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**Welfare and Work
in
Merced County:
Perspectives and
Assessments**

*by the
Center for Public Policy Studies
at
California State University, Stanislaus*

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Acknowledgments

In June 1999, the Merced County Board of Supervisors commissioned the Center for Public Policy Studies at California State University, Stanislaus to prepare a comprehensive study of critical demographic, labor market, and socioeconomic trends in the County. The purpose of the study was to develop an analysis of the trends that would assist the Supervisors in appraising local conditions and crafting public policies to improve economic conditions. The principal report containing the comprehensive data, analysis, and policy recommendations is entitled *Strategic Choices: Creating Opportunity in Merced County*.

This report, *Welfare and Work in Merced County: Perspectives and Assessments*, is a companion report that contains the results of an analysis of surveys of persons applying for or receiving benefits under the Temporary Aid to Needy Families program, persons applying for or receiving benefits under the unemployment insurance program, and professional human services providers in the County.

We want to thank the Board of Supervisors, the County Administrator, and the members of Worknet for facilitating this study.

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Summary

With the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996, Congress replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with a new welfare program known as Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF). California passed its version of welfare reform in 1997 in the form of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids program (CalWORKS). The new program seeks to emphasize the notion of temporary aid through the enactment of a 5-year time limit for receipt of benefits. Under the new program, as soon as someone is accepted into the program that person (with a few exceptions) must immediately begin the process of seeking employment. Consequently, for the most part welfare recipients must be considered a part of the local labor force.

In order to better understand the nature of the labor force challenge involving welfare recipients, we surveyed TANF applicants and participants in Merced County focusing on four sets of information: socio-demographic factors, work history, perception of factors that limit employment, and education, training and skills. In addition, a few questions were asked about family background and support networks. To provide a point of comparison, we administered a similar questionnaire to 79 unemployed persons applying for or receiving unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. We surveyed 124 professional service providers to obtain their perspective on the skills and employment limiting factors of welfare recipients.

The key findings from the analysis of responses to the surveys are the following.

The two survey samples, the unemployed (UI applicants and recipients) and welfare (TANF) applicants and recipients, constitute two distinct populations.

- ❑ Among the UI group, there were very few who received other forms of public assistance.
- ❑ Among the TANF group, there were very few who received UI benefits but most received food stamps.

- ❑ Most welfare applicants and recipients were young adults, between the ages of twenty and thirty-four. Most UI benefit applicants and recipients were older, between the ages of thirty and fifty.
- ❑ Almost all adult welfare applicants and benefit recipients had children while almost one-third of UI applicants did not.
- ❑ Of the TANF group, 84% responded that at least one child would need childcare.
- ❑ 44% of welfare recipients stated that at least two children would need childcare.
- ❑ In contrast, 64% of the unemployed did not have any children needing childcare.
- ❑ Only 16.5% of UI applicants had two or more children in need of childcare.
- ❑ Welfare recipients had substantially higher never married rates than a comparable sample of Stanislaus County welfare recipients and than welfare recipients statewide.

While welfare applicants and recipients and UI applicants and recipients differed significantly in terms of age, family size, and marital status, on most other demographic measures they were similar.

- ❑ The Hispanic share of both groups exceeded 35%.
- ❑ More than 40% of TANF participants and almost 40% of the UI applicants reported having achieved less than a high school education.
- ❑ Both of the sample groups indicated lengthy residence in Merced County with two-thirds having lived in the county for at least 5 years.
- ❑ A majority of both the UI and TANF groups were raised by both biological parents.

There were substantial differences in work history between UI recipients and welfare recipients.

- ❑ 83% of welfare recipients reported they had worked for pay at some point in their adult life.
- ❑ Almost all UI benefit recipients worked forty hours or more per week when they worked. A majority of TANF participants worked forty hours a week when they worked but many worked fewer hours.

- A striking difference between UI benefit recipients and welfare recipients is the length of time at a job: more than half of the UI group worked at their current job for more than 5 years whereas two-thirds of the TANF sample reported that they worked at their last job for one year or less.
- Almost 90% of UI benefit recipients had worked within 6 months of receipt of benefits, almost 60% worked within 3 months. One-third of the welfare recipient sample had worked within three months of benefit receipt. On the other hand, 23.5% of the respondents to our survey indicated they had been out of work for at least one year.
- Almost two-thirds of welfare recipients (63.6%) responded that they would be willing to accept an hourly wage of less than \$7.00. Only 18% of the unemployed group indicated they would be willing to accept such a wage.

UI benefit recipients and TANF participants differed significantly in the extent to which they reported experiencing difficulties in obtaining or sustaining employment.

- Almost one-half of the UI sample did not indicate any factors that impeded employment. This was true for only 19% of the TANF sample.
- Only 3.8% of the UI group reported that they encountered more than two employment impediments.
- In contrast, 41% of TANF participants reported more than two employment obstacles; 22% reported more than 4 impediments.
- Transportation, childcare, clothing, education, and the availability of appropriate jobs appeared to be the most significant challenges for TANF participants.

Very few UI benefit recipients were attending school or job training programs. Very few TANF participants were attending school; a minority were attending training programs.

Both clients and human services providers agreed that the educational shortcomings that welfare recipients experienced had much to do with their labor market difficulties. Job skills, educational levels, and limited basic skills were the

three most commonly cited factors by service professionals in explaining welfare recipients' lack of labor market success.

- Professional providers also agreed that broader economic structural factors contributed to the lack of sustained employment for TANF recipients. These broader factors included transportation and childcare problems and the lack of available jobs.
- Service providers in Merced County also cited attitudinal and behavioral factors among the ten most important factors. In particular, low motivation—the fourth ranking factor—and drug and alcohol abuse were given prominent mention.

Service providers tended to see four factors that must be successfully dealt with for welfare-to-work to succeed.

- The two factors receiving the strongest response were the availability of jobs and the problem of the work motivation of recipients.
- Affordable childcare and improving skills were the other two factors receiving significant support among service providers.

Beyond the need for more research, certain critical findings suggest possible avenues for policy or program changes.

- Unless the educational and job skill limitations are addressed, the employment picture for most current welfare recipients appears to be bleak and the available jobs are unlikely to provide an income sufficient to allow a single-headed household to be able to make ends meet.
- Childcare and transportation appear to be defining issues for a substantial proportion of welfare recipients such that they will serve as major impediments to sustained employment.

Introduction

Merced County faces difficult labor force challenges. With high unemployment rates, low levels of educational attainment for many, and a uniquely young population, Merced County's challenges are daunting. Contributing to the challenges are changes in the nation's and state's legislation governing public assistance. In 1996, Congress enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) requiring welfare recipients to engage in work activities within two years of initial benefit receipt. PRWORA also set a five year limit on an adult's time for receiving cash assistance. The new legislation replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) as the primary welfare program. The intent of TANF was to push more current or potential welfare recipients into the labor force more quickly and for longer periods of time than had previously been true. California codified and customized the policy changes in 1997 through the passage of the California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids program (CalWORKS).

One consequence of the policy change has been a significant turnover in welfare cases and a substantial decline in the caseload in Merced County. For instance, the total number of welfare (AFDC/TANF) cases (counting adults and children) in Merced County dropped from 35,367 in 1996 to 26,269 in 1998. Reductions have continued to occur to the present. Given the substantial declines and given the legislative requirements, for the most part welfare recipients must now be considered members of the labor force.

In order to better understand the nature of the labor force challenge involving welfare recipients, we surveyed TANF applicants and recipients in Merced County focusing on four sets of information: socio-demographic factors, work history, perception of factors that limit employment, and education, training and skills. In addition, a few questions were asked about family background and support networks. The surveys were given in two situations: those attending an initial orientation session (which included previous recipients who ended assistance and were reapplying for assistance) and those enrolled in job search activities. Two hundred and sixty eight (268) applicants and recipients completed the 39-item questionnaire.

To provide a point of comparison, we administered a similar questionnaire to 79 unemployed persons applying for or receiving unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. For the most part, unemployment insurance benefit applicants and recipients are low income, often seasonal workers with little or no history of AFDC or TANF usage. The similarities and differences between TANF participants and UI applicants and recipients may provide useful information to policy makers and program managers.

We surveyed 124 professional service providers to obtain their perspective on the skills and employment limiting factors of welfare recipients. We were also interested in the program and policy recommendations of service providers. Of the 124 service providers surveyed for this study, 79% were employees of the Merced County Human Services Agency. The others were employed by another public agency or a private, nonprofit agency.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Survey Samples

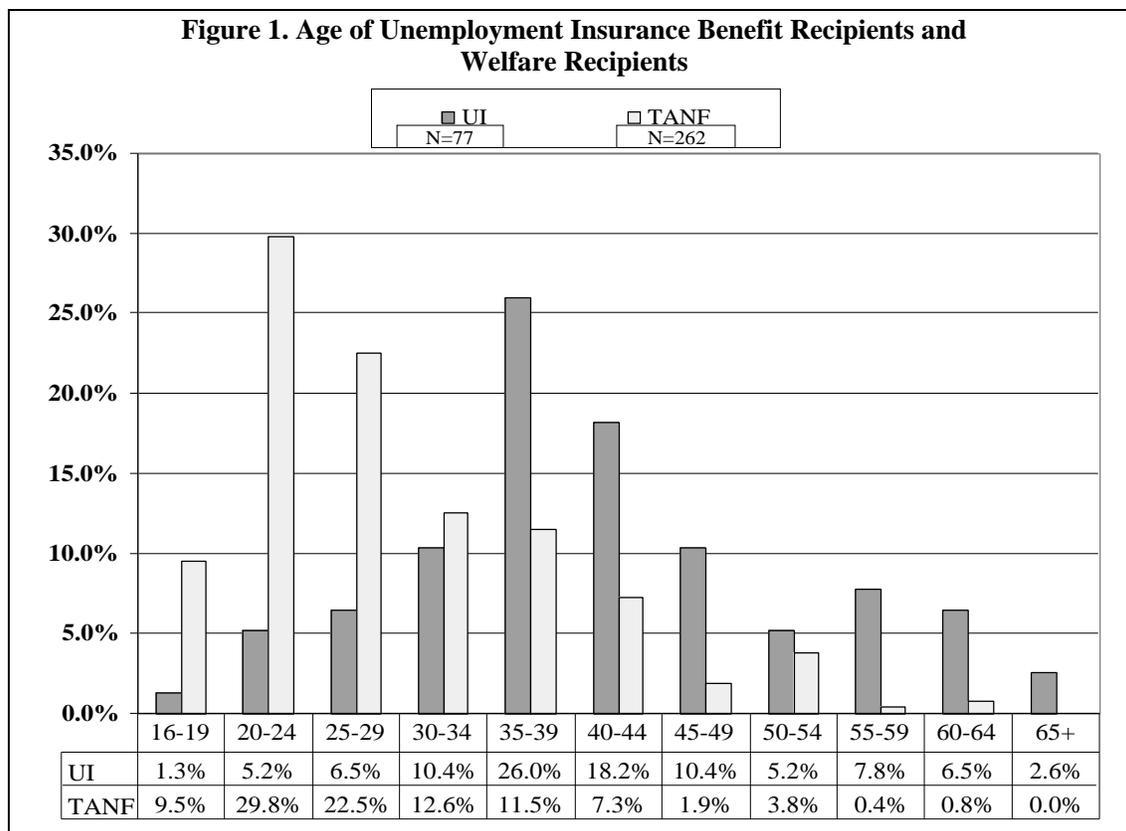
As Table 1 demonstrates, the two survey samples, the unemployed (UI benefit recipients) and welfare (TANF) recipients, constitute two distinct populations. Because both groups included individuals who were in the process of applying for benefits, not all were actually

Table 1. Type of Benefits Currently Received

Type of Benefit	% of UI Recipients (N=76)	% of TANF Recipients (N=268)
Food Stamps	5.3%	71.3%
TANF	10.0	66.0
Child Support Payments	5.3	7.5
UI Insurance	75.0	6.0
Supplemental Security Income	3.9	4.5
Housing Support	1.3	1.9
Disability Payments	0.0	1.5
General Assistance	3.9	1.1
Foster Care Payments	0.0	0.4
Other	0.0	15.3

current recipients, some may ultimately be denied benefits. However, many applicants were also previous recipients.

