

## **Implementations of Welfare Changes for Parents of Young Children**

Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, Judith Smith, Lisa Berlin, and Kyunghye Lee

Center for Children and Families  
Teachers College  
Columbia University

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The Family Support Act of 1988 was perceived as a major step in the alteration of the welfare system as the time of its passage (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Chase-Lansdale & Vinovskis, 1995; Haskins, 1995). The bill required states to implement more programs to enhance what was often termed 'self-sufficiency.' Child care vouchers would be provided for mothers making the transition off of welfare and into the labor force, and Medicaid would continue for a year after leaving welfare. While well-intentioned, the Family Support Act fell short of its goals, as fewer mothers than expected left welfare and the take-up on child care vouchers was relatively weak (Blank, 1993). During the early 1990s, many states requested and received waivers to initiate variations in welfare requirements. By the time the Public Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed in 1996, over 35 states had received waivers and were experimenting with changes in the welfare system. The PRWORA was noteworthy, however, in that it ended the federal entitlement to welfare services (which the states individually could not do). The entitlement was replaced with state block grants, pegged to state costs of welfare services in 1995. Individuals (our focus is on parents) were limited to 60 months of cash transfers from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), the new name for Aid to Financially Dependent Families (AFDC). And, more stringent work requirements were built into the 1996 bill, such that grants were limited to 24 months with no work or participation in workfare programs. States had the discretion to employ even shorter time limits prior to the onset of work, which many states have done.

These changes in the delivery of public assistance reflect altered expectations regarding the support of poor mothers with children. Besides the end to an entitlement, perhaps the most profound discontinuity has to do with requirements for those poor parents with young children. Under the Family Support Act and previous AFDC rulings, mothers who had preschool-aged children (under six years of age) were allowed to stay at home with them. However, even in 1988, there was movement towards requiring mothers with young children to enter self-sufficiency activities; states, for example, were given the option of requiring workfare or learnfare activities for mothers with preschoolers and in some cases even infants. And, in the PRWORA, mothers with young children are required to work, similar to mothers with older children.

The profound change in policy treatment of poor families with young children is mirrored in the current employment rates of non-poor mothers of preschool-aged children (Smith, Brooks-Gunn & Jackson, 1997). Just over one-half of all mothers with infants under one year of age are working. And almost two-thirds of mothers of preschoolers (aged three to five) are employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1996).

The current policies are expected to transform the welfare system into a short-term assistance program for poor families, even those with young children. Part of the rationale for this shift has to do with the fact that a large number of mothers remained on AFDC for long spells. The mothers who were unlikely to leave the welfare rolls after a few years tended to be those who had entered when their children were young and were young themselves (Duncan & Rodgers, 1988; Ellwood, 1988; Ellwood & Bane, 1994). Coupled with the influx of non-poor mothers with youngsters into the work force, the profile of long-term welfare recipients was an impetus for the alteration of the political landscape for poor young children.

Welfare to work programs often stress education and literacy, job training, and job search skills in order to prepare mothers for the work force. That is, their focus is not solely on getting jobs. Several programs were initiated in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s (Maynard, 1995; Riccio, Friedlander & Freeman, 1994; Wood, Bloom, Fellerath & Long, 1995). Results of these efforts offer some insights into what the effects of the more stringent welfare reforms put into place in the mid 1990s and being implemented in the late 1990s might be. We term the first set of demonstration programs (late 1980s) as 1<sup>st</sup> generation (or early) welfare initiatives for young families (recognizing that other demonstration programs existed in the 1960s and 1970s such as WIN (which exempted mothers with children under 6 years of age); however, programs in the late 1980s were the first programs to target mothers with preschool-aged children.

