

**TITLE: “Desperate or Deviant? Trends in Criminality Among TANF Recipients”**

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**ABSTRACT:** As state welfare rolls have declined significantly in the past decade, female criminality has been on the rise. Under these circumstances, we are uniquely poised to answer important questions about the links between gender, welfare receipt, financial hardship and crime. We ask, did the 1996 welfare legislation affect the criminal behavior of current and former recipients? Does going off welfare increase the likelihood of committing an offense, as many critics of the reform argued it would? Or is there more crime among women who remain on the rolls, as the culture of dependency argument suggests? Using the Illinois Family Study (IFS), a longitudinal study of individuals who were receiving welfare in Illinois in 1998, we explore trends in criminal arrest by welfare receipt. We find that financial hardship, in both the forms of unemployment and non-receipt of welfare, is significantly associated with an increased hazard of criminal behavior.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The trends are striking: women now represent the fastest growing incarcerated population in the United States (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999) and, as of the late 1990s, nearly a third of all incarcerated women were receiving welfare prior to the arrest that sent them to prison (BJS, 2000). Despite a lack of rigorous research linking women's poverty and women's crime, it is perhaps unsurprising that many have been quick to blame economic circumstances, including both welfare receipt and the lack of work histories, as causes for women's criminality. For example, a spokesperson for the Speaker of the House argued that welfare was, "contributing to high crime rates..." (Henneberger, 1995), and a senator said, "(welfare) has bred child abuse and neglect and filled our streets with crime." (Excerpts from the Debate, 1996) Others have cited the lack of labor market opportunities as the cause of female crime; a civil rights advocate argued that, "(if) there is a local labor market where there are not enough private jobs to go around, what are mothers and children going to do? They are going to resort to prostitution and panhandling." (A Nation Reacts, 1996)

In this context, it is clear that crime, poverty and welfare receipt are firmly linked in the minds of many Americans, and the scholarly literature on both male and female criminality often associates economic circumstances, and particularly welfare, with crime<sup>1</sup>; the 1996 welfare reform act, which replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance to Need Families (TANF), allows for a test of this interaction.

The impact of the 1996 welfare reform on poor women has been a topic of great interest to scholars and policy makers alike. The radical departure from a federal entitlement paradigm suggested at a minimum that the state and society were in uncharted waters and, at a maximum, that the advocates of the reform were putting a very vulnerable population (poor women and

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<sup>1</sup> Moynihan? Mink? CITE

their children) at extreme risk. However, while many have examined the effects of the reform on work, well-being, health and economic stability, the effects of PRWORA on the criminal behavior of welfare recipients are still unknown.

Now, almost a decade into the new policy regime, we can assess the criminological impact empirically. In this paper, we examine the consequences of TANF on the criminal behavior of poor women. There was and is considerable concern that denying women cash benefits would increase criminal activity, and the concern seems real enough. The 1996 reform did not increase either the number of jobs available nor the wages they paid, but did, with its “work first” philosophy, increase the number of women competing for these positions. To expect those who left the rolls to have difficulty finding work seems obvious, and given no welfare payment and no job, criminal activity might certainly follow for some proportion of this population. We ask, does exit from welfare increase the risk of criminal behavior? And, conversely, does work insulate individuals against such behavior?

### **COMPETING PARADIGMS**

There are many theories as to why individuals commit crimes, ranging from innate criminal tendencies (Wilson & Hernstein, 1985) to youthful indiscretion (Matza, 1990). However, the 1996 welfare debate framed the criminal behavior of the American (largely black and urban) poor in two opposing ways. Conservatives argued that under the AFDC program, we were creating a culture of dependency (Murray, 1984). By entitling individuals to receive a government handout, it was argued, we were teaching generations of children that dependency on the government was acceptable and that personal responsibility was not a priority. By the conservative argument, these children would then grow up to expect handouts, to have children

out of wedlock, and to commit crime, not only because they could, but also because they lack the moral grounding to do otherwise. The only solution, the conservatives argued, was to overhaul the system. By removing the entitlement of welfare and by requiring recipients to work, the cycle that creates the culture of dependency would be disrupted and the individuals caught up in it would be forced to rethink their behaviors and expectations.

