Four Evaluations of Welfare Reform

What Will Be Learned

Peter H. Rossi

Edited by
Douglas J. Besharov and Peter Germanis
2001

Maryland School of Public Affairs
Welfare Reform Academy
Committee to Evaluate Welfare Reform
www.welfareacademy.org

EVALUATION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Douglas J. Besharov

Robert F. Boruch

James J. Heckman

Robinson G. Hollister

Christopher Jencks

Glenn C. Loury

Peter H. Rossi

Isabel V. Sawhill

Thomas C. Schelling

James Q. Wilson

Peter Germanis, Administrator

The Welfare Reform Academy was created in 1997 to help state and local officials, private social service providers, and other interested parties respond creatively to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the new welfare reform law signed by President Clinton in 1996. While the law pressures public officials and service providers to make their programs more efficient and better targeted, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity for states to reshape and improve their programs. The Academy will provide training in program design, implementation, and evaluation for the new TANF, Food Stamp, Medicaid, job training, child care, child welfare, and child support programs.

The Maryland School of Public Affairs is a professional graduate school offering master's and doctoral degree programs in public policy analysis and management. The School also provides mid-career training for federal, state, and local officials. Located just nine miles from the nation's capital, the School is based on the campus of the region's most comprehensive public research university. A rigorous interdisciplinary curriculum emphasizes economic and quantitative approaches to policy analysis, political theory and institutions, public sector finance, and ethics. Specializations are offered in Environmental Policy, International Security and Economic Policy, Public Sector Financial Management, and Social Policy.

Four Evaluations of Welfare Reform

What Will Be Learned

Peter H. Rossi

Edited by Douglas J. Besharov and Peter Germanis

The University of Maryland

School of Public Affairs

College Park, Maryland

2001

© 2001 by the University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without permission in writing from the University of Maryland except in cases of brief quotations embodied in news articles, critical articles, or reviews. The views expressed in the publications of the University of Maryland are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the staff, advisory panels, officers, or trustees of the University of Maryland.

The University of Maryland
School of Public Affairs
2101 Van Munching Hall
College Park, Maryland 20742

Printed in the United States of America

Contents

Preface v

Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research vi

1. Introduction 1
Douglas J. Besharov

2. Research on PRWORA: What Can Be Learned from Four Large-scale Projects Currently Underway 9
Peter H. Rossi

3. The Survey of Program Dynamics 69
Daniel H. Weinberg and Stephanie S. Shipp

4. The National Survey of America's Families 89
Kenneth Finegold and Fritz Scheuren

5. The Project on Devolution and Urban Change 103
Charles Michalopoulos

6. State Welfare Reform Waiver Experiments 107
Howard Rolston

About the Contributors 111

Preface

This is one of a series of reports from the Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research. The committee was formed to help the public, other scholars, practitioners, and policymakers understand research on welfare reform and apply its lessons. Its purpose is to assess the quality and relevance of the most significant evaluation studies, identifying those findings that are sufficiently well-grounded to be regarded as credible. The committee members are experts in evaluation and related social science fields (see next page).

Between March 1994 and December 1999, welfare rolls fell an amazing 54 percent from their historic high of 5 million families. How much of this decline is a result of welfare reform and how much is the result of the economy? What are the effects on low-income families? About a quarter billion dollars is being spent on studies and surveys designed to answer these and other questions.

In this monograph, Peter H. Rossi describes the four major research projects assessing welfare reform: the Survey of Program Dynamics, the National Survey of America's Families, the Project on Devolution and Urban Change, and the Child Impact Experiments. Although Rossi believes that each research effort should be helpful in monitoring the well-being of low-income families, each also has particular weaknesses that limit its usefulness. Rossi concludes by suggesting various efforts to improve existing data collection efforts. This volume also includes the invited responses of the senior researchers from each of the agencies or organizations involved: Daniel H. Weinberg and Stephanie S. Shipp, U.S. Census Bureau; Kenneth Finegold and Fritz Scheuren, Urban Institute; Charles Michalopoulos, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation; and Howard Rolston, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

We sincerely hope that the materials in this report aid in understanding this important topic.

DOUGLAS J. BESHAROV

Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research

Douglas J. Besharov, Joseph J. and Violet Jacobs Scholar in Social Welfare Studies at the American Enterprise Institute and professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs.

Robert F. Boruch, University Trustee Chair Professor of Education and Statistics at the University of Pennsylvania.

James J. Heckman, Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics and director of the Center for Social Program Evaluation at the Harris School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago, 2000 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.

Robinson G. Hollister, professor of economics at Swarthmore College.

Christopher Jencks, professor of public policy at the Malcom Weiner Center for Social Policy at Harvard University.

Glenn C. Loury, professor of economics and director of the Institute on Race and Social Division at Boston University.

Peter H. Rossi, S.A. Rice Professor Emeritus at the University of Massachusetts (Amherst).

Isabel V. Sawhill, Adeline M. and Alfred I. Johnson Chair in Urban and Metropolitan Policy at the Brookings Institution.

Thomas C. Schelling, Distinguished Professor at the School of Public Affairs and Department of Economics at the University of Maryland.

James Q. Wilson, Ronald Reagan Professor of Public Policy at Pepperdine University.