



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Issues in Implementing TANF in New York: The Perspective of Frontline Workers

Author(s): Jan L. Hagen and Judith Owens-Manley

Source: *Social Work*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 171-182

Published by: Oxford University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23717937>

Accessed: 30-10-2017 16:23 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Oxford University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Social Work*

Issues in Implementing TANF in New York: The Perspective of Frontline Workers

Jan L. Hagen and Judith Owens-Manley

The study discussed in this article examined the perspectives of front-line welfare workers on issues related to the implementation of TANF: domestic violence, work requirements, time limits for cash benefits, and functions of workers. Based on focus groups held in upstate New York, findings suggest a lack of criteria for the granting of exemptions from TANF requirements, worker resistance to serving those caught in the cycle of violence, and congruence between the legislation's "work first" strategy and worker preference. However, participants identified limitations to employment-focused welfare programs, including restrictions on education and job preparation. Further research is needed on the implementation of TANF, including use of the Family Violence Option, and on the use of administrative discretion by front-line workers.

Key words: TANF; welfare reform; implementation; front-line workers; domestic violence

With the passage of the new welfare law, the Personal Responsibility and Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-193), Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was abolished and replaced by Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a block grant program that not only limits federal expenditures for state welfare programs, but also removes most of the federal conditions attached to AFDC, including entitlement to welfare for poor women and their children. Although state and local agencies are assuming greater control of welfare programs under TANF, they are required to comply with a number of federal requirements, including new work requirements for welfare recipients and a five-year lifetime limit on federal benefits for families. The legislation also makes provisions for exempting some recipients from the five-year limit on benefits and for exempting victims of domestic violence from that requirement as well as from work and child support enforcement requirements. Under the new welfare law, front-line workers, who serve as the gatekeepers to the nation's welfare

programs and are charged with the day-to-day operations, may play critical roles, involving increased levels of administrative discretion.

The purpose of the study discussed in this article was to examine the perspectives of frontline welfare workers on the implementation of the Family Violence Option, expanded work requirements, time limits for benefits, and roles and functions of front-line workers. Because this was an exploratory study occurring concurrently with initial phases of TANF implementation, we used focus groups of frontline workers as an initial step in identifying emerging issues in program implementation.

BACKGROUND

TANF Provisions

To receive full block grant funding from the federal government under TANF, states must meet several requirements. First, states may not use federal TANF funds to support a family for longer than five years. States, however, are free to use

CCC Code: 0037-8046/02 \$3.00 © 2002
National Association of Social Workers, Inc.

their own funds to support families beyond the five-year limit or to impose shorter time limits. Second, states must engage a percentage of their adult recipients in work or work-related activities. The participation rate for all families receiving TANF began at 25 percent in fiscal year 1997 and increased to 50 percent by fiscal year 2002. The minimum hours of required participation also increased over time, reaching 30 hours each week by fiscal year 2000. In addition, states are required to engage adult recipients in work activities after they have received assistance for two years.

A wide range of activities may be counted toward the participation rate, including job search, unsubsidized employment, subsidized private or public employment, work experience, community service and on-the-job training. However, educational activities have been severely restricted under TANF; only 30 percent of those meeting the work requirements, not the entire caseload, may participate in vocational education and training.

For some families, the lifetime limit on welfare benefits and the work requirements may impose significant hardships and difficulties. Congress addressed this possibility through two provisions. First, states are allowed to exempt up to 20 percent of the caseload from the five-year time limit for TANF benefits because "of hardship or if the family includes an individual who has been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty" (42 U.S.C. 608 (a)(7)(C)(i)). "Hardship" is not defined in the legislation, but the legislation provides definitions of battering and extreme cruelty, which include actual or threatened physical injury, sexual abuse, threatened or attempted physical or sexual abuse, and mental abuse. Implementation of both hardship and the battering and extreme cruelty provisions are subject to further state interpretation, and their application to particular cases may rest with front-line workers.

Second, the Family Violence Option (42 U.S.C. 602 (a)(7)) allows states flexibility in applying TANF rules to victims of domestic violence. Under this option, states may waive such program requirements as time limits, family caps, residency, work participation, and child support cooperation for domestic violence victims if complying with these requirements places clients at risk or unfairly penalizes them. In addition, states may offer confidential screening and identification of domestic violence victims and provide referrals for supportive and counseling services.

In their analysis of the Family Violence Option, Pollack and Davis (1997) suggested that the legislative intent of the option is "to extend to domestic violence survivors the flexibility, protections and services necessary to begin or continue on the path away from abuse and toward safety, physical, mental, and financial recovery, and self-sustaining employment" (p. 1079). To fulfill this intent, frontline workers must fulfill the additional tasks of screening for domestic violence, educating women about domestic violence and their rights, referring clients for needed services, and making determinations for appropriate case planning, including any exemptions from TANF requirements. How front-line workers fulfill these tasks will be important—insensitive responses from services providers and inadequate information have caused women to remain in abusive situations (Carlson & Davis, 1981).