The first wave of initiatives for young families had as their primary target the woman as provider, rather than the woman as parent. The success of these programs is defined partially in terms of entrance into the labor market, stability of work force participation, and wage rate (Long, Wood, & Kopp, 1994; Maynard, 1995; Riccio et al., 1994; Wood et al., 1995). Little attention was given to other indicators of success, notably those associated with family, parental, or child wellbeing. Policy scholars began clamoring for a focus on family as well as work during the mid 1990s (Collins & Aber, 1996; Haskins, 1995; Wilson, Ellwood & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Zaslow, Moore, Coiro, & Morrison, 1995). That is, the move into the work force has potential implications for parents' relationships with family members, parenting practices, parental emotional health, parental sensitivity and harshness toward their children, to name a few of the primary constructs (see Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, in press; Wilson et al., 1995; and Zaslow et al., 1995 for more detailed considerations of parental wellbeing in the context of welfare). With respect to child wellbeing, dimensions include emotional, social, cognitive, linguistic, motivational, physical, and school-achievement outcomes (see Brooks-Gunn, 1995, for a discussion of child outcomes in the context of welfare reform). Entrance into jobs may have both positive and negative influences, depending on the outcome of interest.

In this chapter, we consider the potential impact of moving off of welfare and of entering the work force (both separately and together) upon the wellbeing of parents and children. Our premise is that the new welfare policies limiting the availability of public assistance and mandating increased self-sufficiency will have positive benefits for some and negative effects for others. The general question is as follows--“Under what conditions and for what families will moves from welfare be positive or at the very least benign and when will they be damaging?” To address it, we draw upon our policy research based on poor families with young children who were assessed prior to the 1996 Welfare Reform Act.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, a rationale for our focus on poor families with young children (as opposed to older children or adolescents) is provided. The second highlights a general model for examining the potential influence of welfare reform upon parents and children, as well as implications for three approaches to the study of such effects. The third provides data on links between welfare-related services, family processes, and child wellbeing, using each of the three study approaches. The final section outlines possible policy implications of our findings.

### **Why Focus on Poor Families with Young Children?**

Given our interest in developmental changes over the life course, we are predisposed to look at how intra-familial and extra-familial resources and circumstances exert their influences as a consequence of the age of the child (Brooks-Gunn, Brown, Duncan, & Moore, 1995; Haveman & Wolfe, 1994). This chapter considers young children (defined here from birth to age 6) for a number of reasons. These include findings related to:

- (i) the strength of associations between child wellbeing and early experiences of poverty and welfare,
- (ii) the potent effects of provision of early learning and literacy experiences in the home upon child wellbeing,
- (iii) the efficacy of early intervention programs upon child wellbeing, and,
- (iv) the possible negative effects of maternal employment upon child wellbeing in the first two years of life (see our chapter in *Exits from Poverty* (Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin, & Lee, in press) for a discussion of these four points).

### **How Might Welfare and Work Transitions affect Families?**

In order to explicate the conditions under which and the families for which moves from welfare to work will promote wellbeing and those which will impede it, several sets of conditions need to be examined. These are outlined in this section. In addition, a variety of research designs may be useful; three are considered in this chapter.

### **Possible Determinants of Welfare and Work Effects**

Various conditions are likely to make it more or less likely that welfare and/or work will have an effect on parents or children. We have divided these conditions into five categories:

- (i) child characteristics, such as gender, age, neonatal health, chronic illness, developmental disabilities;
- (ii) parent characteristics, such as emotional health, substance abuse, chronic illness, low literacy skills, developmental disabilities;
- (iii) family conditions, such as social isolation, family conflict, violence and abuse, household and residential stability, involvement of the father, intergenerational welfare receipt;
- (iv) work place conditions, such as wage rate, health insurance, flexibility of work schedule, opportunity for advancements, stability of employment, work hours, proximity; and
- (v) child care conditions, such as staff turn-over, child-staff ratios, group size, education of caregiver, safety of environment, reliability of caregiver, hours, cost and proximity.

A sixth category is, of course, the particular requirements of the welfare demonstration, which also may influence whether or not effects are seen and if so, the direction and strength of such effects (see Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin, & Lee, in press, for a discussion of this model).

