

University of New Orleans

**ScholarWorks@UNO**

---

College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA)  
Working Papers, 1991-2000

Department of Planning and Urban Studies

---

1992

## Poor women, work and child care: the case of Project Independence in Louisiana

Alma H. Young  
*University of New Orleans*

Kristine B. Miranne  
*University of New Orleans*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.uno.edu/cupa\\_wp](https://scholarworks.uno.edu/cupa_wp)

---

### Recommended Citation

Young, Alma H. and Miranne, Kristine B., "Poor women, work and child care: the case of Project Independence in Louisiana" (1992). *College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) Working Papers, 1991-2000*. Paper 22.  
[https://scholarworks.uno.edu/cupa\\_wp/22](https://scholarworks.uno.edu/cupa_wp/22)

This Working Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Planning and Urban Studies at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) Working Papers, 1991-2000 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uno.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uno.edu).

Working papers ( University of New Orleans. Division of Urban  
Research and policy studies

**Poor Women, Work and Child Care:  
The Case of Project Independence in Louisiana**

Alma H. Young, Ph.D.  
Kristine B. Miranne

**RECEIVED**  
DEC 7 1998

SERIALS DEPT.  
EARL K. LONG LIBRARY.  
UNO

DURPS Working Paper No. 11

1992

Division of Urban Research and Policy Studies  
and  
The Project for Urban Education and Community Development

College of Urban and Public Affairs  
University of New Orleans

LA-COL  
HT  
168  
NL  
W67

## **Poor Women, Work, and Child Care:**

### **The Case of Project Independence in Louisiana**

#### **Abstract**

The 1980s ushered in a number of welfare system reforms, the most significant being the Family Support Act of 1988. Women receiving assistance are now mandated to participate in education and training programs to improve their qualifications for employment while decreasing their dependency on welfare. The language of the Act includes a reimbursement for child care expenses. As with much of the national welfare legislation, the individual states are charged with implementing and overseeing the newest reform. We will describe Project Independence, Louisiana's welfare reform program under the Family Act, focusing on an evaluation of the child care component of this state's program. Our policy recommendations include: recognizing the importance of informal child care arrangements, reimbursing informal child care expenses at the same level as formal child care, emphasizing training of child care workers, and continuing support beyond the transitional year outlined in the legislation. Without a comprehensive child care component, the newest reforms are bound to fail.

5129563

The Reagan administration initiated a set of welfare reforms directed at reducing the role of the federal government, the most significant of these being the Family Support Act of 1988. Briefly, entitlements to cash income have been replaced by cash relief that is conditional on work effort. Public assistance is now tied to a mandated program of education, job skills training and job placement, increased collection of child support payments, and subsidized child care. Each state is required to establish a Jobs Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program which must be fully operational by October, 1992.

The philosophy underlying this reform is that the family, as opposed to the government, should provide the primary economic support for its children. The needs of the child are said to be at the heart of this legislation, and yet, the legislation represents the first time that the federal government has required welfare mothers with children under the age of five to enroll for education, training or employment (Vann, 1991). While the intent may be to move individuals from dependency on public assistance into the work force, the need to reduce federal and state monies allocated for income support is also stated as a major governmental concern.

The passage of this Act occurred with little legislative discussion. It is curious that both liberal and conservative legislators supported the passage of this legislation. In the past, these two camps have often occupied opposite poles of the social policy debate. Today, however, it seems that most social policy experts,



be they in the political or academic arena, think apolitically about solutions to social problems that have been narrowly defined. Technical efficiency has become the order of the day.

Even if there appears to be consensus within the political arena, there is still much discussion in academia as to whether the new welfare mandate will actually reduce poverty. In fact, the debate surrounding the passage of the 1988 Act barely addressed whether the program would reduce the poverty of women, the population cohort that represents the majority of those receiving welfare assistance and the one impacted the most by changes in policy.

Given the focus on efficiency and reduction of public monies, it is not surprising that this legislation focused on education and training. As with past welfare reforms, the assumption is that a job is all that stands between welfare dependency and economic sufficiency. The issue not adequately addressed, however, is that working single parents bear the burden of being the primary wage earner in conjunction with bearing domestic and child rearing responsibilities. We also know that the lack of affordable child care is one of the major barriers to women's participation in the labor force (Bloom and Steen, 1990), and that it likely contributes to women's lower earnings as well.

To this end, we direct our attention to evaluating the goals and objectives of the child care component as outlined by the Family Support Act and mandated to the individual states. It should be noted that the federal legislation provides general guidelines and encourages the states to develop their own program.

Utilizing a case study approach, we examine Louisiana's proposal, Project Independence, as it will be implemented state-wide and within Orleans Parish.

