
This is the final report for a qualitative study in Southeast Michigan and Los Angeles, CA, to better understand disconnected mothers’ well-being and experiences related to work, TANF benefit receipt, and material hardship. Common reasons for disconnection from employment included limited job opportunities, lack of transportation, limited English proficiency, lack of affordable child care, and desire to stay home with children. Reasons for non-use of TANF assistance included using child support or Supplemental Security Income for children in lieu of TANF and hassle of complying with TANF application and work requirements. Economic coping strategies included using nutritional assistance benefits (less stigma attached), taking side jobs, receiving informal support from children’s fathers, and receiving material and other assistance from family and friends.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/capabilities-approach-framework-understand-and-enhance-tanf-recipients%E2%80%99-employability

This article used the capabilities approach—a social justice framework—to explore barriers to employment for TANF recipients by considering individuals’ employability in terms of freedom, opportunity, resources, and options. The authors noted the inter-relationships among core areas of functioning and asserted that TANF programs’ overemphasis on work is problematic for those lacking core functioning capabilities. Their recommendations for caseworkers included integrating the concepts of practical reason (e.g., asking a client about life goals) and affiliation (self and other orientation) into client assessments for the hard-to-employ and understanding employment options and work characteristics.

https://www.opressrc.org/content/what-strategies-work-hard-employ-final-results-hard-employ-demonstration-and-evaluation

This final evaluation report summarized the eight programs in and final evaluation results for the 10-year, OPRE-sponsored, Enhanced Services of the Hard-to-Employ (HtE) Demonstration and Evaluation Project. The HtE project explored various strategies for increasing employment in hard-to-employ groups. Three of the eight programs demonstrated increases in employment. Of these three programs, two produced employment gains only in the short-term; these two were large-scale programs that offered subsidized transitional jobs either to long-term welfare recipients or to ex-prisoners. The third, with long-term employment gains, was for welfare recipients with health barriers; it offered unpaid work experience, job placement assistance, and educational services.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/tanf-recipients-barriers-employment

This joint Urban Institute and Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) research brief summarized state and local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program strategies to address TANF recipients' barriers to employment (e.g., low educational attainment, disabling health conditions). Common strategies included using assessments, providing work opportunities, providing enhanced support services (e.g., rehabilitative services, case management, job coaching), and using state-only funding to provide services not countable under TANF participation rate rules to the hardest-to-employ. The authors concluded with implications for state and federal policy and suggested areas for future research.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/online-work-readiness-assessment-barriers-work-and-post-assessment-experiences

This report described an analysis of assessment data from pilot testing of the Online Work Readiness Assessment (OWRA) in Maryland. OWRA is a set of web-based modules developed by ICF International to assess barriers to employment among welfare applicants and to assist caseworkers in developing individualized self-sufficiency plans for clients. The analysis found that OWRA yielded valid, reliable, empirical barriers data to aid in case management decisions. The authors made practice and policy recommendations based on the results and most commonly assessed barriers.

https://www.opressrc.org/content/barriers-employment-among-tanf-applicants-and-their-consequences-self-sufficiency

In this article, Chapin Hall researchers examined potential employment barriers for TANF applicants using baseline interview data from a longitudinal study of 1,075 Milwaukee County TANF applicants. More than half of the sample reported at least two of the 10 barriers studied and more than one-third reported four or more barriers. Depression and no high school diploma or GED were the two most common barriers. These two barriers and a few others were associated with lack of employment post-baseline interview, and more barriers generally related to fewer periods of employment.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/barriers-employment-returners-welfare-and-those-who-have-left-welfare-and-employment-rolls

This article relayed findings of a state study comparing employment barriers for two random samples of TANF leavers: 200 who left and then returned to the TANF rolls (i.e., the “returners”) and 300 who neither returned nor could be found in state employment records (i.e., they appeared to have no labor force attachment; the “leavers”). The two groups reported different barriers to their employment. The returners identified transportation (32%); insufficient pay (29%); lack of jobs in the community (26%); negative attitudes about coworkers (32%); and stressful working environments (29%) as the top barriers to their employment. The leavers reported physical disability (53%), illness or injury (44%), and mental illness (26%) as top barriers to their employment.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/barriers-employment-and-hard-serve-implications-services-sanctions-and-time-limits

In this article, University of Michigan researchers explored long-term welfare recipients’ barriers in moving from welfare-to-work using panel data from the first three years of the Women's Employment Study (WES). The WES sample consisted of single mothers on the February 1997 TANF rolls of an urban Michigan county. Compared to national samples of women, the WES sample women were more likely to lack a high school diploma and to have a transportation problem, certain mental health issues, a child with a health issue, and recent experience with domestic violence. WES sample women who worked less than 75% of the study period also had fewer job skills and were more likely to experience multiple barriers across multiple years. Similarly, WES sample women who received TANF benefits for at least 75% of the study period were more likely to have multiple barriers to employment.

https://www.opressrc.org/content/helping-hard-employ

In this book chapter, the author explored why a large number of hard-to-employ individuals remained disconnected from the labor force despite significant declines in the cash assistance rolls since the 1996 welfare reform. The author described characteristics of hard-to-employ families and barriers they faced, including mental health issues, limited work experience, and a lack of access to transportation and child care. She outlined strategies used by TANF agencies to address the needs of their hard-to-employ population, such as screening and assessment tools, intensive case management, and enhanced transitional employment programs. The author concluded with policy change recommendations, including expanding activities that count toward work participation, altering the time limit, and reconsidering sanction requirements.


https://www.opressrc.org/content/welfare-reform-moving-hard-employ-recipients-workforce-0

This GAO report responded to a Congressional request to better understand the challenges faced by hard-to-employ TANF recipients and the difficulties states faced in helping these individuals secure employment. The authors drew from the Current Population Survey, National Survey of America’s Families, administrative data, and site visits to describe (1) changes in TANF recipients’ characteristics and their participation in work activities, (2) strategies states used to help the hard-to-employ obtain and sustain employment, and (3) challenges states faced in implementing strategies. Although a higher percentage of adult TANF recipients were engaged in work activities than in the past, the majority of TANF recipients were still not working while receiving benefits. In all six states visited, officials agreed that TANF recipients with one or more barriers to employment found it most difficult to secure and maintain employment.