Perceived Barriers to Labor Force Participation Among Welfare Recipients in West Virginia

Melissa Latimer
West Virginia University

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/jrss

Part of the Rural Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for Population Studies at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Rural Social Sciences by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
PERCEIVED BARRIERS TO LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION AMONG WELFARE RECIPIENTS IN WEST VIRGINIA

By Melissa Latimer

ABSTRACT

This research utilizes data collected by the Children's Policy Institute (CPI) of West Virginia in 1993 to identify perceived barriers to labor force participation for families with children receiving AFDC and/or Food Stamps. By merging data on West Virginia from several county-level data sources with the CPI data, this multi-level research identifies the major barriers West Virginia welfare recipients perceive as limiting their labor force participation (i.e., as explaining their current unemployment status). This research also examines how the barriers identified vary among welfare recipients.

INTRODUCTION

One major change in the study of the welfare system within the past 5 years has been a shift in focus from national data to state-specific or regional data. This change documents a growing awareness among sociologists that the historical formation of individual states and their policies (i.e., degree and timing of urbanization, capitalist economic development, class struggles between capitalists and workers, previous policy accomplishments, etc.) as well as the state's institutional structures (Weir, Orloff, & Skocpol, 1988) are key to understanding the multitude of factors affecting the experiences of welfare recipients.

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 1997 Rural Sociological Society Meetings, August 12-17, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The author wishes to thank Ann Tickamyer, Carson Mencken, and three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful review of this article.

2 Melissa Latimer is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at West Virginia University.
This shift in focus also reflects the ongoing change created by the new 1996 welfare law. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act not only passes on increased costs and responsibility to states, but also sets individual and state work participation requirements for welfare recipients. For example, 25 percent of all families receiving welfare benefits in 1997 and 50 percent of all families in 2002 must be in a recognized work related activity. The participation rate for two-parent families is even more demanding (i.e., 75 percent in 1997 and 90 percent in 1999). States that are unable to meet these employment standards lose 5 percent of their state block grant in the first year and an additional 2 percent for each consecutive failure. The financial penalty is capped at 21 percent (Department of Health and Human Services).

This research utilizes data collected in 1993 to determine perceived barriers to labor force participation that AFDC and Food Stamp recipients identify in West Virginia. West Virginia is an important case study for several reasons. First, West Virginia is primarily a rural state, with 64 percent of the total population living in rural areas. Second, West Virginia has one of the highest unemployment rates (11.5 percent in 1993) and individual poverty rates (i.e., 21 percent of women and 18 percent of men in 1990) in the U.S.

In addition, West Virginia had the highest percentage of two-parent families receiving AFDC in the nation in 1993. Twenty percent of all West Virginians receiving AFDC were AFDC-UP families (i.e., both parents are present but unemployed) (CPI, 1995). Given these statistics, it should not be surprising that a recent report from the Appalachian Region Commission (ARC) predicted that the majority of counties in West Virginia (compared to other counties in the Appalachian Region) will face the greatest problems in placing AFDC recipients in jobs (Bischak, 1997).

And finally, West Virginia is one of 14 states which has not collected any data to assess the impact of welfare reform on recipients in the state. In fact, this project utilizes the only existing data on West

---

3 The following activities are recognized as work related activities: unsubsidized employment, subsidized private sector employment, subsidized public sector employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, community service, vocational educational training, jobs skills training, education related to employment, high school or GED completion, or providing child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service project.
Virginia welfare recipients and thus it provides a benchmark for comparisons with future post-reform findings.

By merging individual- and household-level data on welfare recipients with West Virginia county-level data, this multi-level research identifies the major barriers West Virginia welfare recipients perceive as limiting their labor force participation (i.e., as explaining their current unemployment status). This research also examines how the barriers identified vary among welfare recipients. In other words, it asks whether there are differences in perceived barriers due to gender, human capital accumulation, household structure and composition, or the county in which recipients live. Identifying state specific barriers to labor force participation is critical for workers, given the connection between self-esteem, employment, and quality of life. This information is also important for the state itself, given the current economic sanctions for failure to increase the number of AFDC/TANF recipients in employment or employment related activities.

**FACTORS AFFECTING LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION**

A number of studies have identified factors that affect labor force participation. These variables should likewise affect the labor force participation of welfare recipients. The factors consistently cited fall into the following three categories: (1) human capital variables, (2) household structure and composition variables, and (3) labor market variables.

**Measures of Human Capital**

Human capital explanations attribute poverty and welfare recipiency to a lack of training, education, experience, and skills (i.e., human capital). Individuals who accumulate the most human capital "are in greater demand and hence enjoy brighter job prospects" (Rank, 1994, p. 27). Thus, as individuals' human capital varies, so do their opportunities for employment. Human capital investments should likewise affect barriers to employment. Two variables used frequently to measure human capital effects are age and education.

Age has been used consistently as a proxy for experience and productivity. Overall, researchers have found that younger individuals
occupy a weaker position within the occupational structure and thus are more susceptible to poverty (Lichter, 1989; McLaughlin & Sachs, 1988). This research also shows that in general, labor force participation rates tend to decrease as individuals get older (Bokemeier et al., 1983; Deseran, Li, & Wojtkiewicz, 1993). Based on this literature, I expect to find significant differences in the perceived barriers to labor force participation for younger and older welfare recipients in West Virginia.

The average number of years of schooling completed by individuals has also been used in past research to measure the effects of human capital on inequality. Researchers have found that increases in average educational levels significantly (1) decrease the probability of being poor (McLaughlin & Sachs, 1988; Tickamyer & Latimer, 1993) and (2) increase both women’s and men’s labor force participation rates (Bokemeier et al., 1983; Deseran et al., 1993; Tickamyer & Latimer 1993). Thus, I expect welfare recipients with lower educational attainment to identify different barriers to labor force participation than welfare recipients with higher educational attainment.

Measures of Household Structure and Composition

Tickamyer and Bokemeier (1993) argue that households, like labor markets, "are dynamic forms of social relations characterized by changing compositions, shifting patterns of power, motivation, and resources" that operate "within temporal and spatial constraints" (p. 56). Households are significant in understanding labor force participation and inequality because "benefits (and liabilities) from the larger social organization of the economy are redistributed to individuals at the household level" (Deseran et al., 1993, p.166). Two variables used frequently to measure household effects are marital status as an indicator of household structure and number of children/size of household as an indicator of household composition.

In terms of marital status and labor force participation, researchers have found that married women are less likely to work than single women (Bokemeier et al., 1983; Deseran et al., 1993) but that married men are more likely to participate in the labor force (regardless of race and ethnicity) than single men (Tienda & Wilson, 1992). Thus, I expect single welfare recipients to identify different barriers to labor force participation than married workers.
Some researchers have found that overall, as the number of children increases, the probability of women entering or staying in the labor force decreases (Bokemeier & Tickamyer, 1985; Deseran et al., 1993). Studies also show that women (especially single women) with older children are more likely to be in the labor force than women with younger children (Deseran et al., 1993; Parish, Hao, & Hogan, 1991). I expect welfare recipients in smaller households to identify different barriers to their labor force participation than welfare recipients in larger households.

Measures of Labor Market Characteristics

A number of variables have been used to measure the impact of labor market characteristics on workers' labor force participation. These variables can be broken down into at least two categories: (1) measures of the economic viability of the labor market and (2) measures of the economic base. Sustenance diversity (i.e., diversity of an area's industry structure) is one way of measuring the economic viability of a labor market. Mencken (1997) states that "social systems with more diverse industry structures perform better during economic cycles than social systems that are over-concentrated in a few industry sectors" (p. 82). Thus, welfare recipients living in labor markets with greater diversity in their industry structure should identify different barriers to labor force participation than welfare recipients in labor markets with low sustenance diversity.

A variety of variables have also been used to measure the impact of the economic base of an area on workers' labor force participation. Two variables that are particularly relevant for an Appalachian state are the average federal funding and the total earnings in mining in an area. Mencken (1997) argues that "disparities in federal spending can create regional variations in employment growth" (p. 84). Thus, welfare recipients in areas with higher average federal funding should identify different barriers to labor force participation than welfare recipients in areas with lower average federal funding.

---

*West Virginia is an Appalachian state and the ARC allocates federal monies to Appalachian communities.*
Rural areas are the primary location for resource extraction industries. Resource extraction industries such as coal mining tend to be highly volatile, unstable, capital intensive, and dominated by white males. In addition, these industries dominate the areas in which they are located and thus limit other employment opportunities for workers (Tickamyer & Tickamyer, 1988). Thus, welfare recipients living in labor markets with high mining earnings should identify different barriers to labor force participation than welfare recipients in labor markets with low mining earnings.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Data

Data for this research come from a survey of Department of Health and Human Resources aid recipients conducted by the Children's Policy Institute (CPI) of West Virginia in 1993. The CPI defines itself as a nonpartisan research, education, and advocacy group for children in West Virginia. The CPI mailed out 1,699 surveys to randomly selected poor West Virginia families with children who were receiving both AFDC and Food Stamps or Food Stamps only. The experiences of the elderly poor, poor single individuals, poor couples without children, and poor families with children that do not receive AFDC or Food Stamps are not captured with this survey (CPI, 1995). Also, race/ethnicity was not asked on the survey. About 91 percent of individuals receiving assistance in West Virginia are white. Of the initial 1,699 surveys, the majority (930) were sent to families receiving AFDC and Food Stamps. Thirty-three percent of these families filled out and returned these surveys. The remaining 769 surveys were sent to families receiving Food Stamps only. There was a 29 percent response rate for the Food Stamp-only families. There are 293 (57 percent of the total respondents) AFDC/FS respondents and 221 (43 percent) Food Stamp-only respondents. A total of 514 surveys were returned for an overall response rate of 30.2 percent. This 30 percent response rate is actually quite high for welfare recipients, given that there was only one mailing (i.e., no follow-up), the booklet was 35 pages long with 170 numbered questions, and respondents had to

---

3 The author was not involved in any part of the data collection process.
provide their name and address on their returned survey to be compensated with a $5 "gift."

Respondents from this original sample of 514 that were currently employed (approximately 22 percent of the sample) were eliminated from the sample in order to focus on unemployed welfare recipients. The West Virginia county-level data from the census were merged with the CPI data so that measures of the labor market could be included in the models. This simultaneous focus on individual, household, and labor market characteristics reflects the multidimensional framework endorsed by the Rural Sociological Society Task Force (1993) and other recent works by rural sociologists (Brown & Hirschl, 1995; Cready & Saenz, 1997; McLaughlin & Jensen, 1995; Simons, Johnson, Conger, & Lorenz, 1997). These changes plus controls placed on the dependent variables limited my final sample to 358 respondents.

A comparison with other state statistics on welfare recipients indicates that the sample is somewhat representative of the state welfare population. For example, Hannah (1995) found that the average welfare recipient in West Virginia was a 30-year-old white female with two children. Statistics from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Office of Audit, Research, and Analysis indicate that in 1995, single females are the head of households in 69.9 percent of all West Virginia AFDC cases. The state statistics on gender, age, and number of children roughly correspond to the sample statistics presented in Table 1. One major difference is that overall a larger percentage of this sample are married than is found in the overall state population. In addition, 64 percent of West Virginia's population is located in a rural area, while 48.6 percent of this sample is rural. Thus, there appears to be an urban bias in the respondents. Given the historical and current disadvantage of rural areas relative to urban areas, the effect of a more urban representation should be an underestimation of hardship experienced by rural welfare recipients.

Measures

Dependent Variables. The dependent variables are perceived barriers to unemployment. Unemployed West Virginia welfare recipients were asked to indicate on the CPI survey why they are not currently employed. The survey provided a list of 18 perceived barriers to labor force participation. The barriers are as follows: 1) There are no jobs for
my skills, 2) I have no job skills, 3) There are no jobs in my community, 4) I have no one to care for my children, 5) I do not have transportation, 6) I want to stay home and raise children, 7) I do not want to work, 8) I have to stay home and take care of elderly, 9) I was laid off from my job, 10) The company I worked for went out of business, 11) I was fired, 12) I quit, 13) I am now in a job training program, 14) Physical health problem, 15) Mental health problem, 16) Continuing education, 17) Cannot afford child care, and 18) No job experience.

The barriers provided on the questionnaire clearly reflect findings from previous research. For example, Olson and Pavetti (1996) provide an extensive analysis of the literature on individual and household barriers to labor force participation. They identified "eight major personal and family challenges that may affect a recipient's transition from welfare to work" (Olson & Pavetti, 1996, p. ii). The eight factors that they identify are:

1) Physical disabilities and/or health limitations, 2) Mental health problems, 3) health or behavioral problems of children, 4) Substance abuse, 5) Domestic violence, 6) Involvement with the child welfare system, 7) Housing instability, and 8) Low basic skills and learning disabilities (Olson & Pavetti, 1996, p. ii).

There are at least six structural barriers that can also affect a welfare recipient's ability to move from welfare to work. They are housing instability (Polakow, 1993; Quadagno, 1994; Rank, 1994); accessible, affordable, dependable transportation (CPI, 1995; Polakow, 1993; Rank, 1994); accessible, affordable, dependable child care (Clark & Long, 1995; Ellwood, 1988; Gordon, 1994; Polakow, 1993); a lack of jobs and/or high unemployment rate (Bane & Ellwood, 1994; Bloomquist, Jensen, & Teixeira, 1988; Danziger & Danziger, 1995; Jensen & Chitose, 1997); a lack of jobs that utilize the recipient's skills (Holzer, 1995); and low-wage labor in which the additional costs of working that stem from child care and transportation outweigh the financial payoff of work (Haveman, 1995; Maynard, 1995).

West Virginia respondents could check several responses (and up to four were coded) but the multiple responses were not ranked in any

---

While Olson and Pavetti define housing instability as an individual or household barriers, Polakow (1993), Quadagno (1994), and Rank (1994) define it as a structural barrier.
order of significance. Therefore, for individuals with multiple reasons indicated (the majority of the sample marked two), it is impossible to tell if these reasons have equal weight. Frequencies were run to identify the top barriers indicated. These barriers were (1) There are no jobs in my community (19.9 percent), (2) I have no job skills (17.9 percent), (3) I have no one to care for my child/ren (12.9 percent), (4) There are no jobs for my skills (11.8 percent), and (5) I want to stay home and raise child/ren (11.7 percent). It is interesting to note that West Virginia welfare recipients identified two personal and family barriers (only one from Olson and Pavetti's list) and three structural barriers to labor force participation.

In order to further distinguish welfare recipients and the barriers they identify, the most frequent barriers were coded as dummy variables. I combined responses on "There are no jobs for my skills" and "There are no jobs in my community" for the NO JOBS variable. Those who say that they are unemployed because there are no jobs available are coded as 1 and all the other barriers are coded together as 0. The process is the same for each of the other dependent variables, where 1 corresponds to "I have no job skills," "I have no one to care for my child/children," or "I want to stay home and raise my child/ren."

In addition, I also created the dependent variable STRUCTURE where individual/household barriers (as identified by Olson and Pavetti) are separated from labor market/structural barriers. All of the individual and household barriers to labor force participation are coded as 0 and all the labor market or structural barriers are coded as 1. The following are coded as structural barriers: no jobs for my skills, no jobs in my community, do not have transportation, laid off from job, company went out of business, and cannot afford child care.

Independent Variables. A number of individual level and household level measures are used as independent variables. These variables reflect a number of theoretical perspectives and empirical analyses that document the relationship between poverty, "human capital endowments and labor-force attachment of adult household members, demographic composition (including age and minority status of adult members), and the households' family structure and living arrangements"
Measures of Human Capital. AGE is the actual age of the respondent. EDUCATION is a continuous variable that indicates the last grade successfully completed by the respondent. HAD JOB TRAINING is used to determine the effect of job/educational training on labor force participation. For HAD JOB TRAINING, 1=yes and 0=no to the question "has the respondent ever participated in a job training or educational (post-high school) program?" NUMBER OF JOBS is an indirect measure of labor force attachment and is the actual number of jobs the respondent has had in the past 5 years.

FEMALE is the gender of the respondent where 0=male and 1=female. AFDC indicates whether or not the respondent receives Food Stamps only (0) or both AFDC and Food Stamps (1). This measure is included to see what if any differences in employment barriers exist between these groups of welfare recipients.

Measures of Household Structure and Composition. MARRIED represents the marital status of the respondent where 1=married or cohabitating and 0=other. HOUSEHOLD SIZE is the actual number of people (including the respondent) that live in the respondent's household.

Measures of Labor Market Characteristics. The local labor market measures come from several county-level data sources: Census of Housing and Population, County-City Data Book, County-Statistics File 4, and the Regional Economic Information System. Using county-level data as a proxy for labor market areas is appropriate for this research because "rural or regional labor market structure and effect are under investigation" (Tickamyer & Bokemeier, 1993, p.60).

SUSTENANCE DIVERSITY is a measure designed to capture the distribution of employees in construction; retail trade; manufacturing;

---

8There was also a measure of welfare dependency called TIMEAFDC, which was the actual number of total months the respondent had ever received AFDC. Including the TIMEAFDC variable reduced the number of cases to about 200 because not all of the respondents have received AFDC. This variable was eliminated from the analysis.

9I originally had a rural/urban labor market measure in the models where those counties located in a metropolitan statistical area or with cities of 10,000 individuals or more were designated as urban. At the urging of one of the reviewers, I replaced this variable with the diversity of industry structure variable. The dichotomous spatial location measure was really only measuring size of place in a rural state. It makes more sense to include the variable with the most explanatory capacity.
services; transportation/public utilities; fire, insurance, and real estate; and wholesale trade industry sectors (Mencken, 1997). Mencken (1997) states that "high values on this measure of sustenance diversity indicate a more diverse industry structure, and a more complex economy" (p.86). The range for this variable is -162 to 6 with a mean of -3.73. MINING EARNINGS is the log of the total earnings in a county from the mining sector in 1989. This variable ranges from -9.21 to -.395 and has a mean of -3.19. FEDERAL EXPENDITURES represents the total per capita federal spending in the county (excluding transfer payments) in 1989. This variable ranges from $168 to $722 and has a mean of $314.

Data Analysis

The statistical technique used to analyze the data is logistic regression. The effects of the independent variables on each of the dependent variables are expressed in the odds coefficients. For example, the odds coefficient for gender in the NO JOBS model compares the probability that a female welfare recipient will cite a lack of jobs as the reason for her unemployment with the probability a male welfare recipient will cite a lack of jobs as the reason for his unemployment. The odds/ratios for the negative coefficients are recalculated in each of the tables so that the coefficients are more comparable.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the sample. In terms of the dependent variables, about 32 percent of the respondents indicate that they are currently unemployed because they cannot find a job, about 18 percent say that they have no employable skills, about 13 percent indicate

---


11 Other measures of the labor market were population density, access to an interstate or metropolitan area, the percent of housing built before 1939, earnings per manufacturing employee, total county earnings from agriculture and farming, and total federal government employment. None of these variables were correlated with the dependent variables, so they were eliminated from the analyses.
a lack of child care, and 12 percent say that they want to stay home and raise their children. Overall, 43 percent perceive structural barriers as limiting their employment.

The average years of schooling completed is 11.4. The majority of the respondents are female (81 percent) and are on average 30-years-old. Approximately 75 percent of the sample are receiving AFDC and Food Stamps and 25 percent are receiving Food Stamps only.

About 52 percent of the welfare recipients have received some type of job training or educational training and they have had an average of 1.7 jobs in the past 5 years. A slight majority (51 percent) are married and have on average 3.7 total individuals (including themselves) in their household. The descriptive statistics for the labor market variables are as follows: 51 percent of the welfare recipients’ counties are urban, the federal government is spending on average $314 per capita in each county, the average county earnings from mining is -3.19, and the average sustenance diversity score is -3.73.

Tables 2 and 3 contain the results from the logistic regressions. For every model the -2 Log Likelihood statistic for the final step have significant chi-squares (at least p=.01), which indicate that the overall fit of the logistic regression is good for each of the models. Although the pseudo-R²s (referred to as pR² in the tables) are simply descriptive measures (because the formula does not include degrees of freedom nor a sampling distribution), they indicate that between 42 percent and 56 percent of the variance in the dependent variables is accounted for by the independent variables.

Labor market (structural-level) variables have a significant impact on the barriers to employment that welfare recipients identify in West Virginia in three of the five models. For example, welfare recipients who live in a labor market with limited industry diversity are more likely than welfare recipients in a labor market with a diverse industry structure to say that the main reason they are currently unemployed is a lack of jobs in the area. In the NO SKILLS model, mining earnings has a significant positive impact on the dependent variable. As mining earnings increases, the probability of a welfare recipient attributing their unemployment to a personal lack of job skills increases (about 1.21 times per percent increase in total earnings from mining).

For the STRUCTURE model, welfare recipients who are living in a labor market with higher average mining earnings are significantly more likely than those with lower average mining earnings to identify an
Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and frequencies of individual, household, and labor market variables (N=358).

### Dependent Variables

| No Jobs | 31.7% | No Skills | 17.9% |
| No Child Care | 12.9% | Home Maker | 11.7% |
| Structural Barrier | 43.3% |

### Sample Individual and Household Variables

| Age | 30.20 (15-60 yrs) | Gender | Male | 18.7% | Female | 81.3% |
| Education | 11.4 (6-21 yrs) | AFDC/Food Stamp Only | AFDC | 75.4% | FS Only | 24.6% |
| Number of Jobs | 1.7 (0-30 jobs) | Marital Status | Not Married | 48.9% | Married | 51.1% |
| Household Size | 3.7 (2-11 people) | Had Job Training | No | 47.5% | Yes | 52.5% |

### Sample Labor Market Variables

| Urban | 51.4% |
| Sustenance Diversity | -3.73 (-162.3-6.16) | (17.19) |
| Federal Expenditures | $314.23 ($168.27-$722.95) | ($56.02) |
| Mining Earnings | -3.19 (-9.21 - .395) | (1.92) |
Table 2. Logistic regression of NO JOBS, NO SKILLS, NO CARE, and HOMEMAKER on labor market, household, and individual variables.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NO JOBS</th>
<th></th>
<th>NO SKILLS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b^1</td>
<td>O/R^2</td>
<td>b^1</td>
<td>O/R^2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustenance Diversity</td>
<td>-0.0173*</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>-0.0048</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Expenditures</td>
<td>-0.1285</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0405</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining Earnings</td>
<td>-0.0477</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.1891*</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.7446*</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>0.5094</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.0133</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.0969</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.1583*</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.0696</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.2722</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>0.1986*</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.1181</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFDC</td>
<td>0.3357</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.3356</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Job Training</td>
<td>0.6806**</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>-0.6506*</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jobs</td>
<td>0.1160</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.4566***</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.70</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9331</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X^2</td>
<td>38.20***</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.56***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pR^2</td>
<td>0.555</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.484</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^1 These numbers are the unstandardized coefficients.
^2 The numbers in this column are the odds/ratios. Negative coefficients are reversed and recalculated to make the odds/ratios more comparable.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

individual or household barrier to their employment (about 1.16 times per percent increase). Welfare recipients in counties with low mining earnings are more likely to identify a structural barrier to their employment.

Every model has a human capital or household variable with a significant impact on perceived barriers to labor force participation. For example, in the NO JOBS model welfare recipients who have received job/educational training are 1.98 times more likely than recipients who have not received job/educational training to claim a lack of jobs in the
Table 2. Logistic regression of NO JOBS, NO SKILLS, NO CARE, and HOMEMAKER on labor market, household, and individual variables (cont.).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NO CARE</th>
<th></th>
<th>HOMEMAKER</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>O/R²</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>O/R²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustenance Diversity</td>
<td>.0331</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.0108</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Expenditures</td>
<td>.0258</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.1012</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining Earnings</td>
<td>.1796</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.1462</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.0456*</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>-.1152***</td>
<td>1.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.0158</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.1519*</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-.1073</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.7087</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>-.2533</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.0527</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFDC</td>
<td>.0721</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-1.18**</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Job Training</td>
<td>-.5468</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.6931</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jobs</td>
<td>-.1295</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.0949</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.7037</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>22.61**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45.44***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pR²</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.420</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 These numbers are the unstandardized coefficients.
2 The numbers in this column are the odds/ratios. Negative coefficients are reversed and recalculated to make the odds/odds more comparable.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

area/lack of jobs with their skills as the reason for their current unemployment.

In the same model, male welfare recipients are twice as likely as their female counterparts to indicate that they are unemployed due to a lack of jobs/jobs with their skills. Welfare recipients living in larger average households are also more likely than those in smaller households to explain their unemployment due to job unavailability.
Table 3. Logistic regression of perceived structural barriers on labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b¹</th>
<th>O/R²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sustenance Diversity</td>
<td>-.0123</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Expenditures</td>
<td>-.2972</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining Earnings</td>
<td>-.1449*</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-1.40***</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.0243</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.0754</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-.2103</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Size</td>
<td>.1567</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFDC</td>
<td>.5489</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had Job Training</td>
<td>.7181**</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Jobs</td>
<td>.3535***</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>-2.18</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X²</td>
<td>77.47***</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pR²</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹These numbers are the unstandardized coefficients.
²The numbers in this column are the odds/ratios. Negative coefficients are reversed and recalculated to make the odds/ratios more comparable.
* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

Educational level, participation in a job training program, and the number of previous jobs all have a significant effect in the NO SKILLS model. In short, skills are not seen as a barrier if the recipient has the human capital.

As expected, welfare recipients with less education are significantly more likely than those with more education to claim that the reason they are currently unemployed is because they have no job skills. Welfare recipients who have not received job/educational training beyond...
high school or who have limited previous job experience are the most likely to explain their unemployment by a lack of job skills. When human capital is controlled for, women are not significantly more likely than men and AFDC/Food Stamp recipients are not significantly more likely than Food Stamp-only recipients to state that their unemployment was due to a lack of skills.

Given that all of the individuals who indicated that they were unemployed because they could not find someone to take care of their children (NO CHILDCARE) or because they wanted to stay home and take care of their children (HOMEMAKER) were female, I eliminated gender from the NO CHILDCARE and HOMEMAKER models. For the NO CHILDCARE model, younger female welfare recipients are significantly more likely than older recipients to state that a lack of child care prevents their employment.

Younger, more educated women who are receiving Food Stamps only are significantly more likely than older, less educated AFDC recipients to say that they are currently jobless because they want to stay home and take care of their children. The odds of a welfare recipient making this claim decreases 1.12 times for each year increase in age and increases 1.16 times for each year increase in education. AFDC recipients are 3.26 times less likely than Food Stamp-only recipients to state that they are currently unemployed because they want to stay home and care for their children.

For the STRUCTURE model (Table 3), female, mining earnings, had job training, and number of jobs are significant predictors of the perception that their current unemployment is the result of structural barriers. As expected, females are 4.07 times more likely than their male counterparts to claim an individual or household barrier for their current unemployment. Welfare recipients in areas with lower mining earnings are 1.16 times less likely to claim that the reason they are unemployed is because of structural factors than those in areas with higher mining earnings. Welfare recipients who have received job training are 2.05 times more likely than those without job training to identify a structural barrier to employment. One additional job held in the past 5 years raises the odds of a welfare recipient claiming a structural barrier to labor force participation by 1.42 times.
Southern Rural Sociology

DISCUSSION

The data for this study are unique in that they represent what welfare recipients perceive to be barriers to their labor force participation. The overall analysis of this data shows that there are different types of welfare recipients in West Virginia with different perceived barriers to labor force participation.

This research also represents a systematic analysis of the only existing data on welfare recipients in West Virginia. West Virginia is one of the fourteen states which currently do not conduct post-welfare reform surveys of welfare recipients. Wealthier states such as Wisconsin have led the way in implementing and assessing welfare reform. This glaring lack of data from a rural state such as West Virginia provides some insight into the surrounding challenges of welfare reform for rural areas and reinforces the need for similar, more current information from recipients.

In addition, the findings from this study are consistent with the literature on barriers to labor force participation in rural areas. For example, the perceived barrier to labor force participation most frequently (32 percent) cited by West Virginia welfare recipients was a lack of jobs. This perceived lack of jobs as a barrier to employment should not be a surprise, given the official 11.3 percent unemployment rate for the state. This finding adds to a growing body of literature that documents the dismal labor market conditions awaiting welfare recipients, especially those in rural areas/states (Bloomquist, Jensen, & Teixeira, 1988; Danziger & Danziger, 1995; Haveman, 1995; Holzer, 1995; Jensen & Chitose, 1997). Developing and diversifying the infrastructure in rural areas is critical in terms of increasing employment opportunities for welfare recipients in West Virginia.

As expected, male welfare recipients perceive themselves to be less hindered by individual and household barriers than their female counterparts. Males are more likely than females to claim that the reason they are unemployed is because either there are no jobs in their area or no

---

12 There are potential problems in generalizing the findings to other welfare recipients in West Virginia and in other rural states. The written demands of the 35-page questionnaire could potentially weed out welfare recipients with lower educational attainment. Also, married welfare recipients and welfare recipients in urban areas in West Virginia are over-represented in the responses. These factors together can create a more optimistic picture of welfare recipients in West Virginia.
jobs with their skills. There is evidence to suggest that these men’s perceptions are an accurate assessment of their current situation. An analysis of these men’s average monthly incomes from their last employment was $983 compared to $480 for women (CPI, 1995). Thus, many of these men may be trained for and thus are seeking higher skilled jobs (i.e., mining, construction) that simply no longer exist in their communities.

The second perceived barrier to labor force participation most frequently cited by West Virginia welfare recipients was a lack of skills. This finding should not be surprising given that individuals in urban areas have higher average educational attainment than those in rural areas (Rural Sociological Society Task Force, 1993). In 1990, West Virginia had the lowest percentage of college graduates (for those over 25) in the nation (Hannah, 1995). The shift in the national economy from a goods to a service producing industry has resulted in a loss of many blue-collar jobs. The jobs that remain are either very low-waged service jobs (Gorham, 1992) or higher paid jobs with more strenuous education and training qualifications (Tickamyer & Duncan, 1990). The employment qualifications for higher paying jobs are particularly problematic in rural areas where there are twice as many unskilled workers as in urban areas (Deavers & Hoppe, 1992).

Another perceived barrier to labor force participation identified by welfare recipients in West Virginia is a lack of child care. This result again reflects the dismal reality of child care services in the state. About 45 percent of pre-school children and 54 percent of school-aged children in West Virginia needed some type of child care in 1990 (Hannah, 1995). Three counties had no licensed child care centers in 1994. In addition, for 18 counties "licensed child care for children under 24 months was unavailable, and only 105 (36 percent) of the state’s child care centers accepted infants and toddlers" (Hannah, 1995, p. 38). This unavailability was most problematic for younger women.

The final perceived barrier to labor force participation identified by welfare recipients in West Virginia is a personal desire to stay home and raise their children. Young, educated women receiving Food Stamps are the most likely to state that they are unemployed because they want to stay home with their children. It is possible that female welfare recipients with more education have a hard time getting a job with their skill level or have witnessed the difficulty their fathers, husbands, and sons have had in finding suitable jobs.
If local wages are too low, then employment does not provide enough incentive for a woman to leave public assistance and lose benefits (Rogers, Mencken, & Mencken, 1997). Consequently, these women get shut out of or frustrated in the labor market and thus are more likely to accept traditional definitions (i.e., as a mother, not a worker) of themselves. Women fall back on homemaking and redefine it as their "choice" when they get discouraged or leave the formal labor market. There is a long history of women in coal dominated areas extending their homemaking skills to subsidize miners' wages (Pudup, 1990). There is also growing evidence that there is a connection between formal and informal employment opportunities for women (Oberhauser, 1995).

Female Food Stamp-only recipients are more likely than female AFDC recipients to state that the reason that they are currently unemployed is because they want to stay home with their children. It is possible that because Food Stamp recipients overall are more economically secure than AFDC recipients, they feel like they have more of a "choice" in terms of staying home with their children. Also, the work requirements that AFDC recipients must meet in order to receive their benefits (i.e., through JOBS) eliminate staying at home as a possible option for these recipients.

Surprisingly, married women are not any more likely than single mothers to state that the reason they are currently unemployed is because they want to stay at home with their children. Younger women are more interested in staying at home than older women. This difference can probably be explained by the number and age of their children (Rogers, et al., 1997). The younger women probably have fewer (i.e., are experiencing their first child) and younger, more dependent children than the older women.

Another surprising finding was the result concerning the impact of mining earnings on the employment barriers of welfare recipients. Welfare recipients in areas with lower mining earnings are the least likely to claim that the reason they are unemployed is because of structural factors (i.e., there are no jobs available, they were laid off, employer went out of business, etc.). This finding is surprising given that the resource extraction industries have been found to dominate the area in which they are located and this domination limits the recruitment of other employment opportunities to these areas (Tickamyer & Tickamyer, 1988). I expected to find welfare recipients in areas with high mining earnings claiming more structural barriers to employment. It is possible
that the mining sector in West Virginia was experiencing a temporary boom in 1993. Relying on increased mining jobs to improve the employment prospects of welfare recipients is particularly problematic, given the volatile and unstable nature of coal mining and the technological advancements that continue to replace workers in these occupations (Hawley, 1994).

One of the most disappointing results in terms of job training is that welfare recipients with job training are more likely than those without training to state that the reason they are unemployed is because there is a lack of jobs in their community. This effect is not surprising in West Virginia, given that other researchers have found that the combination of extreme ruralness and high unemployment rates reduce the impact of job training programs on improving employment opportunities for disadvantaged workers (Bischak, 1997; Gueron & Pauly, 1991; Johnson & Stromsdorfer, 1990).

Thus, it is simply not enough for welfare recipients to receive job training. It is also important to examine the types of training/skills recipients receive and the demand for those skills in the labor market in which they live and work. Welfare recipients would greatly benefit from a job training program that was based on the assessment of the local labor market’s current and projected skill needs (Jensen & Chitose, 1997).

In sum, the developing state welfare policies must reflect (not punish) the diversity of welfare recipients in West Virginia. For example, women were significantly more likely than men to identify individual and household barriers to employment. If women are primarily responsible for child care, elder care, and housework, these duties will continue to affect their educational attainment and job opportunities. This gender difference becomes particularly problematic under welfare reform when structural barriers are seen as "legitimate" reasons for unemployment while individual or household barriers are seen as a "choice."

REFERENCES

Southern Rural Sociology


