

Insights on Southern Poverty

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University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research

Devolution, discretion, and variation in local TANF sanctioning

Richard C. Fording, Sanford F. Schram, and Joe Soss

With the introduction of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in 1996, state policymakers were given significant freedom to craft their own approaches to public assistance. Devolution of authority from the Federal to state government has been accompanied by a significant decentralization of policymaking authority within states, as well. TANF's emphasis on flexible services and sanctioning virtually ensured that decision making would be given to local implementers, including case managers, in the new world of welfare service delivery. However, many states have further expanded local discretion in TANF implementation by pursuing "second-order" devolution – formal transfers of state control to county governments and/or to local public/private governance boards.

Several studies have examined the characteristics of sanctioned families, using either surveys of TANF recipients or state administrative data. The findings indicate that sanctioned clients often exhibit the characteristics of long-term welfare recipients. Despite this progress in analyzing sanctions, the literature has paid surprisingly little attention to the decentralized implementation processes at the heart of welfare reform. As a result, the consequences of dispersed local implementation remain unknown in our understanding of sanction processes and outcomes.

To answer questions about the effect of sanctions, we examined outcomes in Florida, which stands as a leader in welfare decentralization and second-order

devolution. Relying on administrative records provided by the Florida Department of Children and Families, we conducted a series of analyses which examined the relationship between individual sanction outcomes and (1) individual client traits, (2) local social and economic conditions, and (3) the local political environment. Our results suggest that a significant amount of local variation exists in sanctioning outcomes across the state of Florida, even after taking into account the characteristics of TANF clients. Moreover, local patterns are not random but are systematically related to selected characteristics of the local community, including ideological tendencies.

State and local sanctioning rates in Florida

Along with many other states, Florida employs immediate, full-family sanctions, which result in loss of TANF benefits and a reduction of Food Stamp benefits to the fullest extent permitted by Federal law. In addition to having a relatively strict written policy, Florida appears to enforce sanctions frequently, as well. From 2000 through the first quarter of 2004, an average of 3215 TANF clients were sanctioned each month, comprising, on average, approximately 36% of TANF exits. In contrast, the most recent data reported by the federal government (for fiscal year 2002) show that nationally, approximately 7% of all case closings were due to sanctions.

To examine local variation in TANF sanctioning, we observed sanctioning outcomes for the 24 cohorts of clients entering TANF from January 2001 through December 2002, limiting our observa-

tion to the first 12 months of the first TANF spell for each cohort. Based on these calculations, the average sanction rate across all 66 counties was 39%. This means that for the 24 cohorts, at least 39% were sanctioned off TANF during their first TANF spell. As we anticipated, there has been significant variation in county sanction rates during our study period. For example, four counties sanctioned clients at a rate of less than 30% in our sample, with the lowest sanction rate

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Letter from the director

—By James P. Ziliak—

I am pleased to announce that the core funding underwriting the UK Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR) was renewed this past fall by the Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The 3-year grant was awarded to UKCPR after a nationwide competition for proposals for Area Poverty Research Centers. Other recipients of these grants were the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin and the West Coast Poverty Research Center at the University of Washington.

The UKCPR, which was established by ASPE in 2002, will continue to target its research, mentoring, and dissemination efforts on the issues of poverty and inequality, and their correlates among the citizens residing in the 16 states comprising the southern United States.

The funds support core operations along with our major internal and external research programs including the Regional Small Grants Program; the HBCU, 1890, and Tribal Colleges and Universities Small Grants Program; the Emerging Scholars Program; the Internal Research Support Program; the Graduate Student Research Program; the Seminar Series; and our newsletter *Insights on Southern Poverty*, among others.

We encourage you to visit our website at <http://www.ukcpr.org> to learn more about the Center's activities. A new addition to the site is a publicly available and downloadable dataset containing economic and political data on all 50 states and the District of Columbia, spanning 1980–2004. Included in this Excel file are data on employment, population, unemployment, participation in AFDC/TANF, food stamps, SSI, and other programs, food insecurity, minimum wages, EITC parameters, political party of the Governor, among others.

In this first newsletter after reauthorization we focus attention on research projects funded by the Center over the

past two years through the auspices of our Internal Grants Program and Regional Small Grants Program.

We lead with an article by UKCPR Faculty Affiliate Richard Fording, and colleagues Sanford Schram and Joe Soss, which examines variation in sanctioning against Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients in Florida counties. Their research indicates that relinquishment of enforcement authority to local officials affects the level of sanctioning against recipients. Among the findings is a variation in sanctioning rates based on the local political ideology.

An article by Shiferaw Gurmu, Keith Ihlanfeldt, and William Smith examines the effect of locale on employment among TANF recipients. The authors were interested in work requirements for those receiving government assistance and investigated how job access and place-based influences affect employment probability among those receiving welfare. They relate that important variables to consider in employment include age, education, and size of the family.

Leonard Lopoo's research looks at the relationship between fertility and a family's economic well being in the South. Specifically, he examines the characteristics of mothers in the region and if these characteristics leave women in the South vulnerable to poverty. Differences in Southern mothers as compared to the rest of the country include younger childbearing age, lower education, and a higher likelihood to be of minority status.

Maryah Fram, Julie Miller-Cribbs, and Lee Van Horn examined the characteristics of Southern public grade schools to explain gaps in achievement compared to other regions. They examine the effects of child-, classroom-, and school-level factors as it relates to the quality of education. The authors show, among other findings, that black children are more likely to attend schools with a high percentage of students living in poverty.

