

TANF Leavers: Examining the Relationship Between the Receipt of Housing Assistance and Post-TANF Well-Being

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Abstract

This article describes the results of a study conducted in San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz Counties, California, to learn more about the circumstances of families leaving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and about the effects of housing assistance on post-TANF outcomes. The study used a combination of administrative data from state and county databases as well as survey data collected through interviews occurring 6, 12, and 18 months after TANF exit. Three groups of families with children were tracked: families that left TANF in the fourth quarter of 1998 and were receiving housing assistance in January 1999 (housing-assisted leavers); families that left TANF in the fourth quarter of 1998 and were not receiving housing assistance in January 1999 (non-housing-assisted leavers); and other families that were receiving housing assistance in January 1999 and were either current or former TANF recipients or had never received TANF (housing-assisted others).

The results show that housing-assisted leavers were more likely than non-housing-assisted leavers to belong to a minority racial/ethnic group, have more extensive welfare histories, be older, have more and older children in the household, have higher rates of welfare recidivism 18 months after leaving TANF, and have lower wages and total household incomes. Housing-assisted leavers were also much more likely than non-housing-assisted leavers to be working full time 18 months after leaving TANF. Non-housing-assisted leavers were more likely than housing-assisted leavers to live in extended-family or multifamily households and multiple-adult households. They were also more likely to be living in substandard or crowded housing 12 months after leaving TANF.

■ *Although the provision of housing assistance was associated with reduced crowding and, to a lesser extent, reduced TANF recidivism, it was not associated with a reduced risk of poor outcomes over a broader range of outcomes.*

Since the passage of the federal welfare reform law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) in August 1996, welfare caseloads nationwide have experienced unprecedented declines. However, caseload trends alone tell us little about the circumstances of current and former welfare recipients. Developing a more complete assessment of the effect of welfare reform and identifying strategies to help families achieve self-sufficiency require an accurate understanding of the circumstances of families that have left welfare. To add to our knowledge in this area, the counties of San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz, California, with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, initiated a study of the circumstances of families leaving the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

In this article, we focus on the effects of housing assistance on outcomes for TANF leavers.¹ We examined two groups that were receiving housing assistance in January 1999: families with children that left TANF in the fourth quarter of 1998 (housing-assisted leavers); and families with children that did not leave TANF in fourth-quarter 1998, including those that were receiving, may have received, or may have never received TANF (housing-assisted others). We also present outcomes for families with children that were not receiving housing assistance when they left TANF (non-housing-assisted leavers).

Study Methodology

Administrative Data Sources

The study on which this article is based used county administrative data from the Case Data System (CDS) to identify the TANF leaver population, their demographic characteristics, and the administrative reason for their exit from TANF.² San Mateo County and Santa Clara County housing agencies provided data used to identify the population of families with children receiving housing assistance in January 1999, along with some demographic characteristics. Data from the state Medi-Cal Eligibility Data System (MEDS) were used to track historical receipt of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) or TANF. Data from the state Unemployment Insurance Base Wage File (UIBWF) were used to track historical earnings levels. The CDS, MEDS, UIBWF, and county housing data were used to construct weights to adjust survey data for non-responses. Finally, data provided by HUD were used to supplement county housing data to more accurately identify the group of TANF leavers who were receiving housing assistance when they left welfare (housing-assisted leavers).

Survey Data

A central component of our study was a survey of families in the study populations. The survey contained topical modules with questions about household composition, child well-being, childcare, education and training, employment, income, food security, health insurance coverage, family well-being, and welfare experiences. The survey respondent was almost always the mother or female caretaker of the children. Surveys were conducted in three periods between April 1999 and September 2000.

Sampling Methodology

We identified 2,371 families in the TANF leaver population (444 housing-assisted leavers and 1,927 non-housing-assisted leavers). Housing-assisted leavers constituted 19 percent of the leaver population. The housing population (6,475 housing-assisted others) consisted of all families with children receiving housing assistance in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties as of January 1999.³ The sampling frame for the survey consisted of all families in the population of families in each subgroup, excluding those with a primary language other than English, Spanish, or Vietnamese. There were 2,292 cases in the TANF leaver sampling frame and 5,115 cases in the housing sampling frame. There were 660 cases in the TANF leaver sample and 175 cases in the housing sample.