### **Three Approaches to Studying Welfare and Work Effects**

Our emphasis is on three types of studies--(i) those that focus on the pathways through which a welfare demonstration program might influence outcomes, (ii) those that examine the mechanism through

which changes in work and welfare might affect parents and *children in situations where specific demonstrations are not being tested*, and (iii) those that offer, via randomized design, parent- and child-focused early interventions to poor families. Thus, the first type of study uses experimental designs to examine the efficacy of various welfare programs while the second approach focuses on the natural histories of families who are making job and welfare transitions. The third approach involves the provision of parent-focused services to poor families with young children; these services, while not always targeting maternal employment directly, often provide relevant job-related assistance to families. Given that the focus of this chapter is on young families, all of the studies mentioned have seen or will be seeing families with young children (see Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin, & Lee, in press, for more details).

### **Research on Effects of Welfare and Work on Families**

Using our recent research as an exemplar, in this section, we provide information on how welfare and work transitions in poor young families might impact parenting behavior, parental emotional wellbeing and child wellbeing. Three data sets have been used for these analyses. These are the Teenage Parent Demonstration-Newark Young Family Study, the Infant Health and Development Program, and the National Longitudinal Study of Youth-Child Supplement. They are used to address the following questions-- Does participating in a mandatory sanctioning welfare to work demonstrations affect teenage mothers and their children?; Does making a transition off welfare or combining welfare and work influence mothers or children?; and; Does participation in a family focused early intervention program alter maternal work or child outcomes?

### **Data Sets**

#### *Teenage Parent Demonstration Program*

The Teenage Parent Demonstration (TPD) was initiated in 1986 by the Department of Health and Human Services and Mathematica Policy Research in two states--New Jersey and Illinois. Newark, Camden and Chicago were the sites for the program. All first-time, AFDC-eligible, teenage mothers, about 6000 in all, were assigned (randomly) to one of two groups. All young mothers who entered to welfare program participated in the demonstration (i.e., since all mothers were included the results pertain to the entire population of young mothers in the three sites during the enrollment time frame). Mothers in the follow-up group received the usual welfare services offered by the city welfare department (i.e., financial stipends as well as some referral services). Mothers in the treatment group received both intensive case management as well as sanctions if they did not participate in the mandated education, job training, and employment activities. When mothers in this group had missed several months of the self-sufficiency activities, their welfare stipends were reduced (although, like current sanction programs, their children's stipends were not). At the same time, the case managers worked closely with the mothers to encourage participation. This approach has been termed the "carrot-stick" approach or, perhaps more accurately, the "tough love" strategy (Aber et al., 1995). Young mothers receive support, encouragement, and referrals (especially for child care, given its role as a barrier to employment) from engaged case workers; mothers are required to move themselves along a path to self-sufficiency (Maynard, 1995). The sanctioning component of the Teenage Parent Demonstration was a precursor to requirements under the Family Support Act of 1988, as implemented (often under waivers for specific demonstration programs) by many states in the early 1990s. As such, the results from this demonstration have been carefully scrutinized *via-a-vis* their implications for the now widely-applied welfare grant sanction programs.

The evaluation of the TPD has focused on maternal education, employment and wage rates at

the end of the demonstration (24 to 28 months after intake). Data included interviews with the mother, administrative data from welfare case files, unemployment insurance wage records, case-tracking systems, and child support records. Participation in the program was associated with increased rates of schooling, job training and employment, although these effect sizes, while significant, are modest (Maynard, 1993, 1995), similar to other welfare to work demonstrations conducted at this time (Wood et al., 1995; Riccio et al., 1994). Mothers who were working two years after the demonstration began, however, were in low wage jobs and had not escaped poverty (i.e., their wages did not raise their family income above the poverty threshold). This was true of both the treatment and control group mothers who were working.

