CONNECTICUT
VOICES
FOR CHILDREN

Barriers to employment in the Connecticut Safety Net Population

Preliminary analysis

Priscilla F. Canny, Ph.D.
Director of Research
CT Voices for Children

January, 2000

"Many observers expect that, as states move further along in welfare reform and their caseloads shrink, the remaining recipients will be increasingly disadvantaged because those with the fewest obstacles to work will have left the rolls first." *Zedlewski*

I. Introduction

Many reports are being written about welfare reform and the changes it is imposing on our least affluent citizens. Connecticut is in a unique position to get a headstart on assessing how welfare reform is affecting its citizens, because of its short time limits and early implementation of reforms. With the advent of welfare reform and the requirement that most welfare recipients must work, many recipients have become employed. However, some have been unable to go back to work and others have lost benefits because they were "non-compliant"; they had not followed the rules imposed by Connecticut's Jobs First system. The families who lost cash benefits due to noncompliance with Jobs First work requirements were referred to Connecticut's "Safety Net" Worksteps program. This report looks at early data on these Safety Net clients, a unique subset of welfare recipients. The analysis that follows uses existing data to help identify barriers to employment of this population, assist policy makers, and target areas for future, more rigorous research and analyses.

II. Related Research in Other States

At the end of this report is a list of references on barriers to employment in the welfare population. Two studies most related to this report are those by Sandra Danziger et al at the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin, and by Sheila Zedlewski, Director of the Urban Institute's Income and Benefits Policy Center. These studies report on analyses that show that the greater the number of barriers to employment a recipient faces, the lower the likelihood of employment.

Danziger et al explored the prevalence and effects on employment of 14 barriers in welfare recipients. Data were from a random sample of 753 single mothers with children who were on welfare in an urban Michigan county in 1997. No Hispanics were included. Barriers to employment that were studied and their prevalence in the study population included: less than high school education (30%), low work experience (10%), fewer than 4 job skills (21%), low knowledge of work norms (9%), discrimination (14%), no car or driver's license (47%), major depression (27%), PTSD (15%), generalized anxiety disorder (7%), alcohol dependency (3%), drug dependency (3%), mother's health problem (19%), child health or behavior problem (22%), and domestic violence (15%). Low education, lack of access to transportation, poor health, drug dependence, and major depression were strongly associated with being unemployed. The association between

the number of barriers and the probability of employment was also explored. The probability of being employed decreased significantly as the number of barriers increased.

Zedlewski also analyzed obstacles to work in TANF recipients. The data were from the 1997 National Survey of America's Families, and consisted of 1564 persons sampled nationwide who received TANF benefits in 1997. The obstacles studied were: education less than high school (41%), last worked three or more years ago (43%), child under age 1 (15%), child on SSI (4%), Spanish language (if required for interview) (7%), no car and not in metro area (10%), either poor mental health or poor general health (48%), and either *very* poor mental health or health so poor that it limits work (32%). Zedlewski found that those who reported two or more obstacles to work (42% of the sample) were significantly less likely to be employed. Of those with no barriers, 52% were employed, as compared to 22% of those with one barrier. Of those with 2 barriers, only 6% were employed, and of those with 3 or more, only 3% were employed.

III. Methodology

Clients referred to Connecticut's Safety Net Program, after being discontinued from cash assistance, have a number of assessments, including a Situation Assessment Scale (SAS) designed by Donna Campbell, former Program Director. This scale assesses many of the barriers to employment that the families face.

To better understand the frequency and impact of these barriers to employment among clients who have failed to follow the Jobs First rules, the data from the first 226 cases with SAS forms entered into the Safety Net computer system were analyzed. These cases were referred from October of 1997 to November of 1998. The data were analyzed in the winter of 1999. We plan to continue our analyses with a larger data set once technical difficulties in data transfer are resolved. We hope eventually to obtain the SAS data on at least 1000 Worksteps participants; this would greatly enhance the analyses that follow. Until then, these analyses should be considered preliminary, pilot analyses.