### **Women, Welfare, and Poverty**

The underlying premise of the Family Support Act is that it will reduce welfare rolls and remove individuals from poverty. Although it is recognized that the majority of families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) are headed by women, there is little understanding as to how women's poverty differs from that of men. Most of the academic and legislative debates tend to equate women's poverty with that of men -- the assumption being that women share men's resources. This premise has been the basis for defining the social policy debate as well as for the formulation and implementation of policy directives (Kemp, forthcoming). We argue that this framework has resulted in serious misconceptions about the causes of poverty, the strategies employed to address poverty, and the measurement of success of social welfare policies.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, women are nearly 30 percent more likely to be poor than men (Kemp, forthcoming). Women's poverty is highlighted even more when the issue of race is introduced. Table 1 details the percentage of the population below the poverty line for men and women, and for men and women by race. Although blacks and Hispanics experience more poverty overall than do whites, women within each group are more likely to be poor than their male cohort.

**Table 1**

**Poverty Rates for Persons in Poverty  
By Sex and Race, 1990**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Total
Men	9.3	27.9	26.2	11.7
Women	12.0	35.5	29.9	15.2

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 175, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office: Table 5.

Table 2 outlines the poverty rates for married couples/families and female-headed families by race. There is a pointed contrast between the two types of families; female-headed households are much more likely to be poor than those families comprised of a married couple and their children. Even though poor white female-headed families represent a smaller portion of the population than their black or Hispanic counterparts, the percentage of white female-headed households in poverty is considerably higher than that of white married couples. Among blacks and Hispanics, over one-half of the female-headed households are poor. These statistics readily capture what is commonly referred to as the "feminization of poverty." <sup>2</sup>

**Table 2**  
**Poverty Status by Family Type and Race**  
**For Families with Children Under 18, 1990**

	Married Couples/Families	Female-Headed Families
White	7.1	37.9
Black	14.3	56.1
Hispanic	20.8	58.2

Source: U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 175, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office: Table 21.

Women's poverty in Louisiana is exacerbated by the extent of poverty experienced throughout the state. Louisiana ranks 51st in percentage of its children in poverty; children's poverty rates increased from 23.5 percent in 1979 to 34.6 percent in 1990. The state ranks 49th in percentage of children in single-parent families, which increased from 25.3 percent in 1984 to 31.3 percent in 1991 (Kids Count DataBook, 1992). In Louisiana, an AFDC family of three receives a monthly cash grant of \$190 (\$1,656 per year). This is \$468 less per month than the \$658 need standard established by the state, and \$690 less than the federal poverty level for a family of three. In other words, a family of three on AFDC in Louisiana receives an entitlement that is 22 percent of the annual federal poverty level established for a family that size. It should be noted that although no state brings a family to 100 percent of the poverty line, the nation's median is 47.5 percent (Joseph, Gilbert, and Tuman, 1992).

As of 1990, the reported statistics for New Orleans, a city whose population

was 61.9 percent African-American, reflect a large proportion of urban poor within a poor state:

- 11.9 percent of the city's households (24,094) were receiving AFDC payments.
- 23.8 percent of the city's households (48,348) were receiving food stamps.
- 27 percent of the children aged 19 years and younger (47,398) live in families that receive AFDC (Joseph, Gilbert, and Tuman, 1992).
- Citizens of New Orleans are 25 percent more dependent on social service safety net transfer payments than the average person in the United States (Metrovision, 1990).

A majority of the persons in poverty were African-American. Of those households receiving AFDC, 97 percent were black. Black households receiving food stamps constituted 91 percent of these households. In sum, the AFDC population in New Orleans can be characterized as being very low-income, highly dependent on public assistance, and at high risk due to its persistent level of poverty.

### **Social Policy and Poor Women**

Although cognizant of the fact that the majority of the poor are women and children, policy makers have not framed welfare legislation to deal with issues of gender. They have, however, utilized various theories of poverty put forth in the literature as justification for policy reform. These theories can be divided loosely into two groups: individual (e.g., "culture of poverty" thesis) and structural (e.g.,

the rise in female-headed households). At best, these explanations only describe women's poverty; worse, they either blame women being poor, (i.e., for not having a husband to support them and their children), or characterize their economic status as that of dependents. In either case, the argument seems to be that women's chances for moving out of poverty are tied to their chances of being attached to a man. The lack of jobs produces poverty for men, but the paucity of husbands is apparently the source of women's poverty (Scott, 1984).

Gender roles, however, have shifted dramatically during the past 35 years. In particular, the rapid change over the past two decades in the nation's demographics as more women became heads of their families would suggest that policy makers should construct programs that would mitigate the economic disadvantages of divorce and single-parenthood. Instead, there appears to be little understanding as to the determinants of women's poverty or how to address the problem. Women's increased vulnerability to poverty is not just a function of their inability to marry or stay married (as many would have us believe), but rather, a function of the discriminatory treatment of women in the labor market combined with the allocation to women of the responsibility of children and the lack of affordable child care (Kemp, forthcoming; Caputo, 1989; McLanahan, Sorenson, and Watson, 1989).

In addition to the issue of gender, racial discrimination also becomes important as we discuss the poverty of women and their children. The high percentage of black female-headed families may be a recent historical

phenomenon, but their poverty is not.<sup>3</sup> Although it is particularly black women and children who are poor, it is not simply because they are more likely to live in female-headed households. For example, two out of three blacks living in female-headed households were already poor before a change put them into that family configuration (Bane, 1986).

