1990s (after the passage of TANF).

Using the Women's Employment Study, the authors identify single mothers receiving welfare in one urban Michigan county in February 1997 and track them for two years to determine whether, in the aftermath of welfare reform, it "pays" to leave welfare for work. In 1999, for both monthly and annual incomes, women who had left welfare for employment had higher incomes, on average, than women who were both on welfare and also worked (combiners), women who received only welfare benefits, and women who had left welfare but were not employed.

There can be important differences in the attributes of women who work and those who do not, of course. Nonworking recipients may face more barriers to work, for example. There may also be important but unmeasured differences in personal characteristics, such as ability and motivation. To control for these differences, the authors ran a fixed-effect regression and found that "for every hour a woman works, her monthly net income increases by $2.63" (Danziger et al., p. 397) net of taxes and changes in welfare benefits.

Work effort explained 60 percent of the difference in monthly income between women who worked and women who were on welfare. On average, leavers worked 144 more hours per month than those who remained on welfare, which translates to a $379 increase in monthly income, or about 37 percent. In addition, the women who worked were less likely to have food and shelter hardships, but were also less likely to have health insurance.

Danziger et al. conclude that, at least in Michigan (an important point we return to below), "after welfare reform, it does pay to work" (Danziger et al., p. 398). One reason, they note (in an echo of Wolfe's findings), is that before TANF, welfare benefits were usually reduced by nearly a dollar for each dollar of earnings, but that this changed in the 1990s with expanded earnings disregards and major expansions of the EITC, the minimum wage, and health insurance (through Medicaid and SCHIP).

Clearly, such results are dependent on the local context—the availability of and wages for low-skilled jobs, the rules of the local welfare agency (especially various marginal tax rates), and local differences in demography. In "Does it Pay to Move from Welfare to Work? A Comment on Danziger, Heflin, Corcoran, Oltmans, and Wang," Robert Moffitt and Katie Winder (2005) report on their general replication of the approach used by Danziger et al. using data from their post-TANF "Three-City Study" of low-income families in low-income neighborhoods in Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio. They find "much weaker evidence" that "it does indeed pay for families to move from welfare to work" (Moffitt & Winder, p. 412).

Moffitt and Winder find smaller gains from moving from welfare to work in the three cities of their study than in Michigan. In comparing the studies, they explain that the bulk of the income differences between welfare leavers and welfare combiners in Michigan are due to the higher incomes of other household members

[19] See Coe et al. (1998).

among the former compared to those in the Three-City Study. When their incomes are not considered, in both studies, the impacts are much smaller.

In fact: (1) Average monthly earnings were roughly the same in both studies; (2) leavers in Michigan received more financial support from other household members than combiners or nonworking recipients in Michigan, and more than either leavers, combiners, and nonworking recipients in the three cities; (3) leavers in the three cities lost more of their prior income from means-tested programs and thus had lower "marginal hourly wages";[20] and (4) after accounting for the income support from other household members, the difference in income between Michigan leavers and nonworking recipients declines by more than 40 percent.

Moffitt and Winder find that combining work and welfare may be the most attractive strategy (ignoring the TANF time limit) and conclude that "our result demonstrating that recipients may be better off, or no worse off, economically by working while on welfare rather than leaving welfare is an important finding that suggests that combining work and welfare should be encouraged more than it is now" (Moffitt & Winder, p. 413).

In what is essentially a dialogue between the research teams, the Michigan group then replicated the Moffitt and Winder methodology, adding an additional two years of administrative data. In "Does It Pay to Move from Welfare to Work? Reply to Robert Moffitt and Katie Winder," Sheldon Danziger and Hui-Chen Wang (2005) report that, even when they count only the recipient's income, they continue to find an income difference between working leavers, combiners, and nonworking recipients, although the difference is much smaller than that reported in their original paper. Comparing the findings in the original paper to the updated paper, the income difference between leavers and combiners declines from $444 to $110 (or about 75 percent), and the income difference between leavers and non-working recipients declines from $635 to $339 (or about 47 percent).[21]

Danziger and Wang posit that one reason for the greater returns to work in Michigan as compared to the three cities may be due to cross-state variations in welfare policies and aid to the working poor. The broader lesson is that the post-TANF well-being of low-income families is very much dependent on work supports, such as child care, health insurance coverage, and state earned income tax credits, to increase further the returns to work.

