Effects of Welfare Reform on Teenage Parents and Their Children

J. Lawrence Aber
Jeanne Brooks-Gunn
Rebecca A. Maynard

Abstract

A key question in welfare policy concerns the potential that welfare-to-work programs have to develop in teenage parents the motivation and skills to provide financially for themselves and their children. The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration was a major experiment initiated in 1986 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and evaluated by Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., to test the impact of a welfare-to-work program for teenage parents which anticipated many features of the federal Job Opportunities and Basic Skills training program later established in the Family Support Act of 1988. Teenage mothers entering the welfare system were randomly assigned to a regular services group or to an enhanced services group. Teen mothers in the enhanced services group faced mandatory school and work requirements enforced by financial sanctions and received support services such as case management, parenting workshops, child care assistance, and education and training opportunities.

This article reviews the policy context in which the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration was designed and implemented, and describes how participation in the enhanced services group affected the teen mothers as adults and as parents. Results showed that, for the reasonable aggregate annual cost of $2,400 per participant, the program increased the teenagers’ attendance at school and job training programs, and modestly increased the proportion who were employed to 48%, compared with 43% among those receiving regular welfare services. As the participants’ earnings from employment increased, their welfare grants shrank. Because these changes offset each other, the program did not improve the economic well-being of the families, although fewer tax dollars were needed to support them. The program did not discourage further childbearing, however, or affect either the parenting behavior of the young women or the development of their children, although the mothers who were most engaged in self-sufficiency activities were more positive and supportive when playing with their children.

The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration experience revealed that the problems faced by teenage parents vary widely, making tailored services necessary. The evaluation results suggest that supportive, mandatory welfare-to-work interventions need not harm parents or their children in the short term, and that their modest positive effects on the financial independence of the teenage mothers may yield long-term rewards.
Welfare reform is on the public agenda, as policymakers at the state and federal levels design strategies that promise to reduce the cost of public assistance by discouraging out-of-wedlock births and by assisting welfare recipients to find work. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), the cornerstone of the welfare system, was established to provide benefits for children in families with no breadwinners, and two-thirds of those who receive benefits are children.\(^1\) As a result, welfare reform initiatives designed to affect the behavior of adults—by reducing benefits or by increasing employment, earnings, and skills—will directly affect the lives of young children. Although there have been many experiments with welfare reform, few have systematically examined the effects of alternative policies on the parenting role of adults or on their children. One notable exception is the federally funded Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration, which combined the threat of benefit reductions with services designed to support the teenagers as workers and parents and which is the focus of this article.

The Challenge of Welfare Reform

The nation’s welfare system is characterized by leading policymakers, practitioners, and recipients alike as a system that fosters long-term dependency and offers limited direct assistance to those eager to become self-sufficient.\(^2\) In 1993, AFDC supported almost 15 million individuals each month, including 9.6 million children, at a cost of about $28.1 billion.\(^3\) A rapid rise in case-loads, continuing upward trends in child poverty rates, and concerns about state and federal budget deficits have led to widespread bipartisan demands for welfare reform. The Clinton administration has proposed to achieve this goal by promoting parental responsibility for the support of children, changing the welfare and tax systems to “make work pay,” demanding that all welfare recipients who can work do so, and placing time limits on welfare eligibility.\(^3\) Other proposals, from the states and Congress, include provisions that would deny cash benefits to teenage parents under age 18, eliminate benefit increases for children born after a family first comes onto welfare, and institute a lifetime limit on the receipt of welfare benefits.\(^4\)

Substantial evidence suggests that most welfare recipients would welcome an opportunity to provide for themselves and their families through work. However, they confront problems in finding jobs that pay well, arranging and paying for child care, finding transportation, and retaining their jobs. Many lack the skills demanded by employers for well-paid jobs, and the job training programs available to them have proven to be marginally effective.\(^5\)–\(^7\) As many as half receive such low scores on tests of basic skills that they are precluded from even entering many training programs.\(^8\)–\(^10\)

