



**Briefing Report**



# Michigan Family Impact Seminars

No. 2003-1

## Across Challenging Terrain

### Adolescents and Welfare Reform



**WAYNE STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

School of Social Work

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

Institute for Children, Youth, and Families

# Across Challenging Terrain

## Adolescents and Welfare Reform

Michigan Family Impact Seminars  
Briefing Report No. 2003-2

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# About Family Impact Seminars

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- Family Impact Seminars are nonpartisan educational forums on family issues for state policymakers.
- The seminars analyze the consequences to families of an issue, policy, or program.
- The seminars provide objective nonpartisan information on current issues. They do not advocate or lobby for particular policies.
- Briefing reports make scholarly findings available in an accessible format.
- A Legislative Advisory Committee selects issues for seminars based on emerging legislative need.
- National scholarly experts bring state-of-the-art research on current family issues to policymakers.

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# Executive Summary

Eileen Trzcinski

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In the early stages of research on the impact of welfare reform, most research focused on caseload reduction, employment outcomes, and barriers to employment. Even in research that examined the impact of welfare reform on children, the emphases centered on infants, pre-schoolers, and children at the grade school level. Issues concerning the impact on children in middle childhood and early adolescence were not considered a crucial area for research (1).

## *Key Findings*

### *Across Challenging Terrain: Adolescents and Welfare Reform*

**Recent experimental evaluations of welfare-to-work programs suggest that the adolescents are negatively affected when their parents participate in welfare-to-work programs.**

**Based on data from the national Survey of Program Dynamics, when mothers were sanctioned, adolescents were more likely to be expelled from school, their level of engagement in criminal activity increased, they damaged property more frequently and were more likely to steal something worth less than \$50 in the past year.**

**In Michigan, an estimated one in four adolescents does not complete high school. The risk of not graduating from high school is higher for adolescents in low income than in higher income households.**

This *Michigan Family Impact Seminars Briefing Report, Across Challenging Terrain: Adolescents and Welfare Reform*, focuses on the issue of how welfare reform has affected adolescents. The policy researchers who contributed to this briefing report recognized that a lack of attention to adolescence may be short-sighted. They argued that we must recognize and examine the challenges that adolescents confront as they attempt to traverse the very challenging and changing terrain, which now confronts them and their families under the sweeping changes that occurred with the introduction of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996 (1,2).

*Across Challenging Terrain: Adolescents and Welfare Reform* brings together the results from a wide range of research studies—experimental designs, large national surveys, surveys in Michigan, and smaller qualitative studies conducted in Detroit with the adolescents themselves. The presenters at the seminar held on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2003--Martha Zaslow, Jerrold Brandell, and Jane Zehnder-Merrell--are national and Michigan scholars and leaders in advancing our knowledge and practice base concerning adolescent development, adolescents and welfare reform, and the situation of Michigan adolescents. Additional contributors to the report include Eileen Trzcinski, Deborah Smith and Lynda Ferro.

Major highlights from the report include a discussion of the negative effects on adolescents that were observed in three large-scale experimentally-based evaluations of welfare-to-work programs. In *Welfare Reform's Impact on Adolescents: Early Warning Signs*, Brooks, Hair, and Zaslow describe these negative impacts and explore the possible explanations for these unexpected findings in light of available data and the research literature on child development.

In *Adolescents and Welfare Reform: Psychological Dynamics and Empirical Findings*, Trzcinski and Brandell report on the results from a large scale national survey. This study also finds negative effects for adolescents on a wide range of outcome measures, including school outcomes, status offense/criminal behavioral outcomes, and substance use outcomes. The authors also discuss how the conflicts that adolescents face as they attempt to deal with psychological issues surrounding separation and identity formation can be exacerbated if the parents become or are perceived as becoming less available to their adolescents during this critical period of psychological development.

### ***Key Policy Recommendations***

**Target efforts to decrease the number of changes in adolescents' lives when their parents move from welfare-to-work.**

**Provide guidance to parents about the issue of levels of responsibility and autonomy for adolescent children, with the goal of decreasing situations involving very extensive reliance on adolescents to help their families.**

**Strengthen families by providing them with more economic security and provide greater support to their communities.**

**Develop policy alternatives that increase the economic security of families who work.**

In the next article, *Adolescents in Detroit: Their Own Perceptions of How Welfare and Poverty Affects Their Lives*, Trzcinski presents results from a series of interviews conducted with young adolescents in Detroit. She found the adolescents' own stories and narratives reinforce many of the concerns and findings outlined in the experimental designs and survey results on the effects of welfare reform on adolescents.

In *Adolescents and Welfare Reform in Michigan*, Jane Zehnder-Merrell highlights a number of key findings regarding trends for adolescents. While a number of key indicators have shown major improvements for Michigan adolescents, such as downtrends in teen birthrates and juvenile arrests, one critical indicator has moved in the negative direction. Compared with ten years ago, Michigan adolescents are now less likely to graduate from high school. A risk factor for negative outcomes continues to be lack of economic resources for the adolescent's family.

Additional contributions by Deborah Smith and Lynda Ferro provide an overview of the how adolescents are affected by welfare reform, an extensive resource list, and a list of programs that demonstrate policy options for designing welfare strategies that benefit rather than harm children.

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# Overview

## Deborah Smith

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With the introduction of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, which put into place Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), welfare changed for many families. States are now allowed to set time limits for welfare receipt, and states are also receiving incentives for strengthening their welfare-to-work programs. Much has been researched about mother's well being, family income and hours of work. Some research has been conducted on children's well being, with mostly positive results found for younger children. However, less research has been conducted on the effects of TANF on adolescents.

### How have adolescents been affected by welfare reform?

When welfare reform was introduced, it was believed that adolescents would benefit from having their parents as working role models. Most of the research conducted was designed to measure the effects of welfare-to-work programs on adolescents. These programs are all similar in that they assist people in going to work. Many of them began before TANF was introduced in 1996. The programs differ, however, in the size of cash grants, incentives for working, types of work activities allowed, the nature of supportive services and the frequency and severity for non-compliance. However, current research suggests that several negative effects for adolescents have occurred. These outcomes are related to school achievement, delinquent activity and emotional stability.

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Some of the possible effects of welfare-to-work programs on adolescents (approximately ages 12-18) include:

- Increased depression (1)
- Increased risk of problem behaviors, including smoking, drinking alcohol, using drugs and sexual activity (1,2,3)
- Increased delinquent activity, including increased arrests and convictions and increased police involvement (3)
- Increased theft and property damage (3)
- Decreased school achievement and increased school suspensions (3)
- Poorer attitudes towards school (3)
- An increase of running away from home (3)
- Increased use of special education services (3,5) and an increase in the likelihood of repeating a grade (5).

### How has welfare reform affected Detroit youth?

Qualitative research was conducted in a middle school in Detroit. Youth in this study reported that multiple jobs or evening/night hours interfered with parent-child relationships, contributed to declining grades and made it more difficult for the youth to get to school on time (6). These youth also reported that their household duties changed to more household management and childcare, interfering with schoolwork and time spent with friends (6).



*Researchers suggest that teenagers whose parents enter the workforce may experience a shift in their adolescent roles. The adolescents usually will be given increased responsibility, including an increase in chores, childcare, working and increased emotional support to parents.*

*Living in low-income families seems to be contributing to educational difficulties for Michigan's young teens. To assist adolescents emotionally and behaviorally, Michigan's families need to be strengthened financially.*

### **Why do welfare-to-work programs have harmful effects on adolescents?**

There are several theories that explain why welfare-to-work programs may result in these negative effects on adolescents. One theory is related to adolescent employment. If parents go to work, their incomes may be lower than their income while on welfare (2). Many families may send their teenagers into the workforce to assist in meeting the family's financial needs. While most believe that some employment can be beneficial for teenagers, it is believed that the negative effects are related to teens' working more than 20 hours per week (7,8).

It has also been suggested that adolescent development is less sensitive to economics and finances and more influenced by parenting skills. Less parental supervision may lead adolescents to believe that rules have been suspended (3). A decrease in parental monitoring may lead to an increase in delinquent behavior and a decline in school achievement (4). In addition, researchers hypothesize that teenagers whose parents enter the workforce may experience a shift in their adolescent roles. The adolescents usually will be given increased responsibility, including an increase in chores, childcare, working and increased emotional support to parents (3,4).

Developmentally, adolescents normally are attempting to separate from their parents. This separation can cause anxiety. For teens to make a successful transition to adulthood, parents need to be "containers" for teens' anxiety and fears. If parents are less available due to their employment, teen anxiety can increase (3).