Welfare and Domestic Violence

The Family Violence Option becomes particularly important to women who are abused, in light of research findings that suggest that resources are often a determining factor in women being able to leave their batterers and provide an alternative for themselves and their children (Gondolf & Fisher, 1988). Mandatory work requirements, paternity and child support enforcement procedures, and lifetime limits on welfare all have the potential for increasing the risks of violence for some victims of domestic violence by increasing or prolonging their economic dependence on abusive partners or by exposing them to abusive behaviors from partners who may resent, and therefore interfere with, their efforts at economic self-sufficiency (Howell, 1997).

The extent to which domestic violence permeates the lives of women on welfare and the extent to which it interferes with labor force participation has been investigated only recently. Studies on the prevalence of violence from an adult partner among women receiving welfare suggest current rates of 15 percent to 20 percent (Raphael & Tolman, 1997). Lifetime percentages are far higher. Salomon, Bassuk, and Brooks (1996), in an epidemiologic study of AFDC mothers, found that more than 60 percent of the women had been battered by an adult partner. Several investigations have noted the ways and extent to which abusive partners interfere with women's efforts in welfare-to-work programs (Kenney & Brown,

1996; Raphael & Tolman, 1997). In a survey of battered women, Shepard and Pence (1988) found that the women's work performance was negatively affected by their abusive partners and that their partners also attempted to prevent their working or going to school.

Functions of Front-Line Workers

The implementation of the Family Violence Option, as well as the use of exemptions, may become the responsibility of frontline workers, whose jobs are changing as welfare agencies increase their focus on work-related activities and attempt to prepare recipients for self-sufficiency within the five-year time limit (Holcomb, Pavetti, Ratcliffe, & Riedinger, 1998; U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 1998b). Since the separation of income maintenance from social services in the early 1970s, most front-line workers have been charged with making accurate and timely determination of welfare eligibility.

Although the functions of frontline workers have not been studied extensively, some research suggests that the role remains broader than eligibility determinations and includes linking clients with an array of social services (Hagen, 1987; Weyers, 1981). With the introduction of TANF, the income support function of welfare has the potential for becoming a secondary feature as emphasis shifts to those functions that "divert" people from welfare or prepare them to leave the welfare rolls. This shift in focus suggests that demands may be placed on front-line workers to provide more personal social services, to expand their access functions as well as to provide individual assessment, case management services, and supportive counseling. In addition, implementing TANF requires the support of front-line workers, or "street-level bureaucrats" (Lipsky, 1980), who retain significant discretion in the delivery of welfare services (Brodkin, 1997; Meyers, Glasser, & MacDonald, 1998).

STUDY METHODS

As an initial step toward understanding the perspectives of frontline workers regarding the new

welfare law and its implementation, we conducted four focus groups with welfare workers in two Upstate New York counties during November and December 1997, at which time New York was in the initial phases of responding to the new welfare law. The invitation to participate in the focus groups was distributed at the local welfare agencies, requesting front-line workers to sign up for the focus groups if they were interested.

In each focus group, the discussion was organized around four broad topic areas: (1) the hardship exemption, (2) the family violence provisions, (3) the federally mandated work requirements for single-parent families, and (4) the five-year lifetime limit for cash welfare benefits. Also, focus group participants were asked to rank order seven

case illustrations (Appendix A) in terms of priority for exempting the family from welfare requirements. These ratings then served as the basis for discussing the decision-making process about the hardship and domestic violence exemptions. The case examples, constructed by one of the authors based on practice experience with domestic violence victims and those receiving welfare, were designed to illustrate concretely situations involving hardship and battering and extreme

cruelty. General demographic information also was obtained from the participants. We conducted the focus groups, which were held at the local welfare agencies and lasted about 90 minutes. The group discussions were audiotaped and later transcribed.

Each of us separately analyzed the typed transcript from the four focus groups for major categories of themes and issues (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Krueger, 1994; Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996). The major categories developed by each of us then were compared to determine areas of agreement. Those themes are presented here. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the demographic information and the rankings on the case examples. Descriptive statistics were used to compare characteristics of participants by county and by focus group. Analysis of case ratings was conducted using Kendall's coefficient of concordance,

Since the separation of income maintenance from social services in the early 1970s, most front-line workers have been charged with making accurate and timely determination of welfare eligibility.

a statistic measuring the degree of agreement among the participants on the case ratings.