In contrast, liberals argued against such a change. They argued that removing the entitlement and forcing recipients to work in order to receive a welfare check would result in the most vulnerable populations of women and children being thrown into the street (Ellwood, 1988). Without a support system, families facing very real problems would be unable to fend for themselves, liberals argued, and the result would be third-world poverty for the truly disadvantaged and skyrocketing crime rates as desperation drove individuals to resort to crime in order to survive.

From opposing ends of the political spectrum, conservatives argued that the old welfare system caused individuals to commit crimes and that the new system would fix it, while liberals argued that the old system was the only way to prevent crime and that the new system would stimulate criminal acts by the American poor. But now, nine years after Bill Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA, which did indeed end the entitlement of AFDC, and required work and the sanctioning of non-compliant welfare recipients), we still do not know how these changes in welfare legislation have affected poor women's criminal behavior.

However, to answer such a question requires understanding the context in which individuals decide whether or not to commit a crime. For example, welfare grants pay minimal income, and with the institution of time limits and a more punitive welfare system, even what

little income that welfare provides is less stable than it was a decade or two ago. Further, with the passage of the 1996 reforms, welfare receipt became work-dependent, leading many women to take low-wage, short-term jobs with little opportunity for advancement. In this context, low-income American women are often found cycling through the welfare system and low-wage labor market. But are poor women committing crimes to survive when they lose their welfare grants and/or jobs or is the liberal argument insufficient to explain the criminal behavior of poor women? In this paper, we test both liberal and conservative claims about the effect of the 1996 welfare reform legislation on poor women's criminal behavior we try to answer the question of whether poor women do, in fact, commit crime due to a lack of resources.

### **PRIOR RESEARCH**

Despite the fact that over the decade of the 1990s, the number of women per capita under correctional supervision grew at almost twice the rate of men (Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), there is surprising little research on either women's criminality at a macro level, or how crime rates are affected by the economic circumstances of women on welfare.<sup>2</sup> What little gendered criminological research there is tends to involve smaller samples, be ethnographic in design, and to focus on theory building (i.e., see Maxwell & Maxwell, 2000 for a discussion). There are a few notable exceptions, however. For example, both Richie (1996) and Comak (1996) find that histories of abuse predict criminal behavior in their small, qualitative samples. With a slightly larger sample, but still qualitative in nature, Belknap (1996) finds that race and age are also

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<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of welfare recipients are women, and so women's criminality is central to the debate about the intersection of welfare policy and crime.

important predictors of women's crime.<sup>3</sup> But in none of these studies of the antecedent conditions of female criminality do the researchers explore the importance of economic standing.

Although not a criminological study per se, one of the few pieces to break from feminist theory and offer information on poor or disenfranchised women's economic incentives to crime is Edin and Lein's (1997) groundbreaking study, "Making Ends Meet." In the study, the authors find that prostitution can net a woman upwards of \$40 per hour, but that it is only a minority of their sample of poor, single mothers who resort to any kind of crime in order to make ends meet. Further, when they do turn to illegal work, most take jobs that only garner them the rough equivalent of minimum wage, as such work incurs the least risk of all criminal activity. In discussing the prospect of illegal work (largely prostitution, the sale of stolen goods and the sale of drugs), most mothers invoked the loss of respect and fear of harming or losing their children to the state as the incentives not to engage, and those who did resort to criminal behavior generally reported that it was a necessary and temporary strategy to get food on the table when all other resources had been exhausted.

This is not to imply that there is not work exploring the connections between poverty and crime, but most previous empirical work tests the economic hypothesis for men, and tests it using unemployment and wage rates. For example, Witt, Clark and Fielding (1999) find that unemployment rates in England and Wales are significantly associated with changes in crime rates as predicted by economic hypotheses of criminal behavior (i.e., Becker, 1968). Similarly, Cantor and Land (1985) also find that rising unemployment is associated with increased crime in a U.S. sample, and Gould, Weinberg and Mustard (2002) extend the model by also including wage information and find that both wages and unemployment rates are significantly associated

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<sup>3</sup> Belknap's sample is primarily prisoners and prison officers, which leads us to question whether her results are a true reflection of incidence of crime by race and age, or a measure of incidence of conviction by race and age.

with crime rates in the United States. However, there is some question as to the strength of these findings as many similar studies have also found no significant association between unemployment and crime (i.e., Hale & Sabbagh, 1991; Chiricos, 1987).