Respondent weights were constructed to adjust the samples to match the population in each subgroup. The weights were constructed using the following information: language, case-head age and ethnicity,⁴ number of children in the assistance unit, age of youngest child in the assistance unit, previous cumulative time on AFDC or TANF, historical earnings levels, and administrative reasons for leaving TANF. The weights were the normalized inverse of the fitted probability of being a respondent in the period. The probabilities were derived from a probit analysis.

Exhibit 1 shows the size of each study population, the number sampled for the survey, and the number of interviews completed in each of three interview periods occurring approximately 6, 12, and 18 months after TANF exit. Note that the survey outcomes presented in this article are organized by interview period, not interview number. For

Exhibit 1

Response Counts for 1998 Fourth-Quarter TANF Leavers in Surveyed California Counties (n), 1999–2000

| Population | Total | Sample | Responses | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | | | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months |
| San Mateo | | | | | |
| TANF leavers | | | | | |
| One parent | 302 | 156 | 57 | 91 | 93 |
| Two parent | 34 | 34 | 4 | 16 | 17 |
| Housing-assisted others | 1,297 | 85 | 52 | 17 | — |
| Santa Clara | | | | | |
| TANF leavers | | | | | |
| One parent | 1,505 | 155 | 38 | 92 | 88 |
| Two parent | 276 | 120 | 21 | 69 | 69 |
| Housing-assisted others | 5,178 | 90 | 40 | 24 | — |
| Santa Cruz^a | | | | | |
| TANF leavers | | | | | |
| One parent | 206 | 150 | 50 | 93 | 87 |
| Two parent | 48 | 45 | 18 | 33 | 33 |
| Total | | | | | |
| TANF leavers | | | | | |
| One parent | 2,013 | 461 | 145 (31) | 276 (60) | 268 (58) |
| Two parent | 358 | 199 | 43 (22) | 118 (59) | 119 (60) |
| Housing-assisted others | 6,475 | 175 | 92 (53) | 41 (23) | — |

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; — = group not surveyed at 18 months.

Note: Response rates in parentheses.

^aNo data available for housing-assisted others in Santa Cruz.

Source: 1998–99 county administrative data and 1999–2000 survey data.

example, when we refer to “third interview” outcomes, we mean “third interview period” outcomes—that is, outcomes of interviews conducted approximately 18 months after TANF exit.

Exhibit 2

Demographics of Surveyed Families Leaving TANF, 1999–2000 (%)

| Characteristic | TANF Leavers | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| | Housing-Assisted (<i>n</i> = 444 families) | Non-Housing-Assisted (<i>n</i> = 1,927 families) | Housing-Assisted Others (<i>n</i> = 6,475 families) |
| Race/ethnicity | | | |
| White | 18 | 29 | 13 |
| Hispanic | 46 | 42 | 38 |
| Black | 17 | 9 | 19 |
| Vietnamese | 14 | 12 | NA |
| Other | 5 | 8 | 30 ^a |
| Language | | | |
| English | 76 | 77 | 62 |
| Spanish | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| Vietnamese | 14 | 10 | 12 |
| Other | 2 | 4 | 21 |
| Aid in previous 5 years (months) | | | |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 19 |
| 1–12 | 6 | 17 | 6 |
| 13–36 | 13 | 26 | 17 |
| 37–60 | 81 | 57 | 58 |
| Children (<i>n</i>) | | | |
| 1 | 38 | 48 | 43 |
| 2 | 30 | 30 | 25 |
| 3+ | 32 | 22 | 32 |
| Age of youngest child (years) | | | |
| 0–2 | 26 | 37 | 18 |
| 3–5 | 21 | 27 | 19 |
| 6–11 | 32 | 22 | 36 |
| 12+ | 21 | 14 | 27 |
| Age of case head (years) | | | |
| 16–21 | 9 | 14 | 1 |
| 22–29 | 20 | 33 | 10 |
| 30–39 | 39 | 34 | 41 |
| 40+ | 32 | 19 | 48 |
| Education level (grade completed) | | | |
| 0–8 | 12 | 13 | 24 |
| 9–11 | 39 | 35 | 37 |
| 12 | 29 | 24 | 27 |
| 13+ | 20 | 28 | 12 |
| High school diploma/GED | | | |
| Yes | 68 | 63 | 49 |
| No | 32 | 37 | 51 |

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; NA = not available (Vietnamese ethnicity not separately identified in housing administrative data); GED = general educational development certificate.

^aIncludes Vietnamese.

Source: Education level and high school diploma data: 1999–2000 survey data. Remaining data: 1998–99 county administrative data.