The subgroup of welfare recipients that are most often singled out for attention are teenage parents. A large body of research conducted by sociologists, demographers, and economists has examined links between early childbearing and later income, education, marriage, fertility, and employment.\(^11\)–\(^14\) Young women who become parents as teenagers often find themselves on trajectories that result in more reliance on public assistance and less engagement in the work force.\(^15\),\(^16\) Teenage mothers who work are less likely than older women to have full-time jobs, to be stably employed, and to earn incomes adequate to support a family.\(^13\),\(^17\) A recent report by the General Accounting Office states that 42% of all families receiving AFDC at any given time were begun by a mother who was under the age of 20 when she gave birth.\(^18\) Other researchers report that teenage parents who receive welfare
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The importance of helping teenage parents embark on a path that will lead them toward self-sufficiency goes beyond the financial savings that should result from reduced welfare rolls. Child developmentists who study how the timing of parenthood affects children suggest that the children of teenage parents fare less well in school readiness and high school performance than do children born to older women. One comparison showed that black youths with teenage mothers were 1.5 to 2.5 times more likely than those with older mothers to experience delinquency, early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, grade failure, running away from home, and other behavioral problems. Later changes in the family’s circumstances also affect outcomes for children born to teenage mothers. For instance, one group of researchers has followed the lives of more than 300 low-income African-American mothers in Baltimore who gave birth as teenagers in the late 1960s. Researchers found that the early arrival of siblings hampered the school readiness of the first-born children of teenage parents. However, children whose mothers left welfare before the children began high school performed better in school than those whose mothers remained welfare-dependent. Events such as subsequent births and employment appear to affect not only the life chances of a mother, but also those of her children.

Policy Responses at the State and Federal Levels

Propelled by concerns about rising AFDC costs and its apparent ineffectiveness at improving the prospects of recipients like teenage parents and their children, policy interest in welfare reform grew throughout the 1980s. The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration described in this article was one of the largest of a number of experiments implemented to learn what might be required to help welfare recipients move into the world of work. Begun in 1986, the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration anticipated the provisions aimed at teenage AFDC recipients that would be included in later national welfare reform legislation, giving an early window into the impacts welfare reform might have on this vulnerable population.

The first attempt to reform the federal welfare system in more than two decades took shape in the Family Support Act of 1988. This legislation broke new ground by conveying the expectation that mothers with young children should engage in out-of-home activities that would increase their capacity to provide for themselves and their children. It endorsed the idea that welfare should be a transitional program involving mutual obligations: the government has a responsibility to help welfare families work toward self-sufficiency, and the parents in these families have an obligation to help themselves even while their children are young.

In keeping with these principles, the legislation established the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills (JOBS) training program to provide education and training to adult welfare recipients and facilitate their transition to employment and self-sufficiency. Key features of the JOBS program are mandatory participation in employment-directed activities by adult recipients whose children are three years of age or older, mandated school enrollment for teenage parent recipients, access to education and job training programs, assistance in finding employment, and subsidies for child care services during participation in approved training or employment activities.

The federal government required only modest participation rates in the Family Support Act, however, and the states were slow to build up their JOBS programs. Pressures on state welfare budgets limited state investments in the program, and so

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states tapped no more than 70% of the federal matching funds allocated for the JOBS program in 1993.\textsuperscript{28,29} Despite the fact that teenage parents are to be a priority group for JOBS services, few states have worked aggressively to get out-of-school teenage parents back in school. A contributing factor may be ambivalence on the part of public officials regarding the economics, ethics, and implications of requiring that welfare recipients with young children engage in activities outside the home.