### **What do we know about adolescents and welfare in Michigan?**

Michigan has seen some improvements for adolescents during the past decade, including lower teen birth rates and a decrease in juvenile arrests (9). However, young adolescents in Michigan are having increased difficulties in middle school, and the rate of graduating from high school is decreasing (9). Living in low-income families seems to be contributing to these educational difficulties. To assist adolescents emotionally and behaviorally, Michigan's families need to be strengthened financially. Currently, the Family Independence Program (FIP), Michigan's cash assistance program, has high eligibility requirements. Even if a family is eligible for FIP assistance and has employment, the monthly income per family is not enough to meet the family's basic needs (8). This issue is exacerbated by the fact that low-income families tend to pay more for goods and services than higher income families (10).

### **What can policymakers in Michigan do?**

Although much of the research so far has reported negative effects for adolescents whose parents transition from welfare-to-work, this research is still preliminary. It would be unwise for policymakers to make any final decisions. However, policymakers can:

1. Continue rigorous research into the effects of welfare-to-work programs and time-limited sanctions on young and older adolescents.
2. Strengthen families by providing them with more economic security and providing greater support to their communities.

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# Welfare Reform's Impact on Adolescents: Early Warning Signs

Jennifer L. Brooks, Elizabeth C. Hair, and Martha J. Zaslow

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With the passage of the 1996 welfare reform law, numerous commentators expressed concern about what “ending welfare as we know it” would mean for the young children of welfare recipients. These children, after all, would be experiencing significant changes in their everyday lives as their mothers, who had relied on public assistance to support their families, entered or prepared to enter the work force. However, little concern was expressed about how the adolescent children of welfare recipients might fare as a result of the changes ushered in by the historic new legislation. Despite the expectation that older children would be relatively less affected by welfare reform than their younger counterparts, recent experimental evaluations of welfare-to-work programs suggest that the adolescent sons and daughters in welfare households are indeed affected when their parents are assigned to participate in these programs. What’s more, it seems that these young people may be negatively affected by this participation.

## What were the initial expectations?

The debate around and passage of welfare reform in 1996 led many to wonder how poor children and families would make out under the new law, which had an increased emphasis on work, increased support for working families, and time limits for welfare receipt. Experts on children and families expected that children who were not yet of school age would be most affected by the new work requirements for their parents (1). Those following welfare reform gave limited attention to how older children of adult recipients would be affected by the new law. A few individuals emphasized that adolescents would benefit from having an employed parent as a role model or that they would be harmed by the lack of supervision resulting from parental employment (2). Others focused mainly on how teen parents on welfare might be affected by the new law, and not on the law’s impact on adolescents who lived with a parent or parents who received welfare benefits.

## What unanticipated results occurred?

Recent research calls into question the initial expectations that older children would be relatively unaffected by welfare reform. We looked at data from three rigorous experimental evaluations of welfare-to-work programs conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation. Though established before the 1996 welfare reform law, these programs included some of the law’s key components. Thus, the programs can be viewed as precursors to welfare-to-work initiatives implemented under the new welfare law. In these studies, the adolescent children of parents enrolled in each program were compared with a control group of adolescents in welfare households in which parents were not enrolled.

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*Recent experimental evaluations of welfare-to-work programs suggest that the adolescent sons and daughters in welfare households are indeed affected when their parents are assigned to participate in these programs.*

**The Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project (3)** --Welfare recipients were randomly selected to participate in this program (for the sake of evaluating the program) or to be in a control group that received benefits under Canada's traditional public assistance program. Those in the Self-Sufficiency Project had a year to decide if they wanted to leave Canada's traditional welfare assistance program and participate in a three-year welfare-to work program. Those participating in the program received a substantial amount of income to supplement their earnings if they worked at least 30 hours a week.

**The Minnesota Family Investment Program (4)** --Welfare recipients who were randomly selected to participate in this program were required to participate in at least 30 hours of employment or training services once they had been on welfare for a period of 24 months. (The sample was divided into those who had already been on welfare for 24 months at the start of the program and those who had not). Those who did not meet these participation requirements were sanctioned. The program allowed participants to keep many more of their welfare dollars when they went to work, provided their Food Stamps allotment in the form of a check, provided child care supplements paid directly to the provider, and helped with transportation and other work-related expenses.

**The Florida Family Transition Program (5)**--Welfare recipients who were randomly selected to participate in this program were required to participate in employment or training for at least 30 hours a week, with threat of sanction for those who did not. The program allowed participants to keep a modest amount of their welfare benefits when working, and provided intensified case management as well as an additional year of transitional child care once recipients had left welfare. The program also involved a time limit on the receipt of cash assistance, with a limit of two or three years, depending upon the recipients' prior history of welfare receipt.

*In the Florida Family Transition Program, an increase in arrests, convictions, and involvement with police was found among adolescents in one particular group of families – those headed by mothers who had worked more and spent less time on welfare at the start of the program.*

### **What are the specific findings about affects on adolescents?**

Compared with adolescents in each study's control group:

- Adolescents with parents enrolled in the Canadian Self-Sufficiency Project (3) showed increases in smoking, drinking, drug use, and delinquent activity; increases in the likelihood that teachers called home about their school behavior; and decreases in school achievement.
- Adolescents with parents enrolled in the Minnesota Family Investment Project (4, 6) also showed a decline in school achievement. Their parents were also more likely to receive calls from teachers about their adolescent's school behavior, although this occurred only among families who had recently entered the welfare system when the program started.
- Adolescents with parents enrolled in the Florida Family Transition Program (5) not only showed a decline in school achievement but also were more likely to be suspended from school. Even more troubling, an increase in arrests, convictions, and involvement with police was found among adolescents in one particular group of families – those headed by mothers who had worked more and spent less time on welfare at the start of the program.

We need to keep three important qualifications in mind. First, the effects documented in these studies are not dramatic in size. Second, none of the programs had negative impacts on all aspects of adolescent behavior that were examined. Third, some of the most serious findings occurred only among certain families, such as those on welfare for shorter periods of time or with more work history. Still, there are compelling reasons to pay careful attention to these findings. They occur across all three programs. Finally, they occur in areas that are important for adolescents' future.

## What are the possible explanations?

### ***Hypothesis 1: An erosion in the quality of adolescent-parent relationships.***

Parents assigned to these programs may be parenting their adolescents less effectively, either as a result of their employment per se or through such factors as increased stress and decreased energy.

***What the evaluations found:*** Parents enrolled in the Canadian program reported an increase in their use of harsh parenting directed at older adolescents (ages 15-18). Parents who had only recently begun receiving welfare at the start of the Minnesota program reported increases in their use of harsh parenting directed at younger children. None of these programs affected parents' use of warm parenting, such as showing affection or praise, with their children.

***Hypothesis 2: A decline in parental monitoring.*** These programs may leave parents with less time and energy to monitor their adolescents' behavior. This decreased monitoring may account for some of the increases in problematic behavior we see among young people with parents assigned to participate in welfare-to-work programs.

***What the evaluations found:*** Two of the three programs had an effect on parental monitoring, although only one of these impacts was in the expected direction. Enrollment in the Florida program led to a slight *decrease* in parents' supervision of younger children. This was seen primarily in the group of families whose mothers had worked more and spent less time on welfare at the start of the study –the same group for whom the most severe impacts on adolescents (e.g., contact with police, arrests) were found. However, monitoring in these evaluations was examined only for younger children, not adolescents, so our ability to gauge how these programs affect this behavior is very limited.

***Hypothesis 3: A shift in adolescents' roles within their families.*** Adolescents in families that are making the transition from welfare-to-work may be more likely to assume adult-like roles, assisting their parents in critical ways within their households. Increasing adolescents' level of responsibility in this way may be a deliberate step that families take in order to adapt to the new circumstances that they face as a result of welfare-to-work programs. Still, this shift may have negative consequences for some adolescents.

***What the evaluations found:*** Adolescents in the Canadian program were performing household chores (including sibling care) slightly more frequently than adolescents whose parents were not assigned to the program, suggesting that their parents were perhaps relying on them more to help out with family tasks. Further, these adolescents were more likely to be working 20 hours or more a week, perhaps indicating that they were contributing economically to their families or had greater autonomy in their lives outside of the family (7). This relatively heavy workload could be significant, since some research has suggested that this level of employment among adolescents may lead to increased problematic behaviors, such as drinking and delinquent activities, as well as to lower school achievement (8). Further, the evaluation of the Florida program shows that participation in the program increases the likelihood that younger children in these families were cared for by a sibling.