Further, there have been a number of studies that have explored the links between income inequality and crime that have also yielded mixed results. For example, Danziger and Wheeler (1975) find that income inequality is associated with increased rates of property crime, while Rosenfeld (1986) and Patterson (1991) find no significant association.

Only rarely, however, have researchers made the connections between welfare policy and crime in the exploration of the economic insufficiency argument; we are only aware of two studies that explicitly take public policy into account when discussing changes in the crime rate. The first is a study by Becsi (1999), which examines trends in crime at a state level from 1971 to 1994 using unemployment data, per capita income, assorted demographic characteristics and government spending on education and welfare. Becsi finds that the relationship between economic indicators and crime is consistent with an economic hypothesis, but that a state's spending on education and welfare are insignificant in explaining trends in criminal behavior.

The second is a study by Brown et. al. (2004) which explicitly studies the relationship between employment and criminality, as it is mediated by substance abuse, for a sample of welfare recipients; the authors find no connection between welfare or wages and criminal behavior. However, Brown et. al. also use only self-report measures of all variables of interest, and given the sensitive nature of the measures about which they asked (drug use, welfare receipt, income), and the known bias in such self-reports, we find their results to be suspect.

Despite the wealth of evidence indicating that understanding criminal behavior within welfare populations might be important, it is clear that there is still very little research on this

question. In view of this lack of rigorous research exploring the connections between poverty and criminality, it is our goal to shed light on the issue of why poor women commit crime. Are urban, female welfare recipients more at risk of criminal behavior when faced with fewer resources than they are accustomed to, or is crime unrelated to income among this vulnerable population of the American poor?

## **DATA & METHODS**

We use a longitudinal dataset following current and former welfare recipients to estimate the hazard of arrest as it is predicted by work and welfare status. That is, we use survival time data to test the hypothesis that individuals are at greater risk of committing crime when they are not receiving welfare, not working, or neither working nor receiving welfare. We perform this analysis by locating instances of criminal behavior in historical months and comparing the hazard of a criminal event depending on its timing with relation to welfare and employment spells for our sample of low-income adults in Illinois.

For this analysis, we use the Illinois Family Study (IFS) data, a longitudinal dataset following a representative sample of individuals who were receiving welfare in Illinois in 1998. The IFS dataset includes annual surveys with these individuals starting in the fall of 1999, as well as continuous administrative records of cash welfare, welfare sanctions, income, and criminal record (both arrest and incarceration) provided by the state of Illinois.

The sample was randomly selected from all individuals who were the primary recipient on a Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)<sup>4</sup> grant in nine stratified counties in Illinois in the fall of 1998. Welfare recipients in these counties make up roughly 75% of the entire caseload for the state of Illinois, and our sample consists of 1,363 women. Our sample is

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<sup>4</sup> TANF is the program which replace AFDC after the welfare reform act of 1996.



77% black, 29 years old on average at baseline, 63% of them have completed high school or gotten a GED, and over half have never been married.

The data is read as survival data in historical months, and includes all months between September, 1997, and December, 2001, in which respondents are older than 18. The event of interest is the first observed arrest. Arrest is chosen as a proxy for criminality, as very few individuals have been incarcerated in this sample, and we have no way to measure other outcomes (for example, conviction without incarceration, probation, or a plea bargain). First observed arrest is used due to information available; we do not have the ability to model the timing of a first arrest, as many individuals may have been arrested before 1997, and we cannot model each arrest independently because repeated arrests throughout the historical period are confounded with the original. Therefore, the trajectory to first observed arrest is the measurement used, and criminal behavior is modeled using the hazard of arrest. Arrest is dummy coded as 0 prior to an arrest and 1 in the month in which the arrest occurred and in all months subsequent; individuals who are not arrested during our observation period are coded as zero in all months.

The time-varying covariates are welfare receipt and employment. We coded respondents as receiving welfare in any month in which the respondent is receiving welfare and is not subject to a sanction which reduces the welfare grant, and as not receiving otherwise. We use this sanction determination rather than a simple dichotomous measure of any cash welfare versus no cash welfare as welfare grants are determined using a minimum threshold for the income required for the household<sup>5</sup> to subsist, and therefore any non-voluntary reduction in the welfare grant, by definition, places the recipient and their household below a subsistence income.

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<sup>5</sup> Determined by number of children, other available income, and any other dependents or special circumstances.