Focus groups offered the advantage of exploring a range of views and perception held by front-line workers in a forum allowing for the exchange of ideas as well as exploration of disagreements. Limitations of focus groups stem from not having a representative sample and an inability to generalize to the broader population.

Participants

A total of 29 frontline workers participated in the focus groups. Three groups had seven participants and one group had eight. The majority of participants were women ($n = 22$, 75.8 percent) and white ($n = 25$, 86.2 percent). Additional demographic information was provided by 28 of the participants. The participants worked primarily as eligibility workers ($n = 26$, 92.8 percent), called "welfare examiners" in New York. One participant was a case manager and another was a case-worker. The participants were experienced workers, having worked in human services for an average of 15 years and in their local welfare agencies for 13.4 years. The average age of the participants was 43.5 years, ranging from age 32 to 64. Slightly more than one-third ($n = 10$, 35.7 percent) of the participants had a high school education or its equivalent; 39.3 percent ($n = 11$) held associate's degrees; one-fifth ($n = 6$, 21.4 percent) held bachelor's degrees; and one had a master's degree. Almost one-third of the participants ($n = 9$, 32.1 percent) had received welfare in the past; one-fifth ($n = 6$, 21.4 percent) had been a victim of domestic violence; and 46.4 percent ($n = 13$) had someone close to them involved in domestic violence situations at some time. There were no statistically significant differences based on the demographic characteristics between the participants in the two counties or the participants in the four focus groups.

Because data were not available on the demographic characteristics of workers in two counties or in New York, the participants characteristics were compared with data on front-line welfare workers from a 10-state study (Hagen, Lurie, & Wang, 1993). The demographic profile of participants in this study suggests that the focus group participants were older and more experienced than frontline welfare workers generally, with somewhat lower educational levels, which may be related to their age and years of agency service.

The reported levels of prior welfare use are similar to other findings.

FINDINGS

Hardship and Domestic Violence Exemptions

To consider how applying the 20 percent exemption and the flexibility under the Family Violence Option might be applied in practice, we attempted to simulate the situation by asking the participants to rank order seven case examples, or vignettes, with one representing their highest priority for exemption and seven the lowest (see Table 1). In addition, participant rankings served as the basis for discussing these TANF provisions. There were no statistically significant differences in rankings based on the characteristics of the participants.

Based on Kendall's coefficient of concordance (0 = no agreement, 1 = complete agreement), the overall agreement of rankings by participants was .173, or very little agreement. However, in discussing the rationale for their rankings, participants identified a shared set of factors that influenced their rankings. All participants gave priority for exemptions in cases where the physical safety of the mother and her children was compromised and children were involved in situations that were directly harmful to them. Concerns about the immediate safety and well-being of children were paramount.

The participants recognized that imposing work obligations on a woman in an emergency shelter or in an acute domestic violence situation was not practical, perhaps not even safe.

You can't hold down a job and take care of the kids if somebody's after you with a gun. It's an impossibility. And to overlook that is an injustice

Table 1

Rank Ordering and Measures of Central Tendency of Seven Case Vignettes

Case	N	M	SD	Median	Mode
Abby	27	4.26	1.93	4	6
Brenda	27	4.19	1.60	4	5
Irene	27	3.22	1.78	3	1
Jill	27	2.73	1.80	2	1
Lenore	27	3.33	1.96	3	2
Linda	27	5.30	1.46	5	7
Maria	27	4.63	2.34	6	7

to the client and to the system because sooner or later, you're going to force someone into a job and she's not going to be ready. And if there's somebody after her with a gun, she's not going to hold the job and she's going to be back in the system.

* * *

If they're in the shelter . . . there's more of a priority for them to get housing and to get themselves stable before [going to work].

Most of the participants placed tremendous emphasis on the client's efforts to help herself. To them, this demonstrated a commitment to take action and showed the client's acknowledgement of the seriousness of the situation.

When I say motivation, I mean that they realize the situation that they're in is bad, and they want to do something to improve it. . . . They want to do something to get out of it.

* * *

I put the ones who have already made the step to go into the shelters [as a higher priority] because they're actually making an attempt to get away. [So, I am] more apt to help.

* * *

I just feel that if they don't want to help themselves, there's nothing I can do for them. If they're not going to do it, they're not going to get it from me.

Participants gave lower priority for service and exemptions to clients who demonstrated repeated patterns of relying on welfare and the cyclical pattern of leaving and returning to their abusive partners.

A couple of them [clients in the vignettes] have been on the system two or three different times, and a couple of them seem to be going back in the same situations. They don't seem to learn from the mistakes that they've made in the past, and they don't seem willing or as willing to help themselves to get out of their situations. They're just looking for someone to help them instead of trying to help themselves.

The participants found the cyclical pattern of leaving and returning to their abusive partners both difficult to understand and frustrating. Some worried about the safety of clients, and others expressed concern about the costs incurred in these circumstances.