*Adolescents in families that are making the transition from welfare-to-work may be more likely to assume adult-like roles, assisting their parents in critical ways within their households.*

*The evaluation of the Florida program shows that participation in the program increases the likelihood that younger children in these families were cared for by a sibling.*

*Just as more than one explanation needs to be considered for the recent findings on adolescents, more than one approach may need to be taken to support adolescent development in the context of welfare reform.*

*A key consideration for policy makers as the reauthorization of welfare reform gets under way will be how to support both the positive development of adolescents in families receiving welfare and the economic self-sufficiency of their parents.*

## **What are the implications for policy?**

In light of our analysis of the research findings, policy makers might want to consider a number of complementary approaches to lessen the potentially negative effects of welfare reform on adolescent children of adult welfare recipients:

- Target efforts to decrease the number of changes in adolescents' lives when their parents move from welfare-to-work. This might involve allowing parents greater flexibility (without fear of being sanctioned for noncompliance) to choose jobs that would not leave them dependent upon, or without supervision for, their adolescents.
- Establish more after-school programs for adolescents to increase the degree to which they are engaged in "productive" activities when unsupervised by their parents.
- Provide better access to and financial support for child care for younger children to minimize the degree to which parents are turning to their adolescents to care for their younger siblings.
- Reduce the number of hours that adolescents work, an approach that should perhaps be considered in light of families' need for adolescents' financial contributions.
- Provide guidance to parents about the issue of levels of responsibility and autonomy for adolescent children, with the goal of decreasing situations involving very extensive reliance on adolescents to help their families.

For such recommendations to be effective, they should be informed by a realistic understanding of the circumstances facing many families as they move from welfare-to-work. Clearly, further research is needed to confirm the negative effects of welfare-to-work programs on adolescents and to establish the causes of these effects. The remedies are not likely to be simple.

This chapter suggests that we need to extend our focus beyond issues of how parents supervise and relate to their adolescents. We also need to be concerned about the degree to which adolescents are taking on "adult-like" roles to assist their families. Adolescents are not adults, and taking on adult roles prematurely or too extensively may be harmful to some. At the same time, there is a growing recognition that adolescents' contributions are often critical to the day-to-day functioning of families as they make the sometimes-difficult transition from welfare-to-work. Just as more than one explanation needs to be considered for the recent findings on adolescents, more than one approach may need to be taken to support adolescent development in the context of welfare reform. Indeed, different families may benefit from different approaches or a combination of approaches. A key consideration for policymakers as the reauthorization of welfare reform gets under way will be how to support both the positive development of adolescents in families receiving welfare and the economic self-sufficiency of their parents.

*Excerpted from Welfare Reform's Impact on Adolescents: Early Warning Signs*  
By Jennifer L. Brooks, Ph.D., Elizabeth C. Hair, Ph.D., and Martha J. Zaslow, Ph.D.  
July 2001, *Child Trends Research Brief*, [www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)

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# Adolescent Outcomes and Welfare Reform: Psychological Dynamics and Empirical Results

Eileen Trzcinski and Jerrold Brandell

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In this chapter, we present empirical analyses and theoretical arguments that demonstrate why and to what extent children in late middle childhood and early adolescence are likely to face significant challenges in the wake of welfare reform. Our arguments are based on the premise that adolescence is a developmental epoch characterized by rapid physical, intellectual, and socioemotional growth and change, which is frequently accompanied by turbulence, perplexity, and confusion.

This research examined potential effects of welfare reform on children in late childhood through adolescence. The research used the 1999 U.S. Bureau of the Census Survey of Program Dynamics to examine the links between outcomes for adolescents, source of income, mother's employment, and welfare reform. Specifically, the research examined how poverty status and family welfare receipt during middle childhood interact with current poverty status and welfare receipt during adolescence to influence a range of outcomes for adolescents.

Data from the 1992 and 1993 longitudinal panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation were matched with data from the 1997 and 1998 interviewing years of the Survey of Program Dynamics (1,2). The time period of the SIPP panels precedes the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA). Hence the dataset allowed analyses of periods prior to and after the implementation of PRWORA.

The analyses consisted of an examination of whether and to what extent adolescent outcome variables are affected by:

1. Income level in the period from middle childhood to early/late adolescence
2. Income insufficiency in early/late adolescence as proxied by food insufficiency that affects the child
3. Patterns of AFDC/TANF and Food Stamp receipt in middle childhood to early/late adolescence
4. The reason why mothers left AFDC/TANF
5. Labor force participation of the mother/parent in middle childhood to early/late adolescence
6. Demographic variables.

Adolescent outcome variables were based both on self-reports by the adolescents and parental reports. These outcomes were classified into seven different groups:

1. School outcomes
2. Health and behavioral outcomes
3. Status offense/criminal behavioral outcomes
4. Substance use outcomes
5. Sexual activity
6. After school activities
7. Parental supervision/level of knowledge about friends and schools.

*Adolescence is a developmental epoch marked by rapid physical, intellectual, and socioemotional growth and change, which is frequently accompanied by turbulence, perplexity, and confusion.*

*Current full-time employment was never associated with more positive outcomes for adolescents, except in the case of whether the adolescent is disabled.*

### **What were the effects of maternal employment on adolescent outcomes?**

Current full-time employment was never associated with more positive outcomes for adolescents, except in the case of whether the adolescent is disabled. When mothers of the adolescents worked full-time work in the 1998 SPD, adolescents reported that their parents had less knowledge about their friends and activities and that their parents had less knowledge about their school activities. Parents who worked full-time reported that they were less likely to set rules for television viewing. They were also less likely to report that their adolescents attended classes for gifted children.

Full-time work in middle childhood, as measured by number of periods that a mother/parent worked full-time during the SIPP panel, was also associated with negative outcomes for adolescents. As the number of periods that the mother/parent worked full-time increased, the following outcomes were more likely to be negative:

1. Adolescent's attitude toward school
2. Adolescent has behavioral or emotional problem
3. Adolescent stole something less than \$50 in the past year
4. Adolescent used cigarettes at least once, regularly at any time, and regularly in the past 30 days
5. Adolescent used hard drugs at least once
6. Adolescent used hard drugs in the last 30 days
7. Adolescent had sexual intercourse at least once.

Here it is also important to emphasize that any negative effects of employment stem from the intensity of employment, not from the existence of maternal employment.

*When mothers were sanctioned:*

- *Adolescents were more likely to be expelled from school*
- *Adolescent's level of engagement in criminal activity increased*
- *Adolescents damaged property more frequently*
- *Adolescents were more likely to steal something worth less than \$50 in the past year.*

### **What were the effects of leaving welfare, particularly in the case where the mother was sanctioned?**

When mothers were sanctioned, the following negative outcomes were observed:

1. Adolescents were more likely to be expelled from school
2. Adolescent's level of engagement in criminal activity increased
3. Adolescents damaged property more frequently
4. Adolescents were more likely to steal something worth less than \$50 in the past year.

These results do not imply causation, of course. Families for whom welfare benefits are cut-off may face a wide range of difficulties. Whatever the dynamics, however, the results do suggest that the affected families may need more assistance, not less.

### **What were the effects of food insufficiency?**

When income insufficiency is severe enough to affect the adequacy of an adolescent's diet, the adolescent is affected on a number of important outcomes. Results from other studies, such as Loprest (3) suggest that many current and past welfare participants do face food insufficiency. In cases where the parent reported that food insufficiency occurred, adolescents were more likely to:

- have been expelled from school,
- have a negative attitude toward school,
- be in special education,
- have run away from home, and
- consume alcohol.

## How can these effects be understood in terms of adolescent development?

Adolescence is a major developmental stage characterized by rapid physical, intellectual, and socioemotional growth and change. This stage is frequently accompanied by turbulence, perplexity, and confusion. The appearance of secondary sexual characteristics in both genders, the onset of menarche in girls and the corresponding physiological growth in boys are biological events that mark the transition from late childhood to early adolescence.

Such physical changes are associated with equally significant internal changes, the conflicts to which they may give rise, and various efforts at adaptation. The complexity of this developmental phase is further underscored by neurocognitive changes in adolescence that make possible the capacity for abstract reasoning and logic.

A corresponding decline in the primacy of primary process thinking, or what some in psychoanalytic developmental psychology have termed the language of play, occurs as the adolescent's intellectual prowess is emerging. Important changes occur in developmental domains as the sense of personal morality, development of the ego, and internalized object relations. Another significant task of development is the firming up of one's personal identity, referred to by some developmentalists as the adolescent's sense of self.

***Adolescents and Their Parents.*** Relationships occurring within the adolescent's family tend both to shape and to reflect many of the changes mentioned above. One theoretical position suggests that the reemergence of the separation-individuation matrix, with its attendant struggles over autonomy, is a hallmark of adolescent development (4). Arguments over the adolescent's ceaseless and varied demands for independence, both explicit and implicit, become the daily essence of family life, with differing opinions in regard to the contravention of parental rules and proscriptions threatening at times to replace all other forms of dialogue between adolescent and parent.