Early experience from studies of state- and foundation-initiated welfare demonstrations suggests that it may be possible to change the welfare system to emphasize self-sufficiency by offering, as President Clinton has said, “a hand up, not a hand-out.” For instance, studies have found that welfare recipients view JOBS participation mandates as fair and reasonable if they are associated with real services to assist individuals in working toward self-sufficiency.\textsuperscript{7} Clear participation expectations and strong case management services seem to be most successful in promoting employment and earnings gains.\textsuperscript{30} Special JOBS programs that link teenagers to employment and training services, and provide child care and support services to them have been examined in a number of reports, as well.\textsuperscript{28,30–34} The methods for providing child care assistance range from provision of free care in on-site centers to referrals to child care in the community, to subsidy approaches that pay the cost of any type of child care, including that offered by relatives.\textsuperscript{35–38} Detailed evaluations of practical experience with program implementation can serve as an important guide to the development of new strategies.

**The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration**

In 1986, two years before the Family Support Act was passed, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services initiated the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration to test a new model of welfare which might stem the burgeoning of welfare caseloads by reducing teenage childbearing and improving the employment incentives and prospects of teenagers who do have babies.\textsuperscript{30} Three principles undergirded this model: (1) parents have primary responsibility for their own health and welfare and for the health and welfare of their children; (2) the government has an obligation to help welfare-dependent mothers overcome barriers to self-sufficiency; and (3) intervention should begin early, before welfare dependency patterns develop.

Demonstration programs were established in Chicago and at two sites in New Jersey (Camden and Newark). At each site, teenage parents eligible for welfare who were assigned to the demonstration group received the maximum grant only if they actively pursued skills and experience that would boost their earnings potential and promote their self-sufficiency. Special program offices administered the new welfare requirements and provided comprehensive services to reduce the barriers that impeded the young mothers’ participation in required activities. Thus the demonstration programs linked education, job training, and employment opportunities for the young mothers to services such as child care, parenting supports, and case management assistance that addressed the needs of children, following the model of two-generation programs.\textsuperscript{40,41}

The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration was designed as an alternative approach to routine welfare services which should apply to all the teenage parents entering the welfare system at each site, not only to individuals who might volunteer to receive special assistance in redirecting their lives toward self-sufficiency. By contrast, most previous program initiatives targeted volunteers.\textsuperscript{15,42–45} Each Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration program identified all teenage mothers of a single child when they applied to receive AFDC and enrolled all who completed applications into the experiment (approximately 6,000 mothers over the two-year demonstration period). About half of these
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young mothers were randomly assigned to participate in the enhanced services program in their city, and the remainder were assigned to a control group who received regular AFDC services. This article summarizes information gathered after two years on the effects that the demonstration programs had on the activities, educations, earnings, and childbearing of these young women \(^{42,46,47}\) and on parenting behavior and child outcomes.\(^{48}\)

**Program Components**

Participation in self-sufficiency activities was mandatory for those individuals assigned to the enhanced services group. To continue receiving their full welfare benefits, these young mothers had to develop and comply with approved plans for engaging in school, job training, or employment. Case managers worked with 50 to 80 young women at a time and helped them decide what education or training to pursue, found open slots in education and training programs, coaxed them to persist in their plans, and counseled them when problems arose.\(^{49}\) They also helped the young mothers find child care, deal with personal and family crises, and take advantage of program and community support services. If a young mother failed to persist in her planned activities despite the program's help in addressing obstacles, the case manager applied financial sanctions by cutting her welfare benefits by the amount normally allocated to the mother's needs. For instance, the young mother's monthly AFDC grant (in 1991, a mother with one child received $322 in New Jersey and $268 in Chicago) would be reduced by about $160 until she resumed participation.

Early on, participants were required to attend workshops focusing on personal skills, their new parental responsibilities, and the demands they would face in later education, training, and employment activities.\(^{50}\) Program staff linked participants to education, training, and employment services both in-house and in community agencies. All three programs offered classroom high school equivalency (GED) courses, on-site job readiness workshops, referrals to counseling, and job skill training provided in other agencies. Each program also conducted problem-solving workshops to help selected participants cope with particular problems or pursue particular goals. After the initial workshop series, case managers helped the participants handle parenting issues on an individual basis, and they occasionally made home visits.