Child Support and Father's Work

In important ways, child support enforcement ties together many of the issues in this volume—because it is through the payments of noncustodial parents that government seeks to better the financial condition of single parents (usually mothers with custody of their children) and to recoup its welfare costs. At the same time, as demonstrated by Holzer, Offner, and Sorensen (2005), forcing low-income fathers to pay child support can place them in an even more tenuous financial situation and can create a substantial disincentive to work (at least in the above-ground economy).

At least half of all children are likely to spend at least some of their childhood in a single-parent family, and many of them will be eligible for child support from an absent parent. The child support system is intended to ensure that absent parents contribute to the support of their children. The system performs poorly, however,

[20] Defined by the authors as "the per-hour return in terms of total monthly income from all sources, not just own earnings" (Moffitt & Winder, p. 411).

[21] The authors give two reasons why the reported differences are smaller in their second article than in their first article. First, the authors use TANF administrative data in the second article instead of self-reported TANF benefits; second, to correct for "uncontrolled heterogeneity among work/welfare groups" (Danziger & Wang, pp. 418–419) present in the analysis in the first article, they use a refined fixed-effects model that controls "for differences in demographic attributes and unobserved, time-invariant individual characteristics among the work/welfare groups" (p. 419).

with only about 60 percent of custodial parents having a child support order but only about 75 percent of those with orders actually receiving payment. Only about 60 percent of those receiving payments (or about 50 percent of the total) receive full payment (Grall, 2007).

In "Child Support Enforcement: Programs and Policies, Impacts and Questions," Maureen Pirog and Kathleen Ziol-Guest (2006) summarize the major issues surrounding child support and the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program as they relate to issues of poverty and welfare. In doing so, they place special emphasis on unresolved and troubling policy tradeoffs—among low-income mothers[22] and their children, fathers, and taxpayers—embedded within the program.

Pirog and Ziol-Guest describe how the disappointingly low level of child support paid by noncustodial parents led Congress, in 1975, to create the federal Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program. Now serving about seventeen million children, the CSE is "one of the largest child-focused domestic programs" (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 423). Among other things, the CSE requires states to use various tools to collect child support, including:

> automatic wage withholding; credit bureau reporting; placing liens on property; asset seizure of real and personal property; federal and state tax intercepts; automated withholding from unemployment compensation, disability payments, and pension benefits; regular data matching with financial institutions to locate and attach financial holdings; revocation of professional, drivers', and recreational licenses; denial and revocation of passports; federal criminal penalties for nonsupport in interstate cases; and work requirements for noncustodial parents who are unemployed, delinquent obligors, and whose children receive public assistance. (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 436)

The CSE program initially focused on welfare recipients, but over time, it was progressively expanded to incorporate the child support collections of middle and higher income families. This has led to an exaggerated sense of the program's impact. According to the authors, although "program statistics show dramatic improvements, these advances are overstated when the shift from private to public support collection is taken into consideration" (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 452). They calculate that, of the more than $21 billion increase in child support collections between 1976 and 2004, almost 90 percent represented the incorporation of support payments previously made outside the federal system.

The authors nevertheless credit the CSE with helping states make substantial progress. For example, the number of judicial paternity establishments rose from about 110,000 in 1978 to about 770,000 in 2001, and voluntary in-hospital paternity establishments rose from about 85,000 in 1994 to about 830,000 in 2002. Moreover, although "the likelihood of having an award and receiving at least one child support payment has improved very modestly since 1978," and although "the proportion of custodial mothers who received the full amount of child support due has decreased from 49 percent to 45 percent, . . . the demographic shifts within the U.S. population very likely mask real progress as the percentage increase of never-married families (more difficult collection cases) has far outstripped the overall increase in the population eligible to receive child support services (Sorensen & Halpern, 1999)" (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 426).

Of special relevance to this volume are Pirog and Ziol-Guest's discussion of the impact of the child support pass-through and disregard. A "'pass-through' is the amount of child support given (or passed through) to families receiving welfare and a 'disregard' is the amount or proportion of the 'pass-through' that is ignored when computing eligibility for welfare and/or the amount of the welfare benefit" (Pirog &

[22] Many fathers have custody of their minor children, of course, but the majority of custodial parents, especially low-income, are mothers. This summary tends to refer to custodial mothers as a reflection of that reality.

Ziol-Guest, p. 438). When custodial parents receive welfare, they are required to assign their child support rights to the state.