Work is constructed as a dichotomous measure of whether the individual earned more than half of the median income of the full sample, determined using the median income in the fourth quarter of 1998<sup>6</sup>, the quarter in which the IFS sample was selected. Therefore, an individual is only coded as working if they make more than \$874/quarter, or just under \$300/month, and smaller incomes are discounted. We have also created a measure of the combination of work and welfare, using the using the same distinctions used for the individual measures described above. Therefore, a respondent is considered to be both working and receiving welfare if they are receiving welfare but not under any sanction, and they make more than \$874 in that quarter. All three independent variables of interest, receipt of welfare, work, and both work and welfare receipt, are time-varying and allowed to occur repeatedly throughout the observation period.

As the data includes the exact date of arrest, and exact start and end dates for each welfare spell, coding arrest and welfare receipt as monthly yes/no variables is intuitive. However, the employment data available through IFS is actually quarterly earnings, which makes the coding of work more complicated. We have elected to code the quarterly earnings data into a monthly measure of working by coding an individual as working in each month of a quarter if she has the overall minimum quarterly earnings described above. The difficulty is that any earnings in a quarter will indicate some formal work during that quarter, but it is impossible to determine on a monthly basis when that work occurred.

That is, if a respondent earns \$600 in the month of January, \$300 in February and nothing in March, the only information available to us is that they earned \$900 in the first quarter of the year; being that they made more than half of the median sample quarterly income, the individual is coded as working in all three months of that quarter (January, February, and March). We

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<sup>6</sup> The median sample income for that quarter was \$1,748 (University Consortium on Welfare Reform, 2004)

realize that this may be a weak measure of work, and especially so in that it captures only formal work and not work done “off the books,” but work is too important of a dynamic in an economic explanation of criminal behavior to be completely excluded due to limitations of the data.

This data limitation is also reflected in our measure of the combination of both work and welfare; while the combined measure is a monthly indicator, the variable utilizes quarterly measures. This variable, therefore, indicates both whether the respondent worked in the quarter and whether they received any unsanctioned welfare, meaning that work is more accurately represented, but we sacrifice some of the nuance of the welfare receipt by making it a quarterly measure indicating whether the respondent received an unsanctioned welfare grant in *any* month in that quarter.

We use these distinctions to create three different measures of the immediate economic circumstances of the IFS respondents. We run models for currently not working, currently not receiving welfare, and neither currently working nor currently receiving welfare. However, we also test the power of varying durations of these circumstances. For welfare receipt, two additional dichotomous variables were also constructed to indicate no unsanctioned welfare in this and the past month, and no unsanctioned welfare in this and the past two months.

The work and combined work and welfare variables have only two measured durations due to the quarterly nature of the work variable. The first measure for each is the immediate measure described above, and the second reflects the respondent’s status in both the current and the prior quarter. This results in two more variables, one indicating no work in this or the prior quarter, and the other indicating neither work nor welfare in this or prior quarter. It is important to note that given the monthly construction of the dataset, this means that an individual who is coded as not working in this and the prior quarter has been not working for four to six months

(depending on the quarter-month of the observation). These durations were selected to test the hypothesis that it is recent economic “shocks” that are responsible for criminal behavior, and so more distant measures are unlikely to have predictive validity under this theory.<sup>7</sup>

The survival time dataset is constructed to reflect historical time in months between September 1997<sup>8</sup> and December 2001, and it is the choice of a historical time analysis that results in some individuals being left-censored, as we only use those observations after the individual turns 18. We made this decision to exclude some observations because the context and repercussions of arrest change drastically once an individual is legally an adult, because being under 18 conflicts with the likelihood that the individual has completed high school (an important control variable that we are treating as invariant over time), and because prior to the age of 18, the individual could be the child on someone else’s welfare grant, rather than the primary recipient for her own family.

In light of previous research and the nature of the dataset, we also include a number of other time-invariant covariates, such as race, education, and number of children. Race is a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent is black (Beck & Harrison, 2001), and education is also a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent had a high school diploma or GED at baseline (Belknap, 1996). Number of children is a continuous measure of the number of children that the respondent had given birth to at baseline (Edin & Lein, 1997), and is included as a proxy for size of the household that is dependent on the respondent’s earnings or welfare check.

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that this structure for our key independent variables generally rules out the possibility of miss-specifying the order of arrest and loss of job or welfare grant, but does not rule out simultaneity. That is, a person could be arrested and lose their job/grant both on the first day of the month, and in the case of employment, there is a very small possibility that the order could be confounded (i.e, steal from work so lose job and get arrested simultaneously). However, given the bureaucratic regulations surrounding a welfare case closure, we feel that it is extremely unlikely that the order is confounded for welfare receipt.

