Welfare Reform and "Welfare to Work" as Non-Sequitur: A Case Study of the Experiences of Latina Women in Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT. Welfare reform emerged as a public policy response to a presumed "dependency" on the part of impoverished individuals and families. This behavioral view of poor people is ensconced in the adoption of welfare reform nationally, and many states including Massachusetts, where "work-first" frenzy fed the political momentum for moving families off welfare as quickly as possible, regardless of the consequences for children and families. A study of the experiences of 100 Latina women in Massachusetts during the fall of 1999 and the spring of 2000 shows that welfare reform presents major obstacles for poor women seeking employment as a way out of poverty. These obstacles include three key problems: the lack of information about potential employment and training programs and services; unaccountable discretion on the part of caseworkers; and biased perceptions about Latina women on public assistance. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@*

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INTRODUCTION

This essay examines the experiences of Latina women on public assistance in terms of their ability to access services related to preparation for education, job training, and employment. The key finding reported is that state regulations under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWRA) and Chapter 5 (1995) in Massachusetts, and the Employment Services Program (Chapter 207) of Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) are not effective in assisting poor women become better prepared for entry into the workforce. This program is for parents receiving cash assistance through TAFDC. It is an employment-oriented program based on a strict work-first approach that we find ineffective in helping Latina women in places like Lawrence. Our findings are consistent with a growing number of studies in other places. After surveying 65 cities between January 1999 and December 1999 the Children's Defense Fund (2000: IX) reported that "work is not enough to fend off hardships" and "that many working families are not receiving the supports (food stamps, medical coverage, or child care assistance) they need." In our survey we find indications that state policy and its implementation is discouraging poor women on public assistance from pursuing training. Additionally, much needed supportive services that enhance the prospect of employment are not fully provided to some women.

Our research shows that there are two myths about poor women operating in the implementation of TANF regulations in Massachusetts and that contribute to the state's failure in moving some Latina women towards economic self-sufficiency. One myth suggests an image of poor women as "dependent," "lacking in motivation," and "welfare cheaters." The related myth pertains to the belief that the state is really helping these women improve their economic status by forcing them into work and with little supportive services. Armed with these myths and accompanying stereotypes state political leaders molded TANF to what it is today, a punitive system that provides little help, stigmatizes its par-

ticipants, and does not do much to assist the poor women and their families to climb out of poverty. In fact, this very system actually inhibits poor women from being economically self-sufficient. We also found that issues about fairness and the civil rights of women were raised in the implementation of a work-first policy.

This conclusion is based on examination of the experiences of Latina women in the city of Lawrence, and the surrounding areas of the Merrimack Valley region in Massachusetts. Similar conclusions are reported in the findings of other researchers who examined the impact of welfare reform on children, women, and families. For example, in a study by Jocelyn Frye (2001) it was noted that the civil rights of children and families on welfare is many times violated because of the implementation of welfare reforms. A number of problems in the implementation of this policy are identified that can result in the denial of basic civil rights of clients. These include arbitrary denial of basic program services and the lack of monitoring of discretionary, but sometimes arbitrary, behavior on the part of welfare bureaucrats.

The observations described here emerge from interviews with 100 Latina women formerly on public assistance and after their 24 month "time-clock" limit took effect. Conducted during the fall of 1999 through the spring of 2000, the results of these interviews and other data indicate that Latina women on public assistance were discouraged from services that could have increased their chances for job placement and long-term retention. For this reason we use the phrase "non-sequitur" in our title. The state's policies, practices, and implementation of TANF regulations, according to responses to our survey, have little effect in preparing women on welfare for employment for economic self-sufficiency. The survey serves to condemn the state's work-first approach as shortsighted, ineffective, and unfair. Furthermore, services are provided in demeaning ways suggesting that the objective is not to increase employment capacity and economic independence, but rather punishment for being poor and seeking public assistance.