Among the UI recipients, there were very few who received other forms of public assistance. Among welfare recipients, there were very few who received UI benefits but almost all welfare recipients also received food stamps.



Differences between UI and welfare recipients regarding age, family size, and current marital status depict an important part of the labor force challenge facing welfare recipients. Most TANF recipients in the sample were young adults, between the ages of twenty and thirty-four. They are not typically teenagers, as news stories might lead one to believe, but they are typically younger than those who received UI benefits (Figure 1.). The youthfulness of the welfare population is not of itself particularly important. But when viewed in the broader picture—a picture that includes being a single mother with

Figure 2. Number of Children of Unemployment Insurance Benefit and Welfare Benefit Recipients

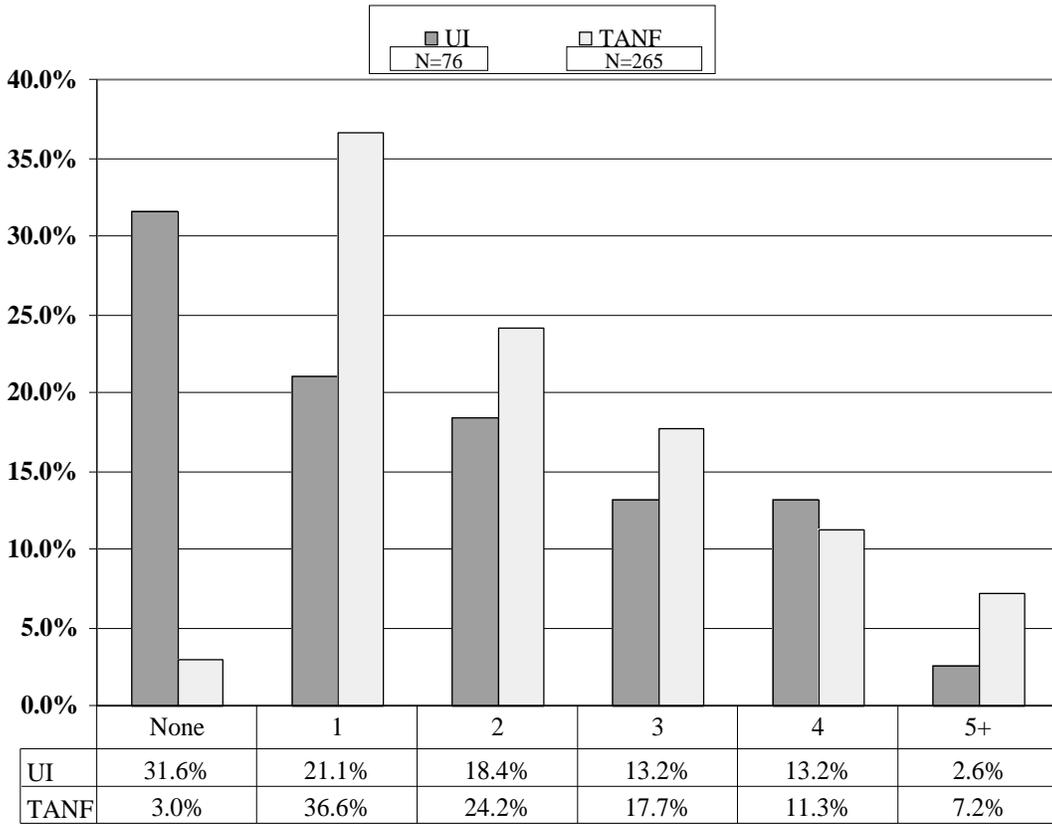
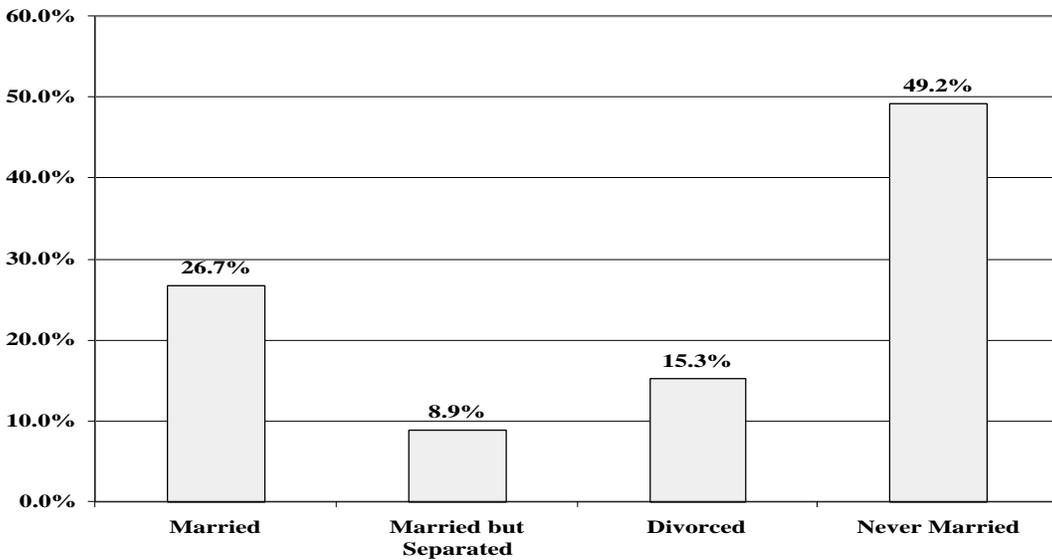


Figure 3. Current Marital Status of Welfare Recipients



low skills and little education, trying to make it in the labor force and take care of children —then this becomes important.

The number of children reported by the sample group of welfare recipients who participated in the survey is representative of the Merced County CalWORKS population. According to Merced County administrative data, the mean number of children for TANF recipients is 2.2 and almost 80% of TANF recipients have 3 or fewer children. Similar results were found in the Center's analysis of the Stanislaus County TANF population conducted in 1998.¹

Although the number of children in a family receiving welfare benefits was lower than is conventionally assumed, the comparison with UI benefit recipients is instructive. Almost all adult welfare benefit recipients had children while almost one-third of UI benefit recipients did not.

The survey asked both groups of recipients to indicate the number of children at home needing childcare if the recipient were working.

- ✓ Of the TANF participants, 84% responded that at least one child would need childcare.
- ✓ 44% of TANF participants stated that at least two children would need childcare.
- ✓ In contrast, 64% of the unemployed did not have any children needing childcare.
- ✓ Only 16.5% of UI benefit recipients had two or more children in need of childcare.

We will return to this point later but it is appropriate to note here that childcare is one of those defining issues for welfare recipients. In the current system, it is not terribly difficult for welfare recipients to obtain funding for childcare. However, it is often difficult to find accessible childcare that a mother trusts and, more importantly, accessible

¹ Steve Hughes, et al.. Getting Back to Work? A Survey of the Unemployed, Welfare Recipients, and Service Providers in Stanislaus County. California State University, Stanislaus, 1998. Pp. 5-6.

and affordable childcare becomes quite difficult once one no longer receives welfare benefits.

Welfare recipients tended to have higher unmarried—and never married—rates than the general population. In part, this can be explained by the participation requirements of the welfare program. In fact, it is our contention that the combination of youth, low skill levels, and the lack of adequate support—particularly the lack of adequate support from the father—are critical factors explaining the need for public assistance.

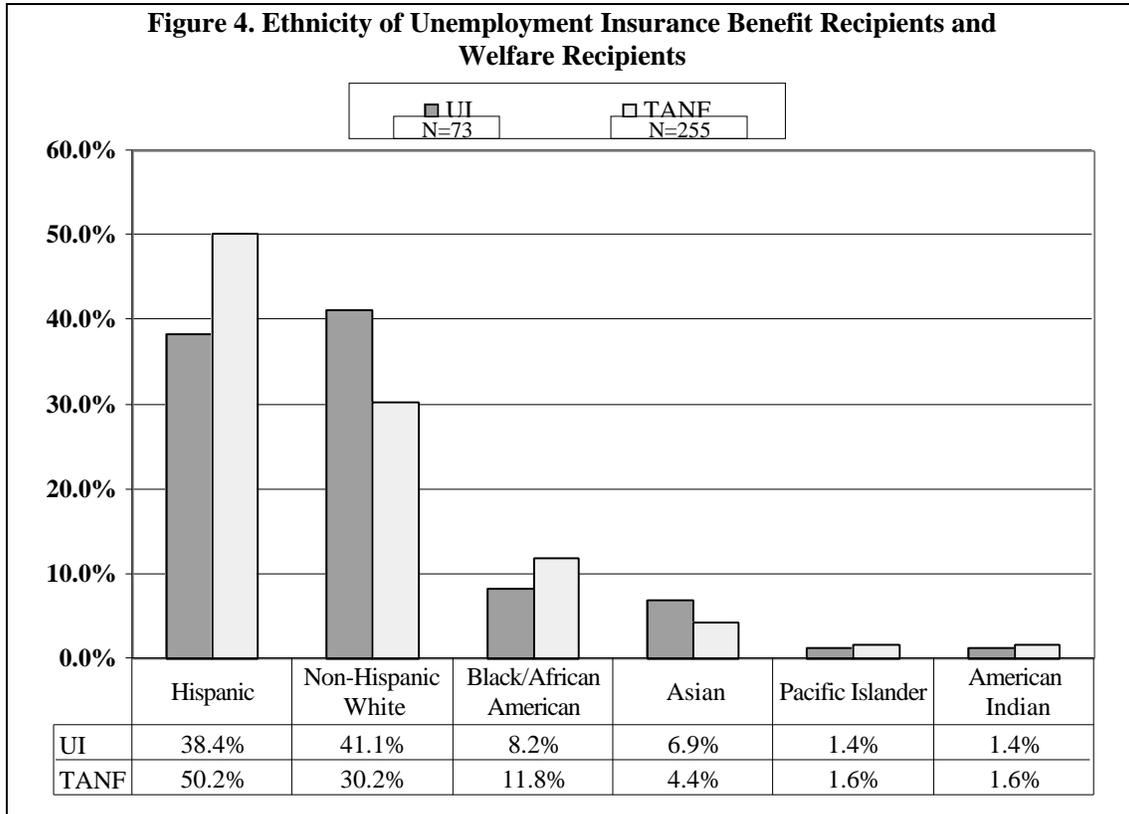
The marital status of the sample group of welfare recipients who participated in the survey showed an unusually high percentage of never married persons (49.2%) than is typically found elsewhere. For instance, the Center’s survey of Stanislaus County recipients found that 23% had never been married.² For the state of California, according to one study, the identical total of 23% reported having never been married.³ At this point, we cannot know if the high rate of never married responses was a consequence of our sampling methodology or reflected a trend in Merced County. According to a study from the Public Policy Institute of California, one of the factors associated with increasing poverty rates in the state has been “a rapid rise in the percentage of never-married mothers...”⁴ It may be that this is particularly true of Merced County.