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at 22%. In contrast, three counties sanctioned at a rate of at least 50%, with the maximum sanction rate at 53%.

As we detail below, our research finds that this variation is driven by a variety of factors. However, one of the most consistent predictors of sanctioning across all of our analyses appears to be the local political ideology. In Figure 1 (below), we provide evidence of this effect by displaying the relationship between local sanction rates and an index of county conservatism based on local voting patterns. This relationship provides compelling evidence of a relationship between local sanctioning outcomes and the political environment and is also confirmed by the estimated regression line, which is also plotted in the figure. Although this relationship proves to be statistically significant, it is clearly far from perfect and suggests that there are likely many other factors that are in-

fluencing local sanctioning outcomes. Thus, we now move to a more detailed and rigorous analysis of sanctioning outcomes which controls for a variety of individual and contextual level variables.

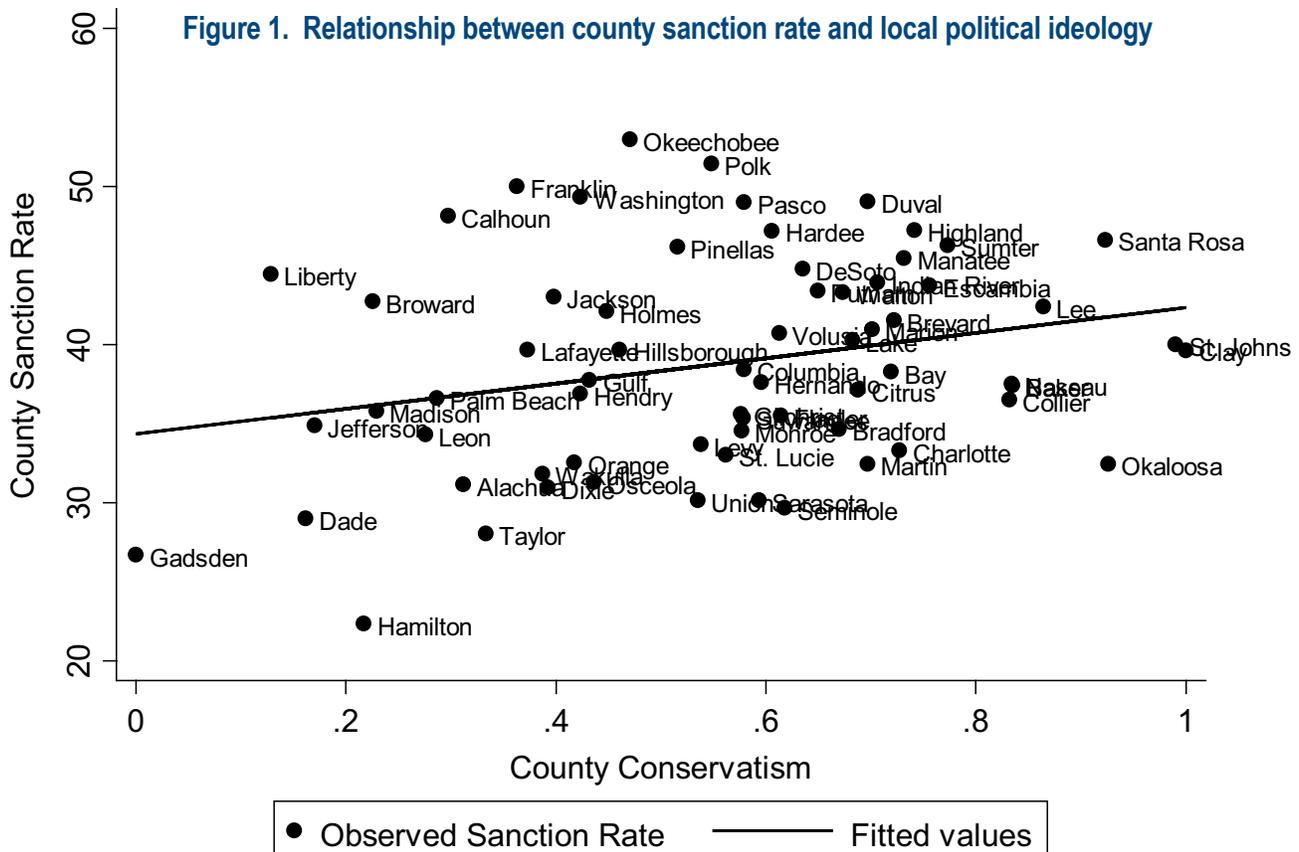
An event history analysis of sanction initiation

To examine the determinants of sanction usage, we employ an event history analysis of the initiation of a sanction. This analysis, which relies on individual level data, estimates the extent to which different individual and community characteristics are associated with the risk of sanction throughout the TANF spell. Our sample consists of individual-level administrative data for all new adult clients entering TANF during the 24-month period from January 2001 through December 2002. As defined, and accounting for a small percentage of cases for which values of some variables are missing, our total sample size exceeds 64,000 individuals and 183,000 person-month observations.