THE MASSACHUSETTS MODEL

Under Chapter 5 of the Acts of 1995, signed into law by the Republican Governor William Weld on February 10, 1995, Massachusetts imposed stricter and shorter time limits to welfare benefits than many other states. The vote for welfare reform in Massachusetts was 133-21 on the House side, and 31-3 on the Senate side, reflecting significant

support on the part of both Democrats and Republicans. In 1999, the TANF allocation in this state was approximately $460 million. In 1995 there were 112,000 families receiving AFDC/TAFDC in Massachusetts. This number dropped to 61,240 families by 1998. Approximately 27,981 (45%) of these families were White; 18,874 (29%) Latino; 11,325 of the families (18%) were Black; 3,481 families (5%) were of Asian-descent; and 189 families (1%) were Native American.

This policy discourages recipients from enrolling in employment and training programs and instead emphasizes a work-first approach.[1] Chapter 5 mandates provisions that force individuals to find any available job regardless of pay or work conditions. Massachusetts' reforms contain regulations prohibiting schooling for higher skilled employment as a way to earn benefits or leave public assistance by limiting benefits to just 24 months in a given five year period. A study by researchers at the University of Massachusetts Boston revealed that the number of students on welfare studying to get a baccalaureate degree dropped by 35% during the period 1993 to 1997 (Dowdy, 1998). Much of the decline in the latter years is attributed to state policies and regulations that utilize stringent provisions and thereby adversely affecting recipient aspirations and opportunities for post-secondary education.

Massachusetts' implementation of TANF set a two-year limit within a five-year period for parents with children over five years of age to obtain training for employment and then find a job. Unlike the state's earlier programs, the agency that administers public assistance, the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, required that during this two-year time period parent's work or volunteer 20 hours per week in order to receive the cash portion of their monthly public assistance. Clients could not use participation in educational and training programs in lieu of the work requirement. During this period of transitioning into the new reforms, many welfare consumers already in programs of higher education were forced to drop-out of school since new state requirements placed pressure and strain on them and their families and also eliminated many support services necessary for their continuation. These new requisites were in place in Massachusetts even though federal welfare reform policies allowed states some flexibility in helping low-income women to access post-secondary education. The leadership of Massachusetts chose not to exercise this kind of option. Perhaps this is why by 1997, two years after the signing of Chapter 5 by the Governor, there was an overall 55% decline in the number of registered welfare consumers among the fifteen publicly funded community colleges. Richard Chacon of *The Boston Globe* further notes that at

Northern Essex Community College, which has a campus in Lawrence (and where approximately half–47.0 percent–of the student body is comprised of Latino/Latina students), there was a 45% decline of registered students on public assistance (Chacon, 1998).

SURVEY DESIGN

One hundred former Latina welfare recipients living in the Greater Lawrence Department of Transitional Assistance catchment area (Andover, Lawrence, Methuen and North Andover) were interviewed between the fall of 1999 and the spring of 2000. Latina women were selected for this study for two reasons. First, Lawrence is now one of the largest cities in New England where the majority of its population is Latino. As reported by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the Latino proportion of the total population for this city of approximately 72,000 persons is 60 percent. Thus, the Latino community is projected to play an increasing role in the labor force in this part of the state. The second reason for using this case is to highlight weaknesses in some of the state's macro-level studies examining the experiences of women on public assistance. Margaret K. Nelson (2002) reviews certain limitations regarding the use of macro-level data in studying welfare reform. Similarly, as explained in a newspaper article by Jennings and Santiago (2001), studies utilizing aggregate data for the entire state tend to hide the actual experiences of particular groups on public assistance, as well as how public assistance is implemented in different cities and regions of Massachusetts.