<sup>8</sup> TANF was implemented in Illinois in July of 1997, but sanction information was not collected for welfare recipients until two months after implementation, in September of 1997.

In addition, we include a number of circumstantial covariates likely to affect the risk of criminal behavior. For example, we include a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent is now or has ever been married<sup>9</sup>, as there is evidence that marriage is associated with higher incomes (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), as well as a dichotomous measure of whether the respondent was a teen mother, as adolescent childbearing is associated with higher rates of poverty (ibid.). In light of the evidence that being a victim of abuse is a predictor of criminality among women, we also include a dichotomous variable for whether or not the respondent has ever been a victim of domestic violence<sup>10</sup> (Richie, 1996; Comak, 1996). Further, given that the IFS sampling strategy and weights do not account for duration of welfare receipt prior to sample selection, we also control for long-term welfare receipt (defined as whether the respondent had spent the equivalent of at least 5 years<sup>11</sup> as the primary recipient of a welfare grant prior to the implementation of PRWORA). We also include a measure of whether the respondent was in a welfare household as a child, which allows us to examine the merits of the conservative argument for a culture of dependency as a result of the intergenerational transfer of poverty.

Two to three Cox regressions are run modeling the hazard of arrest by each duration of the six independent variables of interest. All results are weighted, all control variables are included in all models and the results are presented as hazard ratios.

## **RESULTS**

Table 1 shows demographic means for all groups; as predicted by research on men's criminality, the non-arrested sample is significantly older than the arrested sample (Durose &

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<sup>9</sup> The marriage item in the survey asks respondents to identify whether they are married or "living as married." Therefore, this is likely to capture not just formal marriage, but also common-law marriage or long-term cohabitation.

<sup>10</sup> This dichotomous variable is determined from a 12-item domestic violence scale.

<sup>11</sup> Five years is the lifetime limit on welfare receipt in Illinois, as of the implementation of PRWORA.

Langan, 2003). Other significant differences include whether the respondent has ever been married, and whether the respondent became a parent as an adolescent. Interestingly, despite qualitative evidence (Richie, 1996; Comak, 1996) and its significance in the regression models, incidence of domestic violence is not significantly different between the arrested and non-arrested sample.

Tables 2-4 show the results for Cox proportional hazard models predicting the hazard of arrest by non-receipt of welfare, non-work, and a combination of both non-work and non-receipt of welfare. Not currently receiving welfare is significantly associated with a 14% increase in the hazard of arrest for IFS respondents, and although that hazard declines slightly with longer durations of non-receipt, it is largely unchanged between models (see Table 2). This suggests that the loss or reduction of a welfare grant is, in fact, associated with a greater likelihood of criminal behavior on the part of welfare recipients.

In comparison to non-receipt of welfare, being out of work is a much stronger predictor of criminal behavior for the IFS sample. Not working in any given month is associated with a 50% increase in the hazard of an arrest (see Table 3), while the combination of neither working nor receiving welfare is significantly associated with a 34% increase in the hazard of arrest when using either the immediate measure or the one indicating standing in both the current and the prior quarter (see Table 4). These results indicate that the loss or absence of income from either (or both) welfare or work is associated with an increase in criminal behavior, but that of the two, work is a more substantial influence on the criminal behavior of poor women.

In these models, teen parenthood, having been a victim of domestic violence and long-term welfare receipt are also associated with an increase in the hazard of arrest. Interestingly, however, higher education is also associated with an increased hazard of arrest, in contrast to

prior research finding that lower education is an important predictor of criminality (Durose & Langan, 2003). However, as expected, older age is associated with a reduction in the hazard of arrest. Also significantly associated with a reduction in the hazard of arrest are being Black, ever having been married, and having received welfare as a child.

## **DISCUSSION**

These results seem to justify both liberal and conservative claims about welfare requirements as a potential explanation for poor women’s criminal behavior; clearly, there is an increased risk of criminal acts when financial resources are strained, and this is more true for job loss than for welfare termination. That is, while the loss of a welfare grant does result in a slight increase in the hazard of arrest, as liberals argued it would, the effect is nowhere near as catastrophic as some predicted it would be. At the same time, as women enter TANF-mandated employment, we find that work does protect individuals against criminal behavior as conservatives argued it would, but that the loss of work under a regime without a safety net is a catastrophic shock that places individuals at a greatly increased risk of committing a crime.

