

WELFARE LEAVERS: WHAT TYPES OF JOBS DO THEY HAVE AND HOW DO
THEIR JOBS AFFECT THEIR FAMILY?

by

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ABSTRACT

There is a lot of research about welfare leavers and how they cycle on and off TANF; however, not many studies focus on the types of jobs welfare leavers have and how they fare after they have been off of TANF for a substantial amount of time. This study focuses on the types of jobs mothers enter after they leave TANF, what the characteristics of these jobs are and how their jobs affect them and their family. This study illustrates the perceptions these women have about their jobs and how they affect their family. Using qualitative methods, I interviewed seventeen mothers who had jobs and had been off of TANF for nine months or longer. I used the snowball technique to gain access to this population and social organizations to obtain more interviews from these women. Semi-structured interviews were conducted so I could cater each interview to the leaver, so no interviews were alike. Like past research has shown, I found these mothers were entering service industry jobs. Their jobs paid low wages, were physically and mentally exhausting and produced emotional labor; however, the mothers believed their jobs impacted their family positively by providing more material things, a stable routine and health insurance. Showing welfare leaver's perceptions of their lives after TANF may be helpful because the way they perceive things may be different from the reality around them.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Welfare reform has changed the way families receive assistance in numerous ways. One of the most important ways it has changed is through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) social assistance program. In 1996, The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) ended the cash assistance program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and replaced it with TANF. TANF polices are about work first and encourages recipients to leave TANF for work. In order to implement these new work first policies, TANF requires people to work after receiving two years of cash assistance and a 60 month limit on cash assistance. The emphasis of TANF is to increase the focus on work first and taking personal responsibility for increasing income as well as insuring the well-being of families (Siegal et al. 2007).

Welfare reform has been considered a success because of the drops in caseloads by 50 percent, yet this success says very little about the daily effects of welfare reform on low-income families and how they cope (Harris and Parsi 2008). Many public policy makers agree TANF is a positive approach to getting people off of TANF and into the workforce; however, what kind of work people are transferring into and the wages they receive has been overlooked. Looking at the numbers of people that have moved into paid labor, one might think that welfare reform was a success. According to Rodgers (2003) 33 percent of TANF recipients were employed in 2000, compared to 11 percent who were employed in 1996, and employment rates of women have varied from 60 to 80 percent. Research has found that, although the number of families off TANF is high, head

of households are shifting into low wage jobs and remaining poor even off TANF (Hennessy 2005). People who have transitioned off of TANF are called welfare leavers, and there have been many research studies that track welfare leavers. These studies have found that many leavers have a high work rate within the first year, but the types and quality of jobs these leavers are entering is being overlooked (Hennessy 2005; Rodgers 2003). Many TANF recipients are going to work in low-wage jobs that provide less monetary funds than their cash assistance (Hennessy 2005).

Expansions and contractions in the economy influence unemployment rates, wages and overall economic growth, all of which are important determinants of the economic circumstances facing low-income families (Blank 2009). Welfare reform was enacted in 1996, in the middle of an economic boom, and the growth of the economy made it possible for welfare leavers to find jobs with higher wages (Lein and Schexnayder 2007). There has been a shift in the economy since 2008 and it is now harder for welfare leavers to find employment that have a high wage and consistent hours. There has been an increase in service jobs and this brings up the question: what kind of working conditions are welfare leavers experiencing in their jobs (Blank 2009)? Are their working conditions affecting their lives and families?

Using semi-structured interviews, this study will focus on the types of jobs welfare leavers enter, their working conditions, wages and emotional labor their jobs may cause. I will also be asking how all three of these factors affect welfare leavers' lives and families. I will be focusing on the perceptions of how their families are affected by their working conditions, wages and emotional labor because the answers from the interview will be from the women's point of view. This could have positive implications because

many studies solely focus on wages, and this study will focus on how welfare leavers perceive their current situation. Few studies have interviewed welfare leavers to learn how they have experienced welfare exits. I will focus on leavers who have been off of TANF for nine months or longer and ask them specific questions about the job or jobs they have. What kind of job do they have? What are their working conditions and wages? Does their job produce emotional labor? Can these jobs provide upward mobility?

Many studies have shown that welfare leavers take minimum wage, service sector jobs, but very few question their working conditions and how these types of jobs affect upward mobility, psychological well-being and family (Hennessy 2005; Strother 2003). It is important to pay attention to the types of jobs welfare leavers are entering so policy makers and researchers can see if these jobs really are providing upward mobility or if they are hurting families by making lives more stressful.