One year before the 1995 Massachusetts reforms (December 1994) there were 4,905 cases on the previous welfare program, Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in the Greater Lawrence Area; by December 1998, three years after the reforms, there were only 2,557 cases. This represented a 48 percent decline in just three years. The Greater Lawrence Department of Transitional Assistance office cut its AFDC (or what became known as TANF after the reforms) by almost half, and the 100 women in our research represented a small but important group who experienced cuts in one form or another. Representatives of the local Department of Transitional Assistance area office and community-based organizations in Lawrence helped to identify potential respondents. The community-based organizations that provided assistance were responsible for workforce training, case management, information and referral, job placement, and assisting these women in ac-

cessing support services through contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. Forty-five percent of the women in the study were individuals formerly on welfare and looking for help with job placement, childcare, and transportation. The other respondents agreed to participate in the study when approached by a member of the research team. In the latter case, members of the research team approached individuals in reception areas of the offices of Department of Transitional Assistance and those of local providers. Although the sample is not designed based on random selections of interviewees, the data do provide a "snap shot" of the experiences of many Latina women because of the 1995 Massachusetts welfare reform.

At the time of our survey, 57% of the respondents had reached their time limits and were not receiving cash benefits. Forty-three percent of the respondents had, on their own volition, closed their welfare case before reaching their two-year time limit. Further, 86% of our respondents reported that they were working. All 100 respondents in the survey were no longer receiving cash benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance; however, they all qualified for support services according to the 1995 reforms. All of the respondents had been off welfare for two years or less, earned less than what the state and federal guidelines allowed from outside income, and had children in the appropriate age brackets to be eligible for family non-cash support services. The 100 women in the survey represented individuals who, on one hand, had the characteristics that the reforms of 1995 were targeting, but also were experiencing adverse impacts on their capacity to attain economic self-sufficiency due to state work-first policies. Unlike the periodic cases of former welfare consumers touted by the state's Department of Transitional Assistance, who presumably were benefiting from economic independence and success as a result of welfare reform, the women in this study suggest that a sizeable number, especially those of color, experienced more harm than help.

Identifying and accessing 100 former welfare clients was difficult. The Department of Transitional Assistance had lost contact with most of the women from this population. It seems once off TANF, state and community agencies responsible for on-going assistance did not maintain information about the women and certainly did not collect information about obstacles in finding employment. Members of the research team identified potential respondents by seeking women who sought assistance from local community-based organizations, as well as those who visited soup kitchens and social service agencies. Initially there was much hesitancy on the part of a significant number of women to

participate in the survey. For many, there was fear that members of the research team would disclose their identity along with their comments and responses to others, so they were initially hesitant to participate in an interview. We believe that because the research team was comprised of persons of color, and more specifically, because all three interviewers were Latinas themselves, the respondents were generally receptive to participating in the survey. Once the researchers convinced the respondents that the interviews would remain anonymous, and no identifying information would be placed on the survey instrument, the women became more at ease and forthcoming in their responses.

During the period of the survey's administration, many of the women in the survey (42 in all) were participating in 8 to 12 week job training programs at a local community college, or other job training programs in Lawrence. Slightly over one-third (36.0 percent) of the 100 women were not receiving cash benefits at the time of this research from the Department of Transitional Assistance, but were receiving food stamps. It should be noted that these same 36 women had gotten off welfare on their own volition, "banking" whatever time they had left in the overall five-year federal life time limit for future need. It is interesting that although still in need of non-cash assistance, this group of women had not completely used up their two-year limit provided by the Massachusetts reforms. Though this latter group included many women who were working, however, their earnings often did not meet all of their living costs.

Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The interviewers were female, of Latino background, fluent in Spanish, and former welfare recipients themselves who had successfully transitioned to a career by getting a college education before the reforms. The interviews took place in either the respondent's home, or in the offices of the research team. The questions focused on a range of demographic, economic, and social areas, as well as on their educational experiences while on public assistance. The survey questions were presented face-to-face, and due to limited English ability, most of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The research team also interviewed six representatives of the Department of Transitional Assistance and workers employed by community-based agencies. We inquired about available information regarding the placement and assessment of women for purposes of employment and training. These individuals were asked questions on issues related to the provision of information on services available to these women during the two year transitional period prior to the reforms taking full affect, as well as queries on their personal opinions concerning welfare consumers and the services they were entitled to receive.

Finally, the methodology included observations based on participation in several meetings held by the City's Department of Training and Development. This agency was responsible for a range of services related to welfare reform including, intake and assessment of all women on welfare and in job training, funding local community agencies for specific job training programs, funding transportation services through local providers, providing job placements, and, working with local employers to open employment opportunities for welfare consumers. It had responsibility for assisting these women during and after job training and placement with accessing support services. The Lawrence Department of Training and Development was a major financial conduit through which the state channeled money into the network of organizations responsible for providing training, job placement, and support services to welfare consumers. This department sponsored "Bidders Conference" to discuss new funding opportunities with interested applicants. The research team participated in these meetings with local community agencies and providers.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The survey indicates that of the 100 women in the sample, 63% were born in either the United States or Puerto Rico, and all qualified for public assistance. The data in Table 1 shows that the majority of the women were on public assistance for three years or less. Specifically, 63% had been on welfare for three years or less, 15% had been on public assistance for four-to-six years, and the rest (22%) for seven years or more and most of these were receiving aid due to a disabled family member. This fact debunks the notion that women of color on public assistance were on the public dole for an inordinate amount of time, or were multi-generational cases. It also suggests that these Latina women utilize welfare as a temporary "helping hand" for a short period rather than as a way of life. Indeed, 36% of the women had removed themselves before the time limit on their own volition, and obtained employment.

FINDINGS

Inadequacy of Employment Training

A series of questions in the survey focused on the benefits this group of Latina women received during and after job training, as well as after

TABLE 1. Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Percent
Place of Birth	
USA	27
Puerto Rico	36
Dominican Republic	36
Other	1
Total	**100**
Marital Status	
Single	54
Married	12
Divorced	12
Separated	22
Total	**100**
Length of Time on Welfare	
Three Years or Less	63
Four-to-Six Years	15
Seven or More Years	22
Total	**100**
Education Level	
Elementary	13
Junior High	15
High School (No Diploma)	33
High School Graduate	25
Some College	11
College Degree	3
Total	**100**
Job Placement in Area of Training	
Yes	19
No	81
Total	**100**

the two-year limit and while working. Table 1 reports the education, as well as the employment and training experiences of the Latina women. The data demonstrate that well over one-third of those surveyed had a high school diploma, or high school diploma equivalency (GED) and, or, some college or a formal degree. The majority (61%) had no high school diploma.

The reforms in Massachusetts provided only 8 to 12 weeks of workforce training in a specific job area. Furthermore, as Table 1 shows, 81% of women interviewed had job placements that were not relevant to the areas in which they received training. For most welfare consumers the training areas were very much limited; this was usually determined by what the training provider was offering. Often providers only offered training in areas in which they had an established relationship with a specific employer, and the women received training for a specific job rather than for an industry or long-term career. Because of such relationships with solely one employer, once the particular company filled all of its entry-level openings, the training program was no longer relevant, and became obsolete. For many community organizations in the job-training field there is an inability to shift program emphasis fast enough to help meet the new needs of employers, and thus focusing on meeting immediate labor needs without comprehensive strategies for career development and mobility increases the level of job instability for public assistance recipients. The need to change curriculum, equipment, instructors, and other training necessities required financial and other resources that many local and community organizations did not have.

The data in the survey show that poor Latinas in Lawrence needed specific kinds of education and supports, including English as a Second Language classes, and job search services. Table 2 indicates that 59% had fair-to-poor English proficiency, and 75% stated they received no assistance in finding a job. One of the women surveyed commented: "The DTA needs to help us more with job search. They call us in every week, but give us no help." Further, their need for supportive services, especially transportation to and from the training program, transportation to an interview, and childcare services while in class were unmet, for the most part. Eighty-seven percent of the women interviewed noted that they received no support services while in a training program.

