
CHAPTER VIII: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH WELFARE RECIDIVISM

In this chapter, we examine how case characteristics influenced whether families in the exit cohorts returned to cash assistance after leaving the program. We also examine how case characteristics influenced the number of months in which the cases received cash assistance after the initial program exit.

As in Chapter VII, the following case characteristics are examined in the analysis:

- o prior work experience,
- o the education level of the casehead,
- o the age of the casehead,
- o ethnicity;
- o the number of children in the case, and
- o the type of county in which the family resided.

A. PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE

Exhibit VIII-1: Recidivism by Prior Work Experience, confirms the anomalous finding that we reported in the second administrative data report -- that welfare recidivism was higher among persons who had prior work experience. Among the AFDC exit cohort, 51.8 percent of persons with prior work experience never went back on welfare during the first 36 months after exit, compared to 68.4 percent of persons without a work history. In other words, 48.2 percent of persons with a work history went back on welfare, compared to only 31.6 percent of persons with no work history.

The same finding continues to be true of the September 1996 Work First exit cohort and the two new cohorts. For all three of these exit cohorts, recidivism was higher among persons who had a work history. In addition, persons with no work history received payments for fewer months if they did return. Future data collection activities planned for the evaluation of Work First will explore why this has occurred.

**Exhibit VIII-1
 RECIDIVISM BY PRIOR WORK EXPERIENCE**

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95		WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96	
	Work History	No Work History	Work History	No Work History
0 months	51.8%	68.4%	58.8%	70.1%
1 to 6	15.5%	9.2%	14.2%	9.5%
7 to 12	11.3%	6.9%	10.8%	7.0%
13 to 18	7.4%	4.2%	7.0%	4.5%
19 to 24	6.2%	4.4%	4.4%	3.4%
25 to 30	4.5%	3.0%	3.1%	3.3%
31 to 33	1.6%	1.7%	0.9%	0.9%
34 to 36	1.8%	2.2%	0.9%	1.3%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=4709)	100.0% (N=2508)	100.0% (N=4906)	100.0% (N=2625)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97		WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98	
	Work History	No Work History	Work History	No Work History
0 months	67.9%	76.8%	70.9%	79.2%
1 to 6	16.7%	10.9%	17.6%	10.2%
7 to 12	15.4%	12.2%	11.6%	10.7%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=5004)	100.0% (N=2232)	100.0% (N=4334)	100.0% (N=2015)

B. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF CASEHEAD

Among the cases for which we have data on the education of the casehead, we found that education seemed to be having less of an effect on recidivism among the more recent exit cohorts than among the earlier cohorts. *Exhibit VIII-2: Recidivism by Educational Level of the Casehead*, shows that among the families in the AFDC cohort, those with a casehead who had a high school diploma but no college were the least likely to return to AFDC and received benefits for the fewest months if they did return. For example, 48.3 percent of persons with a high school diploma but no college never returned to welfare, compared to only 34.4 percent of persons without a high school diploma and 37.5 percent of persons with some college education.

**EXHIBIT VIII-2
 RECIDIVISM BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF THE CASEHEAD**

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95			WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96		
	LESS THAN HS	HS DIPLOMA	SOME POST-SECONDARY	LESS THAN HS	HS DIPLOMA	SOME POST-SECONDARY
0 months	34.4%	48.3%	37.5%	44.7%	55.8%	51.9%
1 to 6	12.4%	14.9%	14.9%	14.1%	12.9%	14.7%
7 to 12	13.6%	12.4%	14.7%	13.8%	13.4%	12.9%
13 to 18	11.4%	9.3%	8.3%	11.3%	6.9%	8.6%
19 to 24	11.5%	6.9%	10.5%	6.5%	4.5%	5.5%
25 to 30	8.5%	4.9%	7.1%	5.4%	4.8%	4.5%
31 to 33	3.5%	1.6%	3.3%	2.0%	1.0%	0.8%
34 to 36	4.8%	1.8%	3.6%	2.1%	0.7%	1.1%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=840)	100.0% (N=451)	100.0% (N=960)	100.0% (N=1035)	100.0% (N=419)	100.0% (N=1365)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97			WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98		
	LESS THAN HS	HS DIPLOMA	SOME POST-SECONDARY	LESS THAN HS	HS DIPLOMA	SOME POST-SECONDARY
0 months	56.7%	65.8%	63.1%	63.6%	65.9%	67.9%
1 to 6	19.8%	18.5%	17.8%	18.0%	20.2%	19.9%
7 to 12	23.5%	15.7%	19.1%	18.4%	13.9%	12.3%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=1361)	100.0% (N=433)	100.0% (N=1563)	100.0% (N=1173)	100.0% (N=331)	100.0% (N=1469)

Among the September 1996 Work First exit cohort, there was less of a difference between the sub-groups. About 55.8 percent of persons with a high school diploma but no college never returned to welfare, compared to 44.7 percent of persons without a high school diploma and 51.9 percent of persons with some college. One factor that may have influenced this trend is that post-secondary education was significantly restricted under Work First as an allowable activity. This may mean that persons who have completed some college are less likely to go on welfare with the intent of completing their college educations.

