
CHAPTER VI: WELFARE PARTICIPATION AND RECIDIVISM IN INDIVIDUAL COUNTIES

This chapter examines welfare participation and recidivism patterns in selected counties in North Carolina. The goal is to examine whether certain counties are experiencing higher or lower welfare participation and recidivism rates than other counties. In future reports, we will expand our analyses of county-level longitudinal data to examine the factors underlying the observed variations.

For purposes of the analysis, we have selected seven counties with the largest Work First caseloads, based on July 1999 data. We selected the largest counties because of the need to ensure that we would have adequate sample sizes based on the number of entries and exits in an individual cohort month. However, we also compare the seven counties to “rest of state” to provide some perspective on how the counties compare to smaller counties in North Carolina. The seven counties selected for analysis were County A, County B, County C, County D, County E, County F, and County G.

In addition, we limited our analysis to the June 1997 entry and exit cohorts. These cohorts provide a representative picture of the Work First program while at the same time allowing a sufficient follow-up period for a reliable analysis of welfare participation and recidivism patterns.

A. WELFARE PARTICIPATION RATES

Exhibit VI-1: Welfare Participation At Specific Follow-Up Intervals Among the June 1997 Entry Cohort shows the percentage of welfare recipients who were still on welfare at designated follow-up periods in the seven counties and the rest of North Carolina. The data indicate that **welfare recipients in the seven counties had longer welfare spells than the average for the rest of the state.** For example, in the balance of the state, only 17 percent of families in the entry cohort were still receiving welfare two years after going on assistance, compared to between 20 percent and 27 percent in the seven largest counties.

The data also show that there were variations among the counties in the length of welfare participation. For example, **only about 20 percent of the families in County C and County E counties were still on welfare after 24 months, compared to 25.7 percent in County A and 27.3 percent in County G.**

The percentage of cases that leave welfare within six months is also much lower in the balance of the state than in the seven counties, with the exception of County E County. In the balance of state, only 53.9 percent of the entry cohort were still on welfare after six months, compared to more than 60 percent in County A, County B, County C, and County D, and more than 70 percent in County F and County G.

Exhibit VI-1 WELFARE PARTICIPATION AT SPECIFIC FOLLOW-UP INTERVALS,

**JUNE 1997 ENTRY COHORT, BY COUNTY
(PERCENT OF CASES RECEIVING CASH BENEFITS)**

MONTHS SINCE ENTRY	County A (N= 237)	County B (N=164)	County C (N = 122)	County D (N= 113)	County E (N = 182)	County F (N = 85)	County G (N = 77)	All other (N=2168)
Entry Month	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
6	67.5%	62.2%	66.4%	63.7%	58.8%	75.3%	70.1%	53.9%
12	39.2%	40.2%	50.8%	40.7%	32.4%	51.8%	45.5%	32.6%
18	30.8%	22.6%	31.1%	29.2%	24.7%	25.9%	32.5%	20.8%
24	25.7%	23.8%	20.5%	22.1%	20.3%	21.2%	27.3%	17.0%

B. WELFARE RECIDIVISM IN THE SEVEN COUNTIES

Exhibit VI-2: Welfare Recidivism at Specific Follow-Up Intervals Among the June 1997 Exit Cohort, compares the seven counties and the rest of the state in terms of welfare recidivism among families in the June 1997 exit cohort. As shown in the exhibit, *recidivism is relatively low in County C, County D, and County E counties, and relatively high in County B, County F, and County G counties*. In the last three counties, more than one-quarter of the exiters were back on welfare at six months after exit, compared to between 16 and 19 percent in County C, County D, County E, and the balance of the state. After 24 months, recidivism was more than 17 percent in County B, County F, and County G, compared to only much lower rates in the other large counties and the rest of state.

**Exhibit VI-2
WELFARE RECIDIVISM AT SPECIFIC FOLLOW-UP INTERVALS,
JUNE 1997 EXIT COHORT, BY COUNTY
(PERCENT OF CASES RECEIVING CASH BENEFITS)**

MONTHS SINCE EXIT	County A (N= 517)	County B (N=331)	County C (N = 194)	County D (N= 300)	County E (N = 427)	County F (N =303)	County G (N =215)	All other (N=4949)
Exit Month	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
6	22.1%	25.4%	16.0%	18.7%	17.8%	27.7%	26.5%	17.2%
12	17.4%	25.7%	11.9%	16.7%	14.3%	22.4%	19.5%	13.7%
18	14.1%	19.9%	9.3%	14.3%	12.4%	16.8%	21.4%	10.9%
24	11.4%	17.5%	4.6%	9.7%	11.5%	17.5%	18.1%	8.7%

C. DISCUSSION

The data presented in this chapter suggest that the Work First program is having somewhat less impact in the largest counties than in smaller counties in reducing the welfare caseload and in helping families stay off welfare. There are a number of potential reasons for this situation, such as lower average levels of education and work history among many families in large urban areas when compared to families from other parts of the state. Another potential reason may relate to the way in which Work First has been implemented in some of the larger counties. For example, site visits conducted by MAXIMUS as part of the Work First evaluation have shown that both County A and County B counties have continued to experience difficulties in moving all non-exempt persons in the caseload into employment services. The continued success of the Work First program may involve more in-depth analysis of the dynamics at work in the largest counties, including program operations and employment barriers experienced by Work First recipients.

As part of the evaluation, MAXIMUS is currently conducting surveys of welfare leavers and recidivists in several of the larger counties in North Carolina, including County A, County B, and County C, as well as medium-size counties such as Buncombe and Rowan. The results of these surveys, when combined with the administrative data on the cohorts, will hopefully provide insights into appropriate policy decisions for making Work First as effective as possible in the larger counties in North Carolina.