The data indicates that the majority, 81%, of the women working earned in the range of $5.76 to $11.00 per hour. Specifically, 29% earned between $5.76 and $7.00 per hour, 30% earned between $7.01 and $9.00 per hour, and 22% earned between 9.01 and 11.00 per hour. This is significantly lower than the $20.74 per hour needed for a single parent with one infant preschooler to become self-sufficient in the Greater Lawrence Area based on recent studies, including *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Massachusetts* (Bacon et al., 2000). The lack of support services available to women participating in a training program, especially childcare services and transportation, made it impossible for the majority of the women in our sample to participate in an 8 to 12

TABLE 2. English Proficiency, Job Training Attendance, Assistance with Job Search and Support Services While in Job Training

Characteristic	Percent
English Proficiency	
Good	41
Fair	27
Poor	32
Total	**100**
Attended a Training Program	
Yes	42
No	58
Total	**100**
Received Help with Job Search	
Yes	25
No	75
Total	**100**
Services Received While in Training	
Transportation to and from Training	9
Child Care	1
Transportation to Interview and Job Search	3
None	87
Total	**100**

week training program. This made the workforce training efforts in Massachusetts for these welfare consumers of little consequence in getting and holding a job. In many instances, workforce-related training services actually became obstructions for welfare recipients by personally undermining the self-confidence of women through the attitudes and hostility of some Department of Transitional Assistance staff and contractors. We found a situation, in other words, where officially women were expected to become economically self-sufficient, but yet treated with little respect. One of the women interviewed alluded to this last finding when she noted: "We need more help. They should stop giving us such a hard time." Viewing the Department of Transitional Assistance as an obstacle to their own plans for advancement was rampant in the responses of women.

The Impact of Caseworker Bias

As stated above, the research team interviewed caseworkers from both the Department of Transitional Assistance offices and local community organizations that had contracts to assist current and former welfare consumers, and attended planning meetings with this group. Interviews with these caseworkers helped to determine how they, themselves, viewed the implementation of reforms. Some caseworkers revealed biased attitudes about the women they were responsible for assisting with public assistance. Other researchers have discovered similar attitudes toward specific groups of color, women, and immigrants. In our study, service workers themselves were admitting to adverse treatment.[2] For instance, one Department of Transitional Assistance caseworker responded, "These women have it too easy. We need to make it harder for them." Another caseworker employed under the auspices of a local community agency responded to a question on transportation services with the following: "We don't say much to these women about the fact that they're entitled to transportation to and from school or work. We want them to figure this out for themselves."

The research team obtained a copy of a memorandum and accompanying report that outlined adverse treatment by the city's Department of Training and Development. This agency had become the "gate-keeper" of assessments and referrals for this population, as well as a provider for job placements and support services. Luz Carrion, an intake worker in a job-training program, outlined complaints received from most of the women on welfare about the agency. She notes: "Once a student is in intake at the Department of Training and Development they are required to bring many documents and forms which keep them stuck in a 'black hole,' and in essence dragging-out the process in order for them to receive assistance" (Carrion, 1999). In this report she provides a number of specific clients who had been "bounced around from office-to-office," had their paperwork lost, were repeatedly asked to bring new support documents stretching this process for weeks, or who had never heard back from the CBO.

On several occasions members of the research team attended "Bidders Conferences," open to the public and mainly attended by directors of local community-based agencies, to discuss the availability of services to these women who were either in training programs, had left TANF already, or were about to leave as a result of the 1995 reforms. In these meetings, eligibility criteria for these services, as well as the availability of new funds for them from the Department of Transitional As-

sistance, were discussed frequently. It was apparent in most cases that although all of these women qualified for assistance, arbitrarily imposed obstacles made it difficult for women to access these services. For example, in one meeting in a discussion of the availability of funds to purchase a used automobile or repair one owned by women getting off welfare, administrators responsible for distribution noted that they had to "make sure that they didn't get a flood of these women seeking the money." Another administrator added: "I think we should limit the amount and level of advertising concerning the existence of these monies." After a brief discussion on what should be done, it was concluded by one administrator that "we need to make sure word does not get out too fast and too widely; let's make sure that we give it to those who will benefit the most by staying in a job." Yet, funds were available precisely to help with these kinds of transportation needs.

