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**EXPLORING THE EFFECT OF WELFARE REFORM
IMPLEMENTATION ON THE ATTAINMENT OF
POLICY GOALS: AN EXAMINATION
OF MICHIGAN'S COUNTIES**

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Abstract

This paper presents a cross-sectional examination of the implementation conditions within Michigan during the first year following the passage of federal welfare reform. It asks the question, “Do implementation factors in the welfare system quantitatively influence the achievement of public policy goals?” Drawing on data from 82 counties, this analysis provides an exploratory, multivariate model that controls for environmental factors outside of the influence of program implementers and examines the effects of macro- and micro-implementation conditions on an outcome desired by policy reforms. The results suggest that implementation factors do have a statistically discernible relationship to proportion of a county’s caseload that is combining welfare and work. Implications are considered both for the implementation of policy reforms and future research in this area.

Introduction

Even before the passage of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which devolved additional responsibilities to states and ended the entitlement to cash assistance, there was considerable variation in the administration of welfare programs in this country. States established their own benefit levels, eligibility rules, and administrative systems. Waivers of federal regulations were common and state's experimented with a range of policy innovations and welfare-to-work programs (Wiseman 1993). Because of this diversity, a considerable body of research literature was focused on conditions in states and localities to document how welfare and welfare-to-work programs were actually implemented (Brodkin 1986, 1997; Corbett 1994/95; Hagan, Lurie, and Wang 1993; Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996; Kane and Bane 1994; Meyers, Glaser, and MacDonald 1998; Miller 1991; Pavetti and Duke 1995; Riccio and Hasenfeld 1996; author 1997; Wiseman 1996). Using both qualitative and quantitative methodology, these studies paint a rich picture of how public policy is translated into complex organizational rules, contradictory case worker practices, and diverse program models. Although many of these studies were conducted before the passage of federal welfare reform in 1996, the documented diversity in program implementation is only increasing given the latitude granted to states by the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant (Gallagher et al. 1998; Holcomb et al. 1998; Nathan and Gais 1998).

These past studies of the welfare system clearly establish *how* implementation is important—it shapes which organizations are involved in service provision, institutes the techniques which are adapted to move clients into work, and determines which staff interact with

clients. These studies also establish *why* implementation is important. Implementation determines the messages conveyed to clients about the expectation of the state and the ingredients of formal policy. Given the multiple goals embedded in reform legislation, the implementation process also provides a way that these contradictions are ultimately reconciled (Brodtkin 1987, 1990; Hasenfeld 1997). While these studies add important knowledge about the welfare system, it is also important to know *what* effect implementation decisions have on important policy outcomes.

The existing research on welfare policy outcomes primarily has tried to understand how socio-demographic, economic, and policy factors influence the timing and duration of individuals' dependence on the welfare system (Bane and Ellwood 1994; Duncan and Hoffman 1988; Moffit 1992). These micro-level investigations have yielded valuable insight into welfare dynamics and the intergenerational transmission of dependency. However, data limitations prohibit such studies from exploring whether the contact that individual clients have with the welfare system influences the length of dependence upon public assistance, the probability of combining welfare and work, or the ability to leave the rolls. Formal evaluations of state experimentation before the passage of PRWORA, however, reveal that service delivery approaches have discernible impacts on the employment rates, client earnings and welfare payments (Gueron and Pauly 1991; Martinson 1995). These evaluation studies, though, do not look in detail how variations in policy and program implementation could influence policy outcomes.

In this paper, I introduce exploratory models to examine *what* effect implementation factors have on policy outcomes, using cross-sectional information gathered from all counties in Michigan. Rather than drawing on data from particular local sites, this paper looks across one state to investigate how variations in implementation conditions are related to counties' abilities to

move welfare recipients into the labor market. In particular, this paper explores the question: “Do implementation factors in the welfare system quantitatively influence the achievement of this public policy goal?” Accounting for environmental factors outside of the control of implementing agents, I look at the macro and micro-implementation decisions made in Michigan’s service delivery system and explore whether or not these factors have a discernible effect on policy goals.

Conceptual Framework and Prior Research

The field of policy implementation research is bereft of conceptual clarity. Multiple theoretical models posit competing hypotheses about important predictive factors, significant inter-organizational processes, and, even, evaluative criteria for determining the success and failure of policy implementation (Ingram 1990; Matland 1995; Palumbo and Calista 1990). Scholars can agree, however, that implementation conditions arise from both from the design of policy and the institutional settings within which policy is applied (Bardach 1977; Goggin et al. 1990; Lipsky 1980; Mazmanian and Sabatier 1989; Pressman and Wildavsky 1973). In attempting to explore *what* affect various implementation forces have on welfare policy outcomes, I draw upon a distinction made by Berman (1978) and Palumbo and Calista (1990). They suggest that institutional settings influence implementation at both the macro- and micro-levels.