IV. Results

The SAS II questionnaire asks many questions about possible barriers to employment. The frequencies of most of the SAS II questions for these 226 women can be found in Appendix 1.

The clients' barriers to employment that we analyzed more extensively in this report include (listed by most frequent):
- education less than high school (59%) (*not used in analysis*)
- depression (53%)
- domestic violence (35%)
- health rated "poor" or "fair" (31%)
- reading rated "poor" or "fair" (24%)
- children with behavior problems (17%)

- children with health problems (16%)
- alcohol problems (14%)
- drug problems (12%)
- education less than 8th grade (5%).

At the time of the SAS assessment, 42% of the recipients were employed. We conducted analyses assessing the effect of each of these barriers on whether the person was employed at the time of the SAS assessment. The results of these analyses, ordered by statistical significance, were as follows:

Association between barriers to employment and odds of being employed (in order of statistical significance)		
Barrier	**Odds Ratio**	**P value**
Client's reading rated "poor" or "fair"	2.2	0.02
Client problem with drugs	2.5	0.04
Client's education less than 8th grade*	7.8	0.05
Child with behavior problems	1.5	0.24
Domestic violence	1.4	0.26
Client problem with alcohol	0.7	0.33
Client problem with depression	1.3	0.35
Child with health problems	1.3	0.43
Client's health rated "poor" or "fair"	1.2	0.65
* A majority of the clients (59%) had less than a high school education, with an odds ratio of 1.5 (p=.16) on its association with employment. However, education less than 8th grade was clearly a stronger and statistically significant predictor, and thus used in further analyses.		

As shown in the table above, Safety Net clients with reading problems, low educational attainment and drug problems were significantly less likely to be employed than those without these problems. Specifically, clients with less than an 8th grade education were 8 times less likely than clients with more education to be employed. Clients with poor reading skills and clients with drug problems were more than twice as likely as clients without these problems to be unemployed.

Next we assessed the importance of each of these factors when controlling for the other factors in a multivariate, logistic regression model. Although the statistical significance decreased slightly (due to so many variables being controlled for in a small sample size), the odds ratios remained essentially unchanged. (The full model can be found in Appendix 2.)

Finally, the influence of multiple barriers was examined by creating a summary variable that summed the number of barriers to employment for each person, and looked at whether someone was employed based on the number of barriers they had in their lives.

# of barriers	Percent of clients with barrier(s)	Percent employed
0	17%	42%
1	22%	47%
2	28%	53%
3	16%	43%
4	12%	23%
5	5%	0%
6	1%	0%
8*	1%	0%

(* No one had 7 barriers)

Almost two thirds of the Safety Net clients had two or more barriers, and one in five had four or more barriers. About half of people were employed if they had 3 or fewer barriers, but only 23% were employed if they had 4 barriers, and no one with more than 4 barriers was employed. This "tipping effect" will be discussed in the following section.

V. Discussion

From a review of the literature, and especially the work of Danziger et al and Zedlewski, there are clearly many barriers to employment in the welfare population, with cumulative barriers predicting a greatly reduced likelihood of employment. Indeed, after a certain number of barriers, the likelihood of employment is either zero or close to zero. The results from preliminary analyses of the Connecticut Safety Net client data also show this devastating effect of cumulative barriers.

In comparing the Safety Net client data analyses to Danziger's analyses, it is important to note that the Connecticut analyses were from a convenience sample of a disadvantaged subset of the TANF population and based on a relatively few number of cases. Nonetheless, we find that the prevalence of many barriers, as well as the effect of multiple barriers, is similar to Danziger's study.