The programs provided child care and transportation subsidies to participants, and they paid for training and education expenses such as uniforms, registration fees, and tools. Parents who used licensed child care centers and approved family child care providers could receive child care payments, and when they were at the program site they could use on-site child care. The Chicago and Newark programs provided specially equipped child care rooms, and in the Camden program staff members were available to care for children on an as-needed basis.\(^{37,38}\)

The costs of the demonstration program were relatively modest. About $6.8 million covered operating costs at all three sites, including $4.1 million in federal demonstration funds.\(^{51}\) Total expenditures for the four years of program operations averaged about $2,000 for each of the approximately 3,500 participants. Aggregate resource costs, including the costs of community-provided services such as alternative education and job training services, were about $2,400 a year for each young mother. This sum included about $500 per person for child care and transportation services, including the on-site child care facilities in Chicago and Newark.

**The Participants**

As mentioned above, the demonstration’s target population consisted of all teenage mothers beginning to receive AFDC who had only one child or who were in the third trimester of a pregnancy. Although only 6% to 17% of new AFDC applicants at
the three sites were teenage parents, because they typically depend on welfare for a long time, past experience suggests that they would eventually make up about half of the welfare caseload at each site. The Family Support Act, passed after this demonstration was well under way, made participation in JOBS activities mandatory for AFDC recipients between 16 and 19 years of age who had dropped out of school. Roughly one-third of the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration participants fit those criteria and would be considered mandatory participants in the JOBS program, and another third were likely to become mandatory when they reached 16 or dropped out of school. The JOBS program would not require participation of the final third because they had either completed high school or were older than 19. They were, however, required to participate in the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration activities.

As a group, the mothers in the demonstration were highly disadvantaged, and virtually all faced significant barriers to self-sufficiency (see Table 1). They were young, averaging 18 years of age, and 5% were 15 or younger. About 30% had dropped out before completing high school, and most who were still in school were behind grade level. Some 55% to 60% of the demonstration participants had reading scores below the eighth grade level, which is the minimum level often required for participation in Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) job training courses. More than half of the young mothers had had some work experience. One-third reported child care problems, and one-fourth cited transportation problems that had limited their employment options. Many of these teenage mothers had left their parents’ homes; only about half were living with other adults who potentially could offer economic and social support. Only one-third received financial assistance from the child’s father (30% received child support, 4% lived with the father). The profile of teenagers in this sample is one of young mothers who clearly need a great deal of help if they are to make progress toward economic self-sufficiency.

**Research Questions and Procedures**

The demonstration was designed to address a number of important policy questions. At the most basic level, it sought to increase understanding of the size and characteristics of the population of teenage parents on welfare. Even today, most state welfare agencies cannot review their caseloads and distinguish the teenagers in AFDC households who are themselves parents from those who are not. Little is known about the particular strengths and service needs that characterize the teenage parent population.

Another central goal of the demonstration concerned the feasibility of implementing a universal-coverage, mandatory employment and training program for young parents on welfare. Could states design and operate programs on a sufficient scale to meet the needs of all their clients? Could they develop enough education and training opportunities, and address adequately the child care needs of large numbers of infants? How important and effective would the financial sanctions be in promoting program participation among this special population?

The ultimate questions posed by the architects of the demonstration concerned whether this reformed welfare program would reduce significantly the incidence of long-term welfare dependency. In the short run, this meant looking at the effects of the program on progress toward self-sufficiency. Did the reformed welfare program promote higher levels of participation in activities such as school or job training? Did the young mothers in the reformed system experience higher employment and earn more? Did they delay subsequent childbearing? Were they likely to receive greater financial assistance from the fathers of their children as a result of special efforts by the welfare program to establish paternity and secure child sup-