Demographic Characteristics

Exhibit 2 shows the principal demographic characteristics of the housing-assisted leavers, the non-housing-assisted leavers, and the housing-assisted others. When comparing the housing-assisted leavers with the non-housing-assisted leavers, we noted the following demographic differences:

- Housing-assisted leavers were more likely to belong to a minority ethnic group. However, members of the two leaver groups were equally likely to speak English.
- Housing-assisted leavers tended to have more extensive histories of aid use. Eight in 10 housing-assisted leavers had been on aid at least 3 of the previous 5 years compared with approximately 6 in 10 non-housing-assisted leavers.
- Housing-assisted leavers tended to be older, have more children in the assistance unit, and have older children in the assistance unit.
- Housing-assisted and non-housing-assisted leavers had comparable levels of education.

Compared with the two leaver groups, the housing-assisted-others group was characterized by a larger proportion of families in which the respondent's primary language was not English and in which the head of household was older and less educated. Although this group included families that had never been on TANF, it also included a large number of families that had been long-term recipients of welfare.

Exhibit 3 shows the household structure for each group. Non-housing-assisted leavers were far more likely to live in extended-family or multifamily households and far less likely to live in single-parent households compared with the other groups. In particular, the percentage of non-housing-assisted leavers living in multifamily households doubled

Exhibit 3

Household Structure of Surveyed Families Leaving TANF, 1999–2000 (%)

| Characteristic | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Not living with children | 4.1 | 6.8 | 0.5 |
| One parent | 52.2 | 51.9 | 45.7 |
| Two parent | 4.0 | 16.2 | 19.7 |
| Extended family | 39.8 | 24.4 | 33.1 |
| Multifamily | 0.0 | 0.7 | 0.9 |
| Non-housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Not living with children | 6.4 | 3.3 | 1.2 |
| One parent | 27.1 | 29.6 | 16.0 |
| Two parent | 14.9 | 15.9 | 17.4 |
| Extended family | 43.8 | 37.5 | 49.3 |
| Multifamily | 7.8 | 13.7 | 16.2 |
| Housing-assisted others | | | |
| Not living with children | 7.3 | 8.6 | NA |
| One parent | 52.3 | 48.1 | NA |
| Two parent | 22.5 | 25.6 | NA |
| Extended family | 17.9 | 17.8 | NA |
| Multifamily | 0.0 | 0.0 | NA |

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; NA = not available.

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

from approximately 8 to 16 percent between the first and third interviews, whereas almost no housing-assisted leavers or housing-assisted others were living in such households. This finding highlights the role of housing assistance in reducing the need for low-income families to share housing or “double up.” It will be important to recognize the differences in household structure when we examine household employment and earnings outcomes later in this article. Non-housing-assisted-leaver households tended to include more adults and therefore, in the absence of other factors, more employed adults.

Changes in Family Circumstances Over Time

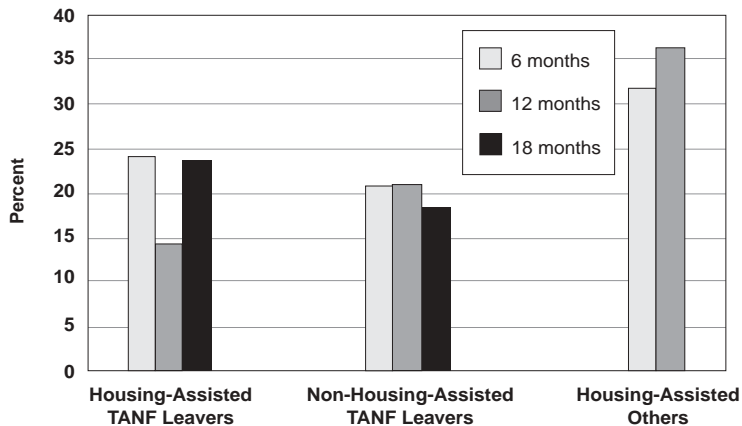
The remaining exhibits in this chapter show measures of selected family circumstances for each group at the first (6-month), second (12-month), and third (18-month) interviews. (Note that housing-assisted others did not participate in the third interview.)

Exhibit 4 shows the percentage of households that were in the TANF program at each interview. At the third interview, 23 percent of the housing-assisted leavers and 18 percent of the non-housing-assisted leavers had returned to TANF. The higher recidivism rate among the housing-assisted leavers may have been related to the finding, noted previously, that they were apparently more disadvantaged, as indicated by their demographic characteristics.