While welfare recipients and UI recipients differed significantly in terms of age, family size, and marital status, on most other demographic measures they were similar. Merced County administrative data indicate that the current TANF population is 47% Hispanic, 28% Non-Hispanic White, 16% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 10% Black. Ethnicity data for the TANF survey sample indicated that our survey over sampled Hispanics and under sampled Asian/Pacific Islanders. In part this was a function of the survey methodology that relied on orientation and job search sessions as the venues for the surveys. This, however, is instructive in two regards. First, it demonstrates the difficulty

² Ibid. Pp. 8-9.

³ Thomas MaCurdy and Margaret O’Brien-Strain. *Who Will Be Affected by Welfare Reform in California*. Public Policy Institute of California, 1997. P. 149.

Figure 4. Ethnicity of Unemployment Insurance Benefit Recipients and Welfare Recipients

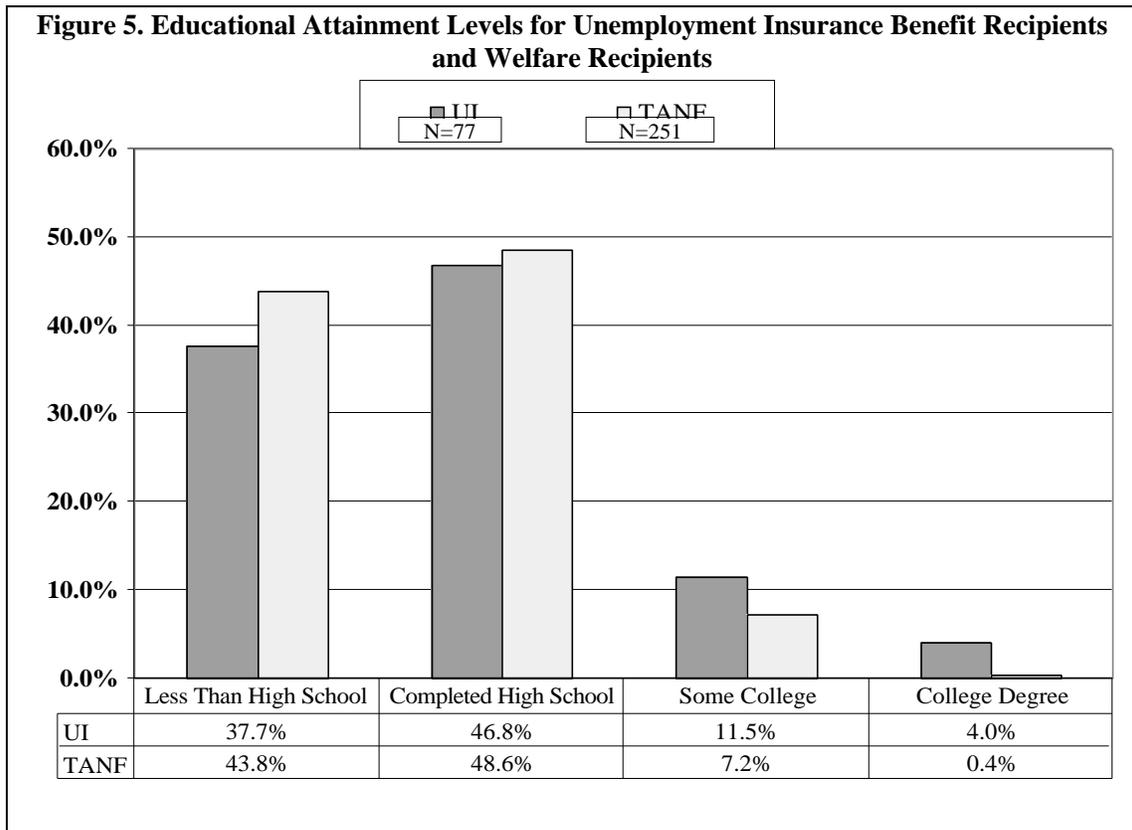


many Asians face in the job search process. Second, it indicates the growing role of Hispanics in the welfare system.

Educational attainment levels for both the UI and TANF samples were quite low as shown in Figure 5 below. More than 40% of the welfare recipients and almost 40% of the UI recipients reported having achieved less than a high school education. Almost one-half of each group completed high school while only a very small percentage went beyond a high school education. These results were very similar to the responses from both UI and TANF recipients in the Stanislaus County sample. In both the Merced County and Stanislaus County samples, a smaller percentage reported some college

⁴ Hans P. Johnson and Sonya M. Tafoya. May 2000. Trends in Family and Household Poverty. San Francisco, California, Public Policy Institute of California.

education compared to an analysis of statewide administrative data. In the sample of welfare recipients in Stanislaus County, 9.4% had gone beyond high school, compared to



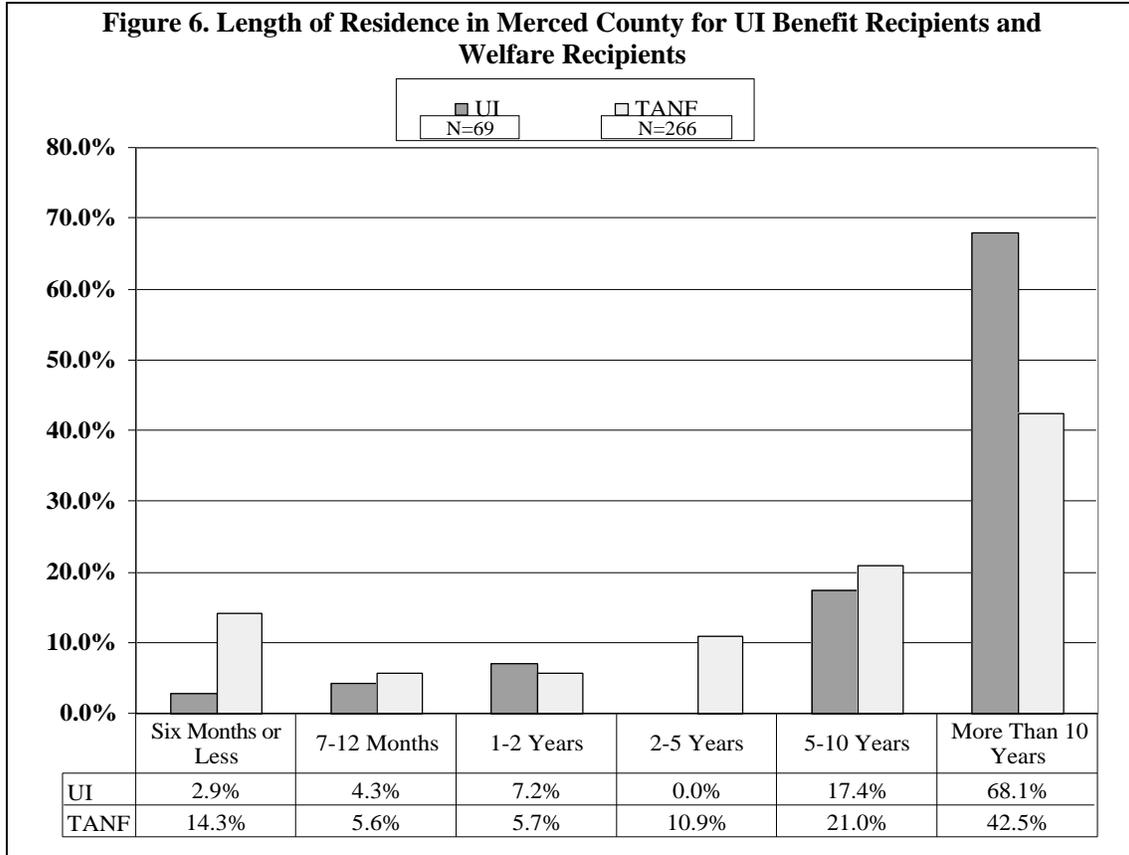
7.6% of the Merced County sample of welfare recipients. For the statewide welfare population, data indicate that 26% had some college education.⁵

For both welfare recipients and UI benefit recipients low educational attainment and inadequate job skills are significant obstacles to higher paying jobs. In the case of welfare recipients, they also help explain the lack of sustained employment. A point to which we shall return later.

Results for both of the sample groups indicated lengthy residence in Merced County. For welfare recipients, almost two-thirds lived in the county for 5 years or more and 42.5% had for more than 10 years. (See Figure 6 below.) The differences are largely

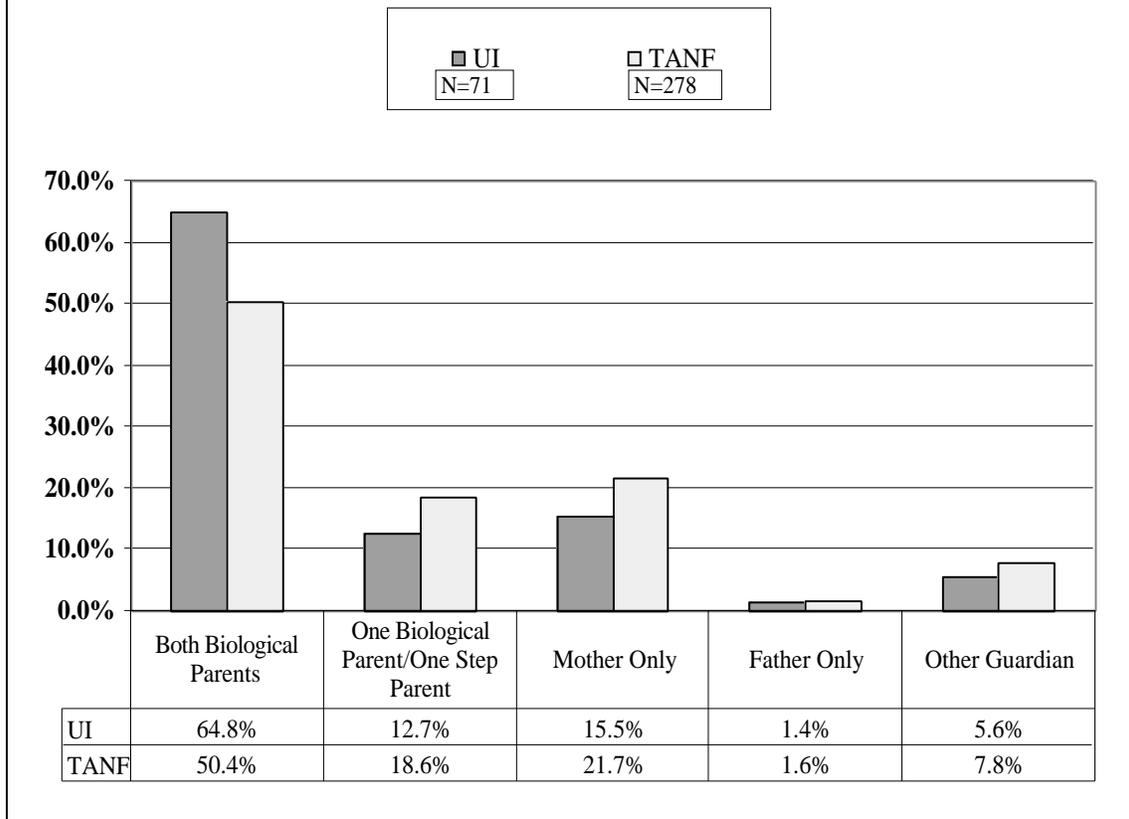
⁵ See MaCurdy and O'Brien-Strain above.

attributable to the fact that the UI population is an older one. Unemployment insurance benefit recipients have had an even lengthier residence in the county with two-thirds having lived in Merced for more than 10 years.