The results for our event history mod-

el are summarized in Table 1, which displays the predicted change in the risk of sanction due to given changes in selected variables. Much as we would expect, we find that sanctions are significantly related to clients' individual traits. Specifically, TANF sanctions are more likely to be applied to the small number of men, relative to the large majority of adult women in the program. We also find that the probability of being sanctioned is higher for clients who are younger, who are heads of two-parent families, and who have less than a high school or college education. The effects of race and ethnicity are more complicated, as our analysis determined that these effects vary in magnitude across the TANF spell. We find that in the earliest months of a participation spell, white clients are significantly more likely to be sanctioned than black or Hispanic clients. However, as the length of the spell grows, black and Hispanic clients become more likely to experience a sanction than their white counterparts.

Our results indicate that differences



Note: The measure of local political ideology is based on county voting patterns across 18 Constitutional amendments that appeared on a statewide ballot over the period 1996 – 2004. The county sanction rate is the percentage of

all new TANF clients sanctioned during the first 12 months of their first spells (for the 24 cohorts entering TANF from January 2001 – December 2002).

in local sanctioning rates are not solely accounted for by differences in the characteristics of local TANF populations, but that they are also driven by local differences in the implementation environment. Specifically, we find that holding individual traits and other county characteristics constant, the risk of sanction in the most conservative county is 41% higher than the risk of sanction in the most liberal county. The results in Table 1 (bottom right) suggest that sanctioning outcomes are also influenced by the socioeconomic environment in which TANF is implemented. We find that all else equal, the risk of sanction is greater in large urban counties and where poverty rates are relatively higher. These results may reflect the effects of environments in which jobs are less accessible or, for other reasons specific to the locale, because TANF clients find the demands of the program more difficult to meet.

Finally, in addition to the effects of individual and community traits, we also find evidence of a seasonal pattern to sanctioning. This seasonal effect is tied with fluctuations in the tourist industry. The relationship between these seasonal effects and tourism sales is extremely strong, suggesting that sanctioning pat-

terns may, in some way, be related to labor market demands that are driven by the tourist economy.

Conclusion

Given the importance of sanctions to the well-being of TANF clients, a number of studies have examined the determinants of sanctioning to gain a better understanding of who is being sanctioned, and why. Although this literature has furthered our understanding of the impact of sanctioning, it has been almost exclusively “client-centered” in its theoretical approach by neglecting to consider the effects of the welfare system and implementation. Our research attempts to shed some light on these effects by examining local variation in sanctioning across the state of Florida, which stands as a leader in the use of sanctioning. We find significant variation in local practices, even after controlling for such important individual traits as education, race, and income. Importantly, we find strong

evidence that local differences are not random but strongly tied to local political values and socioeconomic environment. We cannot pinpoint the causal mechanisms driving these findings, yet there is good reason to believe they are rooted in the decentralized nature of TANF implementation in Florida, along with the inherent discretion present in the process.

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This article summarizes the results of a study funded by the UK Center for Poverty Research, and the full paper is available at <http://www.ukcpr.org/DiscussionPapers.html>.

Table 1. Predicted Change in Risk of Sanction Due to Changes in Selected Variables

Change in independent variable	Percentage change in risk of sanction
Individual characteristics	
Male (compared to female)	+20%
10-year increase in age	-10%
Single-parent compared to two-parent family	-14%
\$1000 increase in earned income (previous quarter)	-01%
Education (compared to 12 years)	
< 12 years	46%
12 years	+13%
Race/ethnicity	
Black (compared to white, by month of spell)	
3 months	-5%
6 months	+13%
9 months	+35%
Hispanic (compared to white, by month of spell)	
3 months	-7%
6 months	+4%
9 months	+17%
Implementation environment	
Most conservative county (compare to most liberal)	+41%
10% increase in county poverty rate	+35%
1 million increase in county population	+28%

Note: These results are based on estimates obtained from a Cox Proportional Hazards Model of sanction initiation. The sample for this analysis consists of all new TANF clients who entered from January 2001 through December 2002. Clients are observed during the first TANF spell, for a maximum of 12 months (clients who exit without being sanctioned, or who were sanctioned after 12 months, are treated as right-censored).

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Does space matter in the employment of TANF recipients?

By Shiferaw Gurmu, Keith R. Ihlanfeldt, and William J. Smith

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 imposed stringent work requirements and time limits on welfare recipients that intensified interest in the factors that affect the employment of recipients, including economic, demographic, and policy factors. The demographic factors frequently discussed in the literature can be roughly divided into two broad categories – family/individual-based and place-based. Individual characteristics include education attainment, training, and experience as well as the recipient's motivation, attitude, and family structure. Place-based influences comprise job accessibility and neighborhood effects. Job access refers to the nearness of compatible job openings, which can reflect fluctuations in the overall economy. Neighborhood effects encompass a variety of potential environmental influences that may alter a person's willingness or ability to work.

The existing evidence on the effects of individual and place variables on the employment of welfare recipients, and low-skill workers generally, is limited because few studies have adequately dealt with the fact that residential location is self-selected. For example, recipients more motivated to work may perform better in job interviews and may be more likely to seek a place to live that

offers nearby job opportunities. Not accounting for self-selection attributes all the unobserved influences of individual motivation to job accessibility and leads to biased estimates of the effect of job access.

There are two approaches toward dealing with self-selection: 1) conduct a random assignment experiment or identify a natural experiment where location is random, and 2) rely upon panel estimation techniques that control both for observed factors and for unobservable factors affecting employment decisions. We use both panel techniques and a natural experiment to study the factors affecting the employment probability of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients living within the metropolitan Atlanta area. In this article we focus on the panel analysis where we use data on the quarterly employment experience of individual TANF recipients that contains both individual and place-level variables. We find substantial evidence that individual and family characteristics are important determinants of the employment probability of welfare recipients. The age and education of the recipient and the number of children and adults in the family are all found to be important determinants of employment. Space (neighborhood effects and job access), on the other hand, is found to be relatively unimportant. This confirms the findings of other recent studies that have focused on the employment of welfare recipients.