Exhibits 5 and 6 show employment and earnings data for the survey respondents. Exhibit 5 shows that most respondents in all groups were either employed or recently employed at the time of each interview. The exhibit also shows a significant increase across interviews in the percentage of housing-assisted leavers who were employed on a full-time basis. Exhibit 6 shows a trend toward higher median wages (among the employed respondents) in each group. On average, housing-assisted others had the highest wages, and housing-assisted leavers had the lowest.

Exhibit 4

Surveyed Households Receiving TANF, 1999–2000



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 5

Employment Status of Surveyed Respondents Leaving TANF, 1999–2000 (%)

| Employment Status | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Unemployed | 3.2 | 5.7 | 8.2 |
| Recently employed | 33.7 | 32.6 | 21.8 |
| Currently working part time | 28.7 | 9.7 | 6.4 |
| Currently working full time | 34.3 | 52.1 | 63.7 |
| Non-housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Unemployed | 3.4 | 4.9 | 2.8 |
| Recently employed | 40.9 | 34.3 | 39.1 |
| Currently working part time | 12.9 | 12.8 | 10.0 |
| Currently working full time | 42.9 | 48.0 | 48.2 |
| Housing-assisted others | | | |
| Unemployed | 8.2 | 16.4 | NA |
| Recently employed | 30.9 | 28.1 | NA |
| Currently working part time | 6.8 | 2.2 | NA |
| Currently working full time | 54.1 | 53.3 | NA |

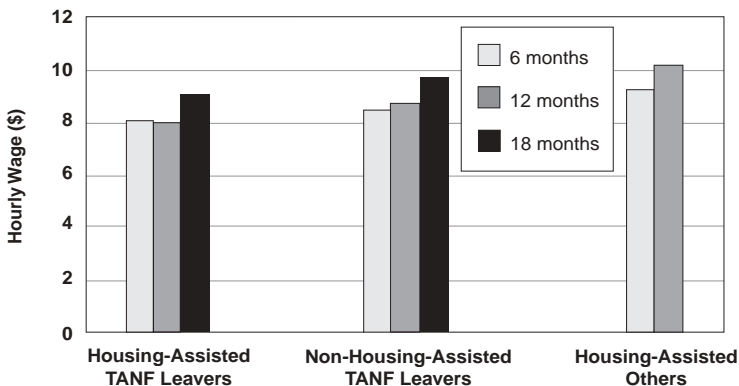
TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; NA = not available.
 Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 7 shows an increasing trend in the percentage of households with earnings across all groups, particularly among housing-assisted others. On average, the proportion of non-housing-assisted leavers with earnings was slightly higher than that of housing-assisted leavers, reflecting the previously mentioned finding that non-housing-assisted-leaver households tended to include more adults and were therefore more likely to include an employed adult.

Exhibit 6

Median Hourly Wage of Employed Survey Respondents Leaving TANF, 1999–2000



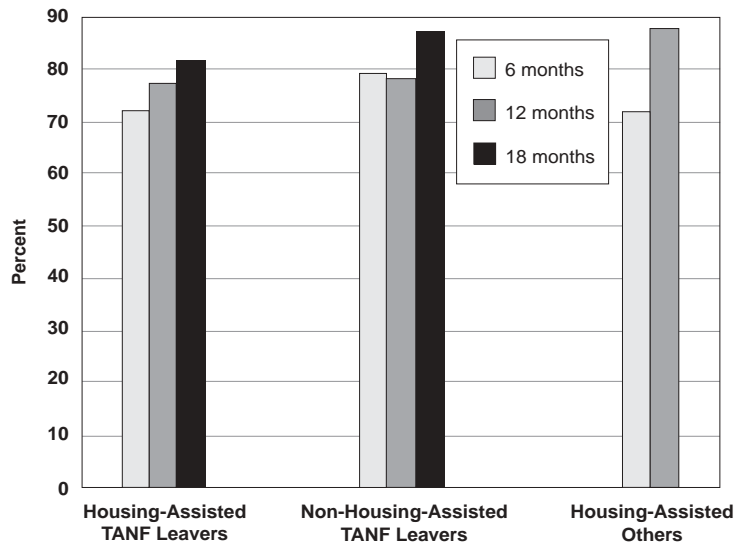
TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 7