Among the two new exit cohorts, there was much less difference in recidivism rates between persons who had only completed high school and persons with college education. In fact, *among the most recent exit cohort – June 1998 – there was little evidence that education was having a major impact on recidivism.* Persons with college educations were the least like to return to welfare (32.1 percent), compared to 34.1 percent of persons who had only completed high school, and 36.4 percent of persons without high school diplomas. Again, this may reflect the fact that post-secondary education is no longer readily available as an activity under Work First, with the result that returning to welfare may be less attractive for persons who have

attended some college. In the absence of post-secondary education as an allowable activity, recidivism outcomes are beginning to follow expected patterns, with slightly lower recidivism rates among persons with more education.

C. AGE OF CASEHEAD

Exhibit VIII-3: Recidivism by Age of Casehead, shows that, among all four exit cohorts, the older the casehead, the less likely the family was to return to cash assistance, and the fewer total months they received cash benefits. The percentage of families in the AFDC cohort who returned to assistance at some point was 53.5 percent among persons aged 18-21, 46.9 percent for persons aged 22-30, 40.6 percent for persons aged 31-40, and only 28.4 percent for persons aged 41 and older. The higher recidivism rate for younger clients may partly reflect lack of work experience. The very low recidivism rate among persons aged 41 and older may partly be due to children aging out of the caseload among this group.

Among the September 1996 Work First exit cohort, recidivism rates were also higher among the younger age groups. However, compared to the AFDC cohort, recidivism rates were lower among these younger age groups, whereas recidivism was not lower among the 41 and older group.

Among the two new exit cohorts, there continued to be higher recidivism rates among the younger families, although the differences with older families are somewhat less pronounced. The data suggest that Work First has clearly had a major impact in reducing recidivism among the 16-21 year age group.

D. ETHNICITY OF THE CASEHEAD

Exhibit VIII-4: Recidivism by Ethnicity, shows that recidivism was higher among blacks than among whites in all four exit cohorts. Among the AFDC cohort, 37.5 percent of whites returned to welfare at some point, compared to 46.7 percent of blacks. Recidivism was lower for both groups among the September 1996 Work First cohort – 31.8 percent for whites and 41.4 percent for blacks.

Among the June 1997 exit cohort, 38.8 percent of blacks returned to welfare within the first 12 months after exit, compared to only 23.6 percent of whites. Among the June 1998 exit cohort, 30.3 percent of blacks had returned to welfare at some point within one year of leaving, compared to only 20.6 percent of whites. The data for the two new exit cohorts suggest that recidivism rates among blacks may be declining somewhat in comparison to whites, but that there is still a substantial difference between the two groups.

**Exhibit VIII-3
 RECIDIVISM BY AGE OF CASEHEAD**

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95	WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96
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	18 to 21	22 to 30	31 to 40	41 and over	18 to 21	22 to 30	31 to 40	41 and over
0 months	46.5%	53.1%	59.4%	71.6%	52.3%	59.0%	63.6%	70.9%
1 to 6	14.0%	15.3%	14.0%	10.8%	13.9%	14.1%	13.1%	10.0%
7 to 12	11.5%	11.4%	9.4%	6.3%	10.2%	11.0%	10.1%	7.1%
13 to 18	8.5%	6.4%	7.1%	1.9%	8.1%	7.6%	5.6%	4.1%
19 to 24	7.9%	5.8%	5.3%	3.9%	6.3%	4.0%	3.3%	3.3%
25 to 30	6.2%	4.3%	2.7%	2.4%	5.8%	2.7%	2.8%	1.6%
31 to 33	2.3%	1.7%	1.1%	1.1%	1.6%	0.9%	0.7%	1.2%
34 to 36	3.1%	1.9%	1.0%	1.9%	1.7%	0.7%	0.8%	1.8%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=1069)	100.0% (N=2710)	100.0% (N=1744)	100.0% (N=462)	100.0% (N=875)	100.0% (N=2670)	100.0% (N=1798)	100.0% (N=492)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97				WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98			
	18 to 21	22 to 30	31 to 40	41 and over	18 to 21	22 to 30	31 to 40	41 and over
0 months	62.9%	67.7%	72.3%	82.5%	63.0%	69.2%	75.8%	78.6%
1 to 6	16.3%	16.6%	15.6%	9.4%	20.1%	17.5%	15.2%	12.9%
7 to 12	20.8%	15.7%	12.1%	8.1%	16.9%	13.4%	9.0%	8.5%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=1023)	100.0% (N=2755)	100.0% (N=1889)	100.0% (N=446)	100.0% (N=722)	100.0% (N=2066)	100.0% (N=1313)	100.0% (N=341)