It's actually kind of hard for me to understand it because I wouldn't take it. So it's really hard for me to understand their going back when I am trying to offer them help to get out of the situation and they don't want to take it. I don't understand their logic.

* * *

If you've got one that this is the fourth, fifth, sixth time that they've gone to the safe house, what are they doing to help themselves? Nothing! . . . We have people in here we've paid \$14,000. They call up the guy and tell them where they are!

Domestic Violence Claims as a Scam

The current welfare rules applying to domestic violence cases in these two counties allow domestic violence victims access to such special resources as relocation expenses and emergency assistance for household expenses. A few focus group participants expressed serious concern about some clients taking advantage of these rules. These situations tended to make several participants skeptical about clients' reports of domestic violence and reinforced their desire for clients to have demonstrated taking some type of action like obtaining orders of protection.

Sometimes people come in and tell you that [they're domestic violence victims] just to get what they can get.

* * *

Some of them have been on so long and they have never been domestic violence in their lives. All of a sudden, we won't let them move, won't give them furniture, and [they say], "I'm domestic violence." You know these people, you grew up with a lot of them, and you know they're lying. Then it changes your faith and I know it changes the other workers' faith in the rest of them.

* * *

It's another scam already. I think people should have to do orders of protection, have to do something, not just say "I am abused."

Extent of Involvement with Domestic Violence

Although the vast majority of participants indicated that they had worked with victims of domestic violence, they did not encounter them

frequently in their on-going work. Both counties have designated workers who handle all the domestic violence cases in need of emergency services. Front-line workers are most likely to deal with these clients after their situation has stabilized. In their on-going caseloads, participants reported having a few domestic violence cases, with estimates ranging from three to six cases out of a caseload of 140. Participants indicated that, although they might be aware of obvious cases of domestic violence, they may not know the extent to which domestic violence occurs in their caseloads and any assistance beyond financial support was not part of their role.

I think we're not trained in what to ask or what to look for, and I think that's why some people are overlooked. They're not going to tell you until it's too late, too, until there's... sanctions.

* * *

I don't see where it touches our job. We determine eligibility. That is our job. The bottom line.

Nonetheless, participants indicated providing a type of access service for clients reporting domestic violence. The participants provided clients with telephone numbers and other information about community resources, including hot-lines, safe houses, and shelters. They learned about these resources primarily from one another rather than as part of any training on how to help clients gain access to community services on their own behalf.

Work Requirements for Welfare Recipients

The federal welfare law as well as the welfare laws in New York have changed the work requirements for welfare recipients, placing greater emphasis on labor force attachment strategies, requiring mothers with children age three and older to participate in work or work-related activities and increasing the number of hours clients are required to participate in work or work-related activities. This emphasis on employment matched the directions of both welfare agencies. When asked about the major organizational message, all participants identified a clear shift from "we give money" to "you have to work."

One welfare agency (in county A) has emphasized labor force attachment strategies for some time, and the phrases "Jobs First," "get a job," and

"work, work, work" were used to characterize the agency's major message to clients. The other agency (in county B) was just shifting to this focus from a human capital investment strategy, but the new message was clear.

Every Monday morning we have a meeting with our supervisor and she says, Don't forget. Our first priority is to get these people jobs!

A secondary organizational theme reinforcing this emphasis on employment was "the clock is ticking," referring to the time limits on cash benefits.

Overall, participants supported this emphasis on employment.

I like the fact that we can say "get a job." When they say, "how am I supposed to support myself?" I like saying "get a job." Before it was the "voodoo" word.

* * *

I feel now we can actually help people, help them to get a better life which is what public assistance is suppose to be. Before it felt like we were just a bank. It was kind of like they come to us for their allowance and we're the... well, did you do you chores? Do you have your landlord form? Ok, you get a \$100. This is much better.

Benefits of New Work Requirements

With one exception, the participants thought requiring work or work-related activities from mothers with children three months or older was appropriate. In part, they thought this requirement was more equitable than the earlier provision exempting mothers until their children were three years old, which was viewed as serving as an excuse not to work, as a "crutch." The new requirement reflects the reality of most parents with young children, including the workers themselves.

People are doing that all the time right now.

* * *

I came back to work after eight weeks. You want to know my opinion?

Participants identified other benefits stemming from the work requirements: reinforcing the work ethic, allowing mothers to serve as role models for their children, and preventing isolation among mothers of young children.

For some participants, this emphasis on employment, along with some of the new regulations requiring some clients to be assessed for drug and alcohol use, was part of “cracking down” on welfare recipients and was viewed positively. A few also viewed it as increasing their authority to enforce compliance by clients.