Background

Two hypotheses relate the employment probability of low skill workers to their residential locations – the spatial mismatch hypothesis and the neighborhood effects hypothesis. The spatial mismatch hypothesis states that job suburbanization has reduced the employment opportunities of central city low-skill residents, because they have been unable to shift their labor supply from the central city to the suburbs. For a review of this literature see, for example, Ihlanfeldt

and Sjoquist (1998). Neighborhood effects encompass a variety of mechanisms that link the neighborhood setting to individual behaviors and opportunities. Examples include peer group influences, role model effects, and informal sources of job market information. While many other examples could be identified, the basic idea is well known – poor neighborhoods result in individual behaviors that are detrimental to both the person and society.

Research that is relevant to our project includes studies based on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's demonstration "Moving to Opportunity" (MTO). In MTO public housing residents with children were eligible to participate in a lottery that randomly assigned them to one of three groups – a control group (remained in public housing), a Section 8 group (given a Section 8 voucher, without a location restriction), and an experimental group (received a Section 8 voucher that required finding housing within a census tract with low poverty (i.e., less than 10 percent)). The majority of the MTO participants were receiving welfare at the time of assignment. The motivation behind MTO was that its randomized design would minimize bias resulting from the self-selection of residential location (Katz et al. 2001; Kling et al. 2004). The MTO studies found no significant differences in employment or earnings between the control and experimental groups, suggesting that nothing about place has an important effect on the labor market outcomes of housing assistance recipients.

Methods

To construct our data we started with administrative TANF records from the Georgia Department of Human Resources. From the TANF records, we obtain both individual and family characteristics on a quarterly basis. We geolocated the TANF records by address

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This article summarizes the results of a study funded by the UK Center for Poverty Research, and the full paper is available at <http://www.ukcpr.org/DiscussionPapers.html>.

and attach neighborhood attributes. From the Georgia Department of Labor, we obtain earnings and the work history information for each TANF case head. The panel includes all females living in the Atlanta MSA who were TANF case heads and 15 to 65 years old in the first quarter of 1999. The data for our main analysis are based on 13,679 TANF recipients (about 85 percent nonwhite). Individuals were followed over 16 quarters – from the first quarter of 1999 to the fourth quarter of 2002.

We specify and estimate static and dynamic probit models of employment choice of TANF recipients. We explain the full-time employment status of individual TANF recipients during a given quarter in terms of job accessibility, labor market competition, childcare, neighborhood characteristics, and individual characteristics. Individual characteristics include age, whether the recipient graduated from high school, number of children under the age of 18, and whether welfare benefits had been received for eight consecutive quarters prior to the first quarter of 1999.

Childcare accessibility is measured by two variables – one to account for access to formal childcare (the number of childcare workers working in the individual’s neighborhood) and the other to account for the availability of informal childcare (presence of other adults within the household). The neighborhood and transit variables include the poverty rate of the individual’s block group, whether the individual resides within a quarter of a mile of a transit line, and whether the individual lives in public housing. Our job access measures are constructed for all-jobs as well as for each major industry grouping.

Results

Data analysis showed that about 25% of the TANF recipients are employed full time during any given quarter, regardless of race. The typical recipient is nonwhite, in her middle 30s, and lacks a high school diploma. Half of the whites and 67% of the nonwhites are long-term recipients of welfare benefits. Family structure also differs between

Table 1: Estimated Average Probability of TANF Recipient Being Employed Full-time in Response to a One-Unit Change in:

Factors	White	Nonwhite	Nonwhite <small>Pub. housing res.</small>
Previous quarter employment status	0.3298	0.3188	0.2910
Number of children	-0.0098	-0.0037	
Availability of informal childcare	0.0302	0.0626	0.0672
Access to job growth (one SD)	0.0022	0.0012	0.0009
Competing labor supply (one SD)	-0.0217		

Notes: Numbers show predicted responses to a unit increase in key control variables. SD refers to standard deviation. For informal childcare and past employment status variables, the estimated effect is for a discrete change from absence to presence of the attribute.

the races, with nonwhites having on average more children than whites. There is, however, little difference in the proportion of cases with two or more adults present in the household.

The residential locations of nonwhites and whites are markedly different. Nonwhite recipients are much more centrally located, with 62% living in the central county in comparison to only 10% of the whites. Neighborhoods of nonwhites are characterized by inferior job access, greater competition for jobs, and a higher poverty rate (almost three times higher). On average, nonwhites experienced decreased accessibility to job growth in seven of the nine industry groupings, whereas their white counterparts experienced decreased accessibility on only four industry categories. Nonwhites are also about four times more likely to live in public housing than whites. However, the neighborhoods of nonwhites do offer two advantages over those occupied by whites – access to formal childcare and to public transit are better in the nonwhites’ neighborhoods.

Table 1 presents estimated changes in the probability of employment of welfare recipients in response to a one-unit increase in several key control variables. Having a high school diploma and a recent work history both increase the chances that a TANF recipient is currently employed. Being employed in the previous quarter increases the probability of current employment by between 29% and 33% over recipients who were unemployed in the previous quarter.