AFDC required states to "pass through" the first $50 of child support to welfare recipients, which was "disregarded" from income in the calculation of welfare benefits. The cost of the pass-through was shared by the state and federal governments. Under TANF, federal cost sharing was eliminated and states were given the option of ending the pass-through. All but sixteen states responded by eliminating their pass-throughs. In the 2006 TANF reauthorization, federal cost sharing was reintroduced ($100 for one child and $200 for two children), with the stipulation that the pass-through must be disregarded from the calculation of income; state provision of a pass-through remained optional.

Pirog and Ziol-Guest believe that the pass-through's small size discourages compliance with child support rules. Many custodial mothers do not view the amount of the pass-through as worth the risk of losing good feelings and informal child support from the noncustodial father. Also, many fathers prefer informal or in-kind child support because they feel it benefits their children (rather than taxpayers), they usually pay less than under an official child support order, and they can "wield greater control over how their child support dollars are spent" (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 439) and, one might add, over the custodial mother.

In a provocative final section, the authors explore the heavy burden current child support policy puts on low-income fathers, including teen fathers and incarcerated fathers who, of course, are disproportionately African American.

> As a redistribution program, issues of fairness and equity arise: How can one balance the needs of children, noncustodial parents, second families, and taxpayers? Do the increasingly powerful enforcement tactics of the CSE program unfairly penalize low-income parents and fragile families? What should be done when the combined income of two parents is insufficient to support two households including children? (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 422)

They conclude: "To date, most research suggests that the positive externalities outweigh the negative and that it is in the collective interest of society to enforce support orders even in cases when ability to pay is low. But the sticky issues of poor fathers and fragile families will not disappear" (Pirog & Ziol-Guest, p. 453).

The Pirog/Ziol-Guest article is largely quantitative. In "Effective Child Support Policy for Low-Income Families: Evidence from Street Level Research," Maureen Waller and Robert Plotnick (2001) summarize the findings of seven qualitative (or ethnographic) studies that expose the stunningly negative attitudes of low-income fathers *and mothers* to the formal child support system—and that describe how many mothers as well as fathers try to avoid its most onerous (to them) strictures.

After noting that "low-income, unmarried parents hold strong, collective beliefs about paternal responsibility and endorse the principle of child support" (Waller & Plotnick, p. 472), the authors seek to explain why there is such a strong preference for informal support (often in-kind) unless private arrangements fail. Based on the studies reviewed, they identify a number of factors, including:

- "Parents experiencing persistent economic insecurity believe that noncustodial parents' contributions should further increase their children's standard of living. In contrast, the practice of retaining child support payments to recoup welfare payments . . . [is] viewed as a way to offset public welfare spending" (Waller & Plotnick, p. 483). "The money doesn't go to the kid. It's not like you're buying the kids something," said one father (p. 473).
- The ability to achieve an informal arrangement that is more favorable to one or both parents, perhaps by using the threat of the formal system as a negotiating tool.

- The mother's fear that paying child support may lead an estranged and perhaps disruptive (or abusive) father to want to be involved with the child. Or her fear that the process may make the father hostile (or more hostile).
- The inability of the child support system to recognize (and protect) ongoing romantic relationships among unmarried couples, "particularly if they are living together and sharing expenses" (Waller & Plotnick, p. 472).
- The frequent accumulation of large arrearages because of retroactive awards, which can be made years after the child was born and received welfare assistance (and which ignore the informal payments made during that period).
- The difficulty of modifying child support awards, perhaps because of job loss, incarceration, or other income declines—before substantial arrearages accumulate.

Waller and Plotnick also describe various strategies for avoiding the formal system. Mothers, for example, may engage in "'covert non-compliance,' by lying about the father's identity or hiding crucial information about him" (Waller & Plotnick, p. 472). And fathers who want to escape their child support obligations may "quit their job," or reduce "their work in the formal economy [and try to] generate more income in the underground economy through under-the-table jobs, selling drugs, stealing, and gambling" (p. 480).

The authors conclude that "the formal child support system would gain greater compliance and legitimacy in the eyes of low-income parents if they perceived it as more beneficial to their children and supportive of their efforts to negotiate economic arrangements" (Waller & Plotnick, pp. 482–483). Hence, "As states have tended to reduce the implicit tax on earnings to encourage welfare recipients to work, a reduction in the implicit tax on support payments might also be in order" (p. 483).