We don’t feel like we have no say in what goes on. Or we don’t feel like we just want to shove them out the door. Now you have more confidence in saying “you’re going to do this, you’re going to do that, you’ll get this, you’ll get that, or forget it. I can’t help you.

* * *

Those kinds of clients [with drug and alcohol issues] . . . now I can say look, you’re going to get drug tested. If the doctor says you need treatment and you won’t [get it], you are not getting assistance. I am not supporting you anymore.

One participant perceived a change in her role as a result of the increased emphasis on getting clients into jobs. She felt she was now being asked to provide counseling to the clients, to “deal more with the client’s psyche” and to serve as a guidance counselor, assisting clients with career planning. Other participants in her group did not share her observations; in fact, they directly opposed it. For them, any counseling clients might need was seen as more appropriately provided by other community agencies, and they did not think they were being asked to fulfill these functions.

Limitations of a “Work First” Strategy

Although the participants believed some clients did not work because of laziness or a learned pattern of relying on welfare, some participants had reservations about labor force attachment strategies because some clients needed additional preparation to find jobs.

You have to have been working for a while to understand what’s expected of you. And, to be honest, I don’t think a large percentage of the population is really educated enough to understand what’s expected of them.

* * *

The problem is . . . most of the people are not able to work, they don’t have the skills, they’re just pushed. They’re not ready and the programs I have found for them are insignificant.

Participants also pointed out the limitations of the jobs clients obtained.

And even if they get a minimum wage job at full-time, they’ll have to work two or three jobs to support a family.

* * *

Yeah, and you can’t work two jobs and raise children alone. You can’t do that because your children suffer for it.

* * *

I always felt that there would be a lot of people who wouldn’t be on assistance if you just paid day care because when you go to work, especially if you have more than one or a young one who needs full time care, it’s like you can either pay your rent or you can pay the babysitter. You can’t pay both.

* * *

Not with the jobs they’re getting at \$5.15, \$5.50, \$5.60 . . .

Although some participants believed earlier agency policies emphasizing education and training made no difference for clients (“Nothing happened. Period.”), other participants continued to believe at least some education and training was important in preparing clients for the work force.

You don’t know how to work if you’ve never worked. You’ve got to start somewhere. . . . One of the things to do is exempt them to allow them to go to school. And that’s a real tough call right now because what the law is saying is that they’re not exempt to go to college or to continue their education. So, we have to encourage them to work around that or to get a part-time job at least. It’s kind of a double-edged sword. My personal belief is that they need some basic training and education, the GED and high school. I encourage them to do that.

Finally, some participants were concerned that community service (or “workfare”) programs were not providing clients with adequate job preparation, in part because of the lack of supervisors’ willingness to work with and assist clients. An additional limitation was the poor quality of assigned work experiences: “They give them the worse jobs to do.” Participants were also concerned that as the agency moved to increase the number of hours clients were required to participate in

work-related activities, regular employees might be displaced.

Child Care Issues

For the focus group participants, work requirements could not be separated from a discussion of child care services. For most participants, the primary child care issue was "getting child care. That's our biggest problem." From this perspective, the need was for more information on available child care services as well as for an expansion of services, especially for infants. This need for child care services also was noted recently by the GAO (1998a). The participants also believed that if the agency was going to require work and work-related activities, there was an obligation to pay for child care.

TIME LIMITS FOR CASH BENEFITS

The most significant change in federal welfare legislation was the repeal of the federal guarantee to assist needy families and their children. Under the new welfare law, federal benefits are limited to a five years. In New York, families who reach the five-year limit are placed on the state's noncash Safety Net Assistance Program.

As significant as these changes may be philosophically and economically for federal and state government, focus group participants saw this aspect of "welfare reform" as basically a "joke" because it represented no significant change in how clients were served in New York. For long-term welfare recipients, voucher payments already were used extensively and for all recipients, some form of benefit continues under the new laws.

If we're going to be paying their rent, paying their electricity, and we're going to be giving them food stamps, I don't think there's any difference.

* * *

I don't see a time limit here. They're still getting their money, no matter how they're getting their money, whether they're getting TANF or Safety Net.

In county A, participants believed that most clients were not taking the five-year limit seriously or they were unaware of the limit. In county B, however, participants reported a wider range of client responses to the time limit. In this county also, some clients (particularly long-term recipi-

ents) viewed the time limits as a "joke" and others were unaware of it. But still other clients, those who had more recently become welfare recipients, were responding by doing more on their own behalf to secure and maintain employment. For some then, the "clock is ticking" served as a motivator, which was reinforced by the new work requirements. But even in this county that seemed to be more aggressively informing clients about the time limits in conjunction with its shift to a labor force attachment strategy, some participants were skeptical that the "ticking clock" would have a long-term effect on clients: "[It will work] until the word is out on the streets that it's a joke. Given them six to eight months."