Family composition also has an important effect. The presence of informal childcare through the presence of a sec-

ond adult in the household increases employment probability by about 3% for whites and 6.3% for non-whites. Another child reduces employment probability by 1% for whites and by 0.4% for nonwhites.

We found only weak evidence that access to job growth improves employment probability for TANF recipients. We have also estimated access measures separately for industry groups most likely to hire TANF recipients. For nonwhites these factors are not significant. Proximity to retail jobs has a positive effect on the employment probability of whites. Taken together, the findings suggest that the best predictor of future employment is past employment, and that establishing a work history, attaining a high school diploma, and finding childcare is more important than neighborhood and job access variables.

Conclusion

While proximity to jobs may matter to other disadvantaged workers, it does not seem to be important to the employment probability of welfare recipients. What does seem to matter are the individual and family characteristics of the recipient, both observed and unobserved. The observed variables that matter are the age and education of the recipient and the number of children and adults in the family. The strength of the effects estimated for unobserved individual differences, initial employment status, and long-term usage of public assistance underscore the importance of unobserved individual characteristics on employment probability. The estimated

(Continues on next page)

strong relationship between current and past employment status suggests that establishing a work history in the formal labor market is key in moving welfare recipients toward self-sufficiency.

While we find no evidence in support of proximity as an important determinant of recipient employment, our results do not imply that space is inconsequential to the overall well-being of the recipient. In addition to possibly beneficial non-employment effects, neighborhoods with less poverty and nearby job opportunities may provide long-run improvements in employment probability not captured by our results.

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Table 2: Selected Results from Dynamic Probit Analysis of Factors Affecting Probability of Full-time Employment of TANF Recipients

Factors	White	Non-white	Non-white Pubhr
Previous quarter employ. status	1.629 [49.9]	1.448 [114.3]	1.434 [39.0]
High school graduate	0.152 [2.60]	0.1447 [6.51]	0.135 [1.99]
Long-term TANF recipient	-0.127 [-2.09]	-0.133 [-5.50]	-0.224 [-2.81]
Number of children	-0.111 [-2.44]	-0.023 [-1.96]	0.028 [0.82]
Informal childcare	0.107 [1.39]	0.382 [14.32]	0.517 [6.52]
Informal childcare* children	0.059 [1.90]	-0.000 [-0.03]	-0.021 [-0.94]
Access to job growth (100s)	0.008 [1.16]	0.002 [1.42]	0.001 [0.46]
Competing labor supply (100s)	-0.007 [-1.61]	0.000 [0.09]	0.003 [0.87]
Neighborhood poverty rate	-0.342 [-0.50]	-0.089 [-0.81]	0.242 [0.37]

Notes: Model also controls for age, access to transit, number of childcare workers in the census block, public housing residence status, county fixed effects, time effects, and individual effects that are allowed to be correlated with all time-varying determinants of employment status. Pubhr refers to public housing residence status. T-statistics are given within square brackets.

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UKCPR young investigator development grant recipients announced for 2006

Researchers from American University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham are the recipients of the 2006 UK Center for Poverty Research Young Investigator Development Grants.

The two winners are Alison Jackowitz of American University and Jeremy Hall of University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Jackowitz, an assistant professor of public administration and policy, will conduct research on why pregnant women in the South choose to postpone participation in the Federally funded Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) nutrition program until after childbirth.

Her research, using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort, examines why some eligible mothers do not participate in the program during the prenatal period despite evidence showing that the greatest benefits occur during this time. Her research indicates that the “largest percent of eligible non-participants during the prenatal period re-

side in the South” and “Southern women also experience the highest rates of premature and low birth weight babies.”

Hall, an assistant professor of government, will examine the link between economic development and poverty, specifically looking at the role of innovation and innovative capacity in the South.

His research will seek to determine what effect poverty has on economic development outcomes and what effect poverty has on state ability to build innovation capacity. Hall’s research hypothesis is that high poverty levels inhibit economic growth for given levels of innovation capacity and that higher poverty levels limit the development of innovation capacity at the state level.

The Young Investigator Development Grants support new and continuing research on poverty by young academics in the social and behavioral sciences, offering seed funds for the support of research and furthering the development of a new corps of poverty researchers.

State-level data sets available at UKCPR Web site

State-level data for economic, political, and transfer program information is now available on the UKCPR Web site.

The site includes information from the 50 states and District of Columbia on population, employment, unemployment rates, personal income, gross state product, and information related to a variety of transfer-payment programs for the years 1980-2004.

Other data available include number and percent of low income uninsured children, personal income, workers compensation, poverty rates, number of poor, party representation in legislatures, and a variety of figures related to earned income tax credit payments.

The link for this data is <http://www.ukcpr.org/publicdata.html>.

Fertility trends, maternal characteristics, and poverty in the American South

By Leonard M. Lopoo

Since at least the early 1800s when Thomas Malthus developed the first economic theory of fertility, social scientists have worked to understand the relationship between fertility and a family's economic well-being. Social scientists have shown that single motherhood often leads to poverty (Duncan and Rodgers 1991; Eggebeen and Lichter 1991) and that over the course of the last 40 years there has been considerable growth in single motherhood among women with poor economic prospects (Ellwood and Jencks 2004). McLanahan (2004) argues that women in the United States are now following two different trajectories. High socioeconomic status women are delaying childbearing. These women are more likely to work and are less likely to divorce, advancing their economic position. Low socioeconomic status women continue to have children at a relatively young age, are less likely to work, and are more likely to divorce. The evidence suggests a large and growing division between the "haves" and "have-nots" in the United States and that family structure decisions play a large role in the economic well-being of these families.