Table 3 indicates that 63% of the women and their families in our research were not receiving food stamps; 68% were not getting any assistance with childcare services; and 86% were not getting any assistance with their transportation needs. Only in the area of health care did we find a majority of respondents receiving assistance from the Department of Transitional Assistance after the closing of their cases. Still, when asked if their caseworker informed them of the possibility of receiving an extension, beyond the two-year limit, under specific eligibility criteria, 57% said that no one had mentioned anything about this. Caseworkers seemed to make arbitrary assumptions about the willingness or capacity of family members, and even friends, in providing assistance such as childcare or transportation; in many cases, women did not receive information about how to access public services.

When asked how they would rate the overall quality of their lives now that they were working and no longer on welfare, the data in Table 3 show that 42% considered it "good-to-excellent," while 58% felt it was "fair-to-poor." When asked to explain why they rated the quality of their lives as such, 42% stated economic reasons, 13% family reasons, and 5% work related reasons according to Table 3. One respondent suggested that women might hold the agency partially responsible for this situation. This person earned $7.00 an hour as a housekeeper and had a 13 year old child, and commented: "I went over to Department of Transitional Assistance to see if I could get food stamps, and they gave me such a hard time. They didn't even tell me if I qualified or not." Many women in the study expressed similar sentiments.

TABLE 3. Impact on Services and Quality of Life After Term Limits

Characteristic	Percent
Received Food Stamps	
Yes	37
No	63
Total	**100**
Received Medicaid (Mass Health)	
Yes	74
No	26
Total	**100**
Received Child Care Voucher	
Yes	32
No	68
Total	**100**
Received Transportation to and from Work	
Yes	14
No	86
Total	**100**
Did Case Worker Inform Client About Possible Extension?	
Yes	43
No	57
Total	**100**
Extra Monthly Money	
Yes	18
No	82
Total	**100**
Quality of Life Rating	
Excellent	6
Good	36
Fair	45
Poor	13
Total	**100**
Reason for Rating	
Economic Reasons	42
Family Reasons	13
Work Related	5
Other	23
N/A	17
Total	**100**

CONCLUSION: WELFARE REFORM AS ANTITHESIS TO EFFECTIVE PREPARATION FOR THE WORKFORCE

According to Judith Gueron, "restrictive welfare reform has taken three approaches in an attempt by government to reinforce the work ethic among the poor, and control the number of welfare cases" (1986: 4). One approach has been to change the rules for determining eligibility. The second has been to treat entitlement as a "bargain" by which benefits required the obligation of looking for work, accepting a job, and/or participating in a job education/training program. The third strategy has been to cut back cash benefits and rely more on alternatives, like child-support, through enforcement changes in tax policy, and job placement. In 1995 welfare reform included all three previous approaches, as well as term limitations imposed by both the state and federal governments. Currently, yet greater restrictive policies regarding the treatment and opportunities for economic mobility for the impoverished is proposed by national leaders. In May 2002, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a welfare bill known as H.R. 4737 in a 229 to 197 vote. If this bill were to become law, however, it would result in more draconian measures aimed at controlling the behavior of poor people. Proposed measures includes the following kinds of policies: reduce from 12 months to 4 months the time possible for parents to be enrolled in education and training programs; increase work requirements to 40 hours per week in order to receive public assistance; and, limit the kinds of activities that could count as meeting the work requirement from 12 hours, to 6 hours.

The Massachusetts model is useful in an ironic way, because it suggests that these kinds of provisions have little to do with preparing people for successful employment experiences. The 1995 welfare reforms developed and implemented in Massachusetts have had an adverse impact on the education, workforce training, and employment on the women and their families. Latina women in Massachusetts, at least based on the experiences of this group in Lawrence, have experienced much adversity and many obstacles to economic self-sufficiency in large part due to 1995 welfare reforms. This contradiction was captured in the interviews with women. As one of the women interviewed stated, "The social workers should be more sensitive and humane. They don't even believe us." Yet, the majority of welfare consumers in Lawrence were legitimately receiving benefits. Further, these women were on welfare for a time much less than the public image attributed to them.

But it was an image of dependency, both unchallenged and perpetuated in the media, and especially in places like Lawrence and other areas identified with relatively high numbers of people of color, that set the stage for the reforms that would take place in 1995.

