
Executive Summary

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In Michigan, more than 440,000 children under the age of 18 live in poverty. In addition, 8% of all children in Michigan live in extreme poverty, with a family income of less than 50% of the poverty level. While Michigan has made some improvements in reducing the child poverty rate, these facts suggest that many children and their families still face economic hardship and insecurity. This Michigan Family Impact Seminar Briefing Report focuses on this topic by describing the scope of the problem, explaining current program and policy responses to the problem and discussing new policies and strategies.

The first article, *Children and Poverty in Michigan*, provides statistics on children and families in poverty in Michigan. It then gives data on how children in poverty fare less well with regards to health, behavior and other indicators compared with children from families with higher incomes.

The second article, *Urban Areas, Poverty, and Welfare Reform: Focus on Wayne County*, provides data that focus on Wayne County. It provides poverty statistics and caseload information for the county and examines how Wayne County compares with other large urban areas. The article then provides potential alternatives that state and local policymakers can consider to address the complex issues involved in urban areas, poverty, and welfare reform.

Next, *Strategies to Support Work and Reduce Poverty* provides statistics on low-income working families in Michigan. It then describes a number of strategies to help low-income families, many of which are already being used in a few states. The article elaborates on possible tax strategies and suggests using a state earned income tax credit. It also provides recommendations on how the unemployment insurance system can more effectively assist the working poor.

Barriers to Employment provides data on barriers to employment for single mothers receiving welfare in Michigan. It charts how these barriers negatively affect the number of hours a single mother is able to work and compares the results to women nationally. It then provides information on other barriers to employment suggested by other research in the same field. The article then charts four policy proposals, already being used a number of states, to assist welfare recipients with reducing and/or eliminating their barriers to employment.

The article, *Domestic Violence and Poverty*, elaborates on the specific barriers to work for victims of domestic violence. The article describes program and policy responses to the problem of poverty and domestic violence. It also makes suggestions for assisting this population with its multiple barriers.

Rebecca Blank attempts to answer the question: “Was the 1990’s war on poverty successful?” in *Fighting Poverty: Lessons from Recent U.S. History*. She provides data on the increase in work activity for low-income families and the decrease in welfare caseloads and the poverty rate in the 1990s. The article then discusses three lessons that we can draw for anti-poverty policy. She describes how a strong macroeconomy matters more than anything else. She explains how the recent changes in welfare may have affected the behavior of low-income families and

presents positive outcome data for a program being run in Minnesota. She also explains how other policies can reinforce states' welfare-to-work efforts. She warns us not to declare success too quickly.

In *How Well Does TANF Fit the Needs of the Most Disadvantaged Families?*, Sheila Zedlewski and Pamela Loprest begin by describing state flexibility with regard to welfare time-limits. Next, they discuss the Urban Institute's National Surveys of America's Families (NSAF). The results of the surveys showed that TANF recipients in 1997 and those in 1999 were not much different with regards to their barriers to employment. The article provides data on the differences between TANF leavers, stayers and cyclers and defines the most "at-risk" of individuals leaving TANF. Finally, the article lists and describes the major challenges for states and makes recommendations for TANF policy.

Additional Resources provides links to websites and other information sources that provide data, make suggestions or describe policies regarding the issue of children and families in poverty.

Presenters

Rebecca M. Blank is Dean of the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, the Henry Carter Adams Collegiate Professor of Public Policy, and Professor of Economics. Her research focuses on the interaction among the macroeconomy, government anti-poverty programs, and the behavior and well-being of low-income families. Her publications include *Social Protection vs. Economic Flexibility: Is There a Trade Off?*, which compares the social protection programs of United States and other industrialized countries, and *It Takes a Nation: A New Agenda for Fighting Poverty*, which analyzes recent discussions about poverty and public policy in the United States. Becky joined the Ford School faculty after serving as a Member of the President's Council of Economic Advisors in Washington, DC.

Sheila Zedlewski is Director of the Income and Benefits Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Her areas of expertise include income security and health benefits, with a focus on the effects of government programs on the distribution of income and poverty. She and her staff have conducted extensive research using the Urban Institute's National Survey of America's Families, which provides a comprehensive look at the well-being of adults and children. Recent publications include "Current and Former Welfare Recipients: How Do They Differ?" and "Work-Related Activities and Limitations of Current Welfare Recipients".