Chapter 1 Introduction

Dramatic declines in the numbers of welfare recipients have followed the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, known as “welfare reform.” In Oregon, where reforms were implemented even earlier, welfare roles dropped by 45 percent between 1996 and 1999. What has happened to the families who left the roles? How are the clients who leave or are diverted from Oregon’s TANF program or who leave the Food Stamp program faring economically? How are their families doing? Have these families achieved self-sufficiency?

The Center for the Study of Women in Society (CSWS) Welfare Research Team at the University of Oregon presents in this report the findings from our study of the economic and family well-being of Oregon families who left Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or the Food Stamp program in early 1998. These families were followed for two years. This study consists of two parts, telephone survey interviews with a statewide random sample of program leavers at two points in time, and in-depth, in-person interviews with a sub-sample of the survey sample. The telephone survey was carried out by the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) of the University of Oregon under contract with CSWS. Administrative data from Adult and Family Services and the Oregon Department of Employment are also part of this report.

This study provides for Oregon answers to questions raised throughout the US about the consequences of the “end of welfare as we know it.”

In this report we answer the following questions:

- Chapter 2-What is the economic and employment status of respondents?
- Chapter 3-Are there differences between men and women in employment and family well-being?
- Chapter 4-What are the situations of those not employed?
- Chapter 5-What are the supports and barriers to getting and keeping a job?
- Chapter 6-How do these families cope with low wages and poverty?
- Chapter 7-How do they see their family well-being?
- Chapter 8-What suggestions do the respondents make for improving services and supports?

Study Design and Methods

Study Design

The study includes two groups of families related to TANF. The first group had received TANF and then left the program. The second group started the application process, but left before qualifying for TANF; they were “diverted.” Families who left the Food Stamp program are included as a comparison group because they represent a low-income population also receiving assistance. (See box, page 3)
The study follows these TANF leavers and diverted and Food Stamp leavers over a two-year period as follows: (Appendix A, Table A.1)

- Case closure - left programs in January, February, or March 1998
- First survey interview - March-June 1999 (n=970)
- First in-depth interview - July-September 1999 (n=78)
- Second survey interview - October-December 1999 (n=756)
- Second in-depth interview - April-June 2000 (n=65)

Sample

A Statewide random sample was drawn by the Oregon Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Oregon from the complete listing of TANF leavers and diverted and Food Stamp leavers who left the programs in the first three months of 1998. Adult and Family Services of the State of Oregon provided this list.

Of this sample:

- 970 respondents completed the first telephone survey (28% of sample)
- 756 of this group completed the second telephone survey (78% of original respondents) (See box on page 4)

A quota sample of 78 from the original 970 respondents was drawn for in-depth interviews. The sample was chosen based on race, gender, geographic location, family structure, number and age of children and age of respondent. Sixty-five of these respondents were located for a second in-depth interview.

An analysis of possible sample bias shows that non-respondents and respondents are generally similar on earnings history and most demographic characteristic data provided by Adult and Family Services and the Oregon Department of Employment. (See Appendix C)

Data

Two telephone interview surveys were developed by researchers from CSWS, AFS and OSRL. Telephone interviews were done by OSRL and the first telephone survey included 275 questions and averaged 31 minutes in length. The second telephone survey included 225 questions and averaged 25 minutes in length. Appendix B gives detailed information about methods used to maximize the rigor of the study, including efforts to ensure that the sample was representative of the universe of TANF/Food Stamp leavers, to ensure the confidentiality of respondents identities, the quality of interviewers and the reliability and validity of the data.

In-depth interview schedules were developed by the CSWS Welfare Research Team. These interviews were semi-structured to explore individual experience. Interviews were conducted in the homes of respondents or, in a few cases, in locations such as parks or restaurants. Interviews lasted from one hour to six hours.
Administrative Record Data were collected by Adult and Family Services staff. The data files included: AFS services and payments given to each respondent between February 1998 and October 1999, household composition with ages, race, gender of each member, date of establishment of paternity and amount of ordered child support for each child, wages earned by quarter along with hourly rate, hours worked and number of employers in each quarter for head of household as well as other household members (wage data from the Oregon Department of Employment). These data covered the period of January, February, or March 1998 to September or October of 1999 (depending on the particular source of data).

Data from each phase of the study were merged and analyzed together to form the basis of this report. (Appendix A, Table A.1)

Definitions of Sample Groups

TANF leavers are respondents/families who were receiving TANF and left the cash assistance program in either January, February, or March 1998 and did not go back on TANF for at least two months afterwards.

The TANF diverted sample included two kinds of cases. The first were all those TANF cases that were denied in January, February or March 1998 and were not opened in a TANF cash pay status during the two consecutive months following the month of denial. The second were those cases in the TANF Assessment program with a Assessment end date during the months of January, February or March 1998 that did not open in TANF cash pay status during the two months following the month in which the assessment period ended.

Food Stamp leavers are respondents/families who were previously receiving Food Stamps but left that program during January, February or March 1998 and did not receive Food Stamps for at least two months following case closure. Each respondent identified the “Head of Household” when contacting the agency for assistance. This individual was interviewed for this study.