Unfortunately, the editors would add, reform will be difficult—because it involves the political system being willing to "excuse" the father from reimbursing the government for welfare payments to his children (and their mother). A secondary factor is that the result would be that some families on welfare would receive more than others, based on the ability of some fathers to pay more than others.

4. HOW MUCH DOES RESEARCH MATTER?

In many respects, this volume is a paean to the welfare researchers who, cumulatively, made an unprecedented, forty-year-long contribution to our understanding of poverty and welfare. Their research, only partially recounted in these pages, was integral to the passage of the Family Support Act in 1988 and, later, of PRWORA/TANF in 1996.

In 1991, JPAM published a "Symposium on the Family Support Act" (see Box 4) that explored the impact of research and evaluation on the crafting of the Family Support Act of 1988. Here's how Michael Wiseman, the editor of that symposium, summarized the impact of research:

> Once the demonstration reports were assimilated, the debate over the provisions of what was to become the Family Support Act of 1988 was carried out under general agreement that: (1) mandatory employment-oriented programs of job search, work experience, and in some instances training could be conducted by local agencies and their subcontractors in a politically acceptable way; (2) such programs had favorable effects, even when scrutinized seriously; and (3) the effects could be had at acceptable costs, especially in light of gains from reduced welfare receipt and increased taxes collected. These simple conclusions substantially restricted the domain of conflict over the nature and content of the work requirement to be included in the new welfare reform legislation. (Wiseman, 1991, pp. 657–658)

Box 4. JPAM "Symposium on The Family Support Act of 1988"

Baum, E. B. (1991). When the witch doctors agree: The Family Support Act and social science research. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 10, 603–615.

Haskins, R. (1991). Congress writes a law: Research and welfare reform. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 10, 616–632.

Szanton, P. L. (1991). The remarkable quango: Knowledge, politics, and welfare reform. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 10, 590–602.

Wiseman, M. (1991). Research and Policy: A symposium on the Family Support Act of 1988. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 10, 588–589.

Wiseman, M. (1991). Research and policy: An afterword for the symposium on the Family Support Act of 1988. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 10, 657–666.

Lest we become too self-congratulatory, however, the next three articles in this volume (one from the symposium) explore the often greater influence of politics, ideology, and information networks—and provide an appropriate caveat about what and how researchers should go about their business.

One article in the JPAM symposium was by Ron Haskins, the senior Republican congressional staffer on welfare issues. In "Congress Writes a Law: Research and Welfare Reform," Haskins (1991) describes the role that social science research played in the development and passage of the Family Support Act of 1988.[23]

Haskins says that "the Family Support Act offers a model of how research can help initiate a policy debate, how it can play a role in shaping the terms of the debate, and how members of Congress can become convinced that a given policy action should be taken because it will produce good outcomes in the long term" (Haskins, p. 488). But, he believes, research does not play as prominent a role as some scholars believe.

According to Haskins, politicians from both parties often misinterpreted the findings and used only those findings that supported their already-held positions on welfare policy. And, as the legislation made its way forward to the debate on the House floor and later to the House–Senate conference on the bill, research played much less of a role. He warns, "Anyone expecting to find trenchant arguments based on research would be disappointed" (Haskins, p. 494). For example, Republicans argued in favor of participation standards, emphasizing that people who accept welfare "owed a mutual obligation," whereas Democrats countered that "the work programs were sometimes demeaning and often led to the harassment of welfare clients" (Haskins, p. 495). He adds, "as often happens in congressional debate, anecdote becomes the enemy of scientific evidence" (Haskins, p. 495). In contrast, Republican and Democratic committee staffers assigned to work on minor provisions of the bill often based their compromises on the published research.

In closing, Haskins warns that when researchers have a direct role in policymaking, they can sometimes become willing accomplices in stretching the interpretation of their findings when it supports their own predispositions, bypassing professional quality control mechanisms such as peer review, journal publication, and replication. As an example, he points to researchers' assertions that preschool and Head Start are cost-effective interventions when the empirical data for this contention are relatively weak. Haskins argues that "researchers who would apply

[23] According to Haskins, although various research studies were cited at hearings and other deliberations about welfare reform, the most influential were MDRC's research on welfare-to-work programs and the studies by Mary Jo Bane and David Ellwood on caseload dynamics.

their knowledge to public policy have an obligation to avoid advocacy" (Haskins, p. 498).