Many families leave TANF and there are few attempts to find out what they are doing now they are off public assistance (Strother 2003). Using qualitative methods, this study will ask how welfare leavers are doing and attempt to find what kind of jobs leavers have and how they are doing in them. I am using qualitative research because I want to focus on the welfare leavers' perspective of their working conditions. Using a qualitative approach allows me to analyze welfare leavers' daily activities on the job and gives me insight into their family dynamic. It is important to focus on more than just wages because there may be other factors as to why welfare leavers have unstable unemployment paths. Focusing on what jobs welfare leavers take and how they are doing off of TANF will help researchers see if these jobs actually help families. There have been many previous studies about leavers cycling on and off TANF, income and wages; I

will be filling a gap in the literature by focusing on the types of jobs leavers enter and how these jobs affect them and their families.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Transitioning from TANF to work may be thought of as straightforward; however, in reality it may be difficult. Families that leave TANF for work enter the world of the working poor, which has its own challenges (Acs and Loprest 2004). Food insecurities, not being able to afford rent or utilities and unstable employment can affect families after they leave TANF (Hennessy 2005; Siegal et al. 2007). Because many leavers face problems such as food insecurity and lack of monetary funds, they cycle on and off TANF (Harris 1996). Harris (1996) studied women who had left AFDC and over one quarter of the women returned within a year of leaving, and 42 percent returned within two years. Leavers face these issues because they mainly work in low-wage service industry jobs. Hennessy (2005) compared welfare leavers who had not been receiving cash assistance for two years to working poor families who have never received cash assistance. She found that past TANF recipients have a harder time paying for rent and utilities than families who have never been on TANF; she also found welfare leavers are more likely to have food shortages. The status of employment can also affect the hardships welfare leavers face. People who are employed part time have 45 percent higher odds of having trouble paying rent and utilities compared to people who are working full time (Hennessy 2005).

Why do welfare leavers experience a greater hardship than the working poor who have never received assistance? It may be the new “work first” strategy that could be pushing people into the labor market with few employment skills, little education and barriers to work (Cancian et al. 2002). Welfare leavers experience multiple barriers to

work and this can make it difficult to find long term, stable employment, which could cause them to cycle on and off TANF. Many welfare leavers cycle on and off because of barriers to work (Harris 1996). When welfare leavers experience one barrier they find it hard to cope with the other barriers they may experience (Lein and Schexnayder 2007). People who return to TANF after they exit typically have low work skills, little education or poor health. (Loprest 2002). Welfare leavers find it particularly difficult to leave TANF for work because their job offer fell through, their wages were not high enough or they voluntarily quit their job (Loprest 2002).

Welfare leavers also may experience greater hardships because many single mothers are being pushed into the labor market and experience income fluctuation, lack of childcare and unstable employment (Litt et al. 2000). Hennessy (2005) found that some women experience no financial gain through their work. They had income losses because they were working for a low wage and lost TANF benefits. Some women cannot work hours when their children are in school, so they have to pay for childcare, which offsets their wages (London et al. 2004). Many single mothers experience this lack of income because they need to pay for childcare and this may hinder them from moving above the poverty line. Some single mothers must maintain their family and social support because of their lack of ability to pay for childcare and their working conditions. If they lost connections to these important supports, they may return to TANF because it would be too difficult to maintain on their own (Siegal et al. 2007).

Low wages and education are not the only factors that may affect welfare leavers' as they transition off of TANF. Race, gender, age and marital status can all affect how successful welfare leavers' transitions can be. Cherlin et al. (2009) compared African

American and Hispanic women after they left welfare and found that African American women were faring worse than Hispanic women. African American women only made small increases in income after leaving TANF, while Hispanic women made large increases in income and were more likely to push themselves over the poverty line (Cherlin et al. 2009). This could be attributed to the dynamic of the household. Cherlin et al. (2009) found that in Hispanic households there were multiple wage earners, and in African American households mother tended to be the only wage earner. Hispanic mothers were also able to rely on a partner's or family member's income when they were not employed, while African American mothers could not (Cherlin et al. 2009). Currently, single mothers have a higher employment rate and lower poverty status compared to single mothers who left AFDC; however, single mothers may have a harder time transitioning off of TANF because they are only living off of one income (Blank 2006). Married women or women living with a significant other may have a higher household income because two people may be working instead of one (Fletcher et al. 2008).

Living on Low Wages

Leaving TANF can also be hard because TANF recipients are used to a certain amount of income per month and when they leave TANF their income fluctuates. Families that leave TANF for work enter the world of the working poor, which has its own challenges (Acs and Loprest 2004). The wages these workers earn are about minimum wage or a little higher and they have a low increase in wages over time. Their wages increase approximately one and a half percent annually, but, although there is an increase, it still makes it difficult to support a family because their wages are low to start

out with (Cancian et al. 1999). Annual incomes of welfare leavers hover above the poverty line and only five to ten percent of families have an income high enough to move above the poverty line (Cancian et al. 1999). After many families leave TANF they cannot survive on just an income of a low wage job. Some families resort to income packaging by combining their wage income with other public assistance programs such as Food Stamps, Medicaid, Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) or Social Security Income (SSI) to get by (Harris 1996; Fletcher et al. 2008; Litt et al. 2000;). Cancian et al. (2002) examined personal earnings plus the public assistance families were receiving and found that, although personal earnings increased when leaving TANF, total income decreased because their public assistance amount decreased.

Some families do not experience financial gain when they exit TANF for work because the income earner is working for a low wage and once they start working their benefits slowly decline (London et al. 2004). Cycling on and off AFDC is common because of low wages, and women who cannot maintain their attachment to the labor force end up back on AFDC (Harris 1996). Recent leavers are more likely to be poor because their wages are low; however, their wages do increase after a year of exiting which makes their benