

ARE WOMEN ON WELFARE DIFFERENT FROM WOMEN WHO ARE "WORKING POOR?"

Background

The Family Income Study is a five-year longitudinal study of Washington households. We compared the characteristics of women who received welfare (Aid to Families with Dependent Children - AFDC) with women who were considered to be "working poor."¹ All respondents had at least one child. We used characteristics of women respondents in the first year of the study for comparison. There were significant differences during the women's youth and in their current characteristics.

Family Income Study Findings

Prior Characteristics

- **Welfare recipients were more likely to have dropped out of school**
(58 percent compared to 27 percent).
- **Welfare recipients were more likely to have been teenage mothers**
(52 percent compared to 33 percent).

Differences in current personal, educational, and employment characteristics are shown on the next page.

Current Characteristics of Women on AFDC and Working Poor Women

Characteristic	AFDC	Working Poor
<u>Personal</u>		
Median Age	29	34
Percent Married	14%	58%
Percent With Another Adult in Household	42%	77%
Median Age of Youngest Child in Household	4	6
Percent With Infant in Household	17%	6%
<u>Education</u>		
Median Years of Education	11	12
Percent With Post-Secondary Degree or Certificate	7%	17%
<u>Employment</u>		
Percent Who Worked in Past Year	41%	100%
Median Hourly Wage in 1987	\$4.23	\$5.06
Median Earnings, <i>if Worked</i> in Past Year	\$1,913	\$7,333
Earnings as a Percent of Household Income	23%	81%

Discussion

Two significant differences - dropping out of school and teenage childbirth - occurred during the women's youth, and are associated with welfare use. Public policy that encourages girls to stay in school through high school graduation and to postpone childbirth may affect later welfare use. Also related to dropping out of school and teenage childbirth is physical or sexual abuse while growing up (See ***Child Abuse, Teenage Pregnancy, and Welfare Dependency: Is There A Link?*** October 1993).

The current differences in characteristics (such as marriage, age of youngest child, and post-secondary education) affect the likelihood of employment and earnings. Public policy that encourages employment and education/training for targeted welfare recipients may help women to leave and stay off public assistance.

¹ For this comparison we used characteristics of women respondents in the first year of the five-year study. At that time, when the samples were first drawn, the AFDC sample best represented the total AFDC population in Washington State, and the "working poor" sample best represented women in households with incomes less than 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Line. The Federal Poverty Line for the first year of the study was \$9,408 for a family of three.