The survey also asked respondents to indicate whether they had been primarily raised by both biological parents, one biological parent and one step parent, mother only, father only, or other guardian. Again, the profile for both unemployment insurance benefit recipients and welfare recipients is similar as indicated below in Figure 7. In both cases, a majority was raised by both biological parents. However, there is a noticeably larger number of welfare recipients who were raised by their mother only or by a biological and a step parent. Given that the differences are small, however, it is unclear as to their importance. Moreover, further analysis revealed that there were no significant differences in educational attainment or work history among the various parenting situations of welfare recipients. It does suggest the possibility, however, that

Figure 7. Parenting of UI Benefit Recipients and Welfare Recipients

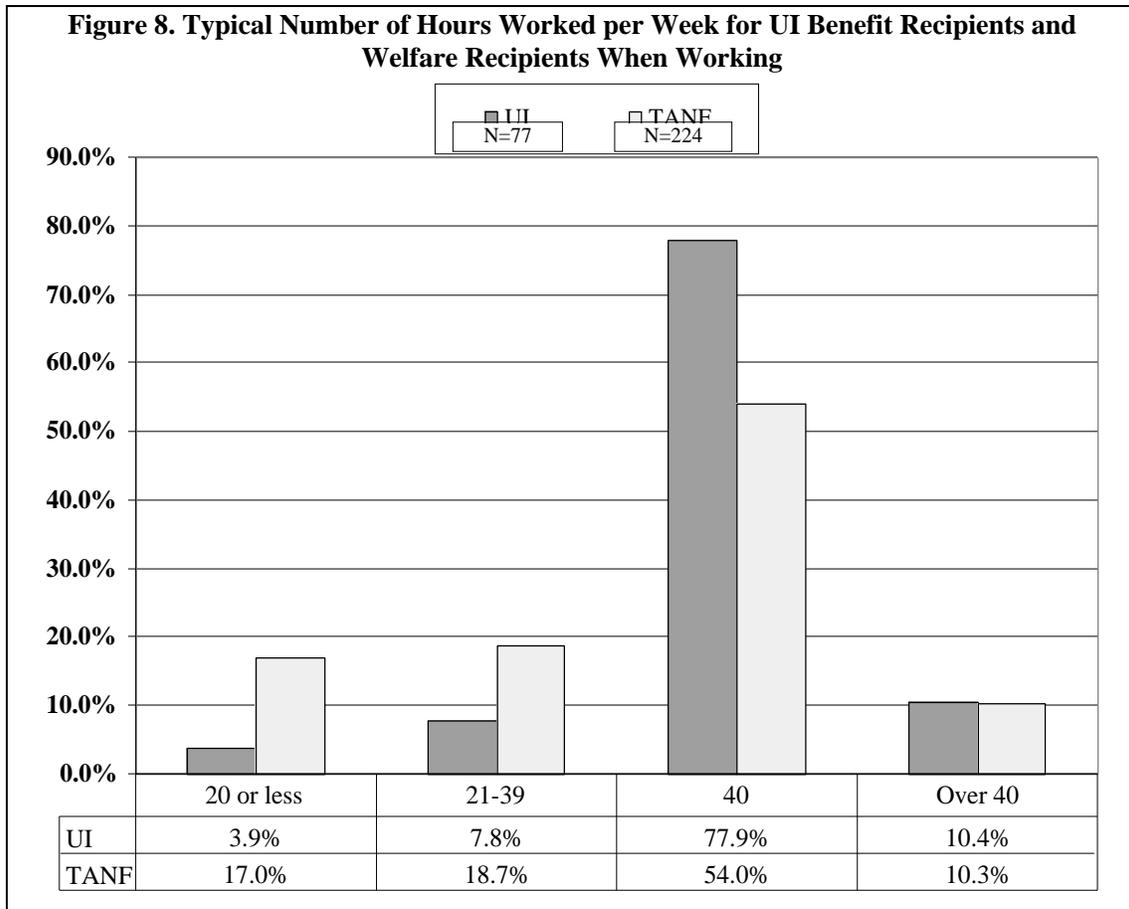


just as welfare recipients tend to experience less stable family and support networks as adults they also tend somewhat more frequently to experience these as children. For the time, however, this possibility must remain a hypothesis requiring further study.

Work History

Current welfare legislation in this country is based on the premise that welfare recipients tend not to work and that the primary reasons for this are the lack of a work ethic and the absence of a work history. Of those completing the survey for this study, only 17.3% of TANF recipients indicated that they were currently working. This would seem to support the premise behind welfare reform. However, 83.2% responded that they had worked for pay at some time. This figure is almost identical to the 85% of respondents to the Center’s survey in Stanislaus County who stated that they had worked for pay. These

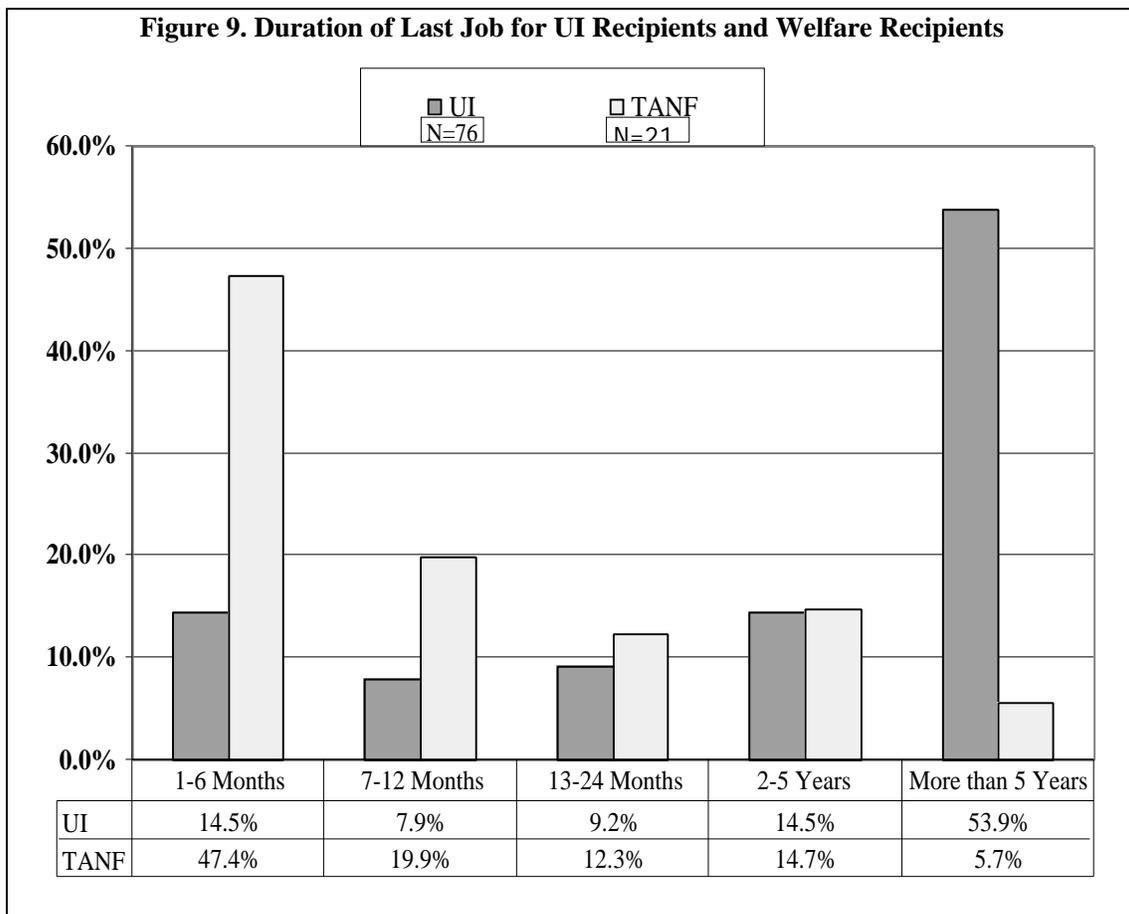
results are consistent with findings from state and national research which indicate that most, perhaps almost all, welfare recipients have some work history.



When welfare recipients and UI benefit recipients worked, they typically worked full, forty-hour weeks. There were, however, significant differences between the two. Almost all UI benefit recipients worked forty hours or more per week. While a majority of welfare recipients worked forty-hour weeks when they worked, substantial percentages (35.7%) indicated they worked less than 40 hours per week. For the most part, this reflects difficulties that many welfare recipients face in the labor market, particularly given their educational and job skill levels. It may also reflect choices made by single mothers who face difficult childcare options. An argument can be made that families of welfare recipients who have children needing childcare would be better served with a system that provided subsidized employment so that the single mothers could work and

also be available to care for their children. The data clearly indicate that this is a problem faced by most receiving welfare but by few receiving UI benefits. It is, therefore, a situation best characterized as a dilemma for the working poor that helps explain why some of the working poor opt for welfare as part of a strategy to make ends meet and still remain available to care for their children.

A striking difference between UI benefit recipients and welfare recipients was the length of time at a job. As indicated at the outset of this report, a substantial proportion of people in Merced County who receive UI benefits are likely to be seasonal workers. Though they may be currently unemployed, they regularly work during several months of the year and typically for the same employer. They are, therefore, not unemployed in the sense of someone who has lost a job and has, at the moment, little prospect of finding one. The employment stability for this group is documented in Figure 9 which



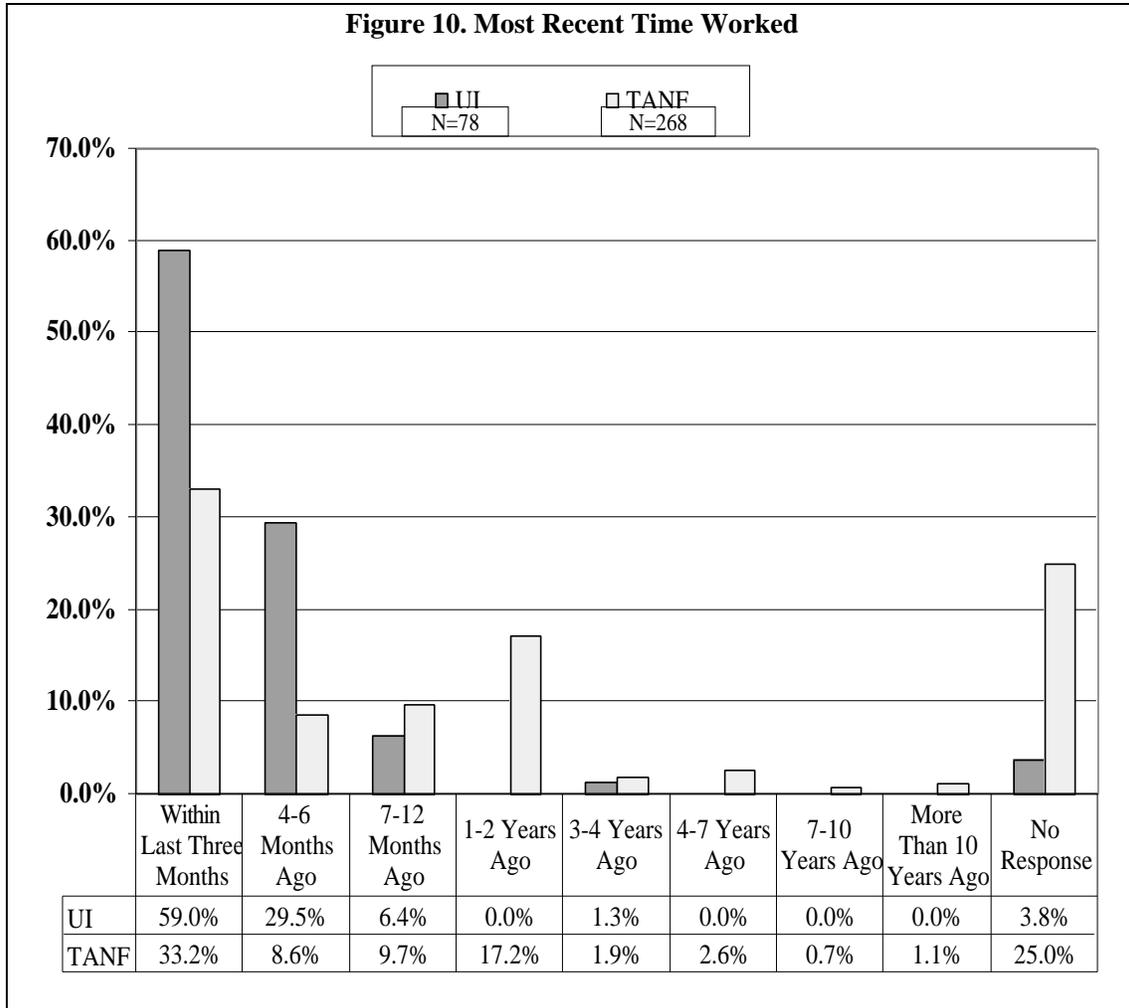
shows that more than half of the UI group worked at their current job for more than 5 years. Welfare recipients, in contrast, demonstrated much shorter periods of work. Two-thirds of the welfare sample reported that they worked at their last job for one year or less and 80% reported having worked for two years or less. For welfare recipients, the issue is not the absence of a work history but the instability of their work and the instability of their labor force participation. To a significant degree, welfare recipients' work history can be characterized as "cycling." Although some welfare recipients become long-term recipients without employment experience, most welfare recipients tend to cycle between welfare and work during the relatively few years of receiving public assistance.

Further information about the work cycles of the unemployed and welfare recipients are provided below in Figure 10. The seasonal nature of work for most UI benefit recipients is confirmed by data which indicate that almost 90% have worked within 6 months of receipt of benefits, almost 60% worked within 3 months.

The picture for welfare recipients is more complex but consistent with other data about work histories. One-third of the welfare recipient sample had worked within three months of benefit receipt. Another 8.6% worked within 4 to 6 months of receiving benefits. These data reinforce the notion that a high proportion of welfare recipients either utilize welfare to get through short periods of difficulty or cycle back and forth between welfare and work. On the other hand, 23.5% of the respondents to our survey indicated they had been out of work for at least one year. This would suggest that about one-fourth of welfare recipients were hard pressed to remain attached to the labor force.

The responses for both UI benefit recipients and welfare recipients in Merced County are similar to the responses to the Stanislaus County survey. Approximately three-quarters of the UI benefit recipients reported that they had worked within 6 months of receipt of benefits. Interestingly, while 59% of the Merced sample of UI benefit recipients reported that they had worked within the previous three months, this was true of only 28.8% of the respondents in the Stanislaus survey. Among welfare recipients, the work profile was similar in both counties.

Figure 10. Most Recent Time Worked



It is also worthwhile to consider the implications of the work of LaDonna Pavetti, as we did in our report about the survey of Stanislaus County UI and welfare recipients. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Pavetti constructed employment and welfare histories for 511 women between the ages of 18 and 27. The work histories of these women were then compared with the work histories of 1,533 women in the same age range who had never received welfare.

Pavetti’s findings were similar to ours. She found that most (95%) of the welfare recipients in her sample had been employed. Compared to non-recipients, however, they experienced shorter periods of employment and longer spells of joblessness. What is particularly interesting is her conclusion that if “women on welfare were to follow the

same employment paths as women with similar characteristics who never had welfare, their employment would increase by 30 percent.”⁶ Although a 30% increase in work is significant, it is also a sobering conclusion for those who believe that welfare mothers work so infrequently that their increase ought to approach at least 100 percent.

Pavetti’s data suggest that there are employment limitations faced by low skilled, single mothers that inevitably limit the amount of work they can perform. Research on the work history and labor force attachment of welfare recipients often uses the term “employment barriers.” For some, the concept of a barrier is a valid notion. For most welfare recipients, as with their working poor counterparts, it is not so much that there are literally barriers to employment as there are limitations to sustained employment.

One of the limiting factors is the wage that can be commanded by people with little education and low skills. Respondents were asked to indicate the lowest wage they could accept. For both UI and TANF recipients, stated acceptable wage rates were low, as demonstrated below in Table 2. Acceptable rates did not exceed \$15.00 per hour and for most they did not exceed \$11.00 per hour. The difference, however, between what UI

Table 2. Minimum Acceptable Wage for Unemployment Insurance Benefit Recipients and Welfare Recipients

Rate of Pay Per Hour	% of UI Recipients Willing to Accept Rate (N=77)	% of TANF Recipients Willing to Accept Rate (N=217)
Less Than \$5.00	0.0%	3.7%
\$5.00-\$5.99	7.8	31.3
\$6.00-\$6.99	10.4	28.6
\$7.00-\$7.99	18.2	11.1
\$8.00-\$8.99	6.5	11.9
\$9.00+	57.2	13.4

⁶ LaDonna Pavetti. 1997. “How Much More Can They Work? Setting Realistic Expectations for Welfare Mothers.” The Urban Institute, A Report to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, July.

recipients told us was acceptable and what TANF recipients told us is remarkable. Almost two-thirds of welfare recipients (63.6%) responded that they would be willing to accept an hourly wage of less than \$7.00. Only 18% of unemployment insurance benefit recipients indicated they would be willing to accept such a wage. At the upper end, 57% of UI recipients wanted an hourly pay of at least \$9.00 while only 13.4% of welfare recipients were demanding this rate.

The responses from UI benefit recipients and TANF recipients in Merced County are similar to the responses to the survey previously administered in Stanislaus County. Like their counterparts in Merced County, welfare recipients in Stanislaus County were willing to accept substantially lower wage rates than were UI recipients. Among welfare recipients in Stanislaus County, 76% stated they would accept an hourly rate of \$6.00 or less whereas only 4.5% of UI recipients indicated they could accept such a rate. As was true in Merced County, a majority of UI recipients in Stanislaus County were not willing to accept less than \$9.00 per hour.

The wage rates that respondents were willing to accept most likely reflected experience in the labor market, with perhaps, a slightly optimistic twist. Given prevailing wage levels in Merced and Stanislaus Counties, what respondents indicated were acceptable wage rates constituted relatively realistic expectations. The problem, most notably for welfare recipients, is that what they are willing to accept are wage levels too low to make ends meet for a family. Without wage increases within a brief time after beginning employment, an unlikely scenario given their skill levels, low income workers who have sole responsibility for the family tend to find it difficult to remain employed. Accepting public assistance, which significantly reduces costs (especially for transportation and childcare), becomes a rational economic strategy.

Another dimension of the work experience that further illustrates important differences between UI and TANF recipients is captured in Table 3 below. The table presents the results of responses to a question asking respondents to indicate the reason for leaving

Table 3. Reason for Leaving Last Job
(Figures in parentheses are for Stanislaus County)

Reason	UI Recipients (N=78)	TANF Recipients (N=267)
Temporary/Seasonal	25.6% (29.4%)	19.5% (25.1%)
Laid Off	25.6 (32.4)	10.9 (8.7)
Business Closed	20.5 (7.4)	2.6 (7.5)
Terminated	20.5 (10.3)	6.7 (7.1)
Ill	0.0 (7.4)	9.7 (12.2)
Quit	0.0 (1.5)	9.0 (7.9)
Problem with employer	0.0 (0.0)	5.2 (0.0)
Moved	0.0 (0.0)	3.4 (11.0)
Transportation Problems	0.0 (0.0)	1.5 (0.0)
Other	7.7 (11.6)	28.9 (20.5)

their last place of employment. The high level of response among UI recipients indicating that their work was seasonal or that they were laid off (many of whom will be recalled) suggests the cyclical but on-going nature of employment among a high percentage of UI recipients. In contrast, there was a much wider array of reasons explaining why welfare recipients terminated their employment. Again, a substantial proportion (30.4%) of the sample reported working in either seasonal or temporary jobs or having been laid off. But illness, problems with employers, moving, and transportation problems accounted for another one-fifth of terminations and 9% responded that they quit. None of these were given as reasons for leaving employment by UI recipients.

The comparison with responses to the survey in Stanislaus County provides both interesting similarities and differences. (Responses to the Stanislaus County survey are provided in parentheses in Table 3 above.) Once again, in general, the patterns are similar. A substantially higher percentage of UI responses cluster in the first two categories, seasonal/temporary and laid off, than was true for welfare recipient responses. On the other hand, in the Stanislaus County survey significantly fewer indicated business closure or termination as reasons for leaving employment.

Factors that Limit Sustained Employment

Although conventional wisdom contends that most welfare recipients do not work, the Center's research as well as most state and national studies provide a very different perspective. As mentioned earlier, 83% of the TANF respondents to our survey stated that they had worked for pay; the percentage of Stanislaus County respondents reporting that they had worked for pay was 85%. Some studies, in fact, argue that virtually all welfare recipients have some work history because it is not possible to make ends meet on public assistance alone.

Nevertheless, it is also true that for many welfare recipients sustaining employment has been difficult. Given the actual work histories of welfare recipients, then, it appears to be more accurate to conceptualize the issue in terms of factors that limit sustained employment rather than in terms of barriers to employment (as we have done previously). The data in Table 4 are revealing. Relatively few people receiving unemployment insurance benefits experienced problems sustaining employment. Only two categories of factors—inadequate education and health problems—were mentioned by more than 10% of the respondents.

**Table 4. Factors that Limit Sustained Employment
(Respondents could indicate multiple factors)**

Limiting Factors	% of UI Respondents	% of TANF Respondents
	(N=77)	(N=268)
Lack a car/transportation problems	3.9%	29.8%
Inadequate education	11.7	24.6
Financial problems	3.9	23.5
Inadequate clothes	3.9	21.3
Cannot find full-time work	0.0	20.5
Lack technical skills	6.6	19.8
Childcare	3.9	19.4
Lack job experience	0.0	16.0
No telephone	3.9	11.6
No jobs I can do	7.8	11.2
Lack job information	0.0	10.4
Health problems	11.7	7.8
No health insurance	9.1	6.7
Depression	0.0	5.6
Disability	5.2	5.2
Criminal justice contact	0.0	5.2
Move often	0.0	4.5
Alcohol/drugs	0.0	3.0
Other	14.3	26.4

Substantially larger numbers of people who received TANF benefits, in contrast, identified factors that limited sustained employment or made it difficult to obtain employment. Transportation problems were identified by almost one-third of the recipients as a factor. Of those identifying transportation as a problem, 27% expressed it in terms of the lack of a car, only 2.6% indicated that the problem was the inability to use public transportation.

Table 5. Transportation to Work

Mode of Transportation	% of UI Respondents (N=78)	% of TANF Respondents (N=266)
Personal Car	91.0%	55.6%
With a friend	5.1	24.1
Walk	0.0	15.1
Bus	0.0	14.7
Bicycle	0.0	7.1
Other	3.9	6.0

Transportation clearly was a significant issue for the single mothers who typically must not only deal with getting to work but with childcare, shopping, doctors' appointments and so forth. It would appear, moreover, that private cars rather than public transportation would provide more utility to more people in solving the transportation problem. This point is reinforced by the data in Table 5 which provides results to the survey's query as to how people got to work.