Adolescents, it is often suggested, are not unlike toddlers in several important respects. They wish to deny their parents a role of continuing importance in their lives, thereby ensuring the expansion of their radius of interpersonal relationships, and yet, this very denial arouses anxiety. "This process produces intense feelings of ambivalence as they also need parents to be available -- assisting them by listening, containing, setting boundaries, and limits, and providing a structured family" to which they may return for help when necessary (Jarvis, p. 118, 5). A further parallel exists in the adolescent's struggle with frustrations and disappointments, which may result in a sense of personal inadequacy, humiliation, or shame.

In the face of the adolescent's endless provocations, the parent's ability and availability to serve as a "container" for the adolescent's fears and anxieties becomes crucial because the experience of containment ultimately allows for the modification, management, and transformation of such troubling feelings and reactions.

Although parental influence may not be nearly as intensive in the day-to-day lives of adolescents as it is for infants and toddlers, earlier developmental injuries and failures may become telescoped to later development. This, in turn, may lead to a range of problems and clinical symptoms that can become further exacerbated by environmental limitations or parental inadequacies.

*Adolescents, it is often suggested, are not unlike toddlers in several important respects. They wish to deny their parents a role of continuing importance in their lives, thereby ensuring the expansion of their radius of interpersonal relationships, and yet, this very denial arouses anxiety.*

*In the face of the adolescent's endless provocations, the parent's ability and availability to serve as a "container" for the adolescent's fears and anxieties becomes crucial.*



*Changes in parental employment may be interpreted as proof that the rules have been suspended, parental injunctions against unacceptable behavior lifted, and so on.*

*Overall, the consistency of theory and empirical results strongly suggests it is time to reconsider any complacency concerning adolescents and welfare reform.*

### **Why will parental absence or lack of availability affect adolescents?**

Adolescents continue to be engaged in a variety of developmental tasks. Are such tasks complicated by dramatic shifts in parental availability, changes that for example, might occur at the same time as the need of both parents or of the only parent in single parent families to obtain employment outside the home? Assuming that not all adolescents will be able to successfully negotiate these developmental hurdles, which adolescents are most likely to be at-risk? To what degree does family income level appear to influence poor outcomes related to both parents' or the only parent's deployment in the work force? These are but a few questions deserving of consideration.

The entrance of the mother into the labor force as a child enters adolescence or the movement from part-time to full-time employment may in some cases add to the burden of anxiety an adolescent is already feeling. In such circumstances, liberation may be misperceived as an abandonment. These changes in parental employment may be interpreted as proof that the rules have been suspended, parental injunctions against unacceptable behavior lifted, and so on. Of course, one might argue against the likelihood of such phenomena in families where preadolescent developmental experiences have been robust, family life has been stable, and certain environmental concerns (e.g., neighborhood crime) do not exist.

Before the advent of welfare reform, past research was unclear on this question. Zaslow and Emig (6), Moore and Driscoll (7), and Young (8) found that maternal employment tended to have either neutral or positive impacts on children in low income families. Other researchers found that mother's employment and positive outcomes for children depended on type and stability of employment (9).

More recent research on welfare reform, such as the findings reported here and in the previous chapter by Brooks, Hair, and Zaslow (10) strongly suggest that adolescents in low income households do sometimes face difficulties as their mothers return to or increase their employment. Such difficulties are more severe when negative consequences from the mother's employment are not offset by gains in income. Overall, the consistency of theory and empirical results strongly suggests it is time to reconsider any complacency concerning adolescents and welfare reform and to look more seriously at how and to what extent adolescents are being negatively affected by welfare reform.

*Excerpted from Trzcinski, E. and Brandell, J. (2002). Adolescent Outcomes, Poverty Status, and Welfare Reform: An Analysis based on the Survey of Program Dynamics, JCPR Working Paper 269, 01-08-2002 .*

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# Adolescents in Detroit

## Their Own Perceptions of How Welfare and Poverty Affects Their Lives

Eileen Trzcinski

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In the early stages of research on the impact of welfare reform, most research focused on caseload reduction, employment outcomes, and barriers to employment. Even in research that examined the impact of welfare reform on children, the emphases centered on infants, pre-schoolers, and children at the grade school level. Issues concerning the impact on children in middle childhood and early adolescence were not considered a crucial area for research (1).

As noted in the previous chapter, however, the stage of adolescence requires the accomplishment of many difficult developmental tasks. Hence children in late middle childhood and early adolescence are likely to face significant challenges in the wake of welfare reform (2).

This chapter presents the results of a study that was undertaken to determine how middle school children assess the effects of welfare reform on their daily lives and the lives of their schoolmates. The purpose of the qualitative interviews with the children was:

- (1) to learn the language that children use to describe welfare and how it affects them;
- (2) to learn what children see as changes in their day-to-day lives now that their mothers need to work additional hours; and
- (3) to learn to how children interpret these changes.

The study consisted of thirty interviews with children and their mothers recruited from a middle school in Detroit. The school was an urban, inner city, public, charter middle school with approximately 400 students, who were predominately African American. Although precise statistics were not available, a large percentage of the students participated in the free lunch program. The goals of the study were to learn how children themselves understand and interpret issues surrounding poverty, welfare, and maternal employment.

From the children's perspective, multiple jobs and evening/night hours interfered with the child-parent relationship on both quality and quantity dimensions. The children also reported other consequences, such as grades going down and not getting to school on time. A universal response among the children and the mothers was that mothers should work, but almost all of the children felt that the mother's work should primarily be limited to the period when the children were in school. The children also reported that welfare and poverty were issues about which children were teased and/or ridiculed at school. The children had different perspectives on why this teasing occurred.

*From the children's perspective, multiple jobs and evening/night hours interfered with the child-parent relationship on both quality and quantity dimensions. The children also reported other consequences, such as grades going down and not getting to school on time.*

*When asked what she felt it was like for other students when their mothers weren't there when they get home from school, one adolescent responded:*

*“It is bad. Anything can happen. Sometimes they talk about it. They don't feel safe. I wouldn't like it. I would have to stay home with my brother and I would have to do my homework by myself. I think it is better that my mom is with me when I come home from school.”*

*The adolescents gave complex perspectives on welfare and poverty.* When asked whether they knew what welfare or food stamps were, the children tended to respond with short, definitional answers. Probing into how children perceived these programs yielded a different, more complex picture. Children reported that they wouldn't use food stamps; they were well aware of the stigma attached. They reported that they did or would feel separate and different if they used food stamps rather than cash.

*The adolescents talked about how welfare and poverty were targets for teasing and ridicule.* In the literature on how children are affected by welfare, researchers have paid scant attention to how children are harmed by negative stereotypes of welfare and poverty (3,4). The student informants, however, reported that welfare, poverty and food stamps were areas where children were subject to teasing, ridicule and harassment. The children's comments indicated that students have internalized broader societal prejudices against the use of welfare and food stamps.

The children reported that students made judgements regarding which children were perceived to be poor. They also reported that the use of welfare and food stamps were topics used by students at the school to embarrass and hurt other students. The children stated that students who were the targets tended to react with embarrassment, sadness, or anger. While not all children reported awareness of welfare, food stamps, and poverty as topics for teasing and ridicule, most of the children reported having witnessed or participated in such encounters.

Students reported a range of reactions from the students who were targets of teasing and harassment. One student reported that the students who were the targets of teasing became “embarrassed or sad”. Another student reported that the children who were teased “ignore it, but it is always in the back of their head, like why are they talking about me, I didn't do anything to you.” In another interview, the student said that when students are teased some children “get mad and some of them cry. Others they just ignore it. Most of them get mad and then comment back.”

*The adolescents gave their own perspectives on mother's employment.* The children consistently responded that mothers should work, but that mother's work schedules should correspond to the child's school schedule. Some children reported that negative changes in their relationships with their mothers had occurred as a result of changes in their mothers' work schedules. These children as well as children who had strong relationships with their mothers both felt that it was optimal when the mother's work schedule allowed her to be at home with her children in the evening and on weekends.

For the most part, none of the children reported difficulties if their mothers were home soon after school ended. These children did not, however, take their mother's presence for granted. All the children, with one exception, placed importance on having a strong and open relationship with their mother. Only one of the older girls, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, was happy that her mother worked long hours and/or in the evenings because she had greater independence.

*Adolescents voiced the importance of maintaining positive relationships with mothers who are working long hours.* In cases where the children's mothers were working, but they had either part-time work or schedules that primarily corresponded with the hours when their children were in school, the children all emphasized the importance of being able to talk with their mothers. They also expressed appreciation for the help they received with their homework and talked about the difficulties that other children may face when these children's mothers are not as available as their own mothers are.