The reforms in Massachusetts resulted in harsh treatment, and two years after they took effect, poor women of color suffered in various ways. Once off TANF, women and their families were denied safety-net assistance that they were entitled to, and proclaimed as such in the language of state and federal welfare reforms. Little (or no) monitoring from both Boston and/or Washington, D.C. allowed field offices of the Department of Transitional Assistance, such as the Greater Lawrence Area Office, to use their discretionary authority to deny the needed services of childcare, food stamps, and transportation. One of our respondents noted: "I have to pay for my own transportation and childcare, and all I make is $350.00 a week." Based on recent developments in the state economy, as well as by the fact that poor women have not been prepared for economic self-sufficiency, we believe that these households will slip deeper into poverty joining the ranks of the persistent poor, or the "working poor."[3] Recent increases in the state's poverty rate tend to confirm this speculation.

Welfare reform hurt Latinas living in Lawrence because they did not receive educational benefits that would give them more marketable skills. Further, the work-first approach presented many of these women with hurdles, especially in finding childcare and adequate public transportation to attend educational or workforce training. The work-first aspect of Massachusetts's welfare reforms obstructed the ability of Latinas to receive preparatory and meaningful education and workforce training. Work-first, in other words, and in spite of the policy and political rhetoric, had little to do with preparing women to enter the workforce as productive workers who could support families. For the group of Latinas we interviewed, work first is more of a monitoring system that attempts to destroy the self-esteem and opportunities for poor women to advance economically.

As if a poor public image, limited time on public assistance, and increased obstacles for education or workforce training were not enough, the women interviewed suffered professional insensitivities at the hands of the very same individuals whose job it was to assist them in the transition to the world of work. The evidence from the survey, and interviews and meetings with caseworkers, and review of secondary documents from worker complaints at some community agencies with contracts to provide services, all serves to illustrate that the women on public assis-

tance were purposely denied many of the support services necessary to attend school or workforce training. In many cases, the Latinas in our survey themselves kept mentioning the "poor" treatment at the hands of their Department of Transitional Assistance caseworker, or the case manager of a local community-based agency. Two of these responses best illustrate such treatment: "They attack us to get a job and they promise help, but they don't work with you after you get a job. They need to be more considerate." Another respondent noted about her case manager at a local agency: "Don't mistreat clients!" Such treatment made a smooth transition into the world of work next to impossible for most of the women.

The experiences and treatment of Latinas in Massachusetts help to illustrate the connections between race and poverty. The fact that poverty in this country is racialized, "facilitated the adoption and support of welfare reform" (Jennings: 2001, 96). Moreover, in many cases across the nation, one can note contradictions between the rhetoric of welfare reform in terms of helping poor people, and in fact, how they are treated, and in certain situations how race and ethnicity determines this treatment (Jennings and Kushnick: 1999). The 1995 welfare reforms in Massachusetts were given a color other than white in order to sway public opinion in their favor. In spite of the fact that historically and today the majority of women on public assistance in Massachusetts are white, the localization of the problem of "welfare cheating" to communities of color like Lawrence made it seem that they were the predominant group on the public dole. The fact that "white people . . . tend not to think of themselves in racial terms" made it difficult for earlier attempts at reform to get general public support (Dalton, 2002: 15). So long as those on welfare, as well as the poor in general, were perceived as white, and therefore "invisible" in the eyes of the voting tax-paying white majority, there was no problem. Once the movement of local and state economic and political leaders in the mid-1980s successfully localized welfare to communities of color, there developed the "problem of welfare fraud," and the whites more readily supported the 1995 reforms in Massachusetts. This also gave administrators responsible for implementing the reforms greater latitude, and therefore less need for public accountability, in their treatment of welfare consumers including control over the lives of these women and their families.