We can trace our current complex rationalizations for poverty to the Social Security Act of 1935, an omnibus law considered the foundation of our welfare state. Welfare scholars usually divide the programs into two categories: social insurance, which is more generous and more popular; and public assistance, which is more stigmatizing and less generous. The programs also divide along the lines of race and gender (Gordan, 1992). The two major forms of social insurance, Old Age Insurance (OAI) and unemployment insurance, disproportionately serve white men. For all intents, these programs are respectable and are not even considered to be welfare. Stipends are relatively high, offered without means-testing, and are received as a matter of entitlement without the requirement that the recipient submit to personal supervision.

Many of the social welfare policies of the past were developed at a time when traditional one-wage nuclear families were the norm, and divorce and single-parent families were the exception. When the Social Security Act was passed in 1935, only 15 percent of married women were in the work force. The policies that were developed provided best for male workers and their dependents. The Aid to Dependent Children program (ADC) was enacted with the assumption that the

number of families headed by women would remain small and that these mothers would remain in the home, rather than enter the labor market. It was assumed that ADC would be replaced by social security, that is, white widows of working men would eventually receive benefits. Divorced, deserted, and never-married women or women of color were not included in these programs of organized public welfare. They were considered the undeserving poor (Vann, 1990). Thus, child welfare programs assumed that most women were mothers, that children required their mother's exclusive care, and that men would support them both. <sup>4</sup>

Public assistance, on the other hand, is often considered to be pejorative. Payments are low; standard amounts keep recipients below the poverty line and are not designed to allow individuals to attain a decent standard of living. Welfare payments are carefully calculated to be less than the lowest paid jobs so that poor people in general will seek employment over public assistance, if at all possible, and women in particular will seek marriage (Caputo, 1989:90). Although in-kind benefits have grown over the years, there is still a large gap between the effective value of the welfare package and the income that wages could generate.

Interpreting public assistance programs as anti-poverty efforts ignores the basic premise of eligibility -- eligibility requires continual destitution. AFDC is actually a consumptive transfer -- benefits are used up each month, leaving recipients just as poor at the end of the month as they were at the beginning (Beechley, 1984).

Thus, even from the beginning of the welfare state, efforts to provide welfare for those on public assistance (mainly women and their children) were not created in



such a way as to ameliorate a person's poverty status. Historically, welfare and anti-poverty have not been synonymous, although the concepts, even today, would have the public believe that they are.

As the welfare rolls grew, and as increasing numbers of women entered the labor market, policy makers turned to measures designed to push single mothers into the workforce. As Handler and Hasenfeld (1991) point out: "The respectability of working married mothers only heightened the perceived deviance and moral depravity of single mothers, especially those with children born out of wedlock, who are on welfare rather than working" (p. 137). The necessity of women with children at all income levels to work changed the attitudes of many, including liberals who historically had opposed punitive welfare policies by arguing that poor women should have the same right as other women to stay home and care for their children.<sup>5</sup>

### **Family Support Act and Child Care**

The Family Support Act of 1988 has expanded the connections between welfare receipt and working mothers that started on a small scale in the 1960s and has been growing since (Vann, 1991). The new law requires mothers on AFDC with children over age 3 years (age one-year at state option) to participate in job training, education, job search, or job placement. Transitional support services including child care are to be provided for one year following AFDC ineligibility due

to increased earnings. States must guarantee child care "to the extent that it is determined by the agency to be necessary" for an individual's employment, training, or educational activities, and if the state determines that the individual is "participating satisfactorily" (Vann, 1991). In the area of child care, as with other components of the Family Act, the liberal tenets of entitlement and self-determination have been replaced with the more conservative notions of contract and compulsion (Abramovitz, 1988).

The provision of supportive services is a good start. One of the expected impediments to the realization of the legislation's goals, however, is the state's commitment to provide child care for all those who need it, and, to condition mandatory participation on its ability (and willingness) to provide such care (Miller, 1990). Critics of the legislation fear that states will not be able to assist in the creation of the large numbers of child care slots that will be needed, will not be able to attract qualified contractors who meet state and federal standards, and will not be able to help contractors in attracting qualified child care workers. The result is that the burden of finding child care will either shift to the recipient with very little formal oversight, or that there will be a loosening of the compulsion to participate from those who fail to locate necessary arrangements (Sanger, 1990). The success of the legislation will ultimately depend on how well women are able to cope with the challenges of securing adequate child care.

## **Louisiana's Program: Project Independence**

Project Independence is the name of the Louisiana JOBS program mandated by the Family Support Act of 1988. In May 1989, a statewide task force recommended that there be six components of Project Independence: 1) education, 2) skills training, 3) job readiness activities, 4) job development and job placement, 5) job search, and 6) on-the-job training. Case managers were to be trained to assist participants in assessing resources and opportunities required for self-support. In addition, the first year of implementation would be limited to six parishes (counties), including Orleans Parish (coterminous with New Orleans). The federal mandate states that mothers with children aged 3 years or younger are exempt from participation, with states having been given the option to require participation from mothers with children 1 year or older. Louisiana chose to exercise the latter alternative.