DISCUSSION

Although the findings from this study are restricted to the focus group participants, they raise a number of issues regarding the implementation of the new welfare law. The lack of agreement among participants about the rank ordering of case vignettes suggests that, without clear agency criteria and priorities, accompanied by intensive training of frontline workers, the granting hardship and domestic violence exemptions is a difficult task for workers to complete and highly dependent on an individual worker's judgment and discretion. Although some administrative discretion on the part of frontline workers may be appropriate, tremendous variability in the granting of exemptions hinders equitable treatment of clients.

These participants were more willing to waive requirements for women who had taken independent action toward addressing their problematic situations through actions such as seeking emergency shelter or orders of protection. Although these frontline workers also may have been using these actions as indirect indicators of the seriousness of clients' situations, this criterion of independent action may result in a system that is unresponsive to domestic violence victims who are not familiar with these alternatives.

The findings also suggest two issues that require additional research and monitoring as the Family Violence Option is implemented. First, the issue of identifying, and perhaps uncovering, domestic violence victims in welfare case loads needs to be addressed. Is there an obligation for welfare workers to do this and if so, who will perform this function? The participants in this study defined a

narrow role for themselves in serving domestic violence victims, limiting their function to eligibility determinations with no obligation to identify clients who are domestic violence victims or to provide counseling and supportive services.

Second, are women who follow the cyclical pattern of leaving and returning to abusive partners less likely to receive exemptions or waivers from requirements? Does special consideration need to be given to how most effectively to serve women and children in these circumstances?

Women's attempts to leave abusive situations must not be undermined, but costs of serving these women and their children over time and worker resistance to these clients may limit their access to welfare services. This, in turn, may further compromise their ability to leave abusive partners because a lack of alternative resources.

The participants' support for the agencies' emphasis on employment ("work first") came with several caveats, including its effectiveness for long-term welfare recipients and the need for some clients to receive additional preparation to be able to participate in the labor force, particularly if the goal is economic self-sufficiency. Similar concerns have been raised by others. Research findings based on AFDC recipients suggest that those most likely to reach the five-year limit tend to have less than a high school education, no or limited recent work experience, and young children (Pavetti, 1995; Petersen, 1995). For this group particularly, a labor force attachment strategy may be ineffective in fostering economic self-sufficiency.

As the participants noted, participation in the labor force does not guarantee economic self-sufficiency, particularly for less-skilled women. Studies on the employment history of women on welfare as well as low-income women suggest that their jobs are characterized as low wage, without benefits, part-time, and in the service sector (for example, Brooks & Buckner, 1996; Hagen & Davis, 1994; Parrott, 1998; Spalter-Roth, Burr, Hartmann, & Shaw, 1995).

Client participation in education and training programs is an option not well-supported by the new welfare law. Some of these participants, however, supported clients' efforts in this area by waiving clients from work rules and by developing strategies that complied with work rules but also allowed continuation of educational efforts. These workers exercised positive discretion (Meyers et al., 1998) to support the educational efforts of

some clients and supplemented this with case planning and supportive counseling.

Finally, community service programs, commonly called workfare, were criticized for not adequately preparing clients for labor force participation and were perceived as potentially leading to job displacement, issues that have been raised in studies on welfare employment programs (for example, Gueron & Pauly, 1991; Hagen & Lurie, 1994).

The findings suggest that the implementation of the new welfare law has not yet had a major effect on the roles and functions of these front-line workers in New York. The focus of their work continues to be eligibility determination, and the access functions they perform have been noted (Hagen, 1987; Hagen & Wang, 1993). However, responses from a few participants suggested that some workers are engaging in case planning and supportive counseling activities, which include developing long-term career/work plans and problem-solving activities with clients to negotiate welfare work rules while continuing their education and training activities. At this stage of implementation in New York, it is premature to conclude that this is a harbinger of changing functions for front-line workers or isolated activities independently undertaken by a few workers. Other states, however, have modified the roles of front-line workers to include functions other than eligibility determination such as case management activities (GAO, 1998b; Holcomb et al., 1998).

CONCLUSION

The labor force attachment strategy emphasized by the new welfare law is congruent with welfare programs of many states (Holcomb et al., 1998) and supported by front-line workers in this study who are positioned to convey "work first" strategy to clients. However, as the workers themselves pointed out, "work first" strategies are not equally effective or appropriate for all clients. More research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of labor force attachment strategies for various subgroups of clients and to identify the additional services needed by more vulnerable and harder to serve clients, including victims of domestic violence. Although the Family Violence Option puts into place safeguards for victims of domestic violence confronting TANF regulations, meeting the intent of the option requires the development of

state rules and regulations to guide its implementation on the front lines. As states develop their programs to serve this vulnerable population, research focusing on the implementation of the Family Violence Option is required.