Poverty is not randomly distributed in the United States. In 2003, 35.9 million people, 12.5% of the population, were poor. Nine of the ten states (including the District of Columbia) with the highest proportion of poor people were located in the southern Census region (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, and Lee

2004). Given the links researchers have established between family structure decisions and poverty, as well as the disproportionate number of low-income families in the American South, this article asks about characteristics of mothers in the American South and if they leave these women and their families vulnerable to poverty (Lopoo, 2005).

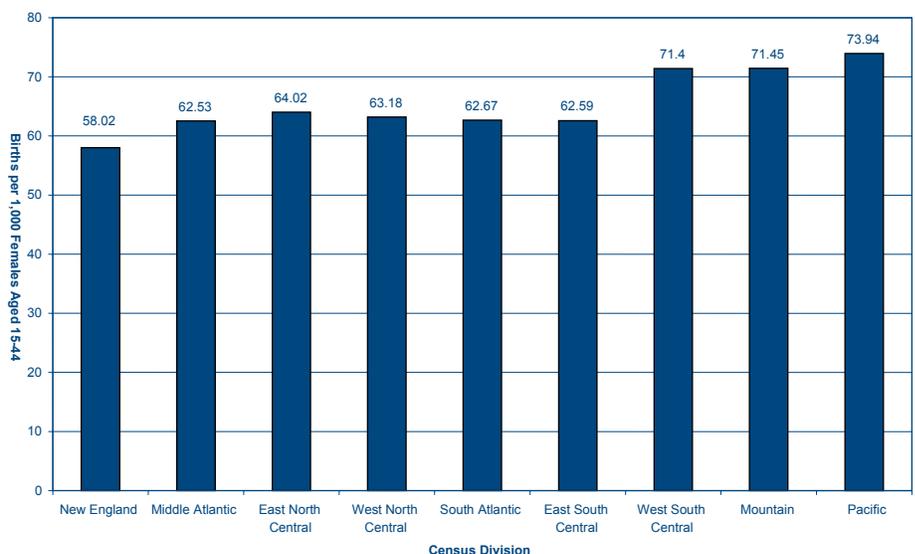
Fertility Patterns

I begin by describing the age-specific fertility patterns of women in the different parts of the United States using National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) birth certificate data for all children born between 1990 and 1999. Next, I model the relationship between poverty and the average characteristics of women who gave birth in 1998 using data from the June 1998 Current Population Survey (CPS). Finally, I simulate poverty rates in the nine Census divisions in the United States (focusing on the southern divisions), comparing the poverty rates in a particular division to what they would be if maternal characteristics had been the same as those found in the New England Census division, the division with the lowest poverty rates.

Figure 1 displays the annual fertility rate per 1,000 women aged 15-44 by Census division averaged from data over the 1990s. The three southern divisions had average annual fertility rates ranging from 62.7-71.4 births per 1,000 females. Rates in the South Atlantic and the East South Central divisions were similar to rates in the Middle Atlantic, East North Central, and West North Central divisions, while the rate in the West South Central division falls just under the rates in the Mountain and Pacific divisions. Obviously, the South did not have the lowest average annual fertility rates during the 1990s, but it did not have the highest either.

Averaging fertility rates from ages 15-44 smoothes the differences in the age when women are having their children. Figure 2 shows annual age-specific teen fertility rates averaged during the 1990s for women in the four Census regions. Teenage fertility rates, which are typically measured from age 15 to 19, are higher in the South than any other region of the country. At about age 22, fertility rates appear to peak in the South, then mostly decline for every age through 44. Af-

Figure 1: Fertility Rates by Census Division



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This article summarizes the results of a study funded by the UK Center for Poverty Research, and the full paper is available at <http://www.ukcpr.org/DiscussionPapers.html>.

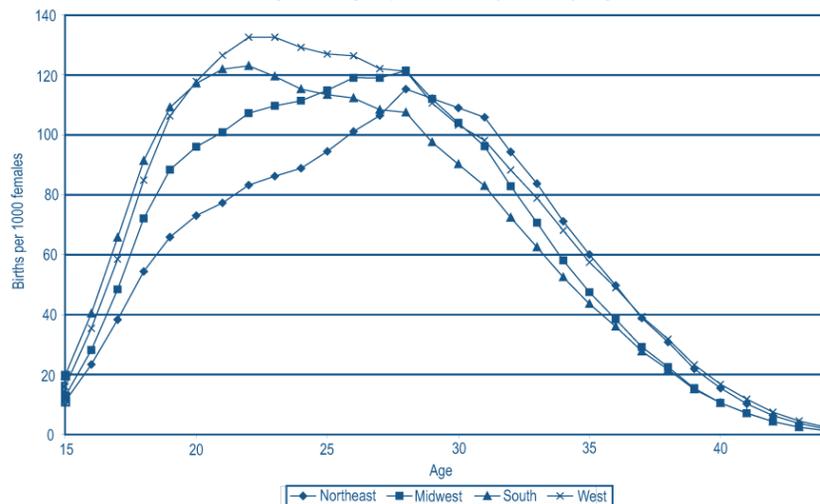
ter age 28, the fertility rates in the South are lower than any other region until age 41. These rates demonstrate that while average fertility rates in the South are no different from the rest of the country, the age profile of fertility in the South is much different, particularly compared to the Northeast and the Midwest, with southern women having their children at younger ages.