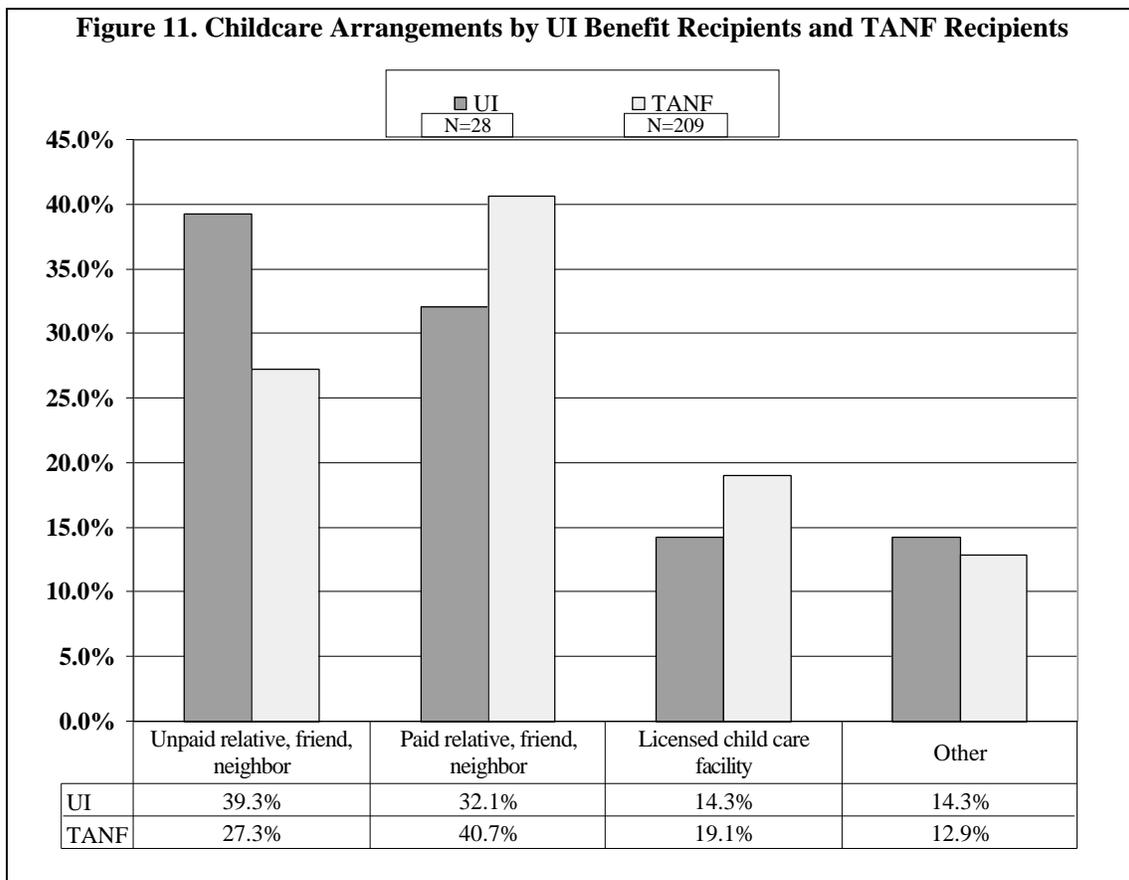
Among the UI benefit recipients, almost everyone drove their own car to work. For TANF recipients, however, only a slight majority were able to use this mode of transportation. A significant part of the problem was that only 55% of the TANF respondents stated that they owned a car in operating order. Another 24.1% drove to work with a friend. Only 14.7% used public transportation to get to work. Presumably, some improvements could be made to bus routes and schedules to improve ridership. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that owning (and ability to maintain) one's own car provides the more optimal solution. This, of course, assumes the legal ability to drive. Of the TANF respondents, 37% indicated that they did not possess a valid driver's license. Among the UI benefit recipients, only 8% indicated that they did not possess a valid driver's license.

Inadequate education, mentioned by 24.6% of respondents, ranked as the second most commonly stated problem. Almost 20% of respondents identified lack of technical skills as a problem. Recipients were aware that they had a difficult time competing in the labor

market with such low levels of job skills. Lack of job experience, mentioned by 16% of respondents, contributed to their competitive difficulties.

Childcare was a factor that affected 19.4% of the respondents to this survey and, along with transportation, education, and job skills, were factors commonly found in other research to be obstacles to peoples’ ability to sustain employment. Many working adults, and most particularly working single mothers, face significant childcare difficulties. The greatest challenge appears to be the ability to find care that is affordable, accessible, and of high quality.

As Figure 11 demonstrates, few lower-income persons utilized licensed day care facilities. In the Center’s survey, only 14.3% of UI benefit recipients and only 19.1% of TANF recipients typically relied on licensed childcare facilities to meet their childcare



needs. Overwhelmingly, the respondents to our surveys indicated that they relied upon relatives, friends, and neighbors to meet their childcare needs. In some situations, this care was paid for; in others it was given free, sometimes in childcare exchange arrangements.

One of the more contentious debates about welfare has to do with the extent to which welfare reciprocity generates dependency on welfare. One particular form of the argument revolves around the issue of inter-generational patterns of welfare receipt. The question is to what extent are current welfare recipients children of welfare recipients. The Center's survey asked respondents whether they grew up in a household where any adult received public assistance.

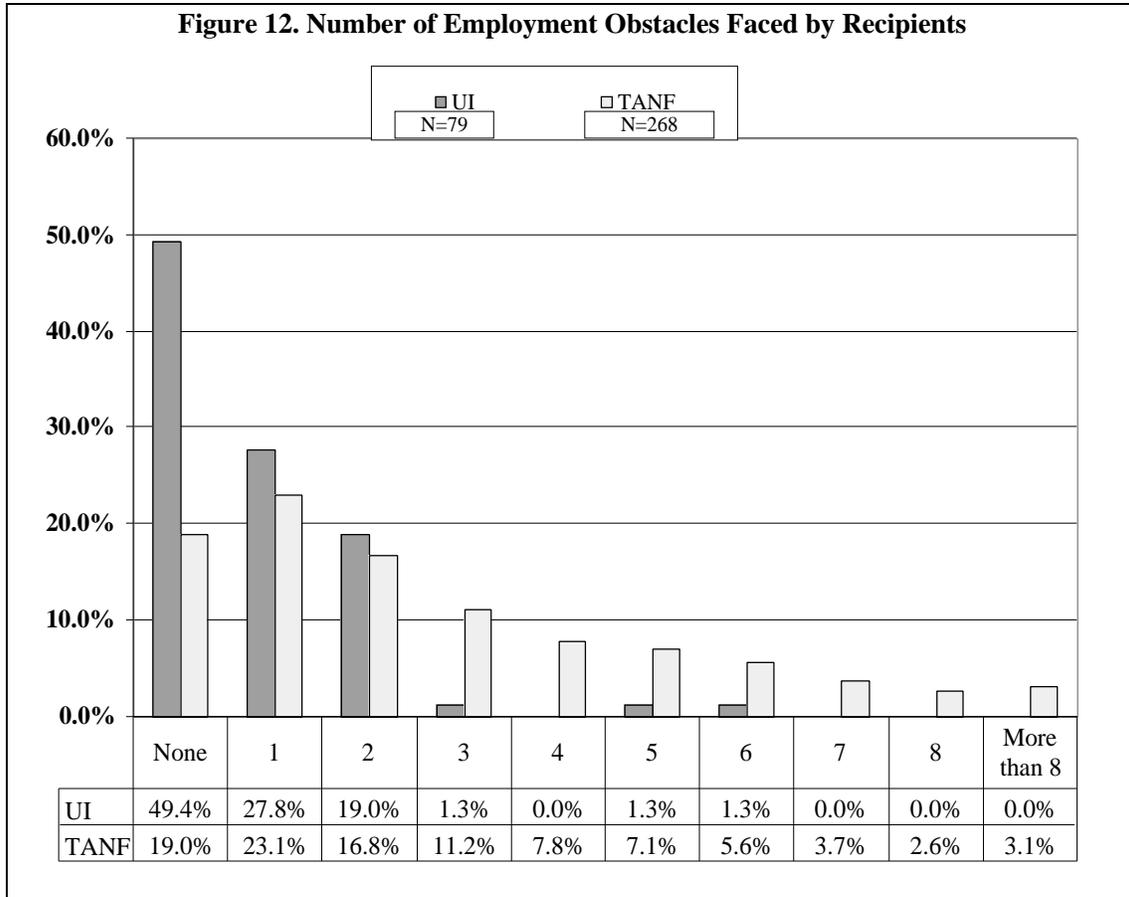
39.9% of TANF applicants and recipients said they grew up in a household where an adult received public assistance;

18.7% of UI benefit recipients said they had the same experience.

These data do not permit us to say with certainty that a culture or family pattern of welfare dependency existed among the 40% of applicants and recipients experiencing inter-generational public assistance. After all, 19% of UI benefit recipients grew up in households that received welfare benefits but were not themselves receiving welfare. On the other hand, the difference in magnitude among the two groups was significant.

Welfare recipients and unemployment insurance benefit recipients differed in the types of challenges they faced to obtain and sustain employment. They also differed in the number of obstacles they encountered. Almost one-half of the UI recipient sample did not indicate any factors that impeded employment. This was true for only 19% of the TANF recipients. Only 3.8% of the UI benefit recipients reported that they encountered more than two employment impediments. In contrast, 41% of TANF recipients reported more than two employment obstacles; 22%, almost one-quarter of the entire TANF sample, reported more than 4 impediments. Further research needs to be undertaken but it would appear that two of the critical variables that limit sustained employment within the TANF population were the number and severity of challenges they faced in obtaining and/or

Figure 12. Number of Employment Obstacles Faced by Recipients



retaining employment. The results of our survey offer compelling evidence that what distinguishes the welfare recipient population from others is in the nature of employment obstacles. Transportation, childcare, clothing, education, and the availability of appropriate jobs appear to be the most significant challenges.

The distribution of responses about factors limiting employment for welfare recipients in Merced County are quite similar to the responses provided in the Stanislaus County survey as revealed in Table 6. Perhaps the most noteworthy difference is that childcare was the most commonly cited difficulty in Stanislaus County while transportation was the most frequently cited difficulty in Merced County. It is also worth noting that inadequate clothing was mentioned by approximately one-fifth of the respondents in both surveys. If indeed inadequate clothing is preventing people from obtaining or retaining a job, it is surely one of the more soluble problems.

**Table 6. Factors that Limit Sustained Employment For TANF Recipients
in Merced and Stanislaus Counties
(Respondents could indicate multiple factors)**

Limiting Factors	% of Merced County TANF Respondents (N=268)	% of Stanislaus County TANF Respondents (N=323)
	Lack a car/transportation problems	29.8%
Inadequate education	24.6	21.4
Financial problems	23.5	(Not asked)
Inadequate clothes	21.3	19.5
Cannot find full-time work	20.5	(Not asked)
Lack technical skills	19.8	21.1
Childcare	19.4	27.2
Lack job experience	16.0	11.5
No telephone	11.6	11.5
No jobs I can do	11.2	(Not asked)
Lack job information	10.4	13.0
Health problems/Disability	13.0	14.2
No health insurance	6.7	8.0
Depression	5.6	(Not asked)
Criminal justice contact	5.2	5.9
Move often	4.5	3.4
Alcohol/drugs	3.0	3.4

Skills, Training, and Education

This study is one of many that documents the low educational attainment and job skill levels of welfare recipients.⁷ This study, as well as the Center’s earlier study of Stanislaus County, also documents similar conditions among unemployment insurance benefit recipients. The evidence is also rather convincing that these low educational and job skill

⁷ See, for instance, Paul E. Barton and Lynn Jenkins. 1995. *Literacy and Dependency: The Literacy Skills of Welfare Recipients in the United States*. Princeton, New Jersey, The Educational Testing Service; Hans P. Johnson and Sonya M. Tafoya. 1999. *The Basic Skills of Welfare Recipients: Implications for Welfare Reform*. San Francisco, California, Public Policy Institute of California.

levels impede the ability to obtain jobs, particularly well paying jobs, and are contributing factors in limiting the length of employment.

