

Family Well-Being After Welfare Reform

*Edited by
Douglas J. Besharov*



Maryland School of Public Affairs
Welfare Reform Academy

Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research

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The Welfare Reform Academy was created in 1997 to help state and local officials, private social service providers, and other interested parties respond creatively to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the new welfare reform law signed by President Clinton in 1996. While the law pressures public officials and service providers to make their programs more efficient and better targeted, it also presents an unprecedented opportunity for states to reshape and improve their programs. The Academy will provide training in program design, implementation, and evaluation for the new TANF, Food Stamp, Medicaid, job training, child care, child welfare, and child support programs.

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Preface

This is one of a series of reports from the Committee to Review Welfare Reform Research. The committee was formed to help the public, scholars, practitioners, and policymakers understand research on welfare reform and apply its lessons. Its purpose is to assess the quality and relevance of the most significant evaluation studies, identifying those findings that are sufficiently well-grounded to be regarded as credible. The committee members are experts in evaluation and related social science fields (see next page).

Between March 1994 and June 2001, welfare rolls fell an amazing 59 percent from their historic high of 5 million families. How much of this decline is a result of welfare reform and how much is the result of the economy? What are the effects on low-income families? About a quarter billion dollars is being spent on studies and surveys designed to answer these and other questions.

This volume reports on “Family Well-Being After Welfare Reform,” a conference held by the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI), in association with the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, on December 8 and 9, 1999. The conference had three objectives: (1) to provide an initial exploration of the well-being of low-income children in the wake of the sharp decrease in welfare caseloads; (2) to identify the existing data sets, surveys, and other materials that could help assess their well-being; and (3) to suggest, in general terms, how existing data sources could be enhanced and what additional ones might be needed for a continuing assessment of the well-being of low-income children and their families.

This volume contains the papers presented at the conference, together with an edited transcript of the comments and general discussion. This book is divided into twelve topic areas: (1) welfare reform update; (2) ongoing major research on welfare reform: what will be learned; (3) material well-being; (4) family versus household; (5) teenage sex, pregnancy, and nonmarital births; (6) child maltreatment and foster care placements; (7) homelessness and housing conditions; (8) children’s health and well-being; (9) nutrition, food security, and obesity; (10) crime, juvenile delinquency, and dysfunctional behavior; (11) mothers’ work and child care; and (12) plans of the Department of Health and Human Services to monitor the well-being of low-income children.

We sincerely hope that the materials in this report aid in understanding this important topic.

DOUGLAS J. BESHAROV

Acknowledgments

This volume reflects the knowledge and good judgement of many people. I want to thank the David and Lucile Packard Foundation for their generous support of the conference at which these papers were first presented, especially Eugene Lewit and Margie K. Shields, who first posed the idea of having a conference devoted to issues concerning the well-being of children and their families after welfare reform. Additional support from the American Enterprise Institute and the Smith Richardson Foundation helped turn the conference papers into this publication. Peter Germanis, my colleague at the Welfare Reform Academy of the University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs, skillfully reviewed the papers for content and guided the administration of the project.

Staff at the American Enterprise Institute provided valuable support work. Research assistant Betsy Allen organized the meeting. Caroline Polk and Susan Freis, with the assistance of Kerri Smith, edited the papers and developed the typographic design. Intern Rob Hom produced the figures. Patrick Ruffini perfected the graphic design and posted the papers on the Welfare Reform Academy website.

Finally, I want to thank the authors and commenters who made an informative and thought-provoking conference and, we think, a valuable volume as the nation assesses the well-being of low-income children and their families in the wake of welfare reform.

Douglas J. Besharov
February 2002

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