

Comparing Welfare and Child Welfare Populations in Milwaukee

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Evaluation of the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare

- "Safety Services" provided when a state investigator identifies safety risks to a child, but not enough to warrant immediate placement.
- 480 families drawn from each of the Bureau's five service sites between November 2000 and November 2001.
- Assessments by case managers (90.2% response) and telephone or in-person interviews w/ primary caregivers (67.5% response).
- One randomly selected "target child" per family
- Case manager surveys focus on perceived child and family needs and provision of services. Caregiver surveys have a greater focus on more in-depth assessment of caregiver and child problems.

Milwaukee TANF Applicant Study

- 1,075 parent applicants (98% response) for TANF at one of six sites in Milwaukee County during March through July 1999.
- Three interview waves at approximately 18-month intervals
- Surveys cover background and experiences of parent (e.g., education, employment, program participation, earnings, health, mental health), information about a focal child (e.g., development, behavior, child care, school performance), and additional information about other household members.
- Linked administrative data on earnings (unemployment insurance data), public assistance, and child welfare services involvement.

Why Milwaukee and Why Now?

- Wisconsin Works (W-2) is high-profile model of welfare reform
- Wisconsin's caseload decline preceded that of most other states and has been more significant than in most other states
- Unique opportunity to compare two groups of low-income help-seeking parents/caregivers in one urban area
- Parents studied at the time they either sought (in the case of W-2) or were referred to (in the case of Safety Services) government-supported family support services, albeit services with distinctly different foci
- We assessed the characteristics of the two populations at roughly the same time
- Service systems were well along in terms of implementation

**Table 5:
Parenting Stress Reported by Parents in W-2 and
Safety Services Study Samples**

Parenting Concern	% Safety Services Parents (n = 324)	% of W-2 Parents (n = 1,075)
Parent feels they are giving up own life to meet child's needs	26.2	36.6
Parent feels trapped by their responsibilities as a parent	23.8	19.8
Parent feels that taking care of their child is more work than pleasure	24.4	19.1
Parent really bothered by things their child does	29.9	20.0
Parent loses patience with their child	13.3	9.1
Parent feels angry with their child	10.8	6.0
Parent feels their child has been quite a bit or a great deal of trouble to raise	22.6	8.9
Parent feels child is harder to care for than most other children	22.2	12.0

Summary of Findings: Differences Between

Groups

- Some psychosocial problems appear more common among recipients of Safety Services than among applicants for TANF
- Children in the families receiving Safety Services may be more troubled than those in the W-2 applicant families

**Table 6: Service Needs Identified by Safety
Services Recipients at Intake (n = 324)**

Need identified	Number	Percentage
Help with transportation	177	54.6
Help applying for financial assistance or income support	163	50.3
Help with basic food or clothing needs	157	48.5
Housing services, such as home repair/maintenance	154	47.5
Counseling (any reason)	152	46.9
Help finding a place to live	149	46.0
Parenting classes	144	44.4
Help with finding and maintaining employment	142	43.8
Day care services	116	35.8
Home management skills	109	33.6
Respite care	80	24.7
Medications for emotional/mental health reasons	81	25.0
Substance abuse treatment	27	8.3
Psychiatric hospitalization	18	5.6

Summary of Findings: Similarities Between Groups

- Caregivers need to find employment to support their families yet face significant human capital deficits
- The level of poverty and the economic hardships that go along with it attest to the difficulty the parents in both groups are having succeeding in the labor market
- Many parents in both groups experience psychosocial and health problems that might affect their ability to hold down a job or parent effectively
- Many of their children are having problems in school and exhibit other behavioral problems
- Many of these parents report significant stress associated with parenting

The Most Important Similarity: Child Welfare Services

Involvement

- 63.8 percent of our sample had been investigated for alleged maltreatment by child welfare authorities in Milwaukee between 1989 and 2003
- Over one-quarter (38.2 percent) had been investigated since they had applied for W-2; 59.8 percent of those with prior investigations
- 16.4 percent had one or more children placed in out-of-home since applying for W-2
- These rates are much higher than pre-TANF rates reported in Milwaukee and other states
- Our data suggest that these higher rates result largely from changes in the characteristics of the entering population