The next article in this volume comes to a similar conclusion about the influence of research on policy but takes from it quite a different lesson. In her 2000 APPAM Presidential Address, "Expertise, Advocacy, and Deliberation: Lessons from Welfare Reform," Mary Jo Bane (2001) describes how she thinks research was misused in the run-up to the enactment of the 1996 welfare reform law, and then suggests what researchers should do to prevent others from misusing their work.

Bane, who was an assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services when TANF was considered and passed (after two Clinton vetoes), compares the policy climate during the deliberations on the Family Support Act of 1988 (FSA) with that surrounding the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. According to Bane (and Haskins), during the FSA debate, policy research, especially by MDRC on the effectiveness of welfare-to-work programs, played a key role. But the 1996 law, she says, contained moments of "startling ugliness" (Bane, p. 501).

The stakes were indeed high, perhaps even the presidency. A senior member of the Clinton administration, she relays Dick Morris's description of the political considerations at play:

> Back at the White House, advisor Dick Morris was conducting daily polls and focus groups for the President's reelection campaign. Morris reported that his polling results indicated that the president would drop 15 points in his approval ratings and risk defeat in the real polls if he vetoed the welfare bill; this finding, he says, strongly influenced the president's decision to sign the bill against the nearly unanimous advice of his cabinet. . . . Both Congress and President appeared to be responding to a voting public that was angry about welfare, impatient for change, and ready to punish any politician that got in the way (Bane, p. 502).

She attributes at least some of the difference between 1988 and 1996 to an enlarged "policy research industry," with an increased number of liberal and conservative advocacy groups becoming involved in the debate, along with various intergovernmental organizations. These groups "became much more sophisticated in communicating their analyses and findings, both to policy makers and in the media. They published in opinion magazines as well as in scholarly journals; they learned how to write press releases and to network with reporters" (Bane, p. 503). More important: "They also became more sophisticated in reinterpreting and discrediting research that suggested other conclusions" (p. 503).

Bane describes how her own research concerning welfare spells (Bane & Ellwood, 1994) was spun for each group's own purposes: "liberal groups could use it to emphasize the need for welfare as transition, conservative groups to emphasize the problem of long-term dependency and intergovernmental groups to conclude that things were so complicated that the federal government should not mandate a universal program" (Bane, p. 503).

Bane's advice to researchers, essentially, is to be aware of the danger that others will use their findings to their advantage and to take that reality into account in publishing research findings, especially in regard to how policy implications are discussed. "To do this well," she advises, "we ought, I believe, individually and collectively, improve our skills in integrating moral, cultural and political reasoning into our drawing of policy conclusions" (Bane, p. 505).

Welfare reform was as much a product of state decisions as it was Washington-driven, perhaps more so. That is what makes the last paper in this section so significant. In "The Dissemination and Utilization of Welfare-to-Work Experiments in State Policymaking," David Greenberg, Marvin Mandell, and Matthew Onstott (2000) report on what state officials said was the impact of the "evaluations of three state welfare innovations: California's GAIN, New York's CAP, and Florida's Project Independence" (Greenberg, Mandell, & Onstott, p. 508).

More than ninety state welfare program administrators were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire, with at least one respondent from every state. Respondents were asked about their familiarity with GAIN, CAP, and Project Independence; how they learned about the programs; if they were aware of the programs' findings; the role of the three programs and other sources in creating and implementing new state welfare policies; and how the state's welfare policy would have been different if the administrators had not known about the three experiments.

The authors report that, of the three programs, GAIN was the most well known and influential: "virtually all respondents said there had recently been serious consideration within their state of moving the JOBS program from a human capital model to a labor force attachment model (the two competing alternative welfare-to-work program models tested by GAIN) and, in fact, all but a few of these states ultimately made such a move" (Greenberg, Mandell, & Onstott, pp. 515–516).

None of the state administrators, however, said that the GAIN findings were the exclusive or even most important reason for the changes adopted in their state. "Other factors—such as political appeal, ease of implementation, as well as consistency with current state objectives, the philosophy of the governor or voters, and federal policy—appear to have been more important in deciding whether to adopt them than the effects estimated by the evaluations" (Greenberg, Mandell, & Onstott, p. 521).

The authors take this to mean that, if states are not using the research findings, "then allowing each state to serve as a laboratory in which different policies and programs are tested will contribute substantially less to effective policymaking than it might" (Greenberg, Mandell, & Onstott, p. 521).

