

CHAPTER VII: WELFARE RECIDIVISM AMONG THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

This chapter presents findings on welfare recidivism (return to welfare) among survey respondents, combining data from administrative records with data from the surveys. Approximately 20 percent of the respondents were back on welfare at the time of the surveys. However, in analyzing recidivism, we excluded the 74 respondents who were back on Work First but who had left welfare for only *one month* between December 1998 and April 1999. The recidivism analysis, therefore, is focused only on those respondents who were off welfare for two or more consecutive months between December 1998 and April 1999. Under this approach, the recidivism rate is somewhat lower – 17.3 percent. The following topics are analyzed in this chapter:

- number and characteristics of respondents who had returned to Work First;
- recidivism patterns by reasons for leaving Work First; and
- comparison of actual recidivism with the perceived likelihood of going back on welfare.

A. NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAD RETURNED TO WORK FIRST

This section presents data on respondents who had returned to Work First at the time of the surveys in the six counties. The key findings in this section are as follows:

- As shown in Exhibit VII-1, the percentage of respondents who had returned to welfare at the time of the survey was highest in County A (20.8%), County E (19.9 percent), and County B (18.0%), and was relatively low in County C (12.5 percent) and County F (12.3 percent).

EXHIBIT VII-1 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO WERE BACK ON WELFARE IN THE MONTH WHEN SURVEYED, BY COUNTY

County A	County B	County C	County D	County E	County F	Total
20.8%	18.0%	12.5%	15.9%	19.9%	12.3%	17.3%

Recidivism by Respondent Characteristics

- The data in Exhibit VII-2 indicate that certain groups of respondents were more likely to be back on welfare than others.
- Recidivism was somewhat higher among females than among males.
- Recidivism was about twice as high among blacks as among whites.
- Recidivism was twice as high among 18-24 year olds as among persons aged 40 and over.
- Recidivism was much higher among persons who had not completed high school than among persons who had attended college.
- Recidivism was lower among persons with other adults in the household. These respondents may have had greater access to the resources of family members than respondents living with no other adults.
- Recidivism was slightly higher among families with two or more children than among smaller families.
- Recidivism was slightly lower among persons who first began receiving welfare in North Carolina after 1996.

B. RECIDIVISM BY REASONS WHY RESPONDENTS LEFT WORK FIRST

This section examines recidivism patterns in terms of the respondents' self-reported reasons for leaving welfare. The findings in this section are as follows:

- Exhibit VII-3 presents data on the reasons for leaving welfare among the recidivists and the respondents still off welfare when surveyed.
- The data show that the most common reason for leaving welfare for both groups was finding a job or returning to work (59.2 percent of those who were off welfare when surveyed and 63.0 percent of those who were back on welfare).
- Recidivists were somewhat more likely to have left welfare for not following rules (15.9 percent compared to only 12 percent of those who were still off welfare).
- Surprisingly, persons who indicated that they had left Work First because they did not want to be on welfare any more accounted for almost the same percentage of recidivists (7.4 percent) as persons still off welfare (8.8 percent)

EXHIBIT VII-2 PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAD RETURNED TO WELFARE, BY SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS

Characteristic	Percent
<i>Gender</i>	
Female	17.4%
Male	10.2%
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
Black	20.2%
White	10.7%
Other	16.4%
<i>Age</i>	
18-24	20.6%
25-29	17.7%
30-34	15.1%
35-39	18.1%
40 +	10.8%
<i>Education</i>	
Did not complete high school or GED	22.2%
Completed high school or GED only	15.8%
Attended college	13.5%
<i>Presence of Other Adults</i>	
No other adults	20.8%
One or more other adults	12.5%
<i>Number of Children</i>	
0-1	14.7%
2 or more	18.7%
<i>Age of Youngest Child</i>	
0-5	19.5%
6-12	14.3%
13+	16.7%
<i>Year First Received Welfare in NC</i>	
Pre-1990	17.6%
1990-1992	19.1%
1993-1995	19.1%
1996-1999	15.6%

**EXHIBIT VII-3
WELFARE STATUS WHEN SURVEYED, BY SELF-REPORTED
REASONS FOR LEAVING WORK FIRST**

	Percent of those still off Work	Percent of those back on Work

Self-Reported Reason for Leaving Work First	First	First
Found a job/returned to work	59.2%	63.1%
Did not follow rules/couldn't meet work requirements	12.0%	15.9%
Did not want to be on welfare or use up benefits	8.8%	7.4%
Change in household situation or make-up	5.1%	2.9%
Increase in assets or income	4.8%	4.2%
Got a higher paying job/more hours	4.4%	1.9%
Issues with the program or case worker	2.2%	1.3%
Moved out of state	1.6%	2.6%