The reasons for these effects may be twofold. On the one hand, the “work first” philosophy of the current system may decrease the attraction of welfare receipt, pushing women who have another option for financial support (such as a job, family, spouse, etc.) off welfare; that is, the choice to end one’s tenure on welfare may sometimes reflect the availability of alternative sources of income, rather than the economic shock that is envisioned when we discuss someone “losing” their welfare grant. Further, while we have tried to control for case “churning,” or the common practice of on-again, off-again welfare receipt, we still recognize that many women on welfare are accustomed to on/off transitions, may know that they are coming

(i.e., choose not to participate in a mandated activity and so expect the sanction), and may not perceive them as a sudden or unanticipated change even if such transitions are non-voluntary.

Secondly, the loss of a job in this welfare policy context (i.e., no welfare entitlement) may be more unexpected and, without a safety net, may trigger an economic shock that makes criminal activity a more likely alternative. In either case, however, we find that economic insufficiency makes criminal behavior more likely for our sample.

The control variables also contain some interesting findings. For example, having at least a high school diploma or GED is associated with significantly increased hazard of arrest, a finding that contradicts data on the education levels of incarcerated men (Durose & Langan, 2003). However, there is evidence that incarcerated women have more education than their male counterparts (i.e., Greenfeld & Snell, 1999), and so this may indicate an important parallel between our sample and national trends. Additionally, and mapping onto findings in the delinquency literature that individuals “age out” of crime (Stattin & Magnusson, 1991), each year of age is associated with a reduced hazard of arrest.

That adolescent parenthood is significantly associated with an increased hazard of criminal outcomes is also a noteworthy point. On the one hand, the increased odds of criminal behavior if a respondent’s first child was born when the respondent was less than 18 years old may be correlated with the economic hardship faced by adolescent parents (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), and thus support an economic hypothesis. However, it is also possible to explain this using some theory of delinquency and risk behavior (i.e., see Hope, Wilder, & Watt, 2003, for a review). That is, if an individual is having sex at a young age, and perhaps even intends to get pregnant at a young age, then they may also be more inclined towards other, also socially unacceptable, practices such as crime. We believe that this second hypothesis is



unlikely, as we are looking at the criminal behavior of women who are generally much older than typical delinquent populations (i.e., see Stattin & Magnusson, 1991, for a review), and so would likely have outgrown their delinquent tendencies, but without further research, we cannot dismiss it.

The effect of ever having been married is also striking; a consistent more than 30% reduction in the odds of arrest is remarkable. In truth, while these effects would be understandable for currently married women given the economic difficulties faced by single women with children (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994), we were not expecting that a measurement of *ever* married would carry such weight. We speculate that this might be evidence of a tangent to Wilson's (1987) marriageable man hypothesis. That is, if non-marital fertility among black women is so high because there are so few employed, well-educated, non-incarcerated black men who are "marriageable," then those women who managed to find one and so married him may be in different economic circumstances from those women who have never married. If the respondent is married at the time of the observation, they may have their husband's income to fall back on, and may not even need to work or receive welfare. Alternately, if a woman was married, but isn't anymore, if Wilson's argument holds and the man she married and divorced was one of these marriageable men, then it is possible that she is receiving formal or informal child support or some other financial support. Unfortunately, however, this data does not support further research into this question.

That women who have ever been the victim of domestic violence are at higher odds of arrest in any given period is not surprising given prior research (i.e., Comak, 1996). Richie (1996) specifies this effect by arguing that victims of domestic violence are often forced by abusive partners to engage in criminal acts (often prostitution or drug running), which could

explain these higher odds of arrest. At this time, we have not yet been begun to examine the nuances of different charges upon arrest but it will be interesting to see if Richie’s causal model is supported by future analyses using IFS data.

These results also draw attention to an interesting divergence in the effects of involvement with men. While ever having been married is a hugely significant protective factor against criminal behavior, ever having been a victim of domestic violence (an abuse most often perpetrated by men) is a significant predictor of crime. Clearly, more information about the partners and relationships of the women in our sample is needed in order to better understand these results.