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The evaluators used a multipronged approach to answer these questions. They gathered baseline information from 5,297 young mothers prior to their assignment into the regular or the demonstration welfare programs and made site visits to observe the programs. A follow-up telephone interview was conducted with 3,867 randomly selected mothers about 30 months after they enrolled in the demonstration, with a response rate of 88%. In addition, 70 mothers responded to in-depth interviews, 88 participated in focus group discussions, and the experiences of 46 were discussed in case conferences with program staff. The evaluators also reviewed state agency administrative records to gather longitudinal data on the young mothers’ receipt of AFDC, food stamps, child support, unemployment compensation, and wages. Finally, a special study involving interviews and videotaped observations conducted at one of the sites assessed parenting abilities and styles, and aspects of the children’s development. From these multiple sources of data, a picture emerges of how the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration was implemented, the experience of the teenage parents in the demonstration, and the short-term effects of the demonstration on the mothers and their children.
Mothers’ Responses to the Program

No program takes place in a vacuum, and the interviews and focus group discussions brought to light many differences in the ways the teenage mothers responded to the opportunities and demands of participating in a welfare-to-work program. All the young women lived in poverty, often in dangerous neighborhoods that provided relatively few role models to guide them toward social and economic independence. They differed considerably, however, in personal characteristics, such as motivation, cognitive skills, self-esteem, and social support, which can impede or facilitate their participation and progress. Examples of these differences are offered here to bring the experiences of the participants to life, and comments by the participants are included in Box 1.

Experiences with Education

As a group, the 30% who were high school dropouts faced the greatest barriers to self-sufficiency. Some had extremely poor basic skills and no family resources to support them; many confronted barriers compounded by deep personal problems, dysfunctional home situations, and welfare system entrenchment. Others had dropped out of school because of transitory circumstances—for instance, when the pregnancy coincided with another major family crisis—and they were more responsive to the program’s pressure to return to school.

Similar contrasts were found among groups of mothers who had more success and stronger attachments to school. Some of the mothers had enough ambition or family support to remain in school after
giving birth; others needed the assistance provided by the demonstration program to maintain attendance. In still other cases, even the program's support failed to keep the teenagers enrolled in school. The high school graduates varied as well. Some already had the skills they needed to pursue employment or higher education, but they lacked motivation or faced family problems and other impediments. Others, on the path to self-sufficiency, took advantage of program resources to expedite their achievement of this goal.

Resiliency and Determination
In spite of the difficult circumstances in which they were living, many of the mothers were highly motivated to improve their own lives and to provide their children with a better childhood than they had experienced. Almost none of the young mothers envisioned permanent dependence on welfare. On the contrary, there was a strong and almost universal hatred of it. Many of the teenagers who participated in the focus groups commented that women on welfare often become “addicted” to receiving public assistance and, over time, lose the motivation and ability to care for themselves.

Child Care
As new parents, the teenagers were inexperienced with child care. Although the demonstration programs helped participants find and pay for licensed child care, many young mothers reported they were afraid to trust a stranger to care for their children and would not even consider care provided by nonrelatives. Ultimately, most of the young mothers were able to rely on relatives to care for their babies. While they were generally satisfied with the child care arrangements they made with relatives, recent research raises concerns that the quality of the care provided by relatives may compare poorly with the quality of licensed forms of child care.

Child Support by Fathers
Only a handful of mothers in the sample cooperated with the efforts of child support enforcement agencies to secure support payments from the children’s fathers. Half of the mothers who were interviewed in person indicated that they were in touch with the fathers of their babies, who provided groceries, diapers, and baby clothes, or small amounts of cash. Yet, the young women felt that it was in their best interest not to cooperate with child support enforcement agencies. Many who received no child support stated that they preferred to have nothing further to do with the babies’ fathers.

Repeat Pregnancies
Although most of the young mothers wanted to postpone further childbearing until they were more financially secure, many acknowledged having problems managing their fertility. Two years after program enrollment, two-thirds of the mothers had experienced a repeat pregnancy.