Given the interest in understanding how such programmatic efforts might influence the lives of the women as mothers (rather than as adults entering the work force) as well as their children's experiences, the Newark Young Family Study was initiated under the direction of Aber, Brooks-Gunn and Carcagno. The goal was to examine parent-child interactions, parental emotional health and coping, and child emotional and cognitive wellbeing. Families were chosen on the basis of the age of the first born child at the time of intake. The home observation and interview took place about three years after intake into the program (or six months after the 24 to 28 month follow-up was conducted to assess the major work and education outcomes of the young women). The study was conducted in Newark, and only African-American mothers were enrolled.

A subsample of 182 mothers and their children were seen, with equal numbers from the treatment and control group. The parent-child observations and child wellbeing assessments allow for an examination of possible effects of enrollment in a welfare to work program that mandated self-sufficiency activities and sanctioned (reduced) welfare stipends when participation lapsed--all in the context of a supportive relationship with a case manager. The Newark Young Family Study represents the first of the three approaches mentioned in the previous section--the welfare to work experimental demonstration program.

### *National Longitudinal Study of Youth-Child Supplement*

The National Longitudinal Study of Youth-Child Supplement (NLSY-CS), begun in 1986, allows for the examination of effects of natural transitions between welfare and work in poor mothers with young children from the mid 1980s through the mid 1990s (Chase-Lansdale, Mott, Brooks-Gunn, & Phillips, 1991). The NLSY began as a panel of about 12000 young men and women in 1979 who have been seen yearly. Each year, the women are asked about childbearing. They enter the Child Supplement when they become mothers. Their offspring have been assessed every other year, from 1986 through 1998. Children are added as they are born. Thus, the sample becomes more representative of births of all women over time. Since the NLSY over-sampled low income white and African-American youth, a relatively large proportion of the families are poor or near-poor (compared, for example, to families seen in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics [PSID]; Chase-Lansdale, Gordon, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997).

The NLSY-CS has been used extensively to examine the effects of maternal employment upon young children's outcomes (c.f., Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1989; Moore & Driscoll, 1997; Parcel & Menaghan, 1997; Zaslow & Emig, 1997). Most of this work has attempted to examine effects of part-time versus full-time work, influences of the timing of work after the birth of a child, and stability of work as well as whether or not families were poor. Most of the published research has focused on the youngest cohorts of mothers from the NLSY-CS, since children who were assessed in 1986 and 1988 were likely to have young mothers (given that the women from

the NLSY were teenagers in 1979, when the study was initiated). Recent analyses include cohorts assessed in 1990 and 1992 as well, extending the age range of the mothers (as well as the socioeconomic characteristics [SES] of the families).

### *Infant Health and Development Program*

The Infant Health and Development Program (IHDP) is an eight-site randomized clinical trial that was designed to test the efficacy of educational and family-support services in reducing the incidence of developmental delays in low birth weight (2500 grams or less), preterm infants (37 weeks of less gestational age), who were born in 1985 (Infant Health and Development Program, 1990). The sample consisted of 985 infants, one-third of whom were assigned to an intervention group (N=377) and two-thirds to a follow-up only group (N=608) immediately after nursery discharge. The Intervention group received home visits to families for the first three years of life (every week in the first year and every other week in the second and third years of life) as well as high quality center-based preschool education in the second and third years (Ramey et al., 1992). Children were seen seven times in the first three years of life.

While families were not chosen with respect to income level or to welfare receipt, the sample has a large proportion of families who were poor, had low levels of education, or were teenage mothers given the sites selected and the fact that SES is inversely related to low birth weight births. Of the 985 children at randomization, about a quarter of their mothers had not completed high school, and one-sixth were teenage mothers, and one-third lived in families with incomes below the poverty threshold at age 1 (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & McCormick, in press; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1997). We use these data to examine the natural histories of welfare and work transitions as they are associated with parenting behavior, maternal depressive symptoms, and child cognitive test scores (the second strategy mentioned earlier; Smith, Brooks-Gunn, Kohen, & McCarton, submitted).