I think it is important to talk to your mom because they have been through so much that you are going through. And they can help you understand why it is happening and stuff like that. (I can talk with my mom) because she is around a lot and nice and understanding. If she wasn't around a lot and I felt uncomfortable about talking with her because she was older, then I would talk with my friends. But we can talk, I like that.

When asked if the child could see any difference in what it is like for other students, whose mothers need to work many hours, she responded:

Sometimes. You can tell they don't get enough attention at home, because when they come to school they want attention. They act funny in front of the class because they want to get attention. Sometimes they will say something funny to get the whole class to laugh and then they get into trouble for speaking. They just want to get attention because they don't get enough at home, because nobody is there for them.

Some adolescents reported difficulties in maintaining a strong relationship with their mothers. From the children's perspective, multiple jobs and evening/night hours tended to interfere with the child-parent relationship on both quality and quantity dimensions. This issue was not universal among the children, but it was reported by several of the children whose mothers were working many hours. The children saw the change in their relationship with their mother as an important outcome of maternal employment. The children also reported other consequences, such as grades going down and not getting to school on time.

One adolescent boy reported the following difficulties and frustrations as resulting from his mother's work schedule:

If my mother didn't work so much, I wouldn't have to watch my little brother and I could be outside more. Also when I have problems with my homework, she isn't here to help me so I have to do it on my own.

If had time to talk with my mom, that would be nice, that would help me. When I do sit down and talk with her, that's if I do, I don't get to tell her what I am thinking and it drives me crazy. She doesn't have time. I think it would be better if she didn't have to work so much. I would have more of a relationship with her.

When she didn't work so much, she used to take us out to the movies on weekends or she would take us to the drive thru, now she is working. She doesn't have time.

*On weekends, when his mother also needed to work, one adolescent boy reported that "I stay up all night, I don't ever go to bed."*

*He also reported that he doesn't spend much time with his mother on weekends, "because during the day she is sleeping because she is working midnights."*

*When asked why he got up after his mom left for work, he answered: "I don't know, I just feel safer. My grandmother she can't protect us."*

*Although he felt that her working was "good for her because of the money she is bringing home," he preferred when she worked fewer hours:*

*"She was home a lot then. It seemed like we had more fun and it seemed like she had less money, but she was home more spending more quality time with us."*

*One child reported a number of negative consequences that she attributed to her increased responsibilities. "I think I slipped in my grades because I have to watch my brothers and sisters more. My grades were much higher. I don't think it helped with my schoolwork, but financially it helps. My mother works a lot so I have to watch my brothers and sisters while she is working and clean up after them. Plus I get sick a lot so I miss school when I'm sick. I missed a whole week a couple of weeks ago. I get a lot of sore throats and runny nose. ...You have to hurry to run out of the house, hurry to get to school. It is hectic. You are rushing here and rushing there. It's not relaxed like it was before."*

*Many of the adolescents reported major changes in their responsibilities for caring for younger siblings and for performing household responsibilities.* The children with childcare and household responsibilities had mixed reactions. Some resented the extra responsibilities and some did not. Some of the children also reported that they didn't have enough time for themselves. In one case, the child told me that he and his sister would stay home from school occasionally and baby-sit for their infant brother when the baby's childcare was unavailable. Most of the children took part in the school's after school program, with most of these children providing favorable reports. In a couple of cases, however, the children would have preferred to have the option of coming home earlier and not being required to spend the extra hours at school.

Evident in the lives of some of the children was the same time pressure felt by many parents today who are juggling work and family responsibilities. Some children mentioned the constant need to be on the move, moving without pause from one responsibility to another, with the accompanying feeling of never having enough time. Within the interviews, the children were asked about their responsibilities with words such as chores and babysitting. Such words connote helping out and sharing in family responsibilities. However some responses indicated a level of responsibility that extended beyond helping out. In some cases, the extent of the children's responsibilities can be more accurately described as parenting, not babysitting, and household management, not chores.

None of the children expressed any enthusiasm for these responsibilities. In some cases, a sense of resignation and reluctant acceptance was evident. In other cases, the children voiced frustration and resentment. Problems were also reported. Some of the children reported fatigue, difficulties in getting to school on time, and grades going down. They also reported that their child care responsibilities interfered with the time they had available to spend with their own friends. These types of issues tended to emerge in families where the interviewed child had younger siblings and where the mother was working multiple jobs and/or non-traditional hours.

Throughout the interviews, adolescents with younger siblings reported heavy responsibilities for child care and household management. Such responsibilities may present developmental challenges for the children, who may be taking on adult responsibilities at too early an age. Several of the children in this study, who were still only middle school students in the 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, expressed the same worries and concerns regarding childcare and household management that parents express. Hence more information is needed on the extent to which welfare reform has resulted in mothers undertaking long hours or non-traditional hours of employment in order to provide basic economic necessities for their families.

*Excerpted from Trzcinski, E. (2002). "Middle School Children's Perceptions on Welfare and Poverty: An Exploratory, Qualitative Study," Journal of Family and Economic Issues (23):4: 339-360.*

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# Adolescents and Welfare Reform in Michigan

Jane Zehnder-Merrell

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## Michigan's Adolescents

The state of Michigan has made improvements for adolescents over the past decade, including declining teen birth rates, juvenile arrests and adolescent injury death rates. However, young adolescents are having more difficulty in school, and Michigan's high school graduation rate is steadily decreasing. Many of these difficulties are related to being raised in low-income families. Increasing the financial security of Michigan's families would assist Michigan's adolescents in becoming successful adults. Michigan's teenagers have benefited in a number of ways during the past decade. These improvements can be attributed to a good economy and special programs for teenagers.

*The state of Michigan has made improvements for adolescents over the past decade, including declining teen birth rates, juvenile arrests and adolescent injury /death rates.*

## How have Michigan adolescents benefited during the past decade?

- Birth rates for Michigan teenagers ages 15-17 decreased by 32% in the 1990's, twice the national average (1).
- Juvenile arrests for violent crimes decreased by 43% (1).
- Juvenile arrests for property crimes declined by 38% (1).
- Injury/death rates for accidents, homicides and suicides for teenagers aged 15-19 dropped by one-third (1).
- Substance use among young Michigan teens declined significantly (1).

## How have Michigan adolescents suffered during the past decade?

Although teenagers in Michigan had lower birth rates, fewer index crime arrests and fewer injury deaths, the number of adolescents that graduate from high school has not improved substantially. The numbers are striking: Approximately one of four youth who enter the ninth grade does not graduate from high school (1). If young adolescents ages 10-14 do not journey through their middle school years effectively, they will have difficulty completing their high school education successfully. Young Michigan teens face the following types of educational problems:

*Approximately one of four youth who enter the ninth grade does not graduate from high school.*

- Young teenagers who are home alone after school for more than three hours are more likely to be depressed or have behavioral problems (1).
- Leisure reading seems to decline over the middle school years (1).
- Most fifth and eighth graders do not pass the science section of the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) (1).
- Caucasian fifth graders are twice as likely to pass the MEAP test than African American students (1).
- The number of young adolescents in Michigan receiving special education services was highest in the 2000-2001 school year (1).

*One-third of young adolescents in Michigan live in low-income families.*

*Low-income teenagers are more likely to have food insecurities or hunger. Hunger contributes to fatigue, poor mental health, and more behavioral disorders.*

*Low-income families often pay more than higher income families for goods and services such as higher car insurance, higher mortgage rates and large fees for check-cashing and other bank services.*

### **Why are Michigan adolescents having more problems now?**

**Michigan Adolescents and Low-Income.** One-third of young adolescents in Michigan live in low-income families (1). (Low income is defined as less than twice the federal poverty level, or \$33,790 for a family of four in 2000.) While having a low income does not necessarily cause behavioral, emotional and academic problems, it does contribute significantly to these issues in the following ways:

- One of seven low-income young teens in Michigan does not have health insurance and may lack access to mental health services, including services for emotional and/or behavior problems (1). This lack of access to services is alarming because a recent study suggests that 48% of low-income Michigan young adolescents were sad or depressed as opposed to only 37% of higher income youth (1).
- Academic stressors, including not getting along with teachers, not understanding homework or trying to get good grades cause more stress on low-income youth than on youth who live in higher income families (1).
- Michigan adolescents in schools with more low-income students are less likely to have access to technology, including computers (1).
- Low-income teenagers are more likely to face food insecurities or hunger. Hunger contributes to fatigue, poor mental health, and more behavioral disorders (1).
- Youth in low-income families participate less in after-school activities. These activities are related to positive adjustment and better academic success (1).