Rewards of Parenthood
The young mothers emphasized the positive aspects of having a child. Their children provided a source of love and affection, enhanced their self-esteem, and made them feel more mature and responsible. Given the limited rewards many teenage parents derive from their lives, these benefits of motherhood can seem quite powerful to them. Some saw working or attending training programs as interfering with their parenting responsibilities. Most teenagers, however, felt it was not only acceptable but desirable to work before their children started school, primarily because they wanted to provide for their children’s needs.

Program Design and Implementation Lessons
The experience of implementing a large-scale, supportive welfare-to-work program for this population of young parents
afforded many lessons relevant to future initiatives in welfare reform.54

**Staff Commitment**

To implement a mandatory program successfully, welfare staff members had to accept an approach that required teenage mothers to go to school, job training, or work, and that imposed consequences on mothers who failed to accept this responsibility, even though it meant the mothers had to leave their babies in the care of another person for substantial blocks of time. This represented a major shift in thinking for those staff accustomed to approving AFDC benefits for mothers who stayed at home.

The program staff also had to recognize and deal creatively with the problems that prevent some young mothers from maintaining a full-time schedule of work or school, spending project resources to resolve those difficulties. For instance, when one case manager visited the home of a young mother with poor attendance, she found the mother and her partner were sleeping in shifts at night to guard the baby’s crib from rats. The case manager helped the couple find better housing, and the young woman began attending program classes. Specialized training was needed to prepare staff who were experienced with adults to work supportively with a teenage population.

**Flexibility**

Services for teenage parents—those offered by community agencies as well as by the program itself—had to be tailored to respond to individual circumstances that often changed rapidly. For instance, many teenage parents would not return to their former high schools for a variety of reasons, including boredom, embarrassment, and conflicts with school staff; yet many also found it difficult to enter educational programs focused on adults. Imaginative programs that combined academics, work experience, and intensive personal attention seemed to work best at sparking their interest and commitment. Schedule flexibility was also imperative to enable the teen mothers to deal with sick children, child care breakdowns, transportation problems, and other crises.

**Child Care Support**

This demonstration underscored that any program intent on engaging teenage mothers in out-of-home activities must deal sensitively with their child care needs. Money to pay for care is needed by those who cannot use free care by relatives: 60% of those who used paid care relied on the subsidies provided by the program. However, most of these young mothers were acutely aware of the widely publicized (if rare) incidents of child abuse in child care settings, and they were reluctant to leave their infants with anyone whom they did not know well and trust. Moreover, the part-time nature of the mother’s activities often prevented her from using center-based child care, and the difficulty of using public transportation when carrying a baby and a day’s worth of baby supplies limited the choice of child care to the immediate neighborhood, where quality was questionable.38,55,56 Subsidies were only part of the child care assistance needs of this population.

**Program Impacts on the Behavior of Mothers**

The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration program showed that it is possible to achieve high rates of participation in activities oriented toward self-sufficiency—such as education or job training—so long as program staff members are committed to work with the young mothers to remove the barriers they face and are willing to use financial sanctions constructively to underscore the responsibilities of parenthood.57 Table 2 shows the program’s effects on the mothers—their involvement in education and employment, their incomes, their ties to the fathers of their children, and their subsequent childbearing.
The three programs succeeded in enrolling nearly 90% of the teenage mothers they targeted. However, this high enrollment rate rested on the emphasis given to mandatory participation requirements and on the efforts of case managers to coax, pressure, and cajole troubled and uncooperative teenage parents into joining the program.\(^5\) Only one-third of these young mothers responded to routine notices about the program participation requirements, but follow-up communications and threats of grant reduction increased the percentage joining the program by an additional 50 points. The 10% who did not complete the enrollment process did not receive any welfare benefits; they were not considered AFDC recipients.