The New Orleans plan was developed by an Advisory Committee composed of 41 persons representing a cross section of the community. One welfare recipient and the head of the Welfare Rights Organization were members of the committee. The committee's charge was to design the program components so that they would be relevant to the available resources at the local level. The program was to be executed through a parish-wide management system utilizing community resources to accomplish the goals and objectives of the program.

In preparation for the local implementation of the program, the Louisiana

Department of Social Services conducted a survey in April 1990 of 10,942 potential mandatory participants (i.e., those custodial parents who met the criteria requiring participation in the program). Groups targeted to participate in Project Independence included recipients who had received AFDC in 36 of the last 60 months, custodial parents under the age of 24 without a high school diploma and/or with no work history, and recipients whose youngest child was age 16 years or older. Within New Orleans, 64 percent (13,777 persons) of the AFDC adult population met these criteria.

Table 3 reflects the age categories of the potential participants. The majority of these individuals (68 percent) were between the ages of 20 to 34 years. Although this age group may be considered prime candidates for employment, they were also more likely to have younger children that require either all day care or before- and after-school care. In comparison, only 28 percent of the respondents were age 35 years or older. This age cohort may only need part-time child care if their children are already enrolled in school.

Table 4 outlines the education levels of the respondents. A majority, 51 percent, did not have a high school diploma, with 8 percent of that group reporting less than a ninth grade education. High school graduates comprised 36 percent of the total and 11 percent had some college. This would indicate that a significant proportion of program resources would need to be targeted toward assisting participants to complete high school or to attain the Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED). It should be noted that the survey also reported that 12 percent of the

**Table 3**

**Age of Potential Participants**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Under 20 Years	341	03
20 - 23 Years	1,521	14
24 - 34 Years	5,898	54
35 - 44 Years	2,409	22
45 Years and Older	605	06
No Response	168	01
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,942</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Louisiana Department of Social Services, 1990.

**Table 4**

**Education Level of Potential Participants**

<b>Education Level of AFDC Respondent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Grades 1 - 8	855	8
Grades 9 - 11	4,657	43
High School Graduate	3,986	36
Some College	1,133	10
College Graduate	101	1
No Response	210	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,942</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Louisiana Department of Social Services, 1990.

potential participants were already involved in self-initiated training or education. Of that group, 23 percent were working toward completing high school or the GED, 33 percent were pursuing vocational/technical training, and 26 percent were enrolled in a college or university.

Another question asked of the respondents referred to their ability to secure transportation. The vast majority of participants depend upon public transit -- a factor that is often considered only in light of its expense. Reimbursing individuals for the cost of transportation is an important support service; however, the time element involved must also be recognized. Women add several hours to their working day if they have to transport themselves to a place of employment or training while also taking their children to child care centers. Table 5 details the means of transportation available to potential participants in Project Independence. Over 90 percent of the respondents depend on public transportation in order to be mobile.

**Table 5**  
**Means of Transportation Available to Potential Participants**

<b>Means of Transportation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Own Automobile	341	3
Other Person's Automobile	497	6
Bus	10,008	91
None	27	-
No Response	69	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,942</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Louisiana Department of Social Services, 1990.

This survey, conducted prior to the implementation of Project Independence, highlights several issues. For women to be able to remove themselves from the welfare rolls, they must secure employment that will support their families. Yet, the young age of these women and the low level of their education present a major challenge. The heavy dependence on public transit is also a challenge, reflecting but one of the everyday logistical problems that these women with children must address in order to go to school or to work.

### **Louisiana's Child Care System**

The societal function of child rearing can not be emphasized enough. Any analysis of poverty among women must take into consideration the expectation that women will be responsible for housework and child care. Women are overwhelmingly the caretakers of children and this leads to their secondary economic status.<sup>6</sup> This situation is compounded by a state that historically has been less than generous in its provision of social services. Although Louisiana has readily accepted the federal mandate of welfare reform, financial constraints limit its ability to make a full range of these services available to those recipients seeking assistance.

The preliminary survey conducted in Orleans Parish also collected data as to the number of children who would be affected by Project Independence. Given the ages of these children as depicted in Table 6, we would expect that approximately

45 percent would require full-time child care and almost 53 percent would need part-time care.

**Table 6**  
**Number of Children Who Would Require Child Care**  
**by Age**

<b>Ages of Children</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
0 - 1 Year (Infant)	1,611	8.0
2 - 3 Years (Toddler)	3,771	18.9
4 - 5 Years (Preschool)	3,592	18.0
6 - 12 Years (Schoolage)	10,562	52.9
Youngest child 16 years and older	445	2.2
<b>Total:</b>	<b>19,981</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Louisiana Department of Social Services, 1990.

In developing its program, the State of Louisiana outlined two components of child care service. First, transitional child care was to be implemented by April, 1990 to provide child care services to certain AFDC clients who become ineligible for a public assistance grant. In order to receive the benefits of this transitional service, a client must have received AFDC benefits for 3 out of 6 months immediately preceding ineligibility and must have become ineligible because of earnings. The child care service would be available for up to one year following ineligibility for an AFDC grant. The intent was to assist individuals in "bridging the gap" between dependence on public assistance and economic independence. The



client was required to contribute to the cost of this service on a sliding scale. Second, JOBS-related child care was to be implemented concurrently with the JOBS program (i.e., child care expenses would be provided while the custodial parent was involved in education, training or job search). Child care reimbursement was to be guaranteed to mothers who had dependent children under the age of 13 or for those children who were physically or mentally incapable of caring for themselves. The Governor's Task Force (1989) stated further:

Although the Act requires that the client be allowed freedom of choice in selecting the method of child care and that the freedom of choice include the right to select other than licensed day care facilities, this Task Force recognizes the profound importance of quality child care and the increased significance of such care in the lives of children from economically deprived families. Consequently we strongly recommend the provision of child care services that will enrich the lives of these children and that sufficient effort be made to counsel AFDC clients and former clients who qualify for these benefits, to avail themselves, for the benefit of their children, of the highest quality child care available (p. 34).

Although the call for the highest quality child care is a valiant statement, the reality is that the child care system in Louisiana/New Orleans is characterized by a low-level of quality, fragmentation, an inadequate financial base, and a lack of skill on the part of many child care workers (Watts, 1992). Child care costs tend to be low in Louisiana, perhaps reflecting the lower incomes of its workers. should be kept low. Keeping child care costs down results in the low wages of child care workers, which in turn leads to a large turnover in staff (approximately 50 percent per year). Louisiana also licenses two classes of child care providers: Class A and

Class B. The former are centers that must meet physical and caretaker/pupil standards. The latter centers have much less stringent standards, are not required to carry liability insurance, and allow for corporal punishment. Other types of child care facilities include family center care (six or fewer children in the home of the caregiver) and school-based care (which is only beginning to acknowledge the fact that there are working hours other than 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.).

Another issue which must be addressed is the actual availability of slots within formal child care centers. Before Project Independence, Louisiana had 3,618 children in subsidized care, with a waiting list of 10,590. In New Orleans, as of January 1990, there were 1,162 children in subsidized care, with a waiting list of 6,249 (Watts, 1992). In fact, after reviewing the resources within the state's communities, the Governor's Task Force anticipated that most of the child care in Louisiana would be provided by private facilities. They recommended that the choice of child care be made by the JOBS participant, with assistance from her case manager who would have an automated listing of licensed child care providers. Family center child care would be an option available to the JOBS participant, and again the case manager would assist with this alternative. Efforts would also be made to identify child care providers for older children (ages 6 to 13 years), through the use of before- and after-school programs and summer camps. Although the state plan did not mention informal child care arrangements through relatives and friends, that too was an option through the federal legislation.

Access to a wide variety of child care arrangements is critical to the success

of Project Independence. Before they can fully participate in this program, women must be assured that their children are receiving adequate and dependable care. The responsibility has been placed on the participant to locate this care. The long waiting lists for subsidized formal child care centers will force women to rely on informal networks. Past ethnographic research has indicated that black single parents have been able to depend on a strong intergenerational system consisting of friends and family who are ready sources of social and economic support (Stack, 1974). Further, recent research has reported that regardless of race, single mothers have better access to kin-based support than married mothers. Many mothers, however, do not have this assumed support and, if they do, the support received is insufficient to provide access to adequate child care (Hogan, Hao, and Parish, 1990). <sup>7</sup>

In addition, welfare mothers express the same concerns about child care as do other working mothers. Research by Sonenstein and Wolf (1990) reported that convenient hours and location, good adult supervision, low child-to-adult ratios, learning opportunities, and the child's happiness, were more important to AFDC mothers than whether the care provided was through formal or informal arrangements. For example, almost 30 percent of Sonenstein and Wolf's sample population required child care before 7:00 a.m. and after 6:00 p.m.; hours not conducive to utilizing formal child care centers. Individuals also indicated that they were concerned about the developmental aspects of child care, particularly the opportunities available for their children to learn. In other words, welfare mothers

should be able to choose the child care arrangements that are best suited for themselves and their children.

The survey conducted in Orleans Parish also asked respondents which type of child care arrangements that they would prefer to have provided by the state. Table 7 reports that a variety of child care options is preferred. Almost 36 percent preferred a formal, licensed child care center. Another 21 percent would prefer the state to provide unlicensed arrangements (e.g., family center care). However, almost 30 percent would prefer no help from the state in providing child care. This group likely included those who have a support system in place that provides child care. Therefore they opt for no intervention by the state. This group may also include those respondents with children of an age where child care is no longer considered necessary.

**Table 7**

**Child Care Arrangements Preferred by Potential Participants**

<b>Child Care Arrangements</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Type A (Licensed Child Care Center)	3,925	35.9
Type B (Unlicensed Arrangement)	2,301	21.0
Type C (Either A or B)	1,156	10.6
Child Care Available at No Cost	339	3.1
Self-Provisioning	3,221	29.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,942</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Louisiana Department of Social Services, 1990.

## **What have we learned?**

Project Independence became operational on October 1, 1990, in 10 parishes (counties). As of October 1991, statistics on the program reflect 700 job placements, of which 436 (62 percent) resulted in welfare grant closures, with the remaining 264 (38 percent) resulting in welfare grant reductions. Additionally, the program has assisted 144 welfare recipients in obtaining their high school diplomas or Graduate Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs). Individual employability plans were developed for 10,521 persons who are now involved in activities determined appropriate by their plans. These activities included adult education, job skills training, job readiness activities, job search, and on-the-job training.

After a year's experience with Project Independence, we can ascertain several facets of the child care component. First, the state share for child care costs is 25 percent (the legislation calls for a state share of child care costs to equal current state shares for Medicaid). Of the states which experimented with workfare prior to the enactment of the Family Act, few were willing to bear the unreimbursed costs of ensuring child care and linking its provision to employment. Massachusetts and California were the exceptions, with Massachusetts spending over 50 percent of its total program expenditures on child care alone (Sanger, 1990). In the JOBS program nationwide, child care costs as a proportion of the total program range from 50 percent in New York to 20 percent in Mississippi. Again, we see Louisiana near the bottom.

Second, Louisiana uses the currently established AFDC earned income disregard amounts as the maximum allowable rate for child care. The maximum allowance for children over 2 years of age is \$175 per month. For those children age 2 years or younger, \$200 per month is the maximum allowable benefit. Children requiring part-time child care (20 hours or less per week) are allowed no more than one-half of the applicable rate. Care provided by unlicensed care givers or family centers also only qualifies for one-half the full-time rate, even if the child is in care for more than 20 hours per week. The monthly amount allowed for child care does allow a mother to find child care although most services received for this level of expenditure may be minimal in terms of quality (Sonenstein and Wolf, 1991). Higher quality care (i.e., those centers that meet national standards) can cost as much as \$75 to \$80 or more per week, substantially higher than the child care allowance.

Third, 86 percent of the children receiving subsidized child care are in Class A center care. The fact that more children are not in family centers or staying with relatives may indicate that case managers are not providing parents with the full array of child care options. Or, it may be that the reimbursement of half the rate for informal care is not adequate to meet the actual cost of such care.

Fourth, child care vendors have already begun to complain about the transient nature of the child care arrangements (Watts, 1992). The instability stems from absenteeism or the need for mothers to change the location of the child care center as they move from one training site to another, from training site

to job, etc. For a mother making child care arrangements, location is often as important a factor as cost.

Fifth, child care is difficult to find for infants, regardless of the ability to pay for care. A recent national study shows that less than 10 percent of the vacancies in child care centers were open to children under the age of one (Agenda for Children, 1992, p.6). Since mothers in Louisiana are being required to participate in the program as soon as their youngest child reaches the age of 1 year, the need for infant care is great.

Sixth, child care is difficult and often unavailable for mothers who work at night or during "odd hours." In addition, the majority of the participants must depend on public transit to travel to their place of training or employment. Formal day care centers usually close by 6 p.m., resulting in many mothers not being able to use this type of care because it is not feasible.

Lastly, mothers are encouraged to turn to their case managers for assistance in finding child care, along with other support services. In the past year, over 100 new case managers were hired to work with Project Independence clients (Watts, 1992). The training for these case workers has been limited, however, and their salaries are low. Turnover of staff is already becoming a problem and one that is likely to grow with time.

## **Policy Recommendations**

State bureaucratic leaders are pleased by the number of persons who already have left the welfare system. As we know, the established measure of success will be the actual reduction in the state's caseload. Until the inception of Project Independence, the lack of subsidized child care in Louisiana had been a major concern. Officials assume that the increased availability of subsidized child care will be an incentive for more women to leave the welfare rolls. Yet, providing monies for child care will not in itself ensure success. To this end, we suggest several recommendations that should be incorporated into the implementation of the child care component of Project Independence.

- \* Case managers must recognize the importance of informal arrangements.**

A majority of the women who participated in the pilot program utilized subsidized formal child care centers. We are concerned, however, that as more women are required to participate in the program, there will be a shortage of available slots within these subsidized formal centers. The existing waiting list for placement in subsidized formal day care will only grow larger as more women participate in the JOBS program. One of the options within the child care component is that women can choose family centers, friends, or relatives as providers of child care. We urge case managers to begin exploring with women the option of informal care, as this is a viable alternative for many of the women who will be participating in the program.



- \* **Informal child care expenses should be reimbursed at the same level as formal child care.**

At this time, informal providers can only be reimbursed one-half of the applicable rate. As Louisiana has opted for the more conservative ruling -- to require women with children aged 1 year or older to participate in this program -- we foresee that mothers will have problems meeting the job participation mandate because formal child care will not be readily available for these younger children. Informal arrangements will become necessary, and in fact, mothers often prefer this type of arrangement for their infants. In their study of AFDC mothers, Sonenstein and Wolf (1991) determined that over 50 percent of the children under the age of 4 years and 40 percent of those age 4 to 5 years, were cared for by relatives. Their study also revealed that out-of-the-home relative care received high ratings from the mothers as to child-to-adult ratios and their children's happiness.