Surveyed Households With Earnings, 1999–2000



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

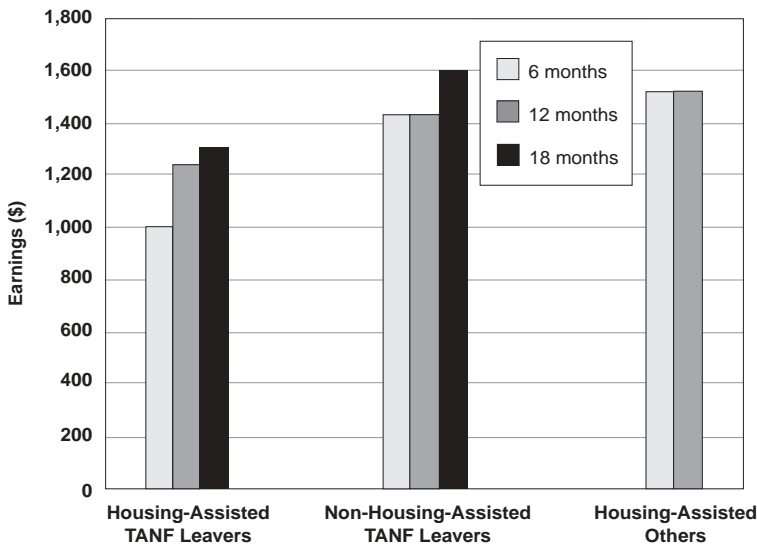
Exhibit 8 shows the median monthly earnings among households with earnings. Housing-assisted leavers had relatively low earnings levels, which again reflects the finding that these households tended to have fewer adults than households in the non-housing-assisted-leavers group. Note the marked increase in earnings exhibited by the housing-assisted leavers between the first and second interviews, which was probably related to the group’s increase in full-time employment during the same period (exhibit 5). Earnings for the non-housing-assisted leavers also increased but not until the third interview.

Exhibit 9 shows median monthly household income. As expected, the trends for earnings and income were similar. Exhibit 10 shows a similar trend in household incomes as a percentage of the federal poverty level, the most telling measure of household income. Clearly, housing-assisted leavers, on average, had very low incomes by this measure at the first interview. On a brighter note, significant increases in household income were evident among all three groups, particularly among the housing-assisted leavers between the first and second interviews.

Exhibit 11 provides a more detailed picture of income as a percentage of the federal poverty level by showing the distribution of households on the income scale. As suggested by exhibit 10, there was a high percentage of very poor families among housing-assisted leavers at the first interview; however, household incomes in this group increased significantly by the second and third interviews. In contrast, housing-assisted others exhibited the opposite trend; although their median household income increased between the first and second interviews, there was a corresponding increase in the percentage of very poor families.

Exhibit 8

Median Monthly Earnings of Surveyed Households With Earnings, 1999–2000



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

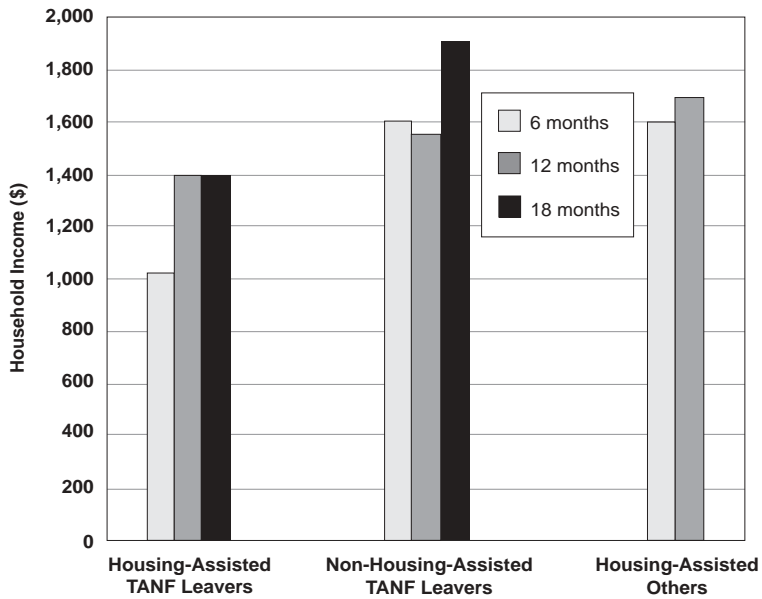
Exhibit 12 shows the percentage of families receiving housing assistance and experiencing various housing conditions at each interview. We used three measures of housing conditions: substandard housing, crowded housing, and excessive rent.⁵ Generally, non-housing-assisted leavers were more likely than the other two groups to be living in substandard housing. The differences were most significant between the housing-assisted and non-housing-assisted leavers, although this relationship did not hold at the second interview. We hypothesize that housing assistance (which was not included in the income totals shown in exhibits 9–11) more than compensated for the lower incomes of the housing-assisted leavers, enabling these families to obtain better housing than that of the non-housing-assisted leavers.