For women who had a child in 1998 in the nine different Census divisions, one of the most striking regional differences is the education level for women in the Northeast and Midwest compared to those in the South and West. Mothers in the New England division had nearly 1.5 more years of education at the birth of their child than those in the West South Central division. Nearly 72% of mothers in the New England division were married when they had their child in 1998 compared to around 66% in the southern divisions. Mothers in the New England division also had fewer children but the differences here are much smaller. As expected, the mothers in the South are much more likely to be African American and the mothers in the West are more likely to be Hispanic.

Links Between Fertility and Poverty

In Table 1 (bottom left), I report predicted probabilities of poverty using estimated regression coefficients from the June 1998 CPS and the average characteristics of mothers in the nine different

Figure 2: Age-specific fertility rates by region



Census divisions from the NCHS data. The baseline predicted poverty rates range from a low in the New England division of 10.2% to a high of 23.7% in the West South Central division. As expected, rates are higher in the South and West than in the Northeast and Midwest.

Next, I simulate poverty rates by changing the value for the observed variables in a given division with the observed average in the New England division. I chose mothers from the New England division as a comparison since these predicted poverty rates were lowest. The third column reports the predicted poverty rate using the average education level from the New England division. The predicted poverty rate in the South At-

lantic division falls 15.5% (from 18.1 to 15.3). In the East South Central division the rate falls 19%, and in the West South Central division the rate falls 26.2%.

In the sixth column, I report results using the racial and ethnic composition of the New England division. Given the large differences in the racial and ethnic composition of the South, one finds fairly large reductions in the predicted poverty rates for these changes, as well, ranging from 9.7% in the East South Central division to 14.4% in the South Atlantic division.

Changes due to the age composition and to unemployment rates are also non-trivial and create declines in the predicted poverty rates in the South. With the age composition in the New England division, the percentage change in the proportion of poor ranges between a 6.1% decline in the South Atlantic division to a decline of 10.3% in the East South Central division. Unemployment rates are also linked to declines in the predicted poverty rates in the South: between 5 and 10.5%.

Conclusions

Few researchers have studied how the characteristics of mothers are related to regional poverty rates in the United States. Using data from the NCHS natality series and the June 1998 CPS, I find similar fertility rates throughout the United States, but women in the South are unique in a variety of dimensions that may help explain high rates of poverty. Women in the South have children

Table 1: Predicted Poverty Rates by Census Division

Census Division	Baseline	NE Educ. (% change)	NE Marriage Rate (% change)	NE parity (% change)	NE Racial/Ethnic Comp. (% change)	NE Age Comp. (% change)	NE Unemp. Rate (% change)
New England	0.102						
Middle Atlantic	0.168	0.150 (-10.7)	0.158 (-6.0)	0.162 (-3.6)	0.150 (-10.7)	0.165 (-1.8)	0.146 (-13.1)
East North Central	0.163	0.139 (-14.7)	0.153 (-6.1)	0.155 (-4.9)	0.153 (-6.1)	0.152 (-6.7)	0.156 (-4.3)
West North Central	0.125	0.114 (-8.8)	0.124 (-0.8)	0.119 (-4.8)	0.127 (+1.6)	0.116 (-7.2)	0.128 (+2.4)
South Atlantic	0.181	0.153 (-15.5)	0.167 (-7.7)	0.178 (-1.7)	0.155 (-14.4)	0.170 (-6.1)	0.172 (-5.0)
East South Central	0.195	0.158 (-19.0)	0.180 (-7.7)	0.194 (-0.5)	0.176 (-9.7)	0.175 (-10.3)	0.180 (-7.7)
West South Central	0.237	0.175 (-26.2)	0.223 (-5.9)	0.229 (-3.4)	0.203 (-14.3)	0.216 (-8.9)	0.212 (-10.5)
Mountain	0.183	0.146 (-20.2)	0.178 (-2.7)	0.171 (-6.6)	0.172 (-6.0)	0.168 (-8.2)	0.170 (-7.1)
Pacific	0.236	0.175 (-25.8)	0.227 (-3.8)	0.223 (-5.5)	0.206 (-12.7)	0.226 (-4.2)	0.198 (-16.1)

Notes: Probabilities are predicted using coefficient estimates from the probit model using the 1998 June CPS substituting mean values for the covariates using the 1998 NCHS natality data (see Lopod (2005) for details); percentage change compared to the baseline model reported in parentheses.

at younger ages than those in the Midwest and Northeast. These mothers also tend to have much lower levels of education and are more likely to be African American or Hispanic.

These findings also suggest that given the sizeable differences in education between the regions, an increase in educational attainment among mothers in the South to the level of those in the New England division would reduce southern poverty rates between 16 and 26%.

This analysis provides some direction for policy makers, suggesting that changes in maternal education may reduce poverty rates appreciably. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 set goals

to delay the fertility of young women. These results suggest that any program that delays fertility and increases educational attainment might reduce poverty.