At the macro-level, the federal or state governments establish the general parameters within which social programs are carried out. When the implementation of social programs is centralized in public bureaucracies, this involves setting funding levels, allocating human resources, and writing administrative rules and regulations. Yet, in the late 1990s, it is rare for public bureaucracies to be the primary agents responsible for implementing social programs. In

fact, as multiple organizations have become involved in the delivery of social policy (Provan and Milward 1993; Smith and Lipsky 1993), macro-implementation factors have become more varied and complex. Through negotiating with various state agencies, establishing contracts with private organizations, and developing performance criteria, state-level managers try to influence the local organizations that deliver public policy and encourage them to behave in desired ways. In the implementation of welfare programs, this can include such things as increasing the number of welfare-to-work providers in a given region, selecting certain counties to receive extra resources, or contracting with particular types of agencies to operate welfare-to-work programs.¹ Much of the early evidence about the implementation of the federal TANF program are examinations of state, macro-implementation factors (Gallagher et al. 1998; Holcomb et al. 1998; Nathan and Gais 1998).

At the micro-level of implementation, the organizations that deliver public policy react to the new responsibilities they are being given. Managers and staff in these local organizations make decisions about how service technology, organizational processes, and daily practices should be adapted given the contours of new policy guidelines. Significant research has documented that these micro-changes rarely conform to the expectations of either policy makers or macro-level implementers (Brodkin 1997; Kane and Bane 1994; Meyers et al. 1998, Pavetti and Duke, 1995). As is true for macro-implementation factors, when decentralized, private organizations are responsible for implementing social programs, the diversity of micro-implementation conditions expands. If there is little programmatic guidance—as is true for Michigan’s welfare-to-work programs—local organizations are free to establish for themselves all elements of service technology. Local welfare-to-work organizations decide whether or not to hold workshops job search techniques, pick the topics to be included in such sessions, and elect whether or not to offer on-going support to clients actively searching for work.

Although not explicitly focused on assessing whether macro- and micro-implementation factors are quantitatively related to policy goals, a few past studies of welfare administration resemble this paper because they seek to understand the relationship between program delivery and policy outcomes. During a prior embodiment of welfare-to-work, Mitchell, Chadwin and Nightingale (1980) explored how the administration of the Work Incentive (WIN) Program² influenced state and local performance. After examining the environmental, managerial and service delivery characteristics, the authors concluded that while socio-economic factors outside the control of managers or staff accounted for between 21 to 43 percent of the variance in selected policy outcomes, other factors within the control of state administrators and local program operators were equally important in determining clients' entry wages and job retention rates.

In a number of studies, Lawrence Mead also has explored how administrative decisions influence the attainment of policy goals. Examining data from the implementation of WIN in New York State, Mead (1983, 1985) concluded that administrative conditions—such as the assignment of client to various service components, the mandatory-nature of participation, and the amount of staff—were just as significant as demographic or labor market characteristics in influencing the number of welfare recipients who find work or remain working after 30 days. Similar findings hold in an analysis of the administration of WIN in all 50 states (Mead 1988).

In more recent work, Mead (1997) asserts that this approach—where the unit of analysis is the program rather than welfare clients—will become increasingly important in this era of policy devolution. As state and local experimentation with various techniques for getting welfare recipients into the labor market increases, the “black box” of implementation becomes even more significant. In this paper, Mead presents data from 72 counties in Wisconsin during the implementation of the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills program³ and explores the relationship

between administrative conditions and a number of policy outcomes, including the proportion of clients working and the proportion retaining jobs for 30 and 180 days. While the statistical significance of various predictors varies by outcome, this analysis provides additional evidence that the decisions made by administrators concerning the type and intensity of welfare-to-work services has a quantifiable impact on policy outcomes.

Mead uses these findings to argue for the imposition of mandatory participation in job search or work for welfare recipients. An evaluation of California's welfare-to-work program Riccio and Hasenfeld (1996), however, documents that while compliance techniques used in local programs—the imposition of sanctions or personalized attention—has some affect on clients participation in work requirements and AFDC savings, the relationship is not as strong as proponents of mandatory participation would assert. None-the-less, this paper and others by Hasenfeld (Hasenfeld and Weaver 1996) document that the way program components are implemented at the local level has a statistically discernible effect on important policy outcomes, such as client participation in job search programs.

Thus, prior research on the welfare system does suggest that macro- and micro-implementation factors may, in fact, have statistically discernible impact on policy outcomes. This paper builds upon this prior work with data gathered from each county in Michigan during fiscal year 1997.

Research Context

During the 1996 national debates over welfare reform, Michigan emerged as a state exemplar of substantive welfare reform. Like other states, Michigan had taken advantage of the waiver of federal AFDC regulations in the early 1990s and instituted a series of programmatic and policy changes. These early choices set Michigan on a path that stresses clients'

combination of welfare and work rather than reducing the welfare roles. The state has not adopted policies that divert potential clients from the welfare rolls or instituted time limits shorter than required by federal legislation; many changes in eligibility rules and program operation were implemented in the early 1990s and were designed to “make work pay,” such as larger disregards of earned income and the elimination of the restrictions on the amount certain families could work. Although the state did institute sanctions for clients who did not comply with new work or job search requirements, the implementation of sanctions has been minimal throughout the state.⁴ In Michigan, the policy “carrots” to encourage work have been larger than the “sticks” requiring them to leave the rolls.