### **Why do low-income families have difficulty achieving financial security?**

Many low-income families receive cash assistance. In Michigan, the Family Independence Program (FIP) is the cash assistance program. FIP provides support and cash supplements while requiring participants to maintain employment. The FIP does not provide low-income families with economic self-sufficiency for the following reasons:

1. Due to eligibility requirements, many low-income people who are employed do not qualify for assistance (2).
2. Due to inflation, families receiving cash assistance are unable to purchase as much with their FIP check as they were several years ago (2).
3. Low-income families often pay more than higher income families for goods and services such as more expensive car insurance, higher mortgage rates and large fees for check-cashing and other bank services (3).

## **What are the eligibility requirements for FIP and how do they affect the working poor?**

To be eligible for FIP, a person or family may not have a gross income (defined as FIP assistance plus employment income) higher than the “payment standard” set by the Family Independence Agency. For a family of three with one working adult, the monthly payment standard is \$459 and has remained the same since 1993 (2). To assist working families and give them an incentive to continue working, Michigan has an “earned income disregard”. This is the amount of employment income that is disregarded when calculating a family’s gross income. Michigan’s income disregard is currently the first \$200 of employment income plus 20% of the remainder of that income (2). This earned income disregard would allow a family of three to have a monthly gross income (employment income plus cash assistance) of no more than \$775.

## **How has the purchasing power of the FIP benefit decreased since 1993?**

Low-income families have a very difficult time meeting their basic needs with such eligibility and income requirements. The Michigan League for Human Services has identified that the monthly “self-sufficiency wage” for a family of three in Michigan is \$2,864--more than three and a half times the amount allowed by the FIP (4).

For example, a single working parent with two children who earned no more than \$775 per month in 1993, that income would be worth only \$630 per month in 2001 (2). To clarify, in 2001 such a family would only be able to purchase 81% of what it could purchase in 1993. Therefore, many families who receive FIP and work continue to be forced to cut back on expenses.

***FIP and the poverty threshold.*** The “poverty threshold” is known as the amount of income a person needs to receive in order to be officially above the poverty level. Each year, the poverty threshold increases with inflation (23% in the past 10 years), and FIP recipients fall further and further under the poverty threshold (2). When families collect more income than the payment standard, their FIP benefits are discontinued. The large gap between FIP recipients’ incomes and the poverty threshold puts an increasing number of welfare leavers further from financial self-sufficiency.

## **How and why do low-income families pay more for goods and services?**

It is very difficult for low-income families to move to self-sufficiency because they tend to pay more for goods and services than families with higher incomes. Because they pay more, they have difficulty saving any money or acquiring assets. The poor pay more for several goods and services, including:

- Transportation – Low-income families typically pay higher interest rates for cars and higher insurance premiums (2).
- Childcare – The non-poor pay approximately 7% of their gross income for childcare while the poor pay 10% or more (2).

*The Michigan League for Human Services has identified that the monthly “self-sufficiency wage” for a family of three in Michigan is \$2,864-- more than three and a half times the amount allowed by the FIP.*

*The large gap between FIP recipients’ incomes and the poverty threshold puts an increasing number of welfare leavers further from financial self-sufficiency.*



*The best way to decrease negative outcomes for adolescents is to strengthen families by providing them with more economic security.*

*Inner city stores typically charge 17.5-22% more than a suburban store for the same item.*

- Healthcare – The non-poor are covered by insurance, usually provided by their employers. The poor typically do not have employer-paid insurance, so they must purchase high cost insurance on their own or go without. In addition, the poor often do not have paid sick leave (2).
- Basic needs – Inner city stores typically charge 17.5-22% more than a suburban store for the same item (2).
- Money management – The poor pay high fees just to cash a check at a check-cashing outlet. Predatory lenders charge more for low-income families, because these families are a higher credit risk and have few choices for check cashing and obtaining credit (2).
- Housing – Low-income families usually must pay a higher interest rate, sometimes around 13% because of poor credit. The non-poor usually pay approximately 30% of their income for housing while low-income families pay 50% or more and often live in substandard housing. Currently, there is a shortage of affordable housing (2).

### **What can Michigan do to assist low-income families in becoming more financially self-sufficient and therefore assist its young adolescents in becoming successful adults?**

The best way to decrease negative outcomes for adolescents is to strengthen families by providing them with more economic security. This can be achieved in the following ways:

1. Michigan can revise the payment standard for the FIP benefit to include an annual adjustment for inflation so that the purchasing power remains the same from year to year (2).
2. Michigan can revise its earned income disregard to give recipients more of an incentive to work and to keep families in the program until their income is closer to the poverty level.
3. A state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) would reward work and help more families meet the basic needs of their children. The federal EITC has proven more effective at lifting families above poverty than any other program. Several states, including Minnesota and Wisconsin, have already instituted a state EITC. Since low-income families pay more substantial shares of their incomes in state sales taxes and payroll taxes than more affluent households, a state EITC would help compensate for this inequity.
4. Michigan can identify a “self-sufficiency wage” to be a benchmark for measuring progress and the effectiveness of programs and policies (4).
5. Michigan could exempt families with earnings below the poverty level from having to pay income tax.
6. Michigan can encourage quality retailers to locate in low-income communities (2).
7. Michigan can provide consumers with tools, including financial education, access to basic financial services and opportunities to build credit (2).
8. Michigan can include rent as part of a credit check (2).
9. Michigan can pass laws to stop predatory lending (2).

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# Speakers

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## **Martha Zaslow, Ph.D.**

Vice President for Research, Child Trends

Martha Zaslow is a developmental psychologist. At Child Trends, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research organization that focuses on research and statistics on children and families, she is Vice President for Research. Her research takes an ecological perspective, considering the contributions of different contexts to the development of children in low-income families, including the family, early childhood care and education, and policy contexts. In studying the role of the family, Dr. Zaslow has studied the impacts on children of different welfare reform policies.

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## **Jerrold Brandell, Ph.D.**

Professor, School of Social Work, Wayne State University

Jerrold R. Brandell is a practicing psychoanalyst and social work clinician, he is Founding Editor of the clinical journal, *Psychoanalytic Social Work*, and also serves on the International Editorial Advisory Board of the *Israel Psychoanalytic Journal*. He has published numerous articles and book chapters and is the author of *Of Mice and Metaphors: Therapeutic Storytelling with Children* (Basic Books, 2000), and editor of four other books, among them *Psychoanalytic Approaches to the Treatment of Children and Adolescents*. He is actively involved in clinical practice, consultation, and supervision, and in 2001 was elected to membership as a distinguished practitioner in the National Academies of Practice.

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## **Jane Zehnder-Merrell, M.P.A.**

Director of *Kids Count in Michigan* and Senior Planning/Research Associate at the Michigan League for Human Services

Since 1994, Ms. Zehnder-Merrell has managed the *Kids Count in Michigan* project that produces an annual data book on child well-being and conducts an ongoing public information campaign around children's issues. *Kids Count in Michigan*, a collaborative project of the League and Michigan's Children, participates in a broad national effort supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to monitor and improve the well-being of children.

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# Selected Resources

Lynda Ferro

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## *Michigan Resources*

Michigan League of Human Services

[www.milhs.org](http://www.milhs.org)

The Michigan League for Human Services (MLHS) is a statewide citizens non-profit organization dedicated to education, research and advocacy for the benefit of low income and other vulnerable citizens in the state of Michigan. MLHS is comprised of over 1,900 organizational and individual members and has served the human services community in Michigan since 1912. MLHS provides links to a wide range of articles and data relevant to welfare reform and adolescents, particularly adolescents who live in low income households.

Michigan's Children

[www.michiganschildren.org](http://www.michiganschildren.org)

Michigan's Children follows a variety of legislative activities related to children's issues in Michigan, including standing committee meetings and the state appropriations process. With direct access to legislators and staff, Michigan's Children has up-to-date information on children's issues.

## *National Resources*

American Public Human Services Association (APHSA)

[www.aphsa.org](http://www.aphsa.org)

Founded in 1930, APHSA is a nonprofit, bipartisan organization of individuals and agencies concerned with human services. Its members include all state and many territorial human service agencies, more than 1,200 local agencies, and several thousand individuals who work in or otherwise have an interest in human service programs. APHSA educates members of Congress, the media, and the broader public on what is happening in the states around welfare, child welfare, health care reform, and other issues involving families and the elderly.

Annie E. Casey Foundation

[www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)

Since 1948, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has worked to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

The Brookings Institute

[www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu)

The Brookings Institute is an independent, nonpartisan organization devoted to research, analysis, education, and publication focused on public policy issues in the areas of economics, foreign policy, and governance.

Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)

CLASP is an organization of program staff whose work is concentrated on family policy and access to civil legal assistance for low-income families. Family policy projects include welfare reform, workforce development, child care, child support enforcement, child welfare, couples and marriage policy, and reproductive health and teen parents. Civil legal assistance projects include "general counsel" to LSC-funded programs and the Project for the Future of Equal Justice. This site provides a side-by-side comparison of Title I provisions in recent WIA Reauthorizations proposals (June 25, 2003) and Child Welfare Provisions, both available at [http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs\\_New](http://www.clasp.org/Pubs/Pubs_New).

Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy

<http://www.brookingsinstitution.org/es/urban/urban.htm>

The Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy (division of the Brookings Institute) seeks to shape a new generation of urban policies that will help build strong neighborhoods, cities, and metropolitan regions. In partnership with academics, private and public sector leaders, and locally-elected officials, the Center will inform the national debate on the impact of government policies, private sector actions, and national trends on cities and their metropolitan areas. By connecting expert knowledge and practical experience to the deliberations of state and federal policymakers, the Center aims to help develop integrated approaches and practical solutions to the challenges confronting these communities.

Child Trends

[www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)

Child Trends is a nonprofit, nonpartisan children's research organization. They collect and analyze data; conduct, synthesize, and disseminate research; design and evaluate programs; and develop and test promising approaches to research in the field. Founded in 1979, Child Trends is supported by foundations, government agencies, private organizations, and individual donors. Child Trends has achieved a reputation as one of the nation's leading sources of credible data and high-quality research on children.

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)

[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)

The CWLA is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to develop and promote policies and programs to protect America's children and strengthen America's families. A major program area centers on the Workforce Development Initiative.

Children's Defense Fund

[www.childrensdefensefund.org](http://www.childrensdefensefund.org)

The Children's Defense Fund began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundations, corporation grants and individual donations, never government funding. The mission of the Children's Defense Fund is to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

Connect for Kids

[www.connectforkids.org](http://www.connectforkids.org)

Connect for Kids, an award-winning multimedia project, helps adults make their communities better places for families and children. The web site offers a place on the Internet for adults—parents, grandparents, educators, policymakers and others—who want to become more active citizens, from volunteering to voting with kids in mind.

#### Finance Project

[www.financeprojectinfo.org](http://www.financeprojectinfo.org)

Resources for policy makers, program administrators, service providers, researchers, academics and students, and others. A comprehensive clearinghouse of information and technical assistance resources to support decision-making that produces and sustains good results for children, families, and communities.

#### Future of Children

[www.futureofchildren.org](http://www.futureofchildren.org)

The primary purpose of The Future of Children is to promote effective policies and programs for children by providing policymakers, service providers, and the media with timely, objective information based on the best available research.

#### The Heritage Foundation

[www.heritage.org](http://www.heritage.org)

Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute - a think tank - whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. Compared with the other resources listed here, the Heritage Foundation provides a more conservative perspective.

#### Joint Center for Poverty Research

[www.jcpr.org](http://www.jcpr.org)

The Joint Center for Poverty Research's mission is to advance the understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and the effect of policies designed to reduce poverty. By social science research, JCPR seeks to influence the discussion and formation of policy, and the behavior and beliefs on individuals and organizations. The research activities of JCPR should be useful to those whose goal is a long-term reduction in poverty in the United States.

#### Making Wages Work

[www.financeprojectinfo.org/win/default.asp](http://www.financeprojectinfo.org/win/default.asp)

A project of The Finance Project, the Welfare Information Network (WIN) is a clearinghouse for information, policy analysis and technical assistance related to welfare, workforce development, and other human and community services. Information Resources are organized into four categories: Program Issues; Management Issues; Research; Other Resources and Links.

#### Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC)

[www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social policy research organization. MDRC is dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low income people. Through research and active communication of the findings, they seek to enhance the effectiveness of public policies and programs.

#### National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)

[www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)

Founded in 1989, NCCP is part of the Mailman School at Columbia University. The National Center for Children in Poverty identifies and promotes strategies that prevent child poverty in the United States and that improve the lives of low-income children and their families.



National Center for Policy Research (CPR) for Women and Families

[www.center4policy.org/](http://www.center4policy.org/)

The web site of the National Center for Policy Research for Women & families, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that is dedicated to providing unbiased, research-based information that can be used to improve the lives of women and families.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

[www.nichd.nih.gov/](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/)

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), created by Congress in 1962, supports and conducts research on topics related to the health of children, adults, families, and populations.

Research Forum on Children, Families, and the New Federalism

[www.researchforum.org](http://www.researchforum.org)

The Research Forum, an initiative of the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University, was created in January 1997 to facilitate the development of rigorous, policy relevant research about the effects of the new federalism on poor and vulnerable populations.

Rural Assistance Center (RAC) – The Rural Monitor

[www.raconline.org](http://www.raconline.org)

The Rural Assistance Center (RAC) was established in 2002 as a rural health and human services "information portal" to help rural communities and other rural stakeholders access the full range of available programs, funding, and research that can enable them to provide quality health and human services to rural residents. To accomplish this, RAC gathers and streamlines information from myriad sources and provides easy access to that information. The Rural Monitor is a publication of RAC.

United States Census Bureau

[www.census.gov/](http://www.census.gov/)

The United States Census Bureau site provides income and poverty reports, American Fact Finder, publications, and census data related to people, income, poverty, etc.

United States General Accounting Office (GAO)

[www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

The General Accounting Office is the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress. GAO exists to support the Congress in meeting its Constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds, evaluates federal programs and activities, and provides analyses, options, recommendations, and other assistance to help the Congress make effective oversight, policy, and funding decisions. This site contains the publication Welfare Reform: Assessing the Effectiveness of Various Welfare-to-Work Approaches (September 99).

Urban Institute

[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

The Urban Institute is a nonprofit nonpartisan policy research and educational organization established to examine the social, economic, and governance problems facing the nation. It provides information and analysis to public and private decision makers to help them address these challenges and strives to raise citizen understanding of the issues and tradeoffs in policy making.

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# Selected Programs

Lynda Ferro

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This chapter *Selected Programs* presents and discusses findings from a number of important reports published from 2000 to 2002 on the impact of welfare reform on children and adolescents. These reports include a 2001 Children Defense Fund report *How Children Fare in Welfare Experiments Appears to Hinge on Income* (1), Duncan and Chase-Lansdale's 2000 JCPR report *Welfare Reform and Child Well Being* (2) and several reports by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation including *How Welfare and Work Policies for Parents Affect Adolescents: A Synthesis of Research and What Works Best for Whom: Impacts of 20 Welfare-to-Work Programs by Subgroup* (3,7).

*The most successful welfare reforms for children have been those that improve their parents' income and economic security by strongly rewarding and encouraging work.*

## What have been the most successful programs for children?

The Children Defense Fund report reviewed the outcomes for children in 16 welfare reform programs. According to this report, the most successful welfare reforms for children have been those that improve their parents' income and economic security by strongly rewarding and encouraging work (1). Sixteen programs begun in the early and mid 1990's, before the welfare overhaul in 1996, sought to encourage work, while they did not all increase the participants' incomes. Some reduced the income and increased the proportion of participants in extreme poverty, defined as below one half of the poverty line (1). The report finds that income appears to matter more for children than does parental employment (1). Those programs that increased employment while not lifting income were found to do more harm than good for children (1).

## What programs help adolescents the most?

Children's ages do appear to matter in welfare-to-work programs. No programs helped adolescents, even among programs that raised income (1). Experts say helping older children may require additional services such as after school activities, flexible program rules, additional income support or a combination of all of these (1). In the case of adolescents, more limited evidence suggests that welfare reform may cause detrimental increases in school problems and risky behavior for adolescents (2). Reduction in maternal supervision, or mother's ability to perform a 'gatekeeping role', increases adolescent risk behaviors (2).

*No welfare-to-work program helped adolescents, even among programs that raised income.*

## What are some welfare-to-work experiments?

Sixteen programs, rigorously evaluated by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), and having thorough data regarding the impacts on child well being are presented in Chart 1(1,3) . Each of these programs expected participants to engage in work or job preparation but varied in affecting family income (1). Variations included the size of the cash grant, the generosity of financial incentives for working, types of work activities allowed or required, nature of support services and frequency and severity of sanctions for non-compliance. Children's well being was measured in terms of school progress, behavior and mental health (acting out or signs of depression), overall health (parental perception) and safety (emergency room visits and/or removal from the home) (1).