An equally plausible explanation, however, is that the state decision making was based on the entire body of research traced in this volume (not just one study in one state, especially since the findings were being driven by the results in one county). In addition, the states may have been engaged in what Eugene Bardach would describe as the development of a compendium of "best practices" in the area of welfare-to-work. In his introduction to a JPAM symposium on "best practices" in JPAM's Professional Practice section (see Box 5), Bardach writes that the flow of information about "best practices" does not just move from researchers to practitioners, but also moves from practitioners to practitioners where the practices "are

Box 5. JPAM Symposium on "Best Practices"

Bardach, E. (2003). Creating compendia of "best practices." Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22, 661–665.

Bendixsen, S., & de Guchteneire, P. (2003). Best practices in immigration services planning. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22, 677–682.

Cannon, J. S., & Kilburn, M. R. (2003). Meeting decision makers' needs for evidence-based information on child and family policy. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22, 665–669.

Christopher, G. C. (2003). Innovative government practice: Considerations for policy analysts. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22, 683–688.

Schorr, L. B., & Auspos, P. (2003). Usable information about what works: Building a broader and deeper knowledge base. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 22, 669–676.

typically vetted by 'experts' applying critical standards of some kind, although not necessarily social scientific standards" (Bardach, 2003, p. 661).

CONCLUSION

It was thirty years between the beginning of the Negative Income Tax experiment and the passage of TANF. As reflected in this volume, those three decades were rich with high-quality and policy-relevant research. Such a sustained research effort is unusual for most domestic programs, and is much to be admired. So one hopes to see other areas of domestic policy also enjoy the benefits of thirty years of high-quality research devoted to them. (We may be at the beginning of such an effort in K–12 education.)

Moreover, even in regard to welfare-related efforts, there are nevertheless important lacunae. For example, as Garasky and Barnow note, the cost-neutrality requirements of the welfare waiver process "limited the ability of states to test promising approaches that require more resources" (Garasky & Barnow, p. 320), including activities like education and training, child care expansions, and post-employment services that involve up-front costs with an expected payoff several years later.

Hence, before closing, it is appropriate to take a broader look at the process of idea generation, program development, evaluation, and implementation (including performance management). In his 2008 APPAM Presidential Address, "From the Great Society to Continuous Improvement Government: Shifting from 'Does It Work?' to 'What Would Make It Better?'" Douglas Besharov urges "systematic and evidence-based efforts to increase program effectiveness," what he labels "continuous improvement government" (Besharov, p. 524).

In a recitation similar to the contents of this volume, Besharov points out the important contribution made by randomized experiments.

> In program area after program area, well-planned and well-implemented randomized experiments, even if not definitive and sometimes controversial, have made major contributions to public policy. An abbreviated list would include evaluations of class size; early childhood education; food stamps cash outs; housing allowances or vouchers; Job Corps; teen mother programs; the 21st Century after-school program; vouchers for housing, job training, and K–12 education; welfare reform programs (such as welfare-to-work); and, of course, the Negative Income Tax (Besharov, p. 528).

But he complains about "the slow pace of knowledge accretion, needed for informed program development and improvement. Current R&D practices are too slow, too haphazard, and too often fail to factor in the dead ends that are inevitable in policy research and program development" (Besharov, p. 527).

Besharov calls for an accelerated process of ideas generation (by using bottom-up techniques) and evaluation (by testing more ideas at once and using techniques less rigorous than randomized experiments, when appropriate). The tools of outcome-oriented performance management should also be harnessed to identify "outliers" and to learn from their successes (as well as failures). He writes:

> Up to now, the tendency has been to use performance management systems to identify the outliers on the left hand of the distribution—and then work to either improve or defund them. That kind of high-stakes management has not made these systems popular with most service providers. Who likes to be judged, especially if the yardstick seems unfair? No better and more visible example exists than the No Child Left Behind law.
>
> Performance management systems, however, can also be—and, increasingly, are—also being used to identify outliers on the right hand of the distribution. These outliers should then be studied to see what it is about them that seems to work better than average. Although accountability is always controversial, such an approach should be less threatening to program operators (Besharov, p. 533).

As he notes, that was "essentially what happened in the welfare reform experiments of the 1980s and 1990s" (Besharov, p. 531). But, as Gueron points out, the multi-decade process of high-quality research and evaluation described in this volume was the result of a highly unusual alignment of factors. How to repeat the process in other areas of social welfare and, frankly, how to speed it up, are key challenges for the full gamut of social welfare programming.

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