The IHDP data also allow for an examination of potential effects of participation in the Intervention group upon parental behavior. In the context of looking at welfare and work transitions, the IHDP offered a very attractive service--full-time, high-quality center-based care for two years--even though it did not offer maternal education, job training, or employment skills training. The IHDP is paradigmatic of family-focused early childhood intervention programs that provide services to parents and children. Do such programs enhance maternal work force participation? And if so, does the effect of a program upon work status in part mediate the effects of the intervention upon the child? This last question is predicated on the premise, of course, that such programs influence the child, which is their primary goal. We look at such a possibility, using the third strategy--looking at the effects of parent-focused early intervention programs upon work (Lee, Kamerman, & Brooks-Gunn, submitted).

### **Research Findings**

Four questions related to welfare and work in the context of the family are addressed:

- (i) The Newark Young Family Study data set from the TPD is used to ask, "Does participation in a mandatory welfare to work demonstration program that includes mandatory work, sanctioning of the welfare stipend for non-participation, and intensive case management affect teenage mothers and their preschool children?";
- (ii) The second issue involves whether or not transitions off of welfare in the first few years of life have any impact upon parenting behavior, maternal emotional health, and child

cognitive test scores. The IHDP data set is used, with the focus being on natural transitions (i.e., not those attached with a specific welfare to work program).

- (iii) The IHDP and the NLSY-CS data sets provide clues as to the benefits (or costs) of combining welfare and work as strategies to make ends meet during the early childhood years, which is the third issue discussed.
- (iv) The final question has to do with the efficacy of family-focused early intervention programs, with a child care component, in influencing the work behavior of mothers. We also ask treatment effects upon children's wellbeing are being mediated by employment of the mother, using the IHDP data set.

*Does Participation in a Mandatory, Sanctioning Welfare to Work Demonstration Affect Teenage Mothers and Their Preschool Children?*

As stated previously, 182 teenage mothers and their children were observed in their homes. Families completed a series of tasks—a storytimes situation, a problem solving (puzzle) task, a free play task, and cognitive assessments. Being assigned to the treatment group did not influence behaviors exhibited by the mothers or children during the play session, nor did it affect the child outcomes examined. The mothers in the treatment group were neither more positive with their children nor were they more negative. Mothers in the treatment group were somewhat less harsh in interactions with their children than mothers in the control group. Their children did not behave differently in the play sessions or differ on the other developmental measures. Policymakers may be encouraged by the suggestion that mandating mothers' participation in self-sufficiency activities is not necessarily detrimental. On the other hand, these results also suggest that, in the short term, welfare-to-work programs do little to enhance the development of the children of poor teenage parents (Aber, Brooks-Gunn, & Maynard, 1995).

Of course, mothers in both groups participated to differing degrees in self-sufficiency activities. To determine whether involvement in education, job training, or employment affected parenting overall, treatment and control groups were combined. The videotapes of the mothers who did not participate in any self-sufficiency activities were compared with those who were moderate or very active participants. Here a number of differences emerged. The mothers who were involved in activities outside the home were less controlling, less negative, and more engaged when they played with their children than were the mothers who were not involved in school, job training, or work. The children of the more active mothers, in turn, showed more enthusiasm and persistence as they played and completed the puzzle task.

While these results are likely to reflect, in part, pre-existing differences between the mothers who are motivated to take advantage of self-sufficiency opportunities and those who remain indifferent, they also fit with the idea that both employment and preparation for work can be a positive influence in the daily lives of poor adults and their families (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1994; Wilson, 1991).