In this context, we wanted to know to what extent TANF and UI benefit recipients were participating in programs to increase their education and improve their skills. As the two figures below demonstrate, very little schooling or vocational training was occurring among UI benefit recipients. Very little schooling but some job training was occurring among TANF recipients.

Current welfare legislation tends to discourage school attendance, except among teenagers who have not completed high school. On the other hand, there is encouragement to attend job training programs when the recipient has not been successful in locating employment. As the data in Figure 14 indicate, the most common programs that TANF recipients attended were those sponsored by the Human Services Agency, previously under GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence), now as CalWORKS.

The survey results from Merced County UI and TANF recipients were virtually identical to the results obtained from the Stanislaus County survey. Our data do not permit us to more thoroughly explore this topic, particularly as to why there appears to be so little inclination to increase education and improve job skills. For the most part, neither UI benefit recipients nor TANF recipients have had schooling experiences that would facilitate school attendance now. Research, including studies cited above, typically conclude that existing job training programs that are not directly connected to employers and specific employment opportunities do not provide much benefit. It may be that many low skill workers or potential workers understand this from experience. And, as mentioned above, current welfare legislation provides little incentive to attend school. Rather, the emphasis is on getting recipients into jobs.

Figure 13. Percent of UI Benefit Recipients and TANF Recipients Currently Attending School

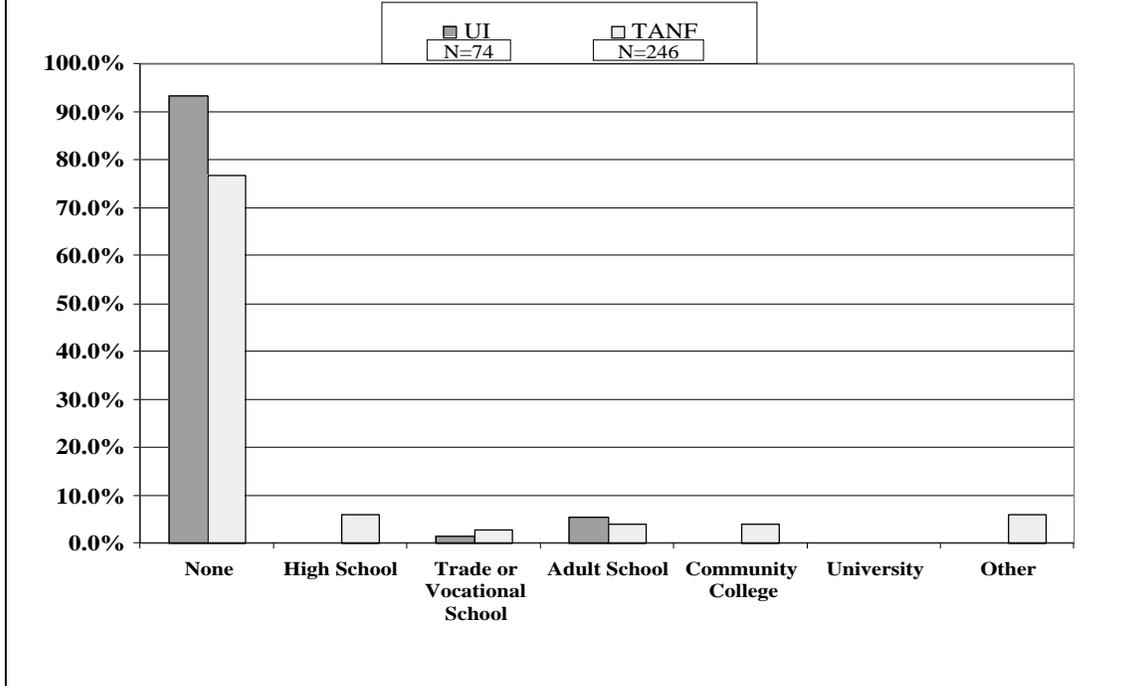
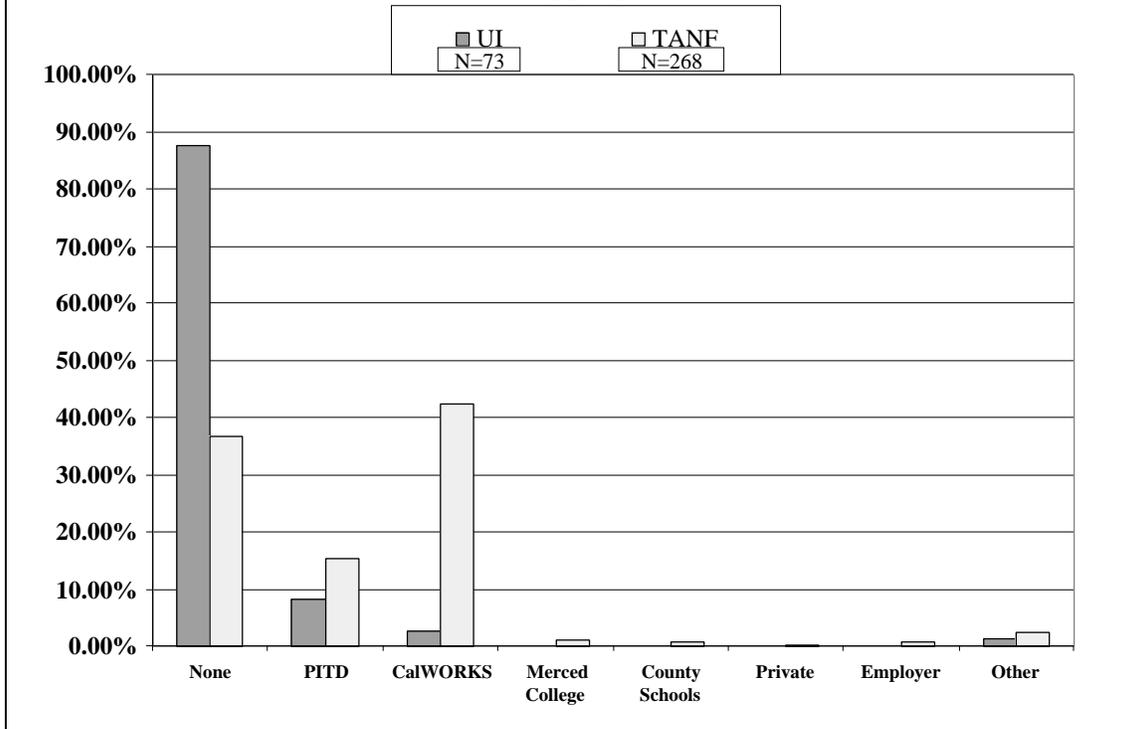


Figure 14. Percent of UI Benefit Recipients and TANF Recipients Currently Attending Training programs



A Service Provider Perspective

The information and analysis presented above are based on the results of surveys of unemployment insurance benefit recipients and TANF recipients in Merced County. These data are useful because they provide insight into the perceptions of individuals who faced numerous educational, social, and employment challenges and who must rely on social insurance and public assistance programs to make ends meet.

To extend the analysis, we surveyed 124 social service professionals who worked in Merced County. Approximately two-thirds (63.7%) of the survey respondents were employed by the Merced County Human Service Agency, 25% were employed by or managed a private, nonprofit organization, and the remainder worked for other state or county agencies. Given this distribution of the respondents, most of the responses summarized below will address perceptions regarding welfare recipients.

Almost all (91.1%) of the respondents worked directly with TANF recipients or others who needed job assistance or assistance meeting family needs. According to the social service providers surveyed for this study, their clients roughly fell into equal-sized groups of those who would be considered working poor, people who were unemployed and looking for work, and people who were unemployed and not looking for work.

The data in Table 7 summarize responses to the following: “thinking about the populations you serve, please rank order what you believe are the top ten factors which make it difficult for your clients to find jobs.” The data in Table 7 should be compared to the data in Table 4 to understand some of the perceptual similarities and differences between clients and providers. To facilitate the analysis, we will concentrate on the responses provided by TANF recipients and compare these to responses given by the case managers and other providers.

Table 7. Providers Perceptions of the Top Ten Factors Making Finding Jobs Difficult for Welfare Recipients (N=113)

Factor	Weighted Average
Job skill levels	64.9
Educational levels.....	64.6
Limited or no basic skills.....	58.1
Low motivation.....	55.9
Transportation problems.....	52.3
Child care arrangements	49.3
Limited or no English skills.....	46.8
Lack of available jobs.....	44.6
Drug and alcohol problems.....	44.0
Mental health problems	26.5

Both clients and providers agreed that the educational shortcomings that welfare recipients experienced had much to do with their labor market difficulties. Job skills, educational levels, and limited basic skills were the three most commonly cited factors by service professionals in explaining welfare recipients’ lack of labor market success.

Professional providers also agreed that broader economic structural factors contributed to the lack of sustained employment for TANF recipients. These broader factors included transportation and childcare problems and the lack of available jobs.

Consistent with the results of the Stanislaus County survey, service providers in Merced County also cited attitudinal and behavioral factors as among the ten most important factors. In particular, low motivation—the fourth ranking factor—and drug and alcohol abuse were given prominent mention. Recipients themselves almost never offered low motivation as characteristic of their situation and only infrequently mentioned drug or alcohol abuse.

Another item in the survey asked service providers if they believed that there are differences between the working poor and welfare recipients that help explain why the

working poor are more likely to work. Of the respondents to the survey, 85.6% said there were differences. The top three differences that were volunteered by the respondents were motivation, dignity and pride, and work ethic.

Our research to date cannot provide definitive evidence as to the extent to which attitudinal factors such as motivation and behavioral factors such as substance abuse limit the willingness and ability of welfare recipients to find and retain employment. The literature on the subject is not definitive either. It would suggest, however, that the prevalence of these factors is greater than recipients admit to in surveys but less prevalent than service providers believe.

Whatever the reality is, what is clear is that to some extent service providers and their clients speak a different language. For clients, the most important limiting factors have to do with the context in which they were brought up, their educational deficits, and current structural conditions which typically find a single mother with significant childcare challenges and a labor market that has far more supply than demand and pays inadequate wages for their skills. Service providers do not deny the importance of education and job training, the childcare difficulties, and the broader economic factors. What distinguished the contrasting perspectives was that service providers also placed much of the blame for the inconstant work history of recipients on the recipients themselves.

Service providers and recipients agreed that recipient's skill levels created problems for the recipients in obtaining and retaining employment. To further explore this issue, we asked service providers to assess the skill levels of welfare recipients in comparison to the county's workforce and the unemployed. . The assessment involved five skill areas: interpersonal skills, technical skills, basic skills, thinking skills, and personal qualities. The list and definition of each skill category were adapted from an U.S. Department of Labor classification of labor skills.