More than 80% of the mothers in the enhanced services group developed a self-sufficiency plan which established long-term goals and specified the steps required to move toward these goals, such as attending school, enrolling in job training, or finding work. Through persistent monitoring and provision of assistance by case managers, the programs were able to keep...
between 40% and 60% of the teenage mothers involved in approved activities each month. Over the course of the two-year program, two-thirds of the young mothers in the enhanced services group received formal warnings that they were in jeopardy of having their grant reduced, and one-third suffered a grant reduction. The majority of those warned or sanctioned subsequently came into compliance with the participation requirements. Participation in program activities was highest among those who entered the program with relatively strong basic skills, were still enrolled in school, did not have any health problems, were black, or lived at home with nonworking mothers.

The two-year demonstration programs improved the life chances of many of the teenage parents they enrolled. Among the program participants, rates of school attendance, job training, and employment increased compared with those for the mothers in the regular services group, while the mothers in the control group faced their challenges with little assistance. The differences between the groups were all statistically significant, though most were only modest in size. The teenage mothers who were assigned to the enhanced services program were considerably more likely to be enrolled in school (41% versus 29% of the regular services group attended school). They were also somewhat more likely to be receiving job training (27% versus 23%), and more of them held a job at the end of the two years (48% versus 43% in the regular services group).

Understandably, the programs increased school attendance most among younger mothers, those with low basic skills, and those who had not graduated from high school. Their impacts on job training and employment were especially large among participants who began with higher basic skills and among older youths. Program impacts on all three self-sufficiency activities (school enrollment, job training, and employment) were the largest among Hispanic participants, the group who were least likely to succeed without the assistance the program provided. Of the Hispanics in the enhanced services group, 42% attended school, 25% took job training, and 42% had a job. The comparable percentages for the Hispanics in the regular services group were 21% in school, 17% in job training, and 25% employed.

Gains in earnings that averaged $23 per month followed from the increased employment among the mothers in the enhanced services group. Also, the combination of those increased earnings and the financial sanctions imposed on the mothers who failed to participate as expected reduced the amount of public assistance received by the program group. They averaged $21 less in AFDC benefits and $2 less in food stamps. As a result, program involvement yielded little or no overall change in the economic welfare of the teenage mothers.

The programs did not succeed in convincing the teenage mothers to limit or delay repeat pregnancies and births, even though they offered specific services, such as family planning, intended to affect childbearing directly. Nor did the participants in the enhanced services group secure more financial support from their children’s fathers. Both childbearing decisions and negotiations concerning child support are more personal than choices about education and employment, yet they also influence a teenage mother’s prospects for self-sufficiency. In future endeavors with this population, efforts should be made to strengthen those aspects of the intervention which deal with family planning and parenting to minimize the challenges to success in school and employment posed by continued childbearing.

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toward self-sufficiency to determining whether participation in welfare-to-work activities had positive or negative effects on the parents' behavior with their children and on the development of the children themselves. Unintended negative consequences for children could result if the stress of juggling work and childrearing leads mothers to spend less time with their children or to be harsh or unresponsive. On the other hand, self-sufficiency activities might enhance parenting skills if they include parenting classes or if they increase the mother's confidence and feelings of efficacy. To explore the effects of program participation on parenting and child outcomes, the researchers conducted an observational study of 182 mothers and their three- to five-year-old children, all of whom were African American, from the Newark site. The sample included mothers from the enhanced services program and from the group that received regular services for AFDC recipients. The mothers were very disadvantaged; only 20% had finished high school after their two years in the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration, and 40% had worked.

Researchers visited the mothers and children at home to conduct interviews and videotape play sessions in which the child tried to complete a puzzle that required help from an adult. During the play session, observers noted the mother's use of harsh control (authoritarianism) and her negativism toward the child. They also recorded the child's enthusiasm, persistence, and anxiety. In addition, the mothers rated their children on checklists of sociability and mental health problems, and the evaluators administered a standard brief test of verbal ability, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R).