As shown in exhibit 3, non-housing-assisted leavers were the most likely of the groups to be living in extended-family or multifamily households. This helps explain why non-housing-assisted leavers were more likely to be living in crowded housing conditions, as exhibit 12 shows. Exhibit 12 also shows a significant reduction in the percentage of housing-assisted leavers living in crowded housing conditions between the first and second interviews.

At the first interview, housing-assisted leavers were the most likely to be paying excessive rent (more than 50 percent of their household income). This circumstance was largely a reflection of their relatively low income levels. The percentage dropped significantly at the second and third interviews, however, resulting in little difference between housing-assisted and non-housing-assisted leavers on this variable. This improvement in the housing conditions of housing-assisted leavers occurred despite the fact that the interviews were conducted when rents were increasing significantly in the study counties.

Exhibit 9

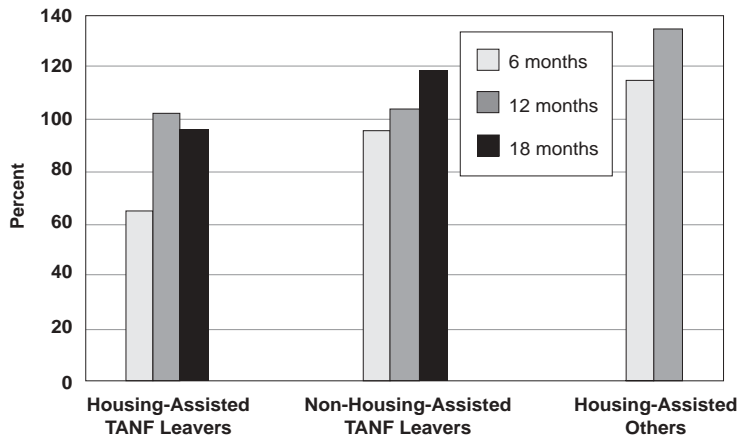
Median Monthly Household Income of Surveyed Families Leaving TANF, 1999–2000



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
 Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.
 Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 10

Median Household Income of Surveyed Families Relative to Federal Poverty Level, 1999–2000



TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
 Note: Housing-assisted others did not participate in the 18-month interview.
 Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 11

Monthly Household Income of Surveyed Families as a Percentage of Federal Poverty Level, by Housing Status, 1999–2000

| Federal Poverty Level (%) | Household Income (%) | | |
|--|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months |
| Housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| ≤ 70 | 56.4 | 28.0 | 15.2 |
| 71–100 | 12.8 | 21.0 | 35.6 |
| 101–130 | 24.4 | 24.3 | 21.5 |
| 131–185 | 6.4 | 16.9 | 13.0 |
| 186–250 | 0 | 1.6 | 10.6 |
| >250 | 0 | 8.2 | 4.4 |
| Non-housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| ≤ 70 | 24.3 | 23.7 | 19.2 |
| 71–100 | 29.5 | 20.4 | 19.6 |
| 101–130 | 13.3 | 20.6 | 17.7 |
| 131–185 | 15.8 | 17.9 | 21.5 |
| 186–250 | 10.5 | 10.4 | 13.2 |
| >250 | 6.7 | 7.0 | 8.8 |
| Housing-assisted others | | | |
| ≤ 70 | 13.4 | 19.8 | NA |
| 71–100 | 22.8 | 18.2 | NA |
| 101–130 | 33.0 | 11.6 | NA |
| 131–185 | 16.2 | 36.0 | NA |
| 186–250 | 7.7 | 5.4 | NA |
| >250 | 6.9 | 9.0 | NA |

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; NA = not available.