In 1994, Michigan moved from welfare-to-work model that stressed education to a quick labor force attachment model, called Work First. Work First programs are focused on moving welfare recipients into the labor market rather than on making them self-sufficient. As a technical manual designed to help states implement a Work First approach summarizes, “...[A]ny job is a good job. The best way to succeed in the labor market is to join it, developing work habits and skills on the job rather than in a classroom” (Brown 1997). Like many other state, administrative responsibility for the new program was taken from the state’s public welfare agency and shifted to a new, economic and workforce development agency to be consistent with this philosophy (Nathan and Gais 1998).

Suddenly, many diverse organizations were involved in Michigan’s welfare system. County offices of the public welfare bureaucracy retained their roles of determining and re-evaluating eligibility for public assistance programs. A decentralized quasi-governmental system previously responsible for the Job Training and Partnership Act (JTPA) was given authority to issue contracts for Work First with private and public organizations. Minimal programmatic oversight was granted and, as a consequence, each Work First contractor provides distinct

services to move recipients into jobs (Seefeldt, Sandfort and Danziger 1998). These conditions provide growing evidence that “devolution” in the welfare system has meant more than shifting responsibilities from federal to state governments (Gallagher et al. 1998; Nathan and Gais 1998). “Second order devolution” is occurring with incredible variation at the county or sub-county level.

The combination of these policy and administrative changes allowed Michigan to apply for TANF funds after the passage of federal welfare reform and to become one of the first states receiving these funds in October 1996. The data examined in this paper were gathered from all Michigan counties during this first year of operation under the new TANF program, from October 1996 to September 1997. While the results are not strictly generalizable to other states because of the diversity of implementation conditions, this analysis does suggest that the choices made by implementing agents—both at the state and local levels—may have a quantifiable impact on policy goals.

Research Methodology

This paper presents a cross-sectional examination of 82 counties in Michigan during the first year following the passage of PRWORA. Wayne County was excluded from this analysis because initial exploration of this data-set determined that it was an outlier on the independent variables included in this model. Wayne County is the site of Detroit and had, in 1994, a population of 2.1 million. The large population makes the service delivery context of the county unique. It has, for example, 26 welfare-to-work providers and 27 public welfare offices. The state, itself, separates Wayne county administrative data from the other counties because of its unique characteristics.

Although prior research (Mitchell, Cadwin and Nightengale 1980; Mead 1985, 1988, 1997) utilizes administrative data from the employment-training system, this source does not provide reliable data in Michigan, particularly concerning the macro- and micro-implementation factors of primary importance here. Instead, the county-level data-set used in this analysis was assembled from a number of sources. Data from the U.S. Census and other government sources are used for a number of the environmental control variables, such as geography, unemployment rate, and poverty rate. Administrative data from the public welfare system are utilized for one independent measure of client characteristics and for the dependent variable examined. (See Appendix A for a detailed definition of all variables.)

The measures of macro- and micro-implementation factors, however, come from telephone interviews with the managers of local public welfare and welfare-to-work programs conducted during fiscal year 1997. Ninety-eight managers who oversee all local public welfare offices in the state were interviewed for this study, representing for a response rate of 100 percent in this population. In addition, interviews with 106 local managers of welfare-to-work programs were conducted, for a response rate of 93 percent. The phone interviews were structured and opened ended, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Managers were asked uniform questions on a range of topics, including organizational conditions, service technology, and interagency collaboration efforts. The results of these interviews were typed into a word processing file, checked for accuracy, and then transferred into a qualitative software analysis package, QSR-Nudist (Hannibal and Gahan 1998; Richards and Richards 1994), that facilitated the systematic application of codes and consistency checks. The results of this initial exploration were presented in a descriptive policy report (author, 1998). To conduct the present analysis, the data from these interviews were quantitatively summarized at the county level.

Measures and Multivariate Model

To explore this research question, we utilized a logit regression model for grouped data that provides generalized or weighted least squares estimates for the dependent variable (Zellner and Lee 1965). In this model, the logit function is the log of the odds ratio:

$$\text{Log} \left(\frac{p_j}{1-p_j} \right) = \beta_0 + \beta_{1x_j} + e_j$$

When p_j equals successes divided by population for the j th observation. In this model, weights are proportional to $n_j p_j (1-p_j)$. This model is appropriate when the available data are, in reality, mean values for the underlying population. Ideally, micro-level data from a state-wide sample of welfare recipients would be available for this analysis to explore how economic, demographic, macro- and micro-implementation factors contributed to individuals' ability to find employment or leave welfare because of work. Such data, however, are not available. Instead, this analysis considers aggregate data that represent these factors at the county-level. As a result, the dependent variable is operationalized as the percentage of the county caseload who combined welfare and work in an average month. Analyses of generalized least squares logit models reveal that this model yields very close estimates to those obtained by individual-level data (Maddala 1983).