Individuals who came to AFS for help but did not receive any type of service (no TANF group or individual intake, no payments of any kind) are not included in this sample. It is important to note that Able Bodied Adults Without Families (ABAWDs) were not included in the Food Stamp leaver sample of this study for two reasons. When we began this study, AFS was engaged in its own study of ABAWDs and we wanted to have some comparability with TANF respondents, all of whom included (or had before the first quarter of 1998) included children.
Locating the Sample

Like all TANF leaver studies of survey data to date, we were unable to reach every respondent randomly sampled from the universe of all clients who left or were diverted from public assistance in the first quarter of 1998. This is a highly mobile population, some with no phones or frequently disconnected phones and many with frequently changing addresses. To reach a representative sample we used aggressive methods. We sent hand addressed pre-contact letters on University of Oregon stationery with standard adhesive postage Stamps rather than bulk mail Stamps. We hand-signed every letter which included information about the $25.00 payment each respondent would receive for his/her participation and the phone number we planned to use to reach the respondent. When letters were returned from the postal service, we contacted AFS to provide us with more current addresses. The letters included a toll-free number to be used for correcting phone numbers or giving us good times to reach the respondent. They also included a stamped self-addressed postcard for the same purpose. Approximately 100 respondents used the toll-free number and more sent back postcards. Some did both. As many as 99 attempts were made to reach some respondents in the first survey and up to 50 attempts were made for the second survey.

We have produced two reports that should be read together. This report answers a series of questions that were collaboratively developed by the CSWS Welfare Research Team and AFS and delineated in the contract for the study. The report uses the best data available from the telephone surveys, administrative records, and/or the in-depth interviews. This report uses primarily telephone survey data, although interview data is used to provide more depth than is available only from telephone survey data for certain questions and is the only source of data for a few questions. Administrative data are also used.

The companion report to this one presents short (two page) profiles of each of the 78 families we interviewed in the in-depth study. It also uses analysis of the voices and concerns of the women and men we interviewed to address some key questions about how these families are doing and how they think the following programs might be changed to better serve their families: Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF); Food Stamps; Employment Related Day Care (ERDC), the Oregon State daycare subsidy for low-income families; Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS), an employment program for TANF clients; and the Oregon Health Plan (OHP), a medical assistance plan for low income families and individuals. All respondent names and other identifying information have been changed to guarantee confidentiality.
Who is in the Sample?

Demographic characteristics

Age:
At the time of the first telephone survey the average age of respondents was 32.5 years. One-quarter of respondents were 25 or younger, about one-fifth were 26-30, one-third were 31-40, and one-fifth were over 40. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

Gender of head of household:
Eighty-six percent of respondents were women and 13 percent were men. The gender of respondents varied somewhat by category of leavers. Ninety-three percent of TANF leavers were women as were 79 percent of the TANF diverted and 86 percent of Food Stamp leavers. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

Race:
Eighty-two percent of respondents were white, 7 percent were Hispanic, 4 percent were African-American, 3 percent were American Indian, 2 percent were mixed race and 1 percent were Asian-American. The racial composition of the leaver groups differed in several ways. Hispanics were only 5 percent of the TANF sample, but were 10 percent of the Food Stamp sample. On the other hand, African-Americans constituted 7 percent of the TANF leavers, 5 percent of the TANF diverted and 3 percent of the Food Stamp sample. Whites were 85 percent of the TANF diverted sample, 82 percent of the TANF leavers and 80 percent of Food Stamp leavers. American Indians were 4 percent of TANF leavers, 3 percent of Food Stamp leavers and one percent of the TANF diverted. There were small differences in the racial composition of the sample at the second contact. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

Household Type:
The vast majority of the sample lived in one-parent households, ranging from 81 percent of TANF leavers to 67 percent of the TANF diverted and 62 percent of Food Stamp leavers. The mean household size was 3.6 people while the median household size was 3.0. At the second telephone contact the percentage living in one-parent families had declined slightly in all groups to 80 percent of TANF leavers, 64 percent of the TANF diverted and 60 percent of Food Stamp leavers. The mean and median family sized remained the same. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

Marital Status:
At the time of the first telephone survey thirty-percent of the respondents were married, 30 percent were divorced and another ten percent were separated. One-quarter had never married, and about 1 percent each were cohabiting or widowed. At the second contact about one-third were married and another one-third divorced. Eight percent were separated and 24 percent were never married. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)
Education:

At the first contact about 20 percent of the sample had less than a high school degree or GED, 40 percent had only a high school degree or GED, about 30 percent had some college and less than 10 percent had an associate’s or bachelor’s degree or more. By the second contact we had lost a small percentage of those respondents with less than a high school degree so that the overall sample was slightly better educated. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

The demographic characteristics of a sample of those who left or were diverted from TANF and Food Stamps may differ somewhat from the demographics of the AFS caseload. This is because it may be that those who leave the programs differ in some ways from those who have not left. For example, there is a higher percentage of two adult households in a leaver sample than a current caseload sample because two-adult households may have the advantage of an additional full-or part-time income, or there may be a higher proportion of men in the leaver sample than in a current caseload sample. (Appendix A, Tables A.2 and A.3)

Conclusion:

When we conceived this study we initially thought that the study of TANF leavers and diverted and of Food Stamp leavers would show quite different findings. This is because the TANF and Food Stamp programs serve somewhat different populations. In fact one of the findings of this study is that TANF leavers and TANF diverted and Food Stamp leavers are not so different. In many of the questions below we present the data on the two populations separately for comparative purposes. Sometimes we further break down the TANF sample into TANF leavers and TANF diverted to show some of the differences between these families.

For many questions below we use telephone survey data on the 756 families who participated in both surveys. This is because the study’s purpose was to follow families over time and we had much less information on the 213 families who we reached only once. We do include information about the full 970 in the first telephone survey for many questions where following people over time is less the point of the question.