Given that the IFS sampling design did not correct for the overrepresentation of long-term recipients in the sample, the result for long-term receipt in adulthood is likely to be an artifact of the IFS sample, but without more in-depth analysis, we cannot rule out the possibility that this is a finding in support of the culture of dependency argument. However, the finding that receipt of welfare in childhood is associated with a significant decline in the hazard of arrest is surprising. It may be that children of welfare learn subsistence tricks that allow them to survive economic shocks within the confines of the law (or to get away with breaking the law), but without more research, we are unprepared to speculate further.

Naturally, however, this research suffers from limitations. Our sample is racially and geographically limited, for example, and the time span of our examination is relatively short. Further, our measure of work is a weak one, including only work “on the books”, and given our conversion of a quarterly measure into a monthly proxy.

Nonetheless, overall, these findings suggest that both liberal and conservative claims with regards to welfare reform and crime may in fact be warranted. The 1996 welfare reform was

premised on the assumption that AFDC created incentives for bad behavior. It was argued that criminality was fueled by the old welfare policy, and that given a new welfare system that rewarded work and disallowed dependency on government handouts, bad behavior would diminish significantly. Clearly, the findings that we are reporting here complicate that claim. Although we don't have a direct comparison on criminal behavior under the two welfare systems with comparable samples, we do show that crime is more likely among women who have experienced job loss or left welfare under the new arrangements, and that criminal activity is associated with economic status, not welfare receipt.

## **CONCLUSION**

By and large, welfare recipients seem to be affected by the same trends as men and the unemployed. A lack of sufficient financial resources is associated with a significant increase in the odds of arrest in any given month, lending support to the liberal charge that forcing women into unstable economic circumstances would have deleterious effects with regards to their subsequent criminal behavior. Age, education and abuse all also have the predicted effects. We, of course, cannot know the levels of criminality that existed under the old welfare system. But we can see that criminal behavior is, at least in part, a function of both work and welfare status under the new welfare system.

This study also presents some interesting and thought-provoking results with regards to childhood welfare receipt, marriage and adolescent pregnancy, however. Further research is obviously needed to see if these trends also appear in other samples. Additionally, it will be important in future work to examine the types of crime for which the Illinois Family Study respondents are arrested to see if they are the property, drug or prostitution crimes that an

economic hypothesis would suggest, or whether crime as it is predicted here also includes violent or other non-monetary crimes.

Many reforms are made looking backwards, and welfare reform is no exception. Changes in the law are made to counter the unintended consequences of prior legislation, and TANF was designed to ameliorate many of the perceived negative effects of AFDC, including the criminal behavior of welfare recipients. The results we report here clearly show that while some efforts may have been successful, there are still other unintended consequences; we find that the loss of income (whether from work or welfare), coupled with human capital characteristics, predicts criminal behavior among welfare recipients. That is, under a “work first” approach to welfare, those with fewer personal resources who compete in the highly unstable lower reaches of the labor market may be more likely to turn to crime, meaning that for some our current welfare system may actually increase the odds of criminal behavior, rather than decreasing them. This is a consequence of “ending welfare as we know it” that surely needs more thought.

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**TABLE 1**  
**Means for Key Demographic Variables**  
**Full Sample, and by Arrest Record**  
**(T-Tests for Significant Difference by Arrest Record)**

	<b>FULL SAMPLE</b>	<b>Arrested Sample</b>	<b>Non-Arrested Sample</b>	<b>Significant Difference?</b>
Respondent is Black	77.3%	77.1%	77.4%	
Respondent has a high school diploma or GED	63.3%	62.6%	63.4%	
Age in 1998	29.1	26.7	29.3	*
Number of Children	3.1	2.9	3.1	
Respondent has ever been married	45.0%	34.4%	46.1%	*
Family received welfare when respondent was a child	44.2%	41.2%	44.5%	
Respondent was a teen parent	29.9%	45.8%	28.2%	*
Respondent was ever a victim of domestic violence	35.9%	39.7%	35.5%	
Respondent was on welfare at least 5 years prior to 1997	62.2%	62.6%	62.1%	
Respondent has ever been arrested	9.6%	100.0%	0.0%	NA
Respondent has ever been incarcerated	1.5%	15.3%	0.0%	NA
<b>N</b>	1363	131	1232	