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Exhibit 12

Housing Outcomes of Surveyed Families Leaving TANF, 1999–2000 (%)

| Outcome | 6 Months | 12 Months | 18 Months |
|--|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Receives assistance | 96.2 | 85.3 | 83.9 |
| Substandard housing | 12.8 | 25.2 | 13.9 |
| Excessive rent | 36.8 | 22.1 | 20.5 |
| Crowded housing | 37.8 | 18.2 | 20.4 |
| Non-housing-assisted TANF leavers | | | |
| Receives assistance | 8.9 | 7.8 | 10.9 |
| Substandard housing | 34.4 | 21.6 | 30.2 |
| Excessive rent | 26.7 | 22.7 | 20.1 |
| Crowded housing | 39.8 | 36.9 | 31.3 |
| Housing-assisted others | | | |
| Receives assistance | 91.3 | 91.5 | NA |
| Substandard housing | 20.8 | 17.9 | NA |
| Excessive rent | 27.0 | 13.3 | NA |
| Crowded housing | 10.5 | 10.9 | NA |

TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; NA = not available.

Source: 1999–2000 survey data.

Statistical Profiling: Is Receipt of Housing Assistance Associated With Postexit Measures of Well-Being?

In this section, we discuss the relationship between characteristics of TANF leavers at exit and postexit outcomes to identify those families that are more likely to have problems after leaving welfare. To accomplish this task, we conducted a series of multivariate statistical analyses to determine the effects of specific family characteristics on outcomes.

Using questions included in the surveys, we measured the following six negative outcome indicators at the second interview:

1. TANF recidivism.
2. Crowded housing.
3. Income below 100 percent of the federal poverty level.
4. Unemployment (household has no earnings).
5. Food insecurity.⁶
6. Lack of health insurance coverage for respondent or at least one child.

The discussion that follows focuses on the recidivism and crowding indicators as well as an “index” indicator that represents the six outcome indicators as a group. In choosing the family characteristics at TANF exit, we selected measures derived from administrative data, which would be observable to county welfare department staff at the time of exit. The specific characteristics we examined were primary language, ethnicity, age of case head, age of youngest child in the assistance unit, cumulative previous time on aid, number of children in the assistance unit, administrative reason for exit, presence of earnings at exit, and receipt of housing assistance at exit.

The results are summarized in exhibit 13. The data given in the exhibit show the estimated effect of each characteristic, controlling for the other characteristics in the model. A positive value indicates that a household with that characteristic is more likely—relative to the reference category for the characteristic group—to experience the outcome under consideration. For example, Latino/Hispanic leavers were 21 percentage points more likely to return to welfare than leavers who were non-Hispanic Whites (the reference category for the race/ethnicity characteristic; see the first column of exhibit 13).

TANF Recidivism

As previously stated, Latino/Hispanic leavers were much more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to return to welfare. Note that using Spanish as the primary language did not have a statistically significant effect on recidivism, suggesting that the finding on Latino/Hispanic leavers was not attributable to the immigrant segment of this group. It is not surprising that leavers who had earnings when they left welfare were less likely to return to welfare than those who had no earnings at the time. Leavers who left the program because of excessive earnings or client request/noncooperation were less likely to be recidivists than those who left the program because they had not submitted the required eligibility forms. Finally, housing-assisted leavers were 8 percentage points less likely than non-housing-assisted leavers to be receiving TANF at the second interview, but this estimate was not statistically significant at standard confidence levels.

Exhibit 13

Relationship Between Characteristics of TANF Leavers at Exit and Outcomes at Second Interview (at 12 Months) (Mean Probability Differences)

| Characteristics | Outcome | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | TANF Recidivism | Crowded Housing | At Least 3 Problems |
| Primary language | | | |
| Spanish | -.06 | .05 | .03 |
| English or Vietnamese | Ref. ^a | Ref. | Ref. |
| Race/ethnicity | | | |
| African American | .07 | .08 | .00 |
| Latino/Hispanic | .21** | .26** | .08* |
| Other (primarily Asian) | -.06 | .30** | .00 |
| Non-Hispanic White | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Age of case head (years) | | | |
| 18–25 | -.09 | .01 | -.13* |
| 26–44 | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| 45+ | .12 | .08 | -.03 |
| Age of youngest child (years) | | | |
| 0–2 | .05 | .08 | .06 |
| 3–11 | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| 12+ | -.09 | .05 | .03 |
| Time on aid in previous 5 years (months) | | | |
| 37–60 | .03 | .11 | .00 |
| 13–36 | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| 0–12 | .06 | .22** | .01 |
| Number of children | | | |
| 1–2 | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| 3+ | -.01 | .39** | .03 |
| Administrative exit reason | | | |
| Failed to provide information | -.03 | .07 | .02 |
| Earnings | -.08* | -.15** | -.11* |
| Client request/noncooperative | -.11* | -.05 | -.07 |
| Other ^b | Ref. | Ref. | Ref. |
| Has earnings in exit quarter | -.13** | -.07 | -.20** |
| Housing assistance at exit | -.08 | -.18** | -.01 |

^aReference category: other values within group are relative to this characteristic.