*Does Making a Transition Off Welfare Influence Mothers or Children?*

The goal of these analyses is to see if a mother's move off of welfare affects family life. To examine this issue, it is necessary to consider whether or not such a move results in a higher family income. Family income is associated with measures of child wellbeing and parenting behavior during the early childhood years (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997). These effects seem to be most pronounced at the lower end of

the income distribution (Duncan et al., in press). Consequently, it is possible that moving *off* of welfare will not be associated with wellbeing if family income remains low (i.e., below the poverty threshold). And, mothers who enter the work force from a bout on welfare are likely to enter low wage jobs, which may not result in increased family income.

In brief, leaving welfare had positive impacts on mothers' parenting behavior, compared to staying on welfare or entering welfare during the two years of this study (i.e., when the children were 1 and 3 years of age). Of particular interest is the fact that leaving welfare but not leaving poverty was associated with more harsh and controlling parenting behavior as well as lower cognitive test scores, in comparison to leaving welfare and poverty. While selection bias cannot be ruled out as a contributing factor to these findings, they are still intriguing, vis-a-vis possible policy implications.

### *Is Combining Welfare and Work Associated with Maternal or Young Children's Wellbeing?*

In the previous section, the concern was with transitions off and on welfare. The focus shifts here to the interface between welfare and work. Mothers on AFDC (or now on TANF) are not likely to meet their monthly expenses, as elegantly demonstrated by Edin and colleagues (Edin & Lein, 1997; Jencks & Edin, 1993). The majority of women on AFDC supplement their income via part-time employment. Given the relative drop in the value of AFDC stipends since the 1970s, "off the books" employment, and/or unreported contributions from family members, friends, or male partners became necessary to meet even the most basic expenses. At the same time, mothers move on and off of welfare, with these transitions occurring quite frequently for some women (Harris, 1993). Thus, we see welfare and work as complementary strategies, rather than opposing strategies, for poor women raising children.

Given this premise, we undertook analyses of the IHDP and the NLSY-CS to take a look at the work and welfare patterns of mothers with young children, concentrating on the first 3 years of life (Smith et al., submitted). Our samples included children who were assessed at ages 5 and 6 in each sample, had family incomes of 200 percent or less of the poverty threshold, and had welfare and work data collected yearly during the first 3 years of life. Six groups of mothers were formed—

- (i) on welfare all 3 years and never employed,
- (ii) employed all 3 years and never on welfare,
- (iii) employed all 3 years and received welfare some or of all 3 years,
- (iv) employed some of the 3 years and never on welfare,
- (v) employed some of the 3 years and received welfare,
- (vi) never worked or received welfare.

Of course, these analyses are limited in that we cannot determine (given the available data) whether or not mothers who were working and on welfare were employed 'off the books' or not. However, the six groups clearly differ as to their strategy of combining work and welfare. Not surprisingly, these groups differ as to their socio-demographic characteristics (age, education, marital status), which are held constant in all analyses.

The general findings, from both samples, suggest that employment has no detrimental effects on

poor and near-poor children's achievement test scores or on behavior problems (see also Parcel & Menaghan, 1997). At the same time, welfare receipt did have a negative effect, but only when it was not coupled with work. That is, the mothers who were not working and were receiving welfare continuously have children with lower achievement scores, compared to the other five groups.<sup>1</sup> Low family income in part accounted for the negative effect of unemployment coupled with welfare receipt on the child's achievement test scores.