**TABLE 2**  
**Predicting the Hazard of Arrest by Welfare Receipt**

	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3	
	B	SEB e <sup>B</sup>	B	SEB e <sup>B</sup>	B	SEB e <sup>B</sup>
Not Currently Receiving Welfare	0.13 **	0.05				
Did not receive welfare in at least this or the past month		1.14	0.11 *	0.05		1.11
Did not receive welfare in at least this or the past 2 months					0.10 *	0.05
Black	-0.16 **	0.06	-0.16 **	0.06	-0.16 **	0.06
Has HS Diploma or GED	0.28 ***	0.05	0.28 ***	0.05	0.28 ***	0.05
Age	-0.04 ***	0.00	-0.04 ***	0.00	-0.04 ***	0.00
Number of Children	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Ever Married	-0.40 ***	0.05	-0.40 ***	0.05	-0.40 ***	0.05
Received Welfare as a Child	-0.42 ***	0.05	-0.42 ***	0.05	-0.42 ***	0.05
Was a Teen Mom	0.41 ***	0.04	0.41 ***	0.04	0.41 ***	0.04
Ever a Victim of Domestic Violence	0.38 ***	0.04	0.38 ***	0.04	0.38 ***	0.04
Long-term welfare receipt	0.31 ***	0.05	0.31 ***	0.05	0.31 ***	0.05
Log-Likelihood		-25585.6		-25587.1		-25587.8
% arrested by Dec. 2001		9.6%		9.6%		9.6%

NOTE: \*\*\* p<.001  
\*\* p<.01  
\* p<.05

**TABLE 3**  
**Predicting the Hazard of Arrest by Work**

	MODEL 1			MODEL 2		
	B	SE B	e <sup>B</sup>	B	SE B	e <sup>B</sup>
Not currently working	0.40 ***	0.04	1.50			
Did not work in at least this or the past quarter				0.37 ***	0.04	1.45
Black	-0.15 *	0.06	0.86	-0.14 *	0.06	0.87
Has HS Diploma or GED	0.33 ***	0.05	1.39	0.33 ***	0.05	1.39
Age	-0.04 ***	0.00	0.96	-0.04 ***	0.00	0.96
Number of Children	-0.01	0.01	0.99	-0.01	0.01	0.99
Ever Married	-0.38 ***	0.05	0.69	-0.37 ***	0.05	0.69
Received Welfare as a Child	-0.44 ***	0.05	0.64	-0.44 ***	0.05	0.64
Was a Teen Mom	0.39 ***	0.04	1.48	0.39 ***	0.04	1.48
Ever a Victim of Domestic Violence	0.38 ***	0.04	1.46	0.38 ***	0.04	1.46
Long-term welfare receipt	0.30 ***	0.05	1.35	0.30 ***	0.05	1.34
Log-Likelihood		-25527.9			-25534.1	
% arrested by Dec. 2001		9.6%			9.6%	

NOTE: \*\*\* p<.001  
 \*\* p<.01  
 \* p<.05

**TABLE 4**  
**Predicting the Hazard of Arrest by both Work and Welfare Receipt**

	MODEL 1			MODEL 2		
	B	SE B	e <sup>B</sup>	B	SE B	e <sup>B</sup>
Neither working nor receiving welfare in at least this quarter	0.29 ***	0.05	1.34			
Neither working nor receiving welfare in at least this or past quarter				0.29 ***	0.05	1.34
Black	-0.14 *	0.06	0.87	-0.14 *	0.06	0.87
Has HS Diploma or GED	0.29 ***	0.05	1.34	0.29 ***	0.05	1.34
Age	-0.04 ***	0.00	0.96	-0.04 ***	0.00	0.96
Number of Children	-0.01	0.01	0.99	-0.01	0.01	0.99
Ever Married	-0.40 ***	0.05	0.67	-0.40 ***	0.05	0.67
Received Welfare as a Child	-0.42 ***	0.05	0.66	-0.42 ***	0.05	0.66
Was a Teen Mom	0.40 ***	0.04	1.49	0.41 ***	0.04	1.50
Ever a Victim of Domestic Violence	0.38 ***	0.04	1.46	0.38 ***	0.04	1.47
Long-term welfare receipt	0.31 ***	0.05	1.36	0.31 ***	0.05	1.36
Log-Likelihood		-25560.7			-25566.8	
% arrested by Dec. 2001		9.6%			9.6%	

NOTE: \*\*\* p≤.001  
 \*\* p<.01  
 \* p<.05