^bIncludes those who left aid for certain identifiable reasons such as not having an eligible child in the home or having excessive assets or unearned income, in addition to cases for which a valid reason for exit could not be identified.

*Statistically significant at $P = .10$.

**Statistically significant at $P = .05$.

Note: This exhibit reports mean probability differences from a probit analysis of each outcome.

Crowded Housing

It is not surprising that respondents with three or more children were much more likely than those with fewer children to be living in crowded housing conditions at the time of the second interview. Families in the “other” (primarily Asian) race/ethnicity category were much more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to be living in crowded housing conditions, as were Latino/Hispanic families. Families receiving aid from 0 to 12 months in

the previous 5 years were more likely than those receiving aid from 13 to 36 months in the same period to be living in crowded housing. Respondents who left aid because of earnings were less likely than those who left for other reasons to be living in crowded housing conditions. Finally, housing-assisted leavers were significantly less likely than non-housing-assisted leavers to be living in crowded housing conditions at the second interview.

Families Experiencing at Least Three of the Six Negative Outcomes

By using an index of families experiencing at least three of the six negative outcomes, we were able to determine whether any characteristics were associated with encountering a broader array of problems. It is not surprising that leavers who had earnings when they left TANF and those who were categorized as leaving the program because of earnings were less likely than others to experience at least three of the six negative outcomes at the time of the second interview. We also found that Latino/Hispanic families were more likely than others and that families with younger case heads (age 18–25 years) were less likely than others to experience problems in three or more of the areas under consideration. Finally, note that there was essentially no relationship between the likelihood of experiencing three or more negative outcomes and receipt of housing assistance at exit. Taken together, these findings show that although the provision of housing assistance was associated with reduced crowding and, to a lesser extent, reduced TANF recidivism, it was not associated with a reduced risk of poor outcomes over a broader range of outcomes.

Conclusions

The comparison between the housing-assisted and non-housing-assisted TANF leavers is particularly instructive because it controls for prior receipt of TANF. We found that the housing-assisted leavers had relatively low incomes initially (which is probably related to their eligibility for housing assistance) but managed to increase their incomes significantly between the first and second interviews. This increase was apparently related to a shift from part-time to full-time employment. Housing-assisted leavers also experienced reductions in the incidence of living in crowded housing and paying excessive rents. Although there was no trend toward improvement in housing quality, housing-assisted leavers were generally less likely than non-housing-assisted leavers to report living in substandard housing.

These better outcomes may have been related to the provision of housing assistance. We found some evidence of a positive relationship between housing assistance and housing quality. This, in turn, may have been indirectly related to other measures of family well-being and the ability to increase work activity. That is, by improving housing conditions, housing assistance may have helped some welfare leavers increase their work activity.

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analyzed with the permission of these agencies. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policy of any agency of the Counties of San Mateo, Santa Clara, and Santa Cruz, California, or any agency of the California state government or the federal government.

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Notes

1. This document is one in a series of reports for this project. Other reports are available on the SPHERE Institute Web site at www.sphereinstitute.org/publications.html.
2. The administrative reason for exiting TANF is the reason recorded in the county administrative database, as opposed to the reason for exit reported by the TANF leaver in the survey.
3. Data on recipients of housing assistance in Santa Cruz County were not available at the time we were defining subpopulations and sampling frames.

4. Age and ethnicity of the parent in a single-parent TANF case; age and ethnicity of the mother or female caretaker in a two-parent TANF case.
5. These terms were defined as follows. Housing was substandard if the respondent reported one or more of these conditions: a leaky roof or ceiling; a toilet, hot water heater, or other plumbing device that did not work; or the presence of rats, mice, roaches, or other insects. Housing was crowded if the ratio of household members to rooms (excluding bathrooms) was greater than one. Rent was excessive if it was more than 50 percent of household income.
6. We determined that a household exhibited food insecurity if the respondent reported that there was sometimes or often not enough food to eat in the household.