1. Interpersonal skills refer to the ability to work as part of a team, to be able to adapt to supervision, and to work in a culturally diverse environment;

- Technical skills include the ability to use computers and to manipulate complex machinery and production processes;
- Basic skills are defined as reading, writing, math, listening and speaking;
- Thinking skills include the ability to learn, to solve problems and make decisions;
- Personal qualities refer to such characteristics as responsibility, adaptability to change, and coping with stress.

Table 8. Service Provider Assessment of Skills

(Numbers are Percentages of Respondents)

Worker Skills	Workforce			Unemployed			Welfare Recipients		
	Good	Adequate	Poor	Good	Adequate	Poor	Good	Adequate	Poor
Interpersonal Skills	37.4	47.3	1.1	4.7	42.4	52.9	3.4	33.3	63.2
Technical Skills	35.2	53.8	11.0	4.6	27.6	67.8	4.4	18.9	76.7
Basic Skills	41.8	48.4	9.9	8.1	38.4	53.5	6.7	22.2	71.1
Thinking Skills	34.1	53.8	12.1	10.5	45.3	44.2	5.6	31.1	63.3
Personal Qualities	35.2	50.5	14.3	10.5	40.7	48.8	4.4	25.6	70.0

As expected, the skills of the unemployed were perceived to be worse than those of the county's workforce and the skills of welfare recipients worse than either of the other two. A majority of the service providers rated the skills of the unemployed as poor in the interpersonal, technical, and basic skills areas. Only for the area of thinking skills did a plurality of respondents rate the unemployed as having adequate skills. A sizable majority of service providers rated the skill levels of recipients as poor in all areas and expressed particular concern about the technical and basic skills and the personal qualities of welfare recipients.

Table 9 provides the results of a similar assessment requested of employers in Merced County. For the most part, employers had a more negative view of the skills of all groups: the workforce, the unemployed, and welfare recipients. Employers shared the service providers' perspective that among welfare recipients the skill areas that were the weakest were technical and basic skills.

Table 9. Employer Assessment of Skills

(Numbers are percentages of respondents)

Worker Skills	Workforce			Unemployed			Welfare Recipients		
	Good	Adequate	Poor	Good	Adequate	Poor	Good	Adequate	Poor
Interpersonal Skills	21.0	63.8	15.2	1.8	37.2	61.0	1.2	28.6	70.2
Technical Skills	13.9	63.9	22.3	1.2	32.3	66.5	0.6	17.8	80.9
Basic Skills	23.3	59.7	17.0	5.4	34.9	59.6	3.1	24.2	72.7
Thinking Skills	18.5	63.4	18.0	5.5	37.6	57.0	1.9	30.6	67.5
Personal Qualities	22.9	62.0	15.1	5.5	38.8	55.8	3.1	29.4	67.5

We turn now from the service provider perspective about the needs, challenges, and obstacles experienced by welfare recipients to a service provider perspective about possible policy options and program challenges. The service provider perspective regarding the challenges and weaknesses experienced by welfare recipients—as discussed above—has consequences for the service provider perspective about the challenges facing the current welfare program.

Service providers tended to see four factors that must be successfully dealt with for welfare-to-work to succeed. The two factors receiving the strongest response were the availability of jobs and the problem of the work motivation of recipients. Affordable

Table 10. The Top Challenges Facing Welfare-to-Work

Challenge	Weighted Score
Availability of jobs	40.3
Lack of motivation	36.0
Affordable child care	21.7
Lack of skills	20.7

childcare and improving skills were the other two factors receiving significant support among service providers. Given what welfare recipients indicated as their most significant challenges, welfare recipients would argue that transportation and education ought to be on the list and would delete “lack of motivation” from the list.

Table 11. Welfare-to-Work Policies: A Service Provider Perspective

Statement	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
1. With proper assistance, most current welfare recipients can find a job.	77.5%	18.3%	4.2%
2. Most welfare recipients who have found jobs are better off than when they were on welfare.	71.9	20.7	7.4
3. Merced County should financially assist people on welfare who want to relocate to other counties or states where a job has been offered.	68.9	20.5	10.7
4. Recipients should be allowed to take college level courses to meet a portion of their work requirement.	81.8	10.7	7.4
5. Recipients should be allowed to earn a high school diploma to meet a portion of their work requirements.	89.3	5.7	4.1
6. Merced County should pay private companies to hire people on welfare.	35.9	53.0	11.1

Service providers were generally quite optimistic that welfare recipients can find jobs as indicated to the response to item 1 in Table 11. Providers were also confident that welfare recipients were better off when they worked than when they were on welfare. However,

providers, as indicated above and reinforced by item 3 in Table 11, were pessimistic that there an adequate supply of jobs existed in the county. More than two-thirds of the respondents agreed that Merced County should assist welfare recipients to locate to areas where there are jobs.

Current welfare legislation, as we mentioned earlier, offers no incentive for recipients to attend college. Service providers felt this policy should be changed to allow college level coursework to meet a portion of TANF work activity requirements.

Service providers did not believe it proper to spend county funds to pay private employers to hire welfare recipients.

We also asked service providers to compare the 3 most important training needs of welfare recipients to the training needs of the unemployed and the working poor. Consistent with their skills assessments, service providers viewed welfare recipients as most in need of basic and interpersonal skills training. To the extent that technical skills would be useful, computer related skills and other vocational training were frequently mentioned.

Table 12. Service Provider Perspective of the Top 3 Skills Training Needs

(Numbers are weighted scores)

	Welfare Recipients	Unemployed	Working Poor
Basic skills	32.3	32.3	
Interpersonal skills	20.3	23.7	
Computer/vocational skills	19.3		20.3
Technical skills		29.3	33.3
More education			27.0

The most significant contrast was with the service provider perspective of the working poor whom the service providers saw as already possessing adequate basic and

interpersonal skills but simply in need of upgrading their education and the more technical skills.

Conclusion

Recent changes in welfare legislation in the nation and state limit the length of time an adult is eligible to receive public cash assistance. Welfare reform has redefined welfare as the provision of temporary assistance and prods county welfare departments to focus on assisting people to transition back into the labor force.

The purpose of this report was to analyze survey information to assist county policy makers, program managers, and human services providers with the task of assessing the labor force challenge Merced County faces as a result of welfare reform. The data base for this report were the results of questionnaires administered to 268 persons applying to or currently receiving benefits through the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program as administered by the Merced County Human Services Agency (HSA). The Center for Public Policy Studies also surveyed 79 unemployment insurance (UI) benefit applicants to provide a comparative perspective. UI applicants and benefit recipients shared some of the socio-demographic characteristics of TANF recipients. On the other hand, in some important ways, UI applicants were quite different. The similarities and differences between UI and TANF applicants and recipients may shed light on the labor force challenges facing welfare recipients.

For an additional perspective, the Center surveyed 124 professional human services providers in Merced County. Approximately three-fourths of the professionals were employees of the Merced County Human Services Agency. The others were employed by another public agency or a private, nonprofit agency.

In 1998, the Center reported the findings of similar surveys administered to similar groups in Stanislaus County. Where appropriate, we presented the findings from the Stanislaus County study to highlight findings from the Merced County study.

The survey results describe very different work histories for UI benefit recipients and welfare recipients. While most welfare recipients did have a work history (83% said they had worked for pay), they worked for significantly shorter periods of time at typically lower paying jobs than did UI benefit recipients. Most UI benefit recipients were out of work for brief periods of time; in fact, a substantial proportion of UI benefit recipients were seasonal workers who regularly returned to the same employer. In contrast, welfare recipients tended to be out of work for lengthier periods of time and tended to move through different jobs.

The survey results strongly suggest that UI benefit recipients and welfare recipients completed similarly low levels of education, possessed limited job skills, and shared similar ethnic characteristics. Given the strikingly different work histories, then, these attributes cannot explain the different work histories.

Critical differences between the two groups do emerge from the survey data. The key differences include the following:

- Welfare recipients on average were much younger than UI benefit recipients;
- Adult welfare recipients were much more likely to need childcare—84% had at least one child needing care and 44% had at least two children needing care whereas 64% of UI benefit recipients did not have any children needing childcare;
- Almost two-thirds of welfare recipients were not currently married and 49% had never been married. While we did not survey the marital status of UI benefit recipients in Merced County, research from Stanislaus County indicated that the vast majority were married;
- Transportation was a significant problem for 30% of welfare recipients but a problem for only 4% of UI benefit recipients;
- 81% of welfare recipients reported at least one factor that significantly impeded their ability to obtain or sustain employment compared to only 51% of UI benefit recipients who reported such obstacles;
- A majority of welfare recipients (52.2%) reported two or more obstacles to sustained employment compared to only 22.9% of UI benefit recipients.

What the survey results indicate is that most UI benefit recipients were older, experienced workers with relatively stable marital situations facing few difficulties in their quest to sustain employment. Their low levels of educational attainment and, in most cases, limited job skills impeded efforts to obtain higher paying jobs.

The contrast with the situation faced by most welfare recipients was stark. Those who applied for or received TANF benefits more typically were younger, unmarried women without another responsible adult to either help with family income or help with childcare. Given their low educational attainment levels and limited job skills and given that a majority faced additional difficulties, most particularly the absence of a functioning automobile, sustaining employment was difficult.

Service providers only partially concurred with the perspective and assessments provided by welfare recipients. Service providers agreed that welfare recipients needed to upgrade their education and their job skills. Service providers also understood that factors such as childcare and transportation acted as impediments to sustaining employment.

What differed was that a high percentage of service providers cited recipient behavior and attitudes as factors that also kept them from obtaining or retaining employment. The most important behavior that concerned service providers was substance abuse and the most critical attitudes had to do with motivation, work ethic, and a sense of pride. These were not characteristics or problems that recipients mentioned when describing their plight. These differences strongly suggest that the service provider perspective differs significantly from their client's perspective and that this may lead to the use of different worldviews or language to describe, explain, and understand a reality.

Our research does not permit us to explore these differences any further or to suggest which perspective is closer to reality. It does, however, suggest that many service providers must understand this conflict of perspectives and its potential for affecting client-provider relationships.

We conclude by asking whether the findings based on the survey results suggest policy and program recommendations. Survey data alone provide a quite limited basis upon which to make policy and program recommendations. One obvious but important conclusion, therefore, is that additional and more detailed survey research needs to be undertaken. The more detailed survey research must be supplemented with data from administrative records to better understand employment histories, labor market conditions, childcare needs, and so forth.

Beyond the need for more research, certain critical findings suggest possible avenues for policy or program changes.

- ❖ Unless the educational and job skill limitations are addressed, the employment picture for most current welfare recipients appears to be bleak and the available jobs are unlikely to provide an income to allow a single parent-headed household to be able to make ends meet.
- ❖ Childcare and transportation appear to be defining issues for a substantial proportion of welfare recipients such that they will serve as major impediments to sustained employment.
- ❖ It is quite possible that full-time employment for single heads of a household is not even a proper goal. There is a growing body of research that strongly suggests that a healthy childhood that adequately prepares a child for adulthood requires the presence of at least one parent—most commonly the mother—when children are at home.
- ❖ There appears to be a significant rise in the number of never married mothers that when coupled with limited education and job skills appears to be correlated with welfare recipiency. This statement of fact ought not to be confused, however, with understanding the problem. One of the unfortunate consequences of much of the literature on welfare is that it often gets read as assigning fault to the mother. In more instances than not, welfare receipt becomes a single mother's most promising survival strategy.

- ❖ Service providers and program managers must be sensitive to differences in perspective about the conditions experienced by welfare recipients and sensitive to the impact these differences might have on successful case management.

2000-2001

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