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Poverty, race, and the contexts of achievement

Examining educational experiences of children in the American South

By Maryah Stella Fram
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Race and class gaps in academic achievement of children have historically been thought to be connected to school segregation, particularly in the South. Relative to the nation, the South is characterized by high levels of poverty, a large African American population, and poor performance in many domains of educational quality. Thus, in the South, there is a heightened need to understand racial achievement gaps in order to improve the effectiveness of education as a pathway to opportunity. While some scholars have focused on cultural or attitudinal explanations for poor and minority children's under-achievement (e.g. Murray 1984), the mainstream of research has acknowledged the need for more structural or contextual explanations (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Wilson, 1987). Recently, greater attention has been paid to understanding academic achievement in its more proximal school social context. Studies addressing "peer group effects" explore the idea that a child's social ties

in school somehow influence that child's individual learning (Hoxby 2000). Other studies focus on classroom processes such as a heightened emphasis on basic skills learning, and others still on school-level factors such as the extent of racial integration. Research has provided some support for each of these ideas, but complexities of accounting for various factors make it unclear how much impact race or class concentration may have on learning. In this research we attempt to account for these various influences by examining the effect of child-, classroom-, and school-level factors on academic achievement among public school children in the South.

Method

The data for this study comes from the first two years of Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K). ECLS-K tracks the educational development of a nationally representative cohort of children, beginning with kindergarten entry in fall of 1998. ECLS-K data was collected from multiple sources, including students, parents, teachers, and school administrators. This study includes measures at the child/family, classroom, and school levels.

We considered a subset of the ECLS-K cohort, limited first to students attending school in the South, as identified by the Census region used in the ECLS-K sampling. We further restrict our data analysis to students attending public schools; those who are white, black, or Hispanic; and those who neither change classrooms during kindergarten, nor change schools between kindergarten and first grade. These restrictions support our analytic focus on children in the South, while also allowing us to attend to the race distinctions most salient to issues of segregation and minority status.

Measures

We measured reading skills, child and family variables commonly thought to affect child learning, classroom variables, and school variables. Reading skills assessments were conducted during the fall and spring of kindergarten and in the spring of first grade. Child and family variables include information from parent interview data, child date of birth and school start date, education attainment of the mother, family socio-economic status, number of parents in household, teenage childbearing, and choice of residence and school by parents. Classroom

variables identify materials availability, organization, and teacher characteristics. Rural and non-rural schools were contrasted. The proportions of minority students and free-lunch eligible students were also examined.

Findings

Of the children in our sample, 1338 (38%) attended high-minority schools. Black students were 2.6 times more likely to attend a high-minority than a low-minority school. Children with single parents disproportionately attend high-minority schools, as do children whose mothers became pregnant while teenagers. Children in high-minority schools also had mothers with lower levels of education and socio-economic status.

At the child/family level, patterns of difference for high/low minority schools held true for high/low poverty schools, though the magnitude of difference varied. Thirty-five percent of the sample attended a high-poverty school. Black students were 1.4 times as likely to attend high-poverty schools as low-poverty schools and 3.8 times more likely than white students to attend high-poverty schools.

Children in both high-minority and high-poverty schools begin kindergarten with significantly lower reading and math skills, and the gap between their skills and those of children in low-minority and low-poverty schools grows slightly over time.

At the descriptive level, our findings suggest that school peer group composition is a significant indicator for a range of differences in educational experiences in Southern public schools. Forty percent of sample children attended a school with more than 50% minority children

Schools with higher proportions of minority or poor children have lower average gains in first grade reading.

enrolled, and nearly as many attended schools with more than 50% free-lunch-eligible children. In part, this reflects the large minority population and the high levels of child poverty in the South. It also indicates substantial concentration of disadvantaged children within a subset of public schools.

Schools with concentrations of disadvantaged children reflect an accumulation of risk factors. In addition to race and income disadvantage, children in these schools come from households with lower socio-economic status, including lower levels of maternal education. The prevalence of growing up in a single-parent household and of having a teen mother also represents barriers to educational achievement, and conditions may reflect less parental time and know-how for supporting learning.

In addition to a descriptive analysis, in our research we estimate multiple regression models that attempt to explain gains in first-grade reading levels as a function of observed child/family, classroom, and school-level factors, as well as unobserved factors that affect reading attainment. We find that most of the variability in first grade learning is attributable to child/family-level factors. Even when accounting for earlier learning experiences and a range of family and child characteristics, nearly 80% of the variability in reading is attributable to differences between children.

Traditionally, things that are measured at the individual level are thought of as behavioral choices. For example, one significant variable, teen mother, is typically understood to represent a personal choice. If women who select into teenage motherhood also experience residential segregation with their children attending poorly equipped schools, then broad structural disadvantage becomes entangled with individual attributes.

While between-child differences dominated the statistical models, there were nonetheless significant school-level

effects. The negative effects of percent minority and percent free-lunch (when entered separately) indicate that schools with higher proportions of minority or poor children have lower average gains in first grade reading.

In regard to classroom processes, the additional classroom predictor variables did increase the explained variability at the classroom level and in the model, overall. It did not, however, reduce the strength of the observed impacts of individual-level factors or of rural school status. Among the classroom factors that had significant effects, composition was found to be important. We find that having higher proportions of classmates who have below grade-level reading skills lowers the average gains in reading of the class. Perhaps the most striking finding across the models is the absence of race effects at all three levels. Child race made no significant difference in reading gains.

Conclusion

This study, in line with previous research, finds significant effects on reading achievement due to child-, classroom-, and school-level differences. A sizeable minority of Southern children attend highly race- and class-segregated schools. These children fare worse than other Southern children. The reasons for this may be quite complex but statistically appear most directly linked to child and family level disadvantage that is accumulated within substandard public schools.

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