**Chart 1. Sixteen Welfare-to Work Programs**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Description</b>
JOBS*	Grand Rapids, MI; Atlanta, GA; and Riverside CA	Sites operated two welfare-to-work programs each as part of the JOBS program authorized by the Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988. At each site, some individuals were assigned to a job-search-first (or Labor Force Attachment) program that required most participants to initially look for work. Other individuals were assigned to an education-first (or Human Capital Development) program that placed most individuals in basic education. Each site had distinctive features: -Grand Rapids' programs imposed frequent financial penalties for non-cooperation. -Atlanta's job-search-first program was relatively flexible; caseworkers were 'customer oriented' and emphasized that education would be available if the job search was unsuccessful. -Riverside's caseworkers enthusiastically advised clients to take a job, regardless of the initial wage.
JOBS*	Detroit, MI; and Oklahoma City, OK	Each site ran an education-focused JOBS program that assigned most individuals to basic education; however the mandate was not strongly enforced.
JOBS Two approaches: -Columbus Traditional -Columbus Integrated	Columbus, OH	Columbus tested two approaches to case management as part of the state's JOBS program. In the Columbus Traditional program, two different workers handled income maintenance and employment and training case management. In the Columbus Integrated program, one staff member handled both. Both approaches were education-focused, placing most participants into basic education and some into post-secondary programs.
JOBS*	Portland, OR	This was an employment-focused program. Staff instructed recipients that their goal should be to get a job, but to wait for a "good" job, rather than take the first job offered. It was flexible; those in need of more skills were encouraged to enroll in short term education or training before seeking a job.
Canada's Self-Sufficiency Project (SSP) (4)	New Brunswick and British Columbia, Canada	Offered strong financial work incentives to single parents who had been receiving cash assistance for at least one year. Parents received half the difference between their own actual earnings and a target level of earnings, provided they worked at least 30 hours per week. The target levels were \$30,000 in New Brunswick and \$37,000 in British Columbia. SSP's goals were to increase both income and employment.

<b>Program</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Description</b>
JobFirst GAIN	Los Angeles, CA	Program stressed immediate employment. Job placement assistance and considerable information to recipients regarding the value of the state's financial rewards for employment were provided. California ran versions of GAIN beginning in the mid 1980's, statewide. GAIN directed individuals considered "in need of basic education" to basic education services, but required others to enroll in a job search activity
Family Transition Program (FTP) (5)	Florida	FTP offered financial incentives to work and imposed a time limit on receipt of welfare benefits. Participants who were considered not to be "job ready" were allowed to participate in education and skills development; others were required to look for work.
Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) (6)	Minnesota	Program combined employment and training mandates for long term welfare recipients with unusually generous financial incentives to encourage work. MFIP's goals were to increase work AND reduce poverty. Therefore, MFIP encouraged clients to take a job quickly but provided benefits to families earning up to 140 percent of the poverty line. The experiment ran in seven counties, rural and urban. A later version of the program did reduce earning supplement and imposed tougher work rules.
New Hope	Milwaukee, WI	New Hope ensured that all participants could receive above poverty incomes, child care, and health insurance if they were willing to work full time. The program provided cash payments to supplement low wages and created temporary work assignments for those unable to find full time employment. Participation was open to low income persons (below 150 percent of the federal poverty line) including childless individuals and others not eligible for conventional cash assistance.

Source: MRDC (1,3)

\*Eleven programs of the federally funded National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS) which included programs in Oklahoma City, OK; Portland, OR; Detroit, MI; and two programs in each of four sites: Atlanta, GA; Columbus, OH; Riverside, CA; and Grand Rapids, MI.

### **What were the effects of income on outcomes for children and adolescents?**

Across the sixteen programs, impact on parental income was widely varied. Five programs lifted income by greater than 5 percent to nearly 20 percent over those in the control group. Four programs reduced the average income by more than 5 percent and as much as 15 percent. The remaining seven programs barely affected income (1).

*Every program that substantially lifted income had mostly good effects on children.*

*Every program that substantially lowered income had mostly bad effects on children.*

Impacts on children varied significantly. Seven programs had “mostly good” effects on children (MDRC found more good impacts than bad impacts on children). Seven had “mostly bad” effects on children, and two programs were neutral (1). Many impacts on children, good and bad, were substantial. Two programs increased the proportion of mothers who stated that their children were removed from their care because the mothers were unable to care for or handle them (1). This proportion nearly doubled in one program (4.5% to 8.5%) and nearly quadrupled in another program (1.9% to 7.9%). Three programs affected the proportion whose children reportedly received/required help with behavioral issues; one doubled this proportion (17.5% to 34.8%) while two others cut it by 25% (1). These impacts occur in areas important for children’s current and future lives.

### **How did income lead to effects on children?**

Income impacts were strongly linked to effects on children. While research is limited, results still indicate a connection between how welfare-to-work programs affect family income and how well children succeed.

- Every program that substantially lifted income had mostly good effects on children.
- Every program that substantially lowered income had mostly bad effects on children.
- Programs that barely changed income had mixed effects on children.

### **What were the impacts on adolescents?**

The pattern of impact on adolescents changes for the worse. SSP and FTP included assessments of adolescent well being. The SSP data showed that teen self reports of drinking and smoking, as well as parental reports of school achievement and problem behavior, were significantly worse in the program group as compared to the control group (2). Parents reported worse school performance, a higher rate of grade repetition, and more use of special education services (7). In addition, adolescents with siblings experienced the most troubling effects, such as a higher rate of suspension, or expulsion, from school, or dropping out, most likely due to the fact that they are often the caretakers of their younger siblings (2,7).

Therefore, some experimental evidence indicates that adolescents may be more at risk with work focused reform (2). Research indicates that the development of older children, specifically adolescents, is less sensitive to family economic resources and more strongly influenced by the affection, supervision, role modeling and mentoring from the adult(s) in their lives (2).

### **How do the programs compare?**

Five of the sixteen programs raised income. They expected parents to work and provided cash assistance. These programs were:

- Canada’s SSP (4), offering the most generous work incentives, of \$3,000 to \$5,000 above Canada’s traditional welfare benefits for those earning \$10,000 annually (2). Enrollment was limited to single parents working at least 30 hours per week, and had received traditional welfare for at least one year. The program raised annual income an average of \$1,000 for adults having children aged 6-11 during a three year program.

- MFIP (6) attempted to reduce poverty by allowing participants to keep more benefits when they worked. A single parent earning \$10,000 a year would be \$1,800 ahead than they would under the traditional rules. The program was mandatory, with parents who failed to participate in employment activities facing a 10% grant reduction. This program raised annual income by \$1,307 for an average single parent, long term recipient (2).
- New Hope, like SSP, was voluntary, with non-cooperation bringing no threat of penalties, but offering families above poverty incomes, child care and health insurance in return for working full time. While work incentives were smaller than in SSP or MFIP, New Hope was unique in offering a full time job, if needed. By the second year, those parents entering the program without a full time job, were making \$1,000 more than control group members (2).

Two other income lifting programs focused more narrowly on boosting participants' own earnings. Programs were flexible, offering parents access to training and allowing them time to find a promising job with higher pay (2). These programs were:

- Portland's jobs program, which took a long term perspective, unlike some other employment focused programs, where staff encouraged participants to not take their first job offer but to hold out for a better wage and fringe benefits. Job training was available for those with low skill sets. Over the two year study, the program raised average annual earnings for all participants by \$921, more than any other program studied and lowered cash welfare payments by \$598.
- Atlanta's job-search-first program was flexible and individualized in its approach, focusing more heavily on education and training. The program was more "customer oriented". Over the two year study period, the program raised average annual earning for all participants by \$407 and lowered welfare payments by \$185.

Four programs lowered income and increased extreme poverty. While three of the four did raise employment rates significantly among parents with school age children, income declined because earnings gains were modest and were outweighed by larger declines in cash assistance and food stamps (2).

- Riverside's job search first program raised average annual earnings by \$638, but welfare fell by \$654, canceling out the extra earnings. If food stamp loss was factored in, this made the disparity even greater. The program reduced earnings plus cash welfare plus food stamps by \$1,129 by the study's second and final year(2).
- Riverside's education first program raised average annual earnings by \$159, but lowered average welfare payments by nearly three times as much - \$525 per year (2).
- Grand Rapids' job search first program raised average earnings by \$518 but lowered average welfare payments by \$702.
- Grand Rapids' education first program raised average annual earnings by \$290, but lowered average welfare payments by \$418 annually.

*Four programs lowered income and increased extreme poverty. While three of the four did raise employment rates significantly among parents with school age children, income declined because earnings gains were modest and were outweighed by larger declines in cash assistance and food stamps (2).*

*Child achievement and behavior were consistently higher in the programs that provided financial and in-kind supports for work than those that did not.*

### **What should policy makers and states be asking?**

Policy makers and states should be asking which policy changes are helping children and which ones are hurting them. States that wish to help children succeed should focus on ending poverty for the children, while assisting struggling families to meet their basic needs. States can strengthen their safety nets to limit those children exposed to extreme poverty. Congress should find methods to boost income and limit income losses as it continually debates TANF reauthorization (1). A key finding is that child achievement and behavior were consistently higher in the programs which provided financial and in-kind supports for work than those that did not. States need to go beyond mere work mandates and provide some combination of cash rewards and in kind supports for mandated work.

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# Wayne State University

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