Although this analysis is primarily concerned with exploring whether implementation conditions have any independent affect on this policy outcome, we have included some environmental factors as control variables, representing factors outside of the influence of implementing agents. Resembling the models used in prior research in this area (Brasher 1994; Mitchell, Chadwin, and Nightingale 1980; Mead 1985, 1997), these environmental measures include geography, local economic conditions, and demographic characteristics of the county and

welfare caseload. Specific variables are whether the county was urban, the unemployment rate, the proportion of jobs in the manufacturing sector, the poverty rate, the proportion of the population with a high school degree, the proportion of the population that are female headed families, and the proportion of cash assistance cases that are white. (Additional details about precise ways all variables are specified are provided in Appendix A.) Table 1 presents some descriptive information about the county level variables used in this multivariate analysis. Ten of the 82 counties are characterized as urban. The average county unemployment rate was 6.4 percent and 17 percent of the jobs were in the manufacturing sector. The average poverty rate was 14.8 percent. In an average county, 75 percent of the adults had a high school degree and 12 percent were female headed families. Eighty-four percent of the welfare recipients in the average county were white.

The macro-implementation variables explored in any such analysis must—by definition—be appropriate to the particular policy context being investigated. To select the appropriate variables for examination in this analysis, I relied upon in-depth knowledge of Michigan’s welfare system gleaned through prior investigations and analyses (author, 1997; author, 1998). The macro-implementation variables represent the parameters which structure Michigan’s welfare delivery system that are established by state and local administrators. They describe county’s with unique public welfare services and the types of organizations administrators select to operate the Work First program. Specifically, these variables denote whether the county was a Project Zero site,⁵ the number of Work First operators in the county, the frequency of non-profit organizations, and whether or not special Work First contracts were given in the county to serve special populations of clients. Four counties in this analysis were designated as Project Zero sites.⁶ The average number of Work First providers in a county was 1.5, with the number varying from 1 to 12. Because of this variation, the variables providing more detailed

information about the welfare-to-work organizations in the county were constructed as a proportion. Thus, rather than constructing a dummy variable to denote the presence or absence of non-profit welfare-to-work programs, the variable represents the proportion of certain types of organizations in the county.⁷ In an average county, 79 percent of the welfare-to-work organizations were private non-profit agencies, 18 percent were schools, and two percent were private for-profit firms. In the multivariate analysis, we utilize the variable denoting the intensity of non-profit service providers in the county. In seven counties, special Work First contracts existed to serve populations with particular barriers to entering the work force, such as pregnant women or non-English speakers.

The final set of predictor variables examined in this analysis correspond to micro-implementation factors within the organizations that provide welfare services in Michigan's counties. Given that Michigan's the public welfare system is a centralized bureaucracy, there is minimal variation in the service technology in that sector of the welfare system. As discussed earlier, however, there is considerable diversity in the service technology used by Work First contractors to move welfare recipients into the labor market; the variables used in this analysis are designed to capture important dimensions of this variation across each county. In particular, we explore the effects of immediate job search, skill-building workshops, and different types of job search assistance provided to clients on the two outcomes of interest. Again, because there are multiple welfare-to-work providers in each county, these dimensions are summarized at the county level as the proportion of providers in that area which utilize various service technologies. As Table 1 reflects, in an average county, 22 percent of the providers required immediate job search from welfare recipients referred to their program. In contrast, 77 percent of the programs in an average county required clients to attend workshops on topics such as resume preparation or workplace behavior. In an average county, 53 percent of the programs offered focused job search

assistance to help clients find a job, including employing a staff member to actively develop potential jobs for clients with local employers or bringing local employers on-site to meet with potential employees. Thirty-two percent of the providers in an average county provided no such job search assistance.

In this analysis these environmental characteristics, macro- and micro-implementation variables are used to predict the proportion of a county's cash assistance recipients combining welfare and work. As other research has documented (Edin and Lein 1996; Spathar-Roth et al. 1995), many welfare recipients "package" income from welfare and from their earnings. In fact, Michigan's welfare reform initiatives stressed this outcome and many policy reforms designed to make "work pay" were instituted for clients receiving public assistance. The average monthly proportion of clients reporting earned income during fiscal year 1997 was 43 percent. This rate was considerably higher than the national average.⁸

Multivariate Results

I developed the model described above to explore whether or not implementation factors have a statistically discernible effect on policy outcomes in the welfare system. I first examine the relationship between the economic and demographic characteristics typically thought to be related to the likelihood of welfare recipients combining welfare and work. I then consider whether various macro-implementation decisions which establish the county's service delivery structure are related to the proportion of clients combining work and welfare. Finally, I examine whether the micro-implementation factors, particularly the service technology used to move welfare recipients into the labor force, have a quantifiable impact on this same outcome. The results of these multivariate analyses are displayed in Tables 2 and 3.⁹

As noted earlier, the majority of research on welfare outcomes has looked at individual-level data rather than aggregate-data to explore whether not demographic characteristics and local economic conditions influence welfare dynamics. Although this analysis uses aggregate county-level data, I began this investigation by examining these same factors. I then include them as control variables in all subsequent models. As Table 2 reveals, the statistically significant environmental factors are county unemployment rate and the proportion of manufacturing jobs in the county. Both have a statistically discernible negative impact. The proportion of female-headed families in the county is positively related to the outcome and reflects the largest magnitude of any coefficient in this initial model. Finally, the proportion of the cash assistance caseload that is white has a positive relationship.