The use of administrative discretion by front-line workers emerged in several areas in this study, including their extension of services for "good" clients, the imposition of work rules and screening mandates, and, at least potentially, their prioritizing clients for hardship and domestic violence exemptions. This suggests that further research on the roles of front-line workers needs to address not only the expansion of their tasks and functions under TANF, but also their use of administrative discretion.

For the profession of social work as well as for individual social workers, the changes introduced under TANF call for both case and cause advocacy to ensure adequate service provision to poor women and their children. Given social work's historical mission of serving and advocating for poor people, a professional obligation remains for individual practitioners and the professional association to keep the experiences of welfare recipients visible as a public issue and to contribute to the development of responsive social policies for poor women and their children (Hagen, 1999). ■

REFERENCES

- Brodkin, E. Z. (1997). Inside the welfare contract: Discretion and accountability in state welfare administration. *Social Service Review*, 71, 2-33.
- Brooks, M. G., & Buckner, J. C. (1996). Work and welfare: Job histories, barriers to employment, and predictors of work among low-income single women. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66, 526-537.
- Carlson, B. E., & Davis, L. V. (1981). Attitudes of service providers toward domestic violence. *Social Work*, 26, 34-39.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Gondolf, E., & Fisher, E. (1988). *Battered women as survivors: An alternative to treating learned helplessness*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Gueron, J. M., & Pauly, E. (1991). *From welfare to work*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Hagen, J. L. (1987). Income maintenance workers: Technicians or service providers? *Social Service Review*, 61, 261-271.
- Hagen, J. L. (1999). Public welfare and human services: New directions under TANF? *Families in Society*, 80, 78-90.
- Hagen, J. L., & Davis, L. V. (1994). *Implementing JOBS: The participants' perspective*. Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government.
- Hagen, J. L., & Lurie, I. (1994). *Implementing JOBS: Progress and promise*. Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government.
- Hagen, J. L., Lurie, I., & Wang, L. (1993). *Implementing JOBS: The perspective of front-line workers*. Albany, NY: Rockefeller Institute of Government.
- Hagen, J. L., & Wang, L. (1993). Roles and functions of public welfare workers. *Administration in Social Work*, 17, 81-103.
- Holcomb, P. A., Pavetti, L., Ratcliffe, C., & Riedinger, S. (1998). *Building an employment focused welfare system: Work first and other work-oriented strategies in five states*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.
- Howell, S. L. (1997). How will battered women fare under the new welfare reform? *Berkeley Women's Law Journal*, 12, 140-150.
- Kenney, C. T., & Brown, K. R. (1996). *Report from the front-line: The impact of violence on poor women*. New York: NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund.
- Krueger, R. A. (1994). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand, Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Meyers, M. K., Glasser, B., & MacDonald, K. (1998). On the front lines of welfare delivery: Are workers implementing policy reforms? *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17, 1-22.
- Parrott, S. (1998). *Welfare recipients who find jobs*. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.
- Pavetti, L. (1995). *Who is affected by time limits?* (Welfare Reform Brief No. 7). Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, P.L. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105.
- Petersen, C. D. (1995). Female-headed families on AFDC: Who leaves welfare quickly and who doesn't? *Journal of Economic Issues*, 29, 619-628.
- Pollack, W., & Davis, M. F. (1997). The Family Violence Option of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996: Interpretation and implementation. *Clearinghouse Review*, 30, 1079-1098.
- Raphael, J., & Tolman, R. M. (1997). *Trapped by poverty/Trapped by abuse*. (Report by Project for Research on Welfare, Work, and Domestic Violence). Ann Arbor: Taylor Institute and the University of Michigan Research Development Center on Poverty, Risk, and Mental Health.

- Salomon, A., Bassuk, S. S., & Brooks, M. G. (1996). Patterns of welfare use among poor and homeless women. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 66, 510–525.
- Shepard, M., & Pence, E. (1988). The effects of battering on the employment status of women. *Affilia*, 3, 55–63.
- Spalter-Roth, R., Burr, B., Hartmann, H., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Welfare that works: The working lives of AFDC recipients*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.
- Tutty, L. M., Rothery, M. A., & Grinnell, R. M. (1996). *Qualitative research for social workers*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- U.S. General Accounting Office (1998a, January). *Welfare reform: States' efforts to expand child care programs*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- U.S. General Accounting Office (1998b, June). *Welfare reform: States are restructuring programs to reduce welfare dependence*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Weyers, N. L. (1981). Income maintenance revisited: Functions, skills, and boundaries. *Administration in Social Work*, 5, 15–28.