### *Does participation in a family-focused early intervention alter maternal work or child outcomes?*

The welfare to work demonstration programs often report very modest enhancements of maternal work force participation, and explanations abound for the lack of large (or sustained) effects. One rationale relies on the fact that mothers, especially those with young children, cannot work without adequate child care. Of low-income mothers who were not working, about one-third state that child care availability is the reason they are not employed (Kisker & Ross, 1997). Unlike the workfare programs, the early intervention programs often offer child care, under the guise of high quality preschool learning experiences. That is, the goal is not to provide child care, but to offer educationally relevant programs (Zigler & Styfco, 1993; Woodhead, 1988). The overlap between families served by early intervention programs and by the welfare system is great. Consequently, early intervention efforts may provide some insight into the effects of work transitions upon parents and young children. Our premise is that providing early education programs, if they involve full-time, center-based care, should enhance mothers' entry into the work force, *even in the absence of job skill and placement services*. Illustrative early intervention programs--those enrolling children prior to age 3-- include the Abecedarian Program (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Burchinal, Campbell, Bryant, Wasik, & Ramey, 1997), the Infant Health and Development Program, and the Parent-Child Development Centers (Andrews et al., 1982). Indeed, the few early intervention studies to report on maternal employment do find significant, if modest, effects (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1994; in press).<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, we do not expect to see much effect of early intervention programs if these programs do not offer such care. Examples of this last class of programs would include most of the home visiting programs (Benasich, Brooks-Gunn, & Clewell, 1992; Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, in press; Olds & Kitzman, 1993). The three reviews just cited have looked at the effect of home visiting programs; the majority of programs do not report on maternal work or schooling outcomes.

In an attempt to explicate links between provision of full-time child care, maternal employment, and child outcomes, we have used the IHDP data set (Lee et al., submitted). These analyses went beyond earlier work by looking at possible links between treatment and child outcome that might be mediated by maternal employment. Like our earlier analyses, we were interested in how poor mothers managed to support their families, taking as a given that many mothers work and receive welfare (Edin & Lein, 1997). However, our focus is on the fact that one-third of the IHDP mothers were receiving full-time child-care and supportive home visiting. Did the receipt of these services influence employment? And, further, did it affect mothers' response to the intervention as a function of work status?

Using a sample of 277 mothers who were below the poverty line (based on an income-to-needs average over the first 3 years of their children's lives, we first divided them into three groups--mothers who depended on welfare but did not work (35 percent), mothers who received welfare but worked (37 percent), and mothers who never received welfare but worked (28 percent). Employment was associated with being in the treatment group, as expected from previous analyses with the full sample (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1994).

With respect to child test scores, larger treatment effects were found for children whose mothers were in the only employed and the employed/welfare group than in the only welfare group. It is possible that those mothers who did not leave welfare, even with child care offered, differ in unmeasured ways from those mothers who used IHDP as an opportunity to enter the work force.

### **Policy Implications: Family and Poor Young Children**

The implications of the findings on exits from welfare and entries into the work force, vis-a-vis parents and their young children, are speculative at best. Why is this so? First, research on family processes and child wellbeing in the face of struggles to make ends meet and to work in the low wage market is just emerging. We look forward to the maturing and deepening of this field of inquiry. Second, almost all of the work to date has focused on work and welfare transitions in families with young children that were not mandatory and did not involve sanctions or term limits (although the TPD in the treatment group were sanctioned if they did not participate in self-sufficiency activities). Even so, the current requirements in most states are more stringent than those in the TPD, given the term limits and the work focus (rather than skills training, education, and/or literacy focus of early welfare to work programs for young parents) of many county and state programs. Also, the sanctions are often larger, proportionately, than those that the Illinois and New Jersey adolescent mothers received in the late 1980s.

Given this rather overwhelming caveat and with some trepidation, we speculate on the implications of this 1<sup>st</sup> generation of research on family processes and child wellbeing for programs in the late 1990s. Two themes are considered, the first having to do with exits from welfare and entrances into the work force, and the second with specific features of various work programs.

The limited evidence to date suggests that generally, exits from welfare are not associated with ill effects upon families. Our work with the IHDP and the TPD suggest, if anything, the opposite. Increased self-sufficiency seems to be linked with positive indicators of child emotions and perhaps less harsh parenting. At the same time, these effects look to be contingent upon the economic circumstances of the family--if exits from welfare are not accompanied by enhanced financial well-being and employment in more than the lowest paying jobs, then parents and children will probably not benefit.

In brief, moves into the workforce, if they are not accompanied by a reduction in financial strain, are not likely to alleviate family conditions related to economic struggles. Clearly, other factors are probably in play (such as child care availability and cost, proximity to jobs, shift hours, and the like). But wage rate will remain a major factor in the next generation of studies.