The variable denoting the proportion of the caseload that is white has a large t-statistic relative to the other factors. The strength of this relationship undoubtedly reflects omitted variable bias since this variable is the only one that reflects the demographic characteristics of the welfare caseload itself, rather than the demographic characteristics of the county as a whole. Data providing more details about the demographic characteristics of welfare recipients, such as proportion with a high school degree or average work experience, are not available on a county-by-county basis in Michigan. As a result, this variable is capturing not only the effect of race on the likelihood a welfare recipient will be working but also unmeasured characteristics in the welfare population as a whole.

These control variables were kept in the models as I explored my central question about the effect of macro- and micro-implementation factors on the attainment of policy goals. Table 3 reports the results of the multivariate analysis when predicting the proportion of the caseload that is working. First, I consider how the macro-implementation factors that form the service delivery structure in Michigan's counties are related to this outcome. Participation in the Project Zero

pilot project is a statistically significant positive predictor in this model and in subsequent ones. The number of Work First providers in the county is negatively related to the outcome, although the magnitude of the marginal effect of this coefficient is very small. Neither the practice of issuing specialized contracts to serve hard to employ clients nor the proportion of the contractors that were non-profit are statistically related to the outcome.

The next series of models seeks to uncover whether micro-implementation factors—the decisions made in local programs themselves—are related to the proportion of welfare recipients who are working. As mentioned earlier, Michigan’s Work First approach to welfare-to-work is focused on quick, labor-force attachment for clients. Within these parameters, managers and staff in local programs make decisions about two dimensions of service technology; whether to provide up-front service *before* clients begin looking for work and whether to provide support *while* clients are actively searching for employment. Although it would be conceivable that local economic conditions would influence the type of service technology adopted by a program—for example, that tight labor markets would inspire programs to offer workshops to hone clients’ job searching skills before they seek employment or that loose markets would make programs less likely to offer on-going job search assistance—an earlier analysis of these data revealed that local unemployment rates are not correlated with the particular service technology adopted by Work First programs (author, 1998). In fact, frequently, there is significant variation in the service technology used by Work First providers in the same county, even though they face the same local economic environment. As explained earlier, the variables in these models are operationalized as the intensity of each service approach because of this intra-county variation.

Columns 2-4 on Table 3 demonstrate how different service technologies are related to the outcome in the multivariate model. In the second column, I examine instances in which clients are required to do their own, independent job search immediately when referred to the program

and are given minimal programmatic support while they search for a job. With environmental control and macro-implementation variables included in the model, this service technology has no statistically discernible effect on the outcome. In the third column, I vary the type of service technology and investigate programs that offer moderately more support to welfare recipients searching for employment. These programs still require clients to immediately begin job search but then provide focused job search assistance, in the form of on-site information sessions with local employers, “job clubs” which provide peer support, or a staff member who actively cultivates local job leads. As the table shows, this analysis finds that both components of service technology have a negative effect on the proportion of a county’s caseload that is reporting earned income. In fact, assuming this model is correctly specified, when the proportion of a county’s providers using immediate job search increases by one percentage point, the proportion of the caseload that is working decreases by 3.3 percentage points. Similarly, when the proportion of a county’s Work First providers using focused job search assistance techniques increases by 1 percentage point, the proportion of the caseload working decreases by 2.8 percentage points.¹⁰

Lastly, I examine the relationship between a final type of service technology and the proportion of a county’s caseload that is working. In this model, I include programs that provide both initial workshops on job search techniques before they begin to look for employment and on-going support while clients are searching for employment. Of the three approaches, this combination offers the most assistance to welfare recipients searching for employment. As the last column in Table 3 reflections, workshops prior to job search are positively related to the outcome. Holding all other factors constant, when the proportion of a county’s Work First providers offering workshops increases by one percentage point, the working welfare caseload increases by 4.7 percentage points. As in the previous model, focused job search assistance is

negatively related to this policy outcome. Assuming this model is correctly specified, the proportion of a county's welfare population that is working decreases by 3.8 percentage points with every one unit increase in the proportion of Work First providers offering this type of assistance.

In analysis not presented here in tabular form, variables representing various workshop topics were substituted for the more general workshop variable listed in column 4. The proportion of the providers offering workshops on specific job seeking skills—interview techniques, resume preparation, application completion, and cover letter construction—was a statistically significant positive predictor of the proportion of welfare recipients combining welfare and work. Some Work First programs, though, provide instruction in other topics. Because managers and staff believe that understanding the rules of the workplace is important to finding jobs in the low wage labor market (Holzer 1996; Moss and Tilly 1996), some programs include workshops on “soft skills,” such as the importance of proper dress, punctuality, and general workplace behavior. In the models used for this analysis, however, these types of programs have a statistically significant negative effect on the proportion of a county's welfare caseload that is working. Still other programs run workshops that try to improve clients' problem management skills. Because of the challenges of problem management and of low-self esteem (Herr, *et al*, 1995; Pavetti, *et al*, 1996), these programs try to increase clients' abilities to function more effectively. For example, they may do simulations that help clients to think through what they would do if their babysitter cancels during their second week of work, do role plays that help clients value their skills as parents, or exercises designed to increase their motivation for work. In the models used for this analysis, the proportion of these types of workshops offered in a county is a statistically significant, positive predictor of the proportion of welfare recipients reporting earned income.