Massachusetts' 1995 welfare reforms were based on a position that made less money available for "safety-net" human services for the poor and in public higher education, and more resources available for short-term (8 to 12 weeks) workforce training programs. Moreover, much of

the available resources for employment-related activities benefited the need for employers to hire entry-level labor, rather than developing comprehensive employment and training strategies benefiting not only clients, but also the overall economy.[4] The job training and education programs developed under welfare reform and workforce development tend to be limited and are usually non-credited and for short duration. Because of tentativeness in providing adequate preparation for full employment at decent living wages, some policy analysts and community activists agree that placing women in entry-level jobs is not a guarantee against poverty or future economic dependency. Jobs "and short term training programs result, at best, in marginal and temporary improvements in earnings and reduced reliance on public assistance . . . families cannot survive on a single low-wage worker's pay" (Kates, 1998: 7).

Most of the women in our survey wanted to continue their education or training. However, state-imposed pressures on them and their families made it difficult and as one respondent aptly noted: "They need to give us more opportunities for training if they want us to work." This critique is echoed in a magazine devoted to workforce training. According to *Training Magazine*: "Our government's rush to 'end welfare as we know it' has ignored crucial aspects of how to train new workers, leaving a lot of former welfare recipients twisting in the wind" (1998: 18). The role of education and training programs under the rubric of welfare reform in 1995 was not a mechanism for pulling these women and their families out of poverty and into employment for livable wages. Education and workforce training with no apparent strategy for self-sufficiency and for short periods shows little benefit for the individual worker, especially poor Latinas on welfare. It is difficult to assess the 1995 Massachusetts welfare reforms as a "success," in terms of preparing poor women, especially Latinas, for economic self-sufficiency. Our research and findings demonstrate a conclusion to the contrary.

NOTES

1. TAFDC recipients are required to participate in the Employment Services Program unless they are employed for compensation for 20 or more hours per week or they are exempt from the 20-hour work requirement. They are required to develop an Employment Development Plan (EDP) that includes the individual's employment goals and the activities needed to meet these goals. The EDP determines which components of the program for which the individual is eligible. An EDP may specify a "basic" or 8-week "structured" job search, skills training, and or education. However, training and education beyond an Associate's degree level cannot be included in an approved

EDP. No funds from the ESP program can be provided for the cost of tuition or for other school-related expenses, excluding childcare and transportation costs. The program also offers a "supported work component" with pre-worksite training and worksite placement, an uncompensated "temp community service program," and a subsidized "full employment program" where participants receive a subsidized wage in lieu of TAFDC and Food Stamp benefits in order to gain work experience.

2. See Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance. (2000). *After Time Limits: A Study of Households Leaving Welfare Between December 1998 and April 1999*. Boston, MA: Author.

3. While medical assistance was still provided to the majority of the women and their families in our sample during the research period, we suspect that at some point this will not be the case. Other industrialized states, with large and growing communities of immigrants of color have eventually denied healthcare coverage to these groups. In the case of California, Celia Gaytan and Jose Atilio Hernandez (1999) concluded: "Unfortunately, although California's welfare reform has succeeded in reducing the number of individuals receiving cash assistance through CalWORKs, it has failed to ensure that individuals continue to have access to Medi-Cal, Transitional Medi-Cal, and other public health programs." (*Beyond a Culture of Fear: How Welfare Reform has Failed Immigrants and Public Health in California*, January 1999, pg. 7). Perhaps a review of more recent Latina cohorts will show this to be the case today in Massachusetts.

4. This orientation is evident in DTA's relationships with community colleges. In a service agreement providing an allocation $900,000 for training, DTA made it clear that it did not expect comprehensive training, but again, a framework that still supported a work-first philosophy. This agreement stipulates that the allocation had to be expended within the following conditions: " . . . (a) offer a curriculum of non-credit certificate programs for a minimum of 200 DTA individuals . . . (b) market the non-credit certificate programs . . . directly to local DTA offices . . . (c) staff their effort with faculty for remedial curriculum . . . and (d) operate . . . non-credit programs that have been marketed to the DTA population" (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1997: 2). This is an example of emphasizing short-term training and sacrificing comprehensive education opportunities that would enhance the economic self-sufficiency of women and their families.

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