We are able to speculate about the effects of several features of welfare to work programs upon families and children. Three of these are (i) the use of sanctions, (ii) the spectre of term limits and (iii) the possibility of combining work and welfare.

How will the increased use of sanctions impact families moving into the work force? Mothers who make the move from welfare prior to receiving sanctions no doubt differ in some respects from mothers who make the move only after receiving sanctions. Our working premise is that mothers who wait until sanctioning are less likely to have characteristics that are conducive to entering the work force. These could include features as disparate as lack of transportation (in settings where public transportation does not exist), emotional or physical health difficulties, low literacy skills, violent personal relationships, disorganized family lives.<sup>3</sup>

Term limits also may limit what can be said about voluntary and mandatory exits (or perhaps the terminology should be "more and less mandatory"). For a variety of reasons, exits from welfare for women who are in vigorous workfare programs may be quite different in 1999 and beyond than in 1996

and earlier. Since so many women have already left the welfare rolls, those left probably have fewer job-related skills in the current programs (Burtless, 1997), this, of course, assumes that the large outflux of welfare recipients will not re-enter the system in the next few years). These mothers are probably likely to have lower wage rates and less stable work experiences than their counterparts who left earlier and more voluntarily. Both of these conditions are associated with low parenting and child wellbeing. Mothers with fewer competencies associated with the work place may also have less adequate parenting skills as well (Mayer, 1997). Consequently, benefits of moves into the work place for the hard-to-place mothers are less likely than for mothers who are placed early or who find jobs on their own.

Combining work and welfare is a time-honored tradition, especially as the value of the welfare stipend drops. Our analyses indicate that for poor and near-poor mothers, this combination is associated with better childhood achievement. Indeed, employment in the first 3 years of life is beneficial, whether or not it is combined with welfare. Children with the most negative outcomes are found in families who report welfare receipt but no work. At first glance, such results may be interpreted as auguring well for families undergoing exits from welfare. This is especially true in that many states are requiring mothers to work while, at least for a time, subsidizing their work efforts via welfare stipends. The question remains, however, as to how different mothers on welfare who did not work might be from their counterparts who augmented their stipends in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Does the former group have fewer marketable skills, lower literacy, or more emotional or physical problems than the latter group? Are these mothers likely to end up in the lowest paying and most repetitive jobs? All of these factors might account, at least in part, for eschewing the welfare-work strategy; they are also likely to make it less likely that entrance into the work force will have positive effects upon their children (see Brooks-Gunn, Smith, Berlin, & Lee, in press, for more details).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These findings are replicated when analyses are run taking out those mothers who were married at both time points (given the possibility of unmeasured differences between those mothers who marry and those who do not).

<sup>2</sup> We do not include Head Start as an exemplar since, for the most part, these programs do not offer full-time care and since the vast majority of children are age 3 or older. The Comprehensive Child Development Centers, also initiated by the Association of Children and Families in the early 1990s to serve the prenatal to age 3 range (Head Start Bureau), did not focus on full-time, center-based services (instead, case management as a way to link to existing community services was the primary goal; St. Pierre, Layzer, Goodson, & Bernstein, 1997). The new Early Head Start Programs, begun in the mid 1990s, target families with infants and toddlers (as well as pregnant women); some of these programs do offer center-based care, although the majority are home-based and/or part-time center-based. Unlike the Comprehensive Child Development Centers, however, Early Head Start has as its primary aim providing parent- and child-focused services to families (Berlin, O'Neal, & Brooks-Gunn, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> An exception might be a group of mothers who are working 'off the books' and therefore do not participate in job searches and interviews until they are sanctioned.

<sup>4</sup> However, the mothers might have had other sources of income, making part-time work unnecessary. Moves into the work force for this group of women (if they have marketable skills) may not have negative consequences upon children.