The distribution of barriers in Danziger's study was quite similar to those noted in the Connecticut Safety Net clients:

Number of Barriers	Danziger study	Connecticut Safety Net study
	% of clients in study with number of barriers	
No barriers	15%	17%
1 barrier	21%	22%
2 barriers	20%	28%
3 barriers	17%	16%
4 barriers	12%	12%
5 barriers	8%	5%
6 barriers	4%	1%
7 or more	3%	1%

Danziger also notes the same results in terms of cumulative effects of multiple barriers: after a certain number of barriers, the probability of employment is virtually zero.

Number of barriers	Probability of employment
1	.60
2	.43
3	.35
4	.16
5	.22
6	.12
7+	.02

By comparison, as noted earlier, about half of the Connecticut Safety Net sample was employed if they had 3 or fewer barriers. This percentage was reduced by half with 4 barriers, and reduced to zero if there were 5 or more barriers.

Zedlewski reported a similar effect of cumulative barriers.

Number of barriers	% of clients	% employed
0	23%	52%
1	34%	22%
2	27%	6%
3+	17%	3%

In studies that look at barriers to employment in the welfare population, the specific barriers assessed may differ. However, the cumulative harmful effect of multiple barriers remains a significant deterrent to employment across studies.

VI. Policy Implications

What are the policy implications of these findings? Danziger suggests that in his population, those who have 4 to 6 barriers "may need to be temporarily exempted from work while receiving counseling, schooling or health/mental health services". For those with 7 or more barriers, "Enhanced and possibly long term services will be required for them…In addition, many of these recipients may need to work in sheltered workshops or community service jobs before they can handle the demands of the workplace. We doubt that the states are adequately prepared to serve this very disadvantaged group of recipients, who may...become an increasing share in coming years."

As Danziger et al state: "Welfare-to-work programs need to be more finely targeted with respect to exemptions and service provision, and states should consider providing longer-term and enhanced supports for those who face low prospects of leaving welfare for employment."

Clearly the Safety Net population, as well as those who continue to receive TFA benefits in the future, will need more intensive and specialized services. These analyses help to reinforce the importance of continuing to collect information on TANF and Safety Net clients, not only about their barriers to employment but also on the effectiveness of the services they receive.

These analyses also help point to an important policy change that could be implemented in the current system: at intake into the Jobs First system, barriers to employment should be comprehensively assessed. Those with multiple (perhaps 3 or more) barriers should be offered specialized services and programs and be subject to different rules. This in-depth assessment should not wait until a client has "failed" and been referred to the Safety Net.

References on Barriers to Employment Among Welfare Recipients

Callahan, Sarah (1999): Understanding Health-Status Barriers that Hinder the Transition from Welfare to Work. (http://www.nga.org/Pubs/Pubs/Health/HSBarriers.pdf*)*

Danziger, Sheila; Corcoran, Mary; Danizger, Sheldon et al (1999): Barriers to the employment of welfare recipients (http://*www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/pubs/dp119399.pdf)*

Johnson, Amy; Meckstroth, Alicia (1998): Ancillary Services to Support Welfare to Work   (http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/isp/ancillary/front.htm*)*

Loprest, Pamela; Zedlewski, Sheila (1999): Current and Former Recipients: How do they differ? (http://newfederalism.urban.org/pdf/discussion99-17.pdf*)*

National Partnership for Women and Families: Obstacles Facing Low Income Women (1999)
*(*http://www.nationalpartnership.org/workandfamily/workplace/lowincome/survey1.htm*)*

National Partnership for Women and Families: (1998) Recent welfare reform legislation erects new barriers to employment for low-income women
(*http://www.nationalpartnership.org/workandfamily/workplace/lowincome/barriers.htm)*

Olson, Krista; Pavetti, LaDonna (1996): Personal and Family Challenges to the Successful Transition from Welfare to Work *(*http://www.urbaninstitute.org/welfare/report1.htm*)*

Zedlewski, Sheila R (1999): Work Activity and Obstacles to Work among TANF recipients (http://newfederalism.urban.org/pdf/anf_b2.PDF*)*
*(*http://newfederalism.urban.org/pdf/discussion99-06.pdf*)*