Jan L. Hagen, PhD, ACSW, is professor, School of Social Welfare, University at Albany, State University of New York, 135 Western Avenue, Albany, NY 12222; e-mail: jh038@cnsvox.albany.edu. **Judith Owens-Manley, PhD, ACSW**, is research coordinator, Resource Center for Human Services, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY.

Original manuscript received February 8, 1999
 Final revision received August 23, 1999
 Accepted November 8, 1999

APPENDIX A

CASE VIGNETTES

Instructions

Please read the seven cases below and rank them in order of priority from 1 (first) to 7 (last) that you would exempt each case from TANF requirements of employment and time-limits for receiving public assistance. The purpose is to identify your values and priorities in making these difficult decisions, first in your independent choices, then through open discussion. The order in which cases are listed is random and is not intended to imply any priority given.

Abby is a 37-year-old white female with two children: John, age 10 and Lisa, age 8. She re-

ceived public assistance for about four years beginning when John was two and she was pregnant with Lisa. She was not married to John's father or Lisa's father, both of whom were African American. Neither has consistently paid child support. Abby is now in a domestic violence shelter with her two children after several years of abuse from her current live-in. He abused the children too. She intends to separate from him, but she has not worked steadily in four years and never had more than a minimum wage job.

* * *

Brenda, an African American woman of 36 with one four-year-old child, has a record with another agency that states she has two children who were taken away and placed for adoption 10 years ago in another state. She has a history of mental illness and was once hospitalized for depression. In spite of that, she does not qualify for SSI. She has worked odd jobs most of her life, sometimes cleaned houses, but she has depended on her transient relationships for financial stability. Brenda is applying for public assistance, is living in a temporary shelter for homeless families, and would like a chance to "straighten her life out".

* * *

Irene, a young Asian woman age 28, graduated from high school with good grades and immediately became pregnant. Her son is now 10 years old. His father, Joe, who is white, lived with Irene and their son for the first four years, but then Irene left him because of repeated abuse. Joe pays child support sporadically and often uses it to threaten Irene or to try to force her to do what he wants her to. He has continued to threaten and harass her for the past six years at every opportunity, and Irene has been afraid to date anyone or to do anything about it. He threatens to kill her if she ever has anyone else and always says he loves her and wants her back again. Irene has a low-paying part-time job and has lost two jobs because Joe is constantly calling her at work, showing up at work to threaten her male co-workers, and leaving her so rattled that she makes costly mistakes on the job.

* * *

Jill is a young white woman in her early thirties with two girls, ages 9 and 12. The children have had a stepfather, Barry, also white, since they were 1 and 4, and Jill receives no child support from their father, whose whereabouts are unknown. Jill has never really worked, but Barry has a good job with sufficient income to allow her to stay home with the children. In fact, he insisted that she not work. Jill recently came into the Domestic Violence Shelter with the girls when the older one disclosed at school that her stepfather had been molesting her for the last two years. There is an open child protective investigation, and it turned out that there has been systematic physical and emotional abuse of Jill for years. She has many old untreated injuries and needs both medical and dental attention, both of which Barry had banned her from getting for herself. The family has been isolated from outsiders, except for the girls' school attendance.

* * *

Lenore, age 25, left her husband two years ago and is living on her own with their five-year-old daughter, Heather. Both are white. Dave has supervised visitation with Lisa because of his abusive and threatening behavior with both Lenore and Lisa, and Dave has broken into their home twice in the past six months. Although Lenore has an order of protection, she is afraid to work, and both she and Heather have problems sleeping. Heather has been unable to attend kindergarten, because she screams and cries when her mother tries to leave her there. Dave is due to go to court again next month, and he may go to jail for a short time. Lenore's lawyer is also going to request that visitation be stopped in the meantime.

* * *

Linda is a 50ish African American woman who looks older than her years. She has had drinking problems in the past, and her 15-year-old son has been living with another family member for the past two years. Linda has held good jobs in the past, but has lost several because of her drinking at times. She lives with long-time boyfriend, Steve, also an alcoholic and known drug dealer. Linda has started in-patient treatment programs twice, but she left before completing treatment and did not

maintain sobriety. She has started out-patient treatment again now, and she is applying for assistance because she left her last job about two months ago. She was having severe headaches and missed 30 days in her past six months of work. She is not eligible for unemployment. She wants to leave Steve and have her son come and live with her again.

* * *

Maria is a 19-year-old Latina and pregnant with her second child. Eighteen-month old Nina stays with Maria's mother for the most part, and Maria has been collecting public welfare benefits for most of two years. She was trying to finish high school credits to attend a community college when she became pregnant by Nina's father. She does not want to marry him and now wants to stay away from him. He abuses drugs and has threatened to "steal" their child. She is hoping to finish high school while she is pregnant and to attend college after the baby is born.