

## SSRC Selections

# Parental Education and Employment

---

Selections highlight research, evaluation reports, and other publications that inform the field about key issues in, and effective practices for, fostering economic self-sufficiency.

---

**Sabol, T. J., & Chase-Lansdale, P. L. (2015). The influence of low-income children's participation in Head Start on their parents' education and employment. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 34(1), 136–161. doi: 10.1002/pam.21799**

**<https://www.opressrc.org/content/influence-low-income-childrens-participation-head-start-their-parents-education-and>**

This article used data from the Head Start Impact Study, a randomized trial of over 4,000 children, to examine the impact that children's participation in Head Start had on parental outcomes. The authors found that parents of children who participated in the program were more likely to continue their education, especially those that started with some college (resulting in attainment of a technical certificate or BA) and African American parents. Similar results were not found for increased employment. The authors offered three theories about the mechanisms by which children's participation in Head Start influenced parental outcomes: *resource allocation theory* suggests that the no-cost preschool offered by Head Start frees up parental time and energy to devote to other activities such as continuing education; *social capital theory* suggests that joining the Head Start community, with opportunities for parental leadership and networking, may motivate parents to pursue their individual education and employment goals; and *developmental systems theory* recognizes the interconnectedness between children's and parent's learning, where academic opportunity and achievement by children will motivate parents to improve their role modeling of academic participation.

**Lake Research Partners & American Viewpoint. (2011). *Toward a two-generation strategy: Voices of American families*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, Ascend.**

**<https://opressrc.org/content/toward-two-generation-strategy-voices-american-families>**

This report captured findings from 10 focus groups with various respondent groups (e.g., African American/Latino Married Fathers, Native American Single Mothers). One area of inquiry was economic context and respondents' motivations for working to be financially secure. Both men and women expressed that enhancing their children's opportunities in life was a major motivator, such as a single mother in Detroit who said she wanted a "secure life, like for my children to have something that they can start with, but I think a lot of times we don't have anything to start with." The focus groups also asked for respondents' views about their children, single parenthood, and the concept of two-generation programming. While respondents valued the term "women-headed families" they wanted programming to be inclusive of

fathers, for the benefit of the child.

**Vu, C. M., Anthony, E. K., & Austin, M. J. (2009). Strategies for engaging adults in welfare-to-work activities. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services*, 90(4), 359-366. doi: 10.1606/1044-3894.3929**

**<https://www.opressrc.org/content/strategies-engaging-adults-welfare-work-activities>**

This 2009 literature review compared employment program models and engagement strategies used to encourage TANF participants to meet work activity requirements. The authors offered two philosophical approaches to employment programming: a labor force attachment approach, wherein participants are encouraged to find work immediately and learn employability skills from on-the-job experience, and a human capital development approach, wherein participants are encouraged to take part in education and skills training before employment. The review cited research that optimal program design incorporates elements from both approaches. Programs using either approach can use a combination of participant- and organization-focused strategies to increase participant engagement with the program and with employment. Participant-focused strategies with evidence of success included comprehensive assessments, individualized service planning, and access to other services. Organization-focused strategies included communicating a clear, consistent message; defining broad and flexible activities; and setting performance standards for staff for participant outcomes and program priorities.

**Juntunen, C. L., & Wettersten, K. B. (2006). Work hope: Development and initial validation of a measure. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 53(1): 94-106. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.53.1.94**

**<https://www.opressrc.org/content/work-hope-development-and-initial-validation-measure>**

This article explained the theory behind and development of the Work Hope Scale, which can be used to understand individuals' vocational goal setting and goal pursuit. "Hope" was defined as having three primary components: a goal (or anchor points), thoughts about how to achieve those goals (or pathways), and the motivation or willingness to achieve those goals (or agency). The authors argued that low-resource workers may have more trouble identifying goals than their better-resourced peers; teasing the concept of hope into these three components may help identify psychological and motivational barriers to employment. Results from the studies supported the usefulness of the Work Hope Scale to career counselors in starting a conversation with clients about the presence or absence of hope for future employment.

**Hodge, S. (2001, December). *Social indicators, dysfunctional career cognitions, and career decision-making self-efficacy in work role participation of welfare recipients*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Vocational Education Research Association, New Orleans, LA.**

**<https://www.opressrc.org/content/social-indicators-dysfunctional-career-cognitions-and-career-decision-making-self-efficacy>**

This article looked at career decision-making self-efficacy<sup>1</sup> among welfare-participating mothers in Middle Georgia. The author administered three measurement instruments with each participant: the *Career Thoughts Inventory*, the *Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy-Short Form*, and the Participation scale of the *Salience Inventory*. Participant answers indicated more trouble coping with externally-posed challenges to employment than with decision-making confusion. Participants expressed confidence in talking with individuals employed in the types of jobs they would like to have, but lacked confidence in creating 5-year plans and deciding how to respond if they were having trouble in their chosen jobs. The most salient “life role” for participants was home and family, indicating that being a parent was a relatively stronger part of their identity than being a worker. The author concluded by suggesting that welfare participants could be “assisted in developing an awareness of their thoughts and beliefs so that they can determine which thoughts facilitate and which thoughts hinder occupational success.”

**Taylor, L. C. (2001). *Work attitudes, employment barriers, and mental health symptoms in a sample of rural welfare recipients*. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(3): 443-463. doi: 10.1023/A:1010323914202**

**<https://www.opressrc.org/content/work-attitudes-employment-barriers-and-mental-health-symptoms-sample-rural-welfare>**

This article reported on a series of interviews done with mothers participating in welfare programs in rural areas of the Southeastern United States to understand their work aspirations, barriers, and facilitators for employment. Most were currently working, unless they were pregnant or had a disability. The interviews revealed a strong preference to work: a large majority of respondents (80%) indicated that they would chose to work even if they had sufficient wealth to support themselves “comfortably” without employment, and 65% indicated that welfare was “not a good way of life.” The respondents listed lack of available jobs, child care, and transportation as barriers to employment or service use.

---

<sup>1</sup> Self-efficacy is an individual's “beliefs about their capabilities to...exercise influence over events that affect their lives.” (<http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/Bandura/BanEncy.html>)