Exhibit VIII-4

RECIDIVISM BY ETHNICITY

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95		WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96	
	White	Black	White	Black
0 months	62.5%	53.3%	68.2%	58.6%
1 to 6	14.4%	12.7%	12.6%	12.9%
7 to 12	8.8%	10.7%	8.8%	10.0%
13 to 18	5.5%	7.0%	5.0%	7.0%
19 to 24	4.3%	6.7%	2.7%	4.8%
25 to 30	2.7%	4.9%	1.8%	4.0%
31 to 33	0.9%	2.2%	0.5%	1.2%
34 to 36	0.9%	2.6%	0.4%	1.5%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=2966)	100.0% (N=4103)	100.0% (N=2897)	100.0% (N=4442)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97		WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98	
	White	Black	White	Black
0 months	76.4%	66.2%	79.4%	69.7%
1 to 6	13.9%	16.0%	13.9%	16.5%
7 to 12	9.8%	17.8%	6.7%	13.8%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=2842)	100.0% (N=4232)	100.0% (N=2136)	100.0% (N=3969)

Exhibit VIII-5: Recidivism by Ethnicity at Specific Follow-Up Intervals presents additional data on recidivism by ethnicity, showing the percentage of families who had returned to welfare at various follow-up intervals among the four exit cohorts. The data for the AFDC cohort show that, within two years after leaving welfare, 11.4 percent of whites and 18.5 percent of blacks were back on welfare. After three years, the percentages were 7.0 percent and 13.1 percent, respectively.

Among the September 1996 exit cohort, 8.0 percent of whites and 13.7 percent of blacks were back on welfare after three years. Overall, the rates of recidivism for both groups were lower in the September 1996 cohort than among the AFDC exit cohort.

Data for the two new cohorts indicate that ethnicity continues to be correlated with recidivism rates, although overall recidivism is declining among both whites and blacks. For the June 1997 exit cohort, 13.0 percent of blacks and only 5.7 percent of whites were back on welfare after two years. Among the June 1998 exit cohort, 16.6 percent of blacks and 9.5 percent of whites were back on welfare after one year.

**Exhibit VIII-5
 RECIDIVISM BY ETHNICITY
 (PERCENT OF COHORT RECEIVING CASH BENEFITS IN THE SPECIFIC MONTH)**

MONTHS SINCE EXIT	AFDC COHORT FEB 95		WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96	
	White	Black	White	Black
Exit Month	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
6	17.2%	24.6%	14.3%	20.8%
12	16.4%	22.5%	12.8%	20.3%
18	14.2%	22.3%	10.5%	17.1%
24	11.4%	18.5%	8.0%	13.7%
30	9.2%	15.5%	6.0%	11.9%
33	7.9%	14.8%	4.9%	10.7%
36	7.0%	13.1%	4.3%	8.9%
MONTHS SINCE EXIT	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97		WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98	
	White	Black	White	Black
Exit Month	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
6	13.6%	22.6%	10.9%	18.2%
12	10.8%	18.4%	9.5%	16.6%
18	7.6%	15.5%		
24	5.7%	13.0%		

E. NUMBER OF CHILDREN

Exhibit VIII-6: Recidivism by Number of Children, shows that among the earlier cohorts, families with one child were somewhat less likely than larger families to return to welfare, and received benefits for fewer months if they did return. Among AFDC families, about 41 percent of those with only one child returned to welfare at some point, compared to about 46 percent of larger families. Among the September 1996 exit cohort, only 35.0 percent of families with one child returned to welfare, compared to 39.7 percent of those with two children, and 43.2 percent of those with three or more children.

Among the two more recent exit cohorts, there is less evidence that family size is correlated with recidivism. Among the June 1997 exit cohort, larger families were only slightly more likely to return to welfare than families with one child. Among the June 1998 exit cohort, family size appears to have no relationship to recidivism. In future reports, we will conduct analyses of recidivism by the age of the youngest child, since this has been found to be correlated with recidivism in other studies.