The results of comparisons on these outcomes showed that being assigned to the mandatory enhanced services program did not influence the behavior of the mothers or children during the play session, nor did it affect the children's development. The mothers in the enhanced services program were neither more positive with their children nor more negative and harsh. Their children did not behave differently in the play sessions or differ on the other developmental measures. Policymakers may be encouraged by the suggestion that mandating participation in self-sufficiency programs like the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration does not, in itself, impose hardships that express themselves in negative parenting or problems for children. On the other hand, these results also suggest that, in the short term, welfare-to-work programs do
little to enhance the development of the children of poor teenage parents.

Of course, mothers in both groups participated to differing degrees in self-sufficiency activities. To determine whether involvement in education, job training, or employment affected parenting overall, the program and control groups were combined. The videotapes of the mothers who did not participate in any self-sufficiency activities were compared with those who were moderate or very active participants. Here a number of differences emerged (see Figure 1). The mothers who were involved in activities outside the home were less controlling, less negative, and more engaged when they played with their children than were the mothers who were not involved in school, job training, or work. The children of the more active mothers, in turn, showed more enthusiasm and persistence as they played and completed the puzzle task.

While these results are likely to reflect preexisting differences between the mothers who are motivated to take advantage of self-sufficiency opportunities and those who remain indifferent, they also fit with the idea that both employment and preparation for work can be a positive influence in the daily lives of poor adults and their families.59,60

Conclusion

The Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration experience yields lessons that can be useful to policymakers eager to reform the welfare system. This effort showed that large-scale, supportive welfare-to-work programs for teenage parents can be implemented at relatively modest cost through typical human service agencies. The program’s participants were not volunteers but representative samples of the teenage parents coming onto welfare in three cities. Consequently, the demonstration staff experienced the full spectrum of opportunities and challenges facing young parents as they attempt to move to a more stable and independent lifestyle, and the comprehensive evaluation provided further insights into the social, psychological, and economic forces that shape these young mothers’ lives.

The demonstration program’s combination of mandatory requirements and supports increased participation by teenage parents in activities thought to promote human capital development and self-sufficiency, such as school, job training, and employment. Moreover, the demonstration showed that, if a mandatory participation requirement for teenage parents is coupled with supportive case management and other social services, it need not add to the stress on young, poor mothers. Nor does that requirement appear to harm their parenting or their preschool children’s development. Nonetheless, causing no harm is not the same as providing benefits.

These findings suggest that welfare reformers who hope to replicate or improve on the outcomes of the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration should focus their efforts in several areas: (1) communicate clear expectations about the need for education, training, and employment; (2) recognize and flexibly respond to the diverse needs and abilities represented in the teenage parent population; (3) be prepared to solve practical problems that keep teenage mothers from fully participating in activities that promote self-sufficiency; and (4) build in direct supports for both parent and child development, if the aim is to improve the life chances of the children of poor, teenage parents.

Because the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration anticipated major features of the Family Support Act, these findings have direct relevance to current debates about ways to build on the strengths and address the weaknesses of the JOBS program established by that legislation, the nation’s most recent effort to reform the welfare system. In contrast, they offer little guidance as to the likely effects of the more drastic provisions now under discus-
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The top graph demonstrates that the group of mothers who did not become involved in self-sufficiency activities were more authoritarian and more negative when dealing with their children as they tried to solve a puzzle task than were the mothers who were minimally or very involved in those work and training activities. The bottom graph shows that the children of those inactive, negative mothers were less enthusiastic and persistent as they worked with the puzzles. The sample includes 182 mother-child pairs from both the enhanced and regular services groups at the Newark site.

sion, such as two-year time limits on receipt of benefits and withdrawal of cash assistance for the children born out of wedlock to teenage parents. As policymakers, program designers, and the public consider such harsh and untested welfare approaches, they would be wise to take advantage of the understanding of welfare reform yielded by years of careful social experimentation and evaluative research on programs like the Teenage Parent Welfare Demonstration.

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57. This section draws heavily on work cited in note no. 46, Maynard, Nicholson, and Rangarajan.

58. This section draws heavily on work cited in note no. 48, Aber, Berlin, Brooks-Gunn, and Carcagno.