In all of the models used to predict this outcome, the two variables denoting service delivery structure remain statistically significant. The number of Work First providers in the county is consistently a negative predictor of the proportion of clients who are working. However, in all models, the magnitude of the coefficient is quite small.¹¹ In contrast, counties designated as a Project Zero pilot site have statistically significant positive relationships of sizable magnitude with this outcome. In fact, if the model used in this analysis is correctly specified, being a Project Zero site increases the proportion of a county's caseload that is working by 13.4 to 13.7 percentage points, holding all other factors constant. In the county with the mean outcome, this would entail an increase of 32 percent of the proportion of the caseload that is working.

Discussion and Implications

This exploratory analysis was undertaken for two purposes. For one, it was intended to add to our understanding about the various elements of program implementation in the devolved welfare system. Now that cash assistance recipients have time-limited eligibility, there are a growing array of techniques designed to move welfare recipients into the labor market. Since decision making has devolved to state and local managers about both service delivery structure and service technology used to move welfare recipients to work, it is important to explore whether or not these decisions have any quantifiable impact on policy outcomes. Secondly, this paper sets out a conceptual framework for exploring how these macro- and micro-implementation factors are related to these outcomes. This exploratory model has potential for enriching what we learn about the multiple level and factors involved in the implementation of social welfare programs.

Before considering both of these purposes, in turn, let us first summarize the results of this examination. As would be expected, there are many forces outside the influence of implementing agents that predict how many welfare recipients in a county report earnings from work. Geography, economic conditions, and demographic characteristics are all significant factors that influences how a county stands on this important policy goal. What this analysis reveals, however, is that the decisions made by implementing agents also have a statistically discernible relationship to this outcome.

In the multivariate analysis, the county's designation as a Project Zero site and it's number of Work First providers were consistently statistically significant predictors. The Project Zero finding is particularly striking because of the relatively large magnitude of its marginal effect. From July 1996 to June of 1997, the counties selected to participate in Project Zero were focused on the goal of reducing the number of welfare recipients who were not employed twenty hours a week to zero. To work toward this vision, the sites were given additional resources. In particular, they were allotted extra resources to address clients' child care and transportation barriers and three of six offered mentoring services. The Project Zero sites also were the pilot for a substantial reorientation of the public welfare office. These counties were the initial implementation sites for Michigan's new classification of front-line welfare workers, "Family Independence Specialists." Although not fully implemented during this first year, the idea behind the new position was to transform front-line staff from mere eligibility workers more professional case-managers who would help families move into employment.¹² At a minimum, when clients applied for assistance in a Project Zero site they were given a clear message about the importance of finding work and relying on cash assistance temporarily. Unfortunately, there is not data to explore which of these micro-implementation factors of the Project Zero intervention—the increased child care and transportation, the mentoring program, the altered role

of front-line workers, or the interactions in the public welfare office that stressed work—is related to the quantifiable effect on the outcome examined in this paper. This analysis does show, however, that the environment created by this pilot program had an statistically detectable on the proportion of the county’s caseload that was working, even when controlling for other environmental factors.

The consistently negative, albeit small, effect of the county’s number of Work First providers reveals that more providers do not move larger proportions of the welfare caseload into employment. This is probably because of the complexity introduced into the system by larger numbers of programs. In the decentralized Work First system, there are few ways to standardize the message clients receive about policies to encourage work, to accurately monitor clients’ participation in the Work First program, or to assure that efficient coordination occurs between the various organizations involved in implementation (Author, forthcoming). These factors seeming detract from the ability of a county to move clients to work.

Like most studies of welfare implementation, the findings of this paper are not strictly generalizable to other states other; however, this analysis does provide some empirical evidence about the relationship between service technology and the goal of moving welfare recipients into work. Although conventional wisdom abounds, there is relatively little empirical evidence linking Work First service technology to policy outcomes. Building on comparisons of various welfare-to-work program evaluations in the last 15 years (Gueron and Pauly 1991), the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation has written a technical assistance guide for states that stresses that workshops and ongoing support while clients are engaged in job search are the “best practices” for Work First programs (Brown 1997). Other analysts conclude that job search assistance, particularly an individual job developer, is more beneficial than clients’ independent job search (Herr et al. 1996; Westat 1997).

Among the counties in Michigan, independent job search with minimal programmatic support has no impact on the proportion of a county's welfare caseload that finds employment. This is consistent with the recommendation by others in the field that this approach is not the most effective at helping welfare recipients to find employment. When investigating the various ways of supporting job search, I find that the proportion of programs with workshop sessions has a positive effect on the percentage of county's welfare caseload that is working. In particular, workshops stressing job seeking skills—such as interview techniques, resume preparation, or cover letter preparation—and problem management techniques seem to be particularly useful. Again, these findings reinforce conventional wisdom about the types of useful services to include in Work First programs.

One finding of this analysis, however, contradicts widely accepted practices. In our models, the proportion of a county's programs that use job search assistance—such as on-site employer information sessions, job clubs that offer peer support, or job development staff—is negatively related to the county's working caseload. There are a couple of potential explanations for this finding. In interviews with local Work First managers, a sizable minority voiced their belief that continued job search assistance is not necessary; these managers argued that clients who do their own search are more committed to the jobs they accept and more able to look for another job when the first one ends. Another potential explanation is that programs offering continued support are not reaching out to employers who are the right match for their clients' skills or employment preferences. In a second wave of data from this study of local programs, we are collecting more comprehensive data that will allow us to better identify which employers are being targeted and what types of relationships Work First programs cultivate with them. This additional information will allow for more exploration of the potential source of the negative

relationship between the intensity of these services and the proportion of a county's caseload that it working.