Increasing the monies available for informal care provides more alternatives to mothers who under other circumstances may not be able to participate in mandated training and education programs or be able to accept employment because child care is not available. It is anticipated that many of the jobs available to participants will be within the service sector. Many of these positions require shift work during a time of day when formal child care is not available. This concern is exacerbated by the transportation time added as most participants will have to rely on public transit.

- \* Training for child care workers should be a priority of the JOBS component of Project Independence.**

One way to increase the number of child care options is to encourage the training of child care workers. Child care workers can be trained for work in both formal and informal child care arrangements. In fact, women who are currently caring informally for the children of other poor women can be better trained for the work they already do. In conjunction, if informal child care arrangements are adequately funded and these arrangements are encouraged by case managers, then the child care component of Project Independence can supplement the work requirement by actually creating jobs. Women will be able to place their children within their known network of friends and relatives while being assured that these individuals have received formal child care training.

- \* Project Independence participants need continued support once they have completed their transitional year.**

Once a participant is employed and has completed her transitional year, she is likely to still require subsidized child care. An individual employed at the minimum wage will not be able to afford the true costs of child care. Case managers should be made aware of other programs available that subsidize child care and assist their clients in obtaining these services. For example, Congress has recently instituted the Child Care and Development Block Grant program. This program provides child care vouchers for low- and moderate-income families. Families receive assistance on a sliding scale, covering between 10 percent and 100 percent of their total cost,

depending on family size and income. In Louisiana, only Class A centers and registered family child care providers (i.e., parents can register relatives or in home providers with the state) can be paid through the grants. At this time, eligibility is based on a participant earning 75 percent or less of the state's median income. Virtually all Project Independence participants would qualify. If women are to continue to be employed and not return to welfare dependency, then all supportive resources must be made available to them even after they have completed Project Independence.

### Summary

If Louisiana continues to measure the success of Project Independence by the number of women who leave the welfare system, then it must recognize that the provision of child care services is as important as the jobs/training component. If women are assured that their children are receiving adequate child care, they will be able to commit themselves to education and training programs that can lead to reduced dependency on financial assistance. However, women need to be free to choose the child care arrangements they prefer. For poor women, especially black women, access to kin networks has been a major source of child care support. These mothers often prefer that child care be provided within these networks. The state must recognize the validity of these informal child care arrangements. Further, the state must find ways to enhance the economic well-being of these care-givers, such

as providing training and income for the work they do.

We are, concerned, however, that regardless of the success of child care arrangements, women will still be poor. Welfare-to-work programs will not change the societal patterns of women's employment. Job skills training and education efforts are targeted for entry-level positions with low wages and few, if any, benefits. The current fixation on workfare as a solution to poverty is ironic in view of the fact that a growing number of the poor are working full-time at jobs that do not pay enough to keep them above the poverty level. The failure to raise the minimum wage since the early 1980s has also significantly depressed the earning power of low-wage jobs. In addition, there is a latent hostility within the labor market toward welfare mothers. Like many other women, these individuals are likely to be placed in part-time jobs and be paid less than the annual minimum wage, all in the name of welfare reform.

## Endnotes

1. For a well-detailed argument addressing the formation of gendered social policy see L. Gordan, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890 - 1935." American Historical Review, 97,1, (1992): 19-54.

2. See D. Pearce, "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare," Urban and Social Change Review, 11,1-2, (1978): 28-36. Considered the seminal work on this issue, Pearce explores 1) the role of various sources of income (earned income, public assistance, and private transfer income) in shaping women's poverty and 2) the role of the welfare system in perpetuating women's poverty. For an expanded discussion of the feminization of poverty argument see W. Sarvasy and J. Van Allen, "Fighting the Feminization of Poverty: Socialist-Feminist Analysis and Strategy," Review of Radical Political Economics, 16,4, (1984): 89-110.

3. It is not possible to focus on the poverty status of women without addressing issues of race, class and gender. For the purposes of this discussion, however, the social policy debate will be addressed in a generalized form with gender being identified as a single characteristic. Discussions about the racial and sexual politics of welfare can be found in R. Sidel's Women and Children Last (New York:Penguin Books,1986); W. J. Wilson's The Truly Disadvantaged. (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1990); L. J. D. Wacquant and W. J. Wilson, "Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 501, (1989): 8-25; and M. B. Wilkerson and J. H. Gresham, "The Racialization of Poverty," The Nation, (July 24/31, 1989): 126-132.

4. See D. Miller, Women and Social Welfare: A Feminist Analysis, (New York: Praeger, 1990) for a comprehensive analysis of the policies leading up to the current welfare reform. Although there are several excellent works which present the history of welfare policies, Miller's research focuses specifically on issues of gender and social policy.

5. See M. Abramovitz, "Why Social Welfare is a Sham." Nation, 247,7, (1988): 221+. Abramovitz states that by pointing to the large labor force participation of women, workfare advocates are ignoring the declining standard of living that has compelled more middle-class women and mothers of young children to enter the workforce. Another ignored statistic is one that reports that two-thirds of all married mothers with young children are employed but that a large percentage of these do not work full-time, year round.