- Exhibit VII-4 shows the actual recidivism rates by the major reasons for leaving Work First. The data indicate that recidivism rates were highest among persons who left welfare to move out of state and among persons who left because of problems following program rules. Recidivism rates were lowest among persons who left due to a change in household composition and persons who left to get a higher paying job or more work hours.
- Those who left welfare due to getting a job or going back to work were more likely to have returned (18.4 percent) than those who left due to changes in household composition. (10.7 percent). This finding is consistent with other research which shows that persons who leave welfare for a job have a higher risk of returning to welfare (due to job instability) than persons who leave welfare for such reasons as changes in marital status or household composition.

**EXHIBIT VII-4
PERCENTAGE BACK ON WORK FIRST, BY SELF-REPORTED
REASON FOR LEAVING WELFARE**

Self-Reported Reason for Leaving Work First	Percent Back on Work First
Moved out of state	25.8%
Did not follow rules/couldn't meet work requirements	21.7%
Found a job/returned to work	18.3%
Increase in assets or income	15.5%
Did not want to be on welfare or use up benefits	15.1%
Change in household situation or make-up	10.7%
Got a higher paying job/more hours	8.5%

- For the recidivists, Exhibit VII-5 shows the reasons for leaving welfare, by county. The results show some variation among the counties in reasons for leaving welfare.
- In County C, only 47.5 percent of the recidivists had left welfare to take a job, compared to 71.8 percent in County E.

- In County B, 23.5 percent of those who were back on welfare had left because they were sanctioned or failed to meet work requirements. Thirteen percent of those who were back on welfare in County C left because they did not want to be on welfare or use up their benefits.

**EXHIBIT VII-5
SELF-REPORTED REASONS FOR LEAVING WELFARE AMONG
RECIDIVISTS, BY COUNTY**

Reason	County A	County B	County C	County D	County E	County F*
Found a job/returned to work	65.8%	63.2%	47.5%	57.4%	71.8%	70.0%
Did not follow rules/couldn't meet work requirements	12.3%	23.5%	15.0%	19.1%	11.3%	10.0%
Did not want to be on welfare or use up benefits	8.2%	8.8%	12.5%	4.3%	4.2%	10.0%
Change in household situation or make-up	5.5%	0.0%	2.5%	2.1%	1.4%	20.0%
Increase in assets or income	6.8%	2.9%	5.0%	2.1%	4.2%	0.0%
Got a higher paying job/more hours	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	4.3%	2.8%	0.0%
Moved out of state	1.4%	2.9%	7.5%	2.1%	1.4%	0.0%

*Based on the responses of 10 individuals who had returned to welfare.

C. ACTUAL RECIDIVISM IN COMPARISON TO THE PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD OF RETURNING TO WELFARE

- In Chapter V, we presented data on respondents' perceived likelihood of returning to welfare in the six months following the survey. For those respondents who were interviewed before October 1999, we were able to examine administrative data for the six-month period after the interview to determine whether they actually went back on welfare.
- Exhibit VII-6 compares the respondents' perceived likelihood of returning to welfare (based on the survey responses) to their actual rate of recidivism in the six months after being interviewed. Data are presented only for respondents who were not already back on welfare at the time of the surveys.
- The data indicate that only 35 percent of those who thought it *very likely* they would reapply in the next six months actually went back on welfare in the six-month period after being interviewed.
- Only 19.4 percent of those who thought it *somewhat likely* they would reapply in the next six months actually went back on welfare during the six-month period.
- On the other hand, 16.4 percent of those who thought it *somewhat unlikely* they would reapply did go back on welfare.

- In addition, 13.1 percent of those who thought it *very unlikely* they would reapply went back on welfare.
- It is possible that some of the respondents who thought it unlikely they would reapply encountered unexpected circumstances after being interviewed, such as job loss.

EXHIBIT VII-6
ACTUAL RECIDIVISM IN THE SIX MONTHS AFTER THE SURVEY, BY
PERCEIVED LIKELIHOOD OF REAPPLYING

Actual Recidivism in Six Months After the Survey	Perceived Likelihood of Reapplying for Welfare in Next Six Months					Total
	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not Sure	Somewhat Unlikely	Very Unlikely	
Went back on Welfare	35.0%	19.4%	18.5%	16.4%	13.1%	17.2%
Did not go back on welfare	65.0%	80.6%	81.5%	83.6%	86.9%	82.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%