Implications for Further Research

When combined with past research, this paper provides growing evidence that implementation factors do have a statistically discernible effect on policy outcomes. This conclusion underscores the significance of implementation factors, particularly in social programs where important decision-making responsibilities are passed to states and localities. The ways social policy is implemented matters not only because it influences *how* programs are shaped, *how* staff interact with clients, and *how* clients understand program rules. This analysis and others suggest that the implementation of welfare programs also matters because it has an independent effect on a county's policy outcomes.

Although this paper suggests that implementation influences policy outcomes, there are limitations to this case study. For one, the model is exploratory, and not all potentially important implementation elements are operationalized. An important macro-implementation variable not included in the model is the amount of financial resources allotted to each county for welfare-to-work services. In addition, an important micro-implementation variable not included is the county's sanction rates for non-compliance. Given the emphasis in recent law on mandatory participation in these programs, it would be interesting to know if variations in the rate of sanction imposition had any discernible effect on policy outcomes. Finally, as states give more discretion to front-line staff in the public welfare office, additional measures of micro-implementation factors will be important to include in multivariate models.¹³

Secondly, better specification of certain measures would be desirable. As pointed out earlier, the micro-implementation variables representing the types of service technology used by welfare-to-work programs is summarized at the county level as the proportion of the providers

who use each approach. Ideally, these measures would be adjusted to reflect the proportion of a county's caseload that receives each approach. In addition, better control variables that denote the human capital characteristics of the welfare caseload, such as level of education, work experience, or work level, would be desirable.

Finally, other important policy outcomes could be explored with such models. For example, county's participation rate in employment activities—an important outcome given the federal TANF requirements—would be an important outcome to explore. The proportion of the caseload employed for 90 days or leaving the welfare rolls would be additional important outcomes to investigate with such a model. In this paper, I could not address any of these concerns—limited implementation variables, specification of certain variables, and restricted outcomes—because of data limitations. Future research should strive to address these issues.

In spite of these qualifiers, this paper provides an exploratory examination of how macro- and micro-implementation conditions are related to policy outcomes in the welfare system. The distinction used here between these two-levels of implementation will be important as we try to understand how programs are refined and delivered in the devolved welfare system. The service delivery structure established by state and local administrators creates the parameters within which programs are implemented. It establishes the resources allocated to various counties, the number and type of local organizations involved in service provision, and the efforts made to assist sub-populations that might face substantial barriers to sustaining employment. At the micro-level, the service technology used by organizations to assist clients is crucially important because it is, at this level, that policy ideals are operationalized and developed into specific interventions. Quantitative models that separate these two-levels of implementation will help us to better tease apart what decisions are important in helping states and counties move toward the goal of reforming the welfare system.

Endnotes

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1. In a preliminary paper, Jennings and Ewalt (1998) offer initial evidence from a survey of state TANF administrators that macro-implementation activities are correlated with the administrators' articulated goal of welfare reform.
 2. The federal Work Incentive Program operated from 1967 to 1988 and was administered at the local level by employment security agencies and public welfare departments.
 3. In 1988, the federal government passed the Family Support Act which was a prior attempt to reform the welfare system. The welfare-to-work initiative was called Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program and stressed human capital development through education and training.
 4. During the last three months of fiscal year 1997, for example, a reduction in grants was made on only 0.2 to 0.3 percent of the state's caseload.
 5. In 1996, Michigan implemented the pilot project, "Project Zero," in six sites with the goal of reducing the number of welfare cases without earned income to zero. Additional information about the scope of the initiative is explained later in the paper. In addition, see Seefeldt, Sandfort and Danziger (1997).
 6. Because the two other Project Zero sites were in Wayne county, they are excluded from this analysis.
 7. While it would be desirable to have these variables adjusted for the proportion of the county's caseload served by a particular type of provider, this data was not available systematically for all counties in the state.
 8. The most recent national data available is from fiscal year 1995. In that year, Michigan had the second highest rate among states of clients combining welfare and work at 23 percent (this included Wayne county which is not included in this analysis). This rate compared to a national average of 9.5 percent.

9. Like other prior research in this area (Mead 1997; Riccio and Hasenfeld 1997), we've elected to utilize a p-value less than or equal to 0.10 to designate statistical significance in these exploratory models.
10. Because of the estimation model used, the coefficients reported in Table 3 is not directly reflective of the magnitude of the marginal effects. To calculate the magnitude, these coefficients were transformed using the following derived formula: $\bar{y}(1 - \bar{y})\beta$.
11. The marginal effect of this variable is between 0.37 and 0.62 percentage points in all models.
12. See Seefeldt, Sandfort and Danziger (1998) for more details about the initial implementation of this initiative.
13. An example of some such factors can be found in Riccio and Hasenfeld (1996) and Hasenfeld and Weaver (1996).

