

Effects of Welfare and Employment Policies on Adolescents and Their Younger Siblings:

Exploring the Mini-Mom Phenomenon

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RUNNING HEAD: Program effects on adolescents and their siblings

Anti-poverty and employment policy developments, such as the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, have led both policymakers and researchers to express growing concerns over how children in low-income families fare in the era post-1996. While early debates about welfare reform focused on the potentially detrimental effects of maternal employment on preschool- and elementary school-aged children, emerging evidence indicates that low-income adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to policy-driven increases in maternal employment. Using longitudinal data from several experimental evaluations of anti-poverty and employment programs that increased work among low-income parents, Gennetian et al. (2002) found that adolescents whose parents were subject to the conditions of these programs fared worse on assessments of school achievement than their control group counterparts. Furthermore, a closer examination of subgroups of adolescents indicates that these adverse effects were concentrated among adolescents who had younger siblings (Gennetian, 2004).

Welfare and employment programs might affect adolescents in low-income families through a myriad of changes in maternal employment, income, and family functioning. It is possible that increased maternal employment reduces the amount of time that parents have to tend to household duties and care for their children. In recent ethnographic data, findings suggest that low-income adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, are called upon to assume many “adult” household duties, such as caring for younger siblings, cleaning, shopping, or cooking, when their parents work (Dodson & Dickert, 2004). While it is possible that these increased responsibilities enhance self-esteem and maturity (as was found by Chase-Lansdale et al., 2004), these adolescents might also be fatigued and have less time to complete other school-related tasks. To date, these potentially competing processes remain largely unexplored.

The current study examines how sibling care arrangements might account for the effects of welfare programs on the group of adolescents with younger siblings. Although we draw upon earlier findings of Gennetian et al. (2002), the current study adds to the literature in two key ways. First, the current study includes data from two longitudinal experimental evaluations of welfare and employment programs conducted in Iowa (the Family Investment Program (FIP)) and Indiana (the Indiana Welfare Reform evaluation (IWRE)) that were not featured in prior work. The inclusion of these two evaluations adds to the variety of policy approaches and resulting heterogeneity of employment and income experiences of the low-income mothers that are examined. For example, FIP was a welfare and employment program that sanctioned families' cash grants for lack of parental participation in employment and job training services. Moreover, findings from FIP suggest that some families subject to the program's conditions experienced income losses over the follow-up period. Second, the current study is the first to examine the role of sibling caretaking arrangements for shaping the effects of welfare and employment programs on adolescents and their elementary school-aged siblings in a low-income sample. Indeed, data on sibling care is somewhat unique to the set of welfare reform evaluations examined in this study. Understanding how and why maternal employment affects children during early and late adolescence is an emerging topic of interest and thus, the current study has the potential to inform policy, as well as more broadly contribute to the developmental literature.

This study will examine the following research questions:

1. What are the effects of welfare reform programs on adolescents who have younger siblings?
2. Do welfare programs affect the likelihood that parents will use sibling care relative to other care arrangements, among households with adolescents and younger siblings?

3. Do differences in the use of sibling care relate to, or correspond, with the effects of welfare programs on schooling outcomes of adolescents with younger siblings?
4. How do impacts of welfare programs on employment and income correspond to the impacts on sibling care and schooling outcomes of adolescents with younger siblings?

Data and Samples

The data for this study are drawn from five longitudinal experimental welfare reform program evaluations, which tested several policy approaches (e.g., earnings supplements / disregards, time limited benefits, or mandatory employment requirements) to encourage employment among low-income mothers: 1) the Family Investment Program (FIP) conducted in nine counties in Iowa, 2) the Family Transition Program (FTP) conducted in Escambia County, Florida, 3) the Jobs First Evaluation (Jobs First) conducted in New Haven and Manchester, Connecticut, 4) the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) conducted in seven counties in Minnesota, 5) the State Indiana Welfare Program conducted statewide. Participants were randomly assigned to either program or control group conditions. Random assignment for each of these evaluations was conducted between 1993 and 1996. Follow-up periods for these evaluations ranged from 3 to 6 years after random assignment.

Measures

A common set of variables are used across the datasets. Parental economic outcomes were measured from administrative records. Parental employment outcomes were measured by survey-based employment histories. Sibling care was collected at the time of the follow-up survey through parent reports. Adolescent schooling outcomes were collected at the time of the follow-up survey via parent reports.

Analyses

The analyses for this study are primarily experimental and consider the impacts of each program. First, we assess the impacts of the welfare programs on adolescent outcomes for both the group of adolescents with younger siblings and without younger siblings. Second, we examine the impacts of these programs on sibling caretaking arrangements. Third, we examine the impact of these programs on maternal employment and economic outcomes for the both the group of families with adolescents and younger siblings and without younger siblings to determine the extent to which program-driven changes in maternal employment and income line up with program effects on sibling care and schooling outcomes. As a complimentary strategy to understanding the effects of sibling care on adolescents, we also explore predictors of sibling care. Preliminary findings are presented and the public release of this paper is scheduled for June 2005.

References

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