**Exhibit VIII-6
RECIDIVISM BY NUMBER OF CHILDREN**

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95			WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96		
	ONE CHILD	TWO CHILDRE N	THREE OR MORE CHILDRE N	ONE CHILD	TWO CHILDRE N	THREE OR MORE CHILDRE N
0 months	59.1%	54.2%	54.1%	65.0%	60.3%	56.8%
1 to 6	12.6%	15.4%	13.3%	12.2%	14.0%	12.7%
7 to 12	9.2%	10.3%	11.5%	8.6%	10.2%	11.8%
13 to 18	6.4%	6.0%	6.7%	6.0%	6.1%	7.4%
19 to 24	6.1%	5.3%	5.7%	3.7%	4.2%	5.0%
25 to 30	3.4%	4.4%	5.3%	2.8%	3.5%	3.5%
31 to 33	1.5%	2.0%	1.6%	0.9%	0.8%	1.2%
34 to 36	1.8%	2.2%	1.9%	1.0%	0.9%	1.5%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=3649)	100.0% (N=2052)	100.0% (N=1096)	100.0% (N=3847)	100.0% (N=2128)	100.0% (N=1170)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97			WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98		
	ONE CHILD	TWO CHILDRE N	THREE OR MORE CHILDRE N	ONE CHILD	TWO CHILDRE N	THREE OR MORE CHILDRE N
0 months	71.3%	69.2%	68.3%	73.1%	72.7%	72.7%
1 to 6	14.8%	15.0%	16.6%	15.1%	16.5%	15.5%
7 to 12	13.9%	15.9%	15.1%	11.8%	10.8%	11.8%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=3526)	100.0% (N=2159)	100.0% (N=1211)	100.0% (N=3104)	100.0% (N=1887)	100.0% (N=1075)

F. COUNTY TYPE

Exhibit VIII-7: Recidivism by County Type at Time of Exit, shows that the families who resided in rural counties at the time they left AFDC or Work First were somewhat less likely to return to welfare than families living in metropolitan areas (large cities). Among the AFDC cohort, 39.4 percent of rural families returned to welfare at some point, compared to 44.3 percent

of families in metropolitan counties. Among the September 1996 cohort, 33.8 percent of rural families returned to welfare at some point, compared to 40.1 percent of families in metropolitan counties.

For the two new cohorts, the exhibit shows recidivism within the first 12 months after leaving welfare. Among the June 1997 exit cohort, there is less of a difference between rural and metropolitan areas in recidivism. However, the June 1998 exit cohort does show more evidence of a relationship. Among this cohort, 23.8 percent of rural families had returned to welfare during the first year, compared to 30 percent of families in metropolitan areas.

Exhibit VIII-7
RECIDIVISM BY COUNTY TYPE AT TIME OF EXIT

Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 36 Months After Exit	AFDC COHORT FEB 95			WORK FIRST COHORT SEP 96		
	RURAL	URBAN	METRO-POLITAN	RURAL	URBAN	METRO-POLITAN
0 months	60.6%	58.0%	55.7%	66.2%	63.6%	59.9%
1 to 6	12.7%	13.6%	13.2%	11.9%	12.8%	12.5%
7 to 12	9.2%	9.4%	10.4%	8.3%	9.4%	10.1%
13 to 18	5.9%	6.3%	6.4%	6.1%	5.4%	7.0%
19 to 24	5.5%	5.2%	6.1%	3.7%	3.8%	4.5%
25 to 30	3.3%	3.9%	4.3%	2.4%	3.1%	3.6%
31 to 33	1.0%	1.7%	1.9%	0.6%	0.8%	1.2%
34 to 36	1.9%	1.9%	1.9%	0.9%	1.1%	1.2%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=1128)	100.0% (N=3353)	100.0% (N=2736)	100.0% (N=1356)	100.0% (N=3529)	100.0% (N=2646)
Number of Months Receiving Benefits Out of First 12 Months After Exit	WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 97			WORK FIRST COHORT JUN 98		
	RURAL	URBAN	METRO-POLITAN	RURAL	URBAN	METRO-POLITAN
0 months	71.6%	71.6%	69.2%	76.2%	75.4%	70.0%
1 to 6	14.8%	15.3%	14.5%	13.7%	15.0%	16.2%
7 to 12	13.7%	13.1%	16.3%	10.2%	9.5%	13.8%
TOTAL	100.0% (N=1227)	100.0% (N=3287)	100.0% (N=2722)	100.0% (N=1091)	100.0% (N=2839)	100.0% (N=2419)