APPENDIX A. DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

| Outcome of interest | |
|--|--|
| Working recipients | The average monthly proportion of current cash assistance recipients with earned income, October 1996-September 1997. |
| Regional Characteristics | |
| Urban | 1= urban (when more than 70% of population live in an urban area) 0= rural |
| Unemployment rate | Average monthly county unemployment rate, October 1996-September 1997. |
| Manufacturing sector | Proportion of jobs in manufacturing sector, 1993 Bureau of Economic Analysis. |
| Poverty rate | Proportion of individuals below federal poverty line, 1994 Current Population Survey. |
| High school degree | Proportion of adult population with high school degree, 1990 census. |
| Female-headed family | Proportion of female-headed families, 1990 census. |
| White | Proportion of cash assistance recipients who are white, June 1997. |
| Service Delivery Structure (Macro-implementation factors) | |
| Project Zero | 1= counties designated Project Zero program sites 0= counties not designated Project Zero sites |
| Work First providers | Number of Work First providers in the county. |
| Non-profit agency | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that are non-profit. |
| Specialized contractors | 1= counties in which Work First contracts were awarded to serve populations with special barriers to employment such as pregnant women people with limited English proficiency and those unable to find work through typical job search techniques. 0= counties in which such contracts did not exist. |
| Service Delivery Process (Micro-implementation factors) | |
| Immediate job search | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that had clients immediately search for employment. |
| Job seeking skills | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that provided classroom instruction in resume preparation, application completion, and interviewing techniques |
| Soft skills | Proportion of Work First providers in the county offering classroom instruction in "soft skills" such as dress, punctuality, and rules of the workplace. |
| Problem management skills | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that offered training to improve problem-solving skills and boost self-esteem. |
| Focused job search assistance | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that offered one or more of the following services: a staff position devoted to job development, employers on-site visits or an organized peer group to support job search efforts. |
| No job search assistance | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that provided no job search assistance |
| Workshops | Proportion of Work First providers in the county that offered clients classroom instruction to assist in job search efforts. |

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of Model Variables

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Environmental controls | | |
| Urban | 0.1220 | 0.3292 |
| Unemployment rate | 6.4408 | 2.6416 |
| Manufacturing | 0.1722 | 0.0812 |
| Poverty rate | 14.8573 | 3.9807 |
| High school degree | 0.7494 | 0.0557 |
| Female-headed family | 0.1242 | 0.0269 |
| White | 0.8442 | 0.1829 |
| Service delivery structure | | |
| Project Zero | 0.0488 | 0.2167 |
| Work first providers | 1.4756 | 1.4421 |
| Non-profit agency | 0.7868 | 0.3628 |
| Specialized contractor | 0.0854 | 0.2811 |
| Service Technology | | |
| Immediate job search | 0.2189 | 0.4016 |
| Job seeking skills | 0.7791 | 0.3992 |
| Soft skills | 0.2185 | 0.3845 |
| Problem management skills | 0.4130 | 0.4708 |
| No job search assistance | 0.3224 | 0.4450 |
| Focused job search assistance | 0.5362 | 0.4724 |
| Workshops | 0.7689 | 0.4099 |
| Working recipients | 0.4312 | 0.0783 |

Source: Computed by author.

Table 2. The Effect of Environmental Controls on the Proportion of a County's Welfare Caseload Working

| Environmental Controls | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Urban | -0.0343 (0.0732) |
| Unemployment | -0.0309* (0.0183) |
| Manufacturing | -1.2059*** (0.3757) |
| Poverty | 0.0155 (0.0114) |
| High school degree | 0.6854 (0.7806) |
| Female-headed family | 2.1544* (1.2407) |
| White | 0.9946*** (0.1720) |
| Sample size (n) | 82 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.4767 |

*p < .10; **p < .05; ***p < .01.

Source:

Table 3. The Effect of Macro- and Micro-Implementation Factors on the Proportion of a County's Caseload that is Working^a

| Predictors | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Service Delivery Structure | | | | |
| Project Zero | 0.5602*** (0.1370) | 0.5474*** (0.1387) | 0.5517*** (0.1347) | 0.5604*** (0.1310) |
| Work first providers | -0.0152* (0.0084) | -0.0156* (0.0084) | -0.0194** (0.0085) | -0.0257*** (0.0087) |
| Non-profit agency | -0.0532 (0.0631) | -0.0538 (0.0633) | -0.0217 (0.0642) | -0.0459 (0.0623) |
| Specialized contractor | 0.6036 (0.0593) | 0.0616 (0.0600) | 0.0974 (0.0612) | 0.0831 (0.0590) |
| Service Technology | | | | |
| Immediate job search | | -0.0829 (0.0677) | -0.1343* (0.0697) | |
| No job search assistance | | 0.0062 (0.0721) | | |
| Focused job search assistance | | | -0.1113* (0.0611) | -0.1535** (0.0635) |
| Workshops | | | | 0.1901*** (0.0694) |
| Sample size (n) | 82 | 82 | 82 | 82 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.5825 | 0.5800 | 0.5995 | 0.6197 |

* p < .10; ** p < .05; *** p < .01.

^aThe above models include control variables not shown for environmental factors outside of the control of program implementers.

Source:

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