6. See R. Sidel, Women and Children Last, (New York:Penguin Books, 1986); D. Miller, Women and Social Welfare: A Feminist Analysis, (New York, Praeger, 1990). Due to their child care responsibilities, women do not have the opportunity to build a consistent work history. The result is that women have difficulty finding employment that pays more than the prevailing minimum wage or provides employee benefits such as health care.

7. There is little evidence to support the interpretation that black families are especially well prepared to cope with the challenges imposed by single motherhood. Rather, these women are often involved in support networks because they are frequently in situations where such support is critical to their survival. Thus, we should not assume that because a woman is part of a support network, she automatically has access to a system that will provide child care. For further discussion of this argument, see D. P. Hogan, L. Hao, and W. L. Parish, "Race, Kin Networks, and Assistance to Mother-Headed Families." Social Forces, 68,3,(1990): 797-812. This study was conducted prior to the full implementation of the Family Support Act of 1988. Yet, the issues raised are even more important now as women receiving AFDC are mandated to participate in the education and job training programs.

## References

- Abramovitz, M. 1988. "Why Social Welfare is a Sham." Nation. 247,7:221 +
- Agenda for Children (1992) Agenda for Children Newsletter. Summer.
- Bane, M. J. 1986. "Household Composition and Poverty" in Danziger, S. and D. W. Weinberg. (eds.). Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Beechley, L. 1984. "Illusion and Reality in the Measurement of Poverty." Social Problems. 31,3: 322-333.
- Bloom, D. E. and T. P. Steen. 1990. "The Labor Force Implications of Expanding the Child Care Industry." Population Research and Policy Review. 9, (January): 25-44.
- Caputo, R. 1989. "Limits of Welfare Reform." Social Casework. 70,1:85-95.
- Gordon, L. 1992. "The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890-1935." American Historical Review. 97,1: 19-54.
- Governor's Task Force. 1989. Governor's Task Force on Welfare Reform: Final Report and Recommendation. Baton Rouge: Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support.
- Handler, J.F. and Y. Hasenfeld. 1991. The Moral Construction of Poverty. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hogan, D. P., L. Hao, and W. L. Parish. 1990. "Race, Kin Networks, and Assistance to Mother-Headed Families." Social Forces. 68,3: 797-812.
- Joseph, M., G. Gilbert, and D. Tuman. 1991. "Project Independence: A Description and Analysis of Potential Economic and Social Benefits to AFDC Families, Their Children, and the Economic Development of New Orleans" in The State of Black New Orleans. New Orleans: Urban League of Greater New Orleans.
- Kemp, A. (forthcoming) "Poverty and Welfare for Women: The Alternative Between Being Deprived or Destitute." In Jo Freeman, ed., Women: A Feminist Perspective.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. Kids Count Data Book. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy.

- Louisiana Department of Social Services. 1990. Survey of Mandatory JOBS Participants in Orleans Parish. Baton Rouge:Office of Family Security.
- McLanahan, S. S., A. Sorenson, and D. Watson. 1989. "Sex Differences in Poverty, 1950 - 1980." Signs. 15,1: 102-122.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. "Metrovision: An Economic Development Plan for Metro New Orleans." New Orleans: Greater New Orleans Chamber of Commerce.
- Miller, D. C. 1990. Women and social welfare: A feminist analysis. New York:Praeger.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1990. Orleans Parish JOBS Program Plan. New Orleans:Office of Eligibility Determination, June 13.
- Pearce, D. 1978. "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare." Urban and Social Change Review. 11,1-2: 28-36.
- Sanger, M. B. 1990. "The Inherent Contradiction of Welfare Reform." Policy Studies Journal. 18,3: 663-680.
- Sarvasy, W. and J. Van Allen. 1984. "Fighting the Feminization of Poverty: Socialist-Feminist Analysis and Strategy." Review of Radical Political Economics. 16,4: 89-110.
- Scott, H. 1984. Working Your Way to the Bottom: The Feminization of Poverty. Boston: Pandora Press.
- Sidel, R. 1986. Women and Children Last. New York: Praeger Books.
- Skocpol, T. 1992. "The Narrow Vision of Today's Experts on Social Policy," Chronicle for Higher Education. (April 15, 1992): A30.
- Sonenstein, F. L. and D. A. Wolf. 1991. "Satisfaction with Child Care: Perspectives of Welfare Mothers." Journal of Social Issues. 47,2: 15-31.
- Stack, C. 1974. All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community. New York:Harper & Row.
- U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. 1990. Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 175, Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.



- Vann, B. H. 1991. "Childcare and the Welfare State: Who's Minding the Kids and What is the State's Role in Picking up the Tab?" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Social Science History Association, New Orleans, November 1.
- Wacquant, L. J. D. and W. J. Wilson. 1989. "Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City." Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 501,: 8-25.
- Watts, J. (1992) Executive Director, Agenda for Children, Personal interview, New Orleans, May 11.
- Wilkerson, M. B. and J. H. Gresham. 1989. "The Racialization of Poverty," The Nation, (July 24/31): 126-132.

3974-107PB-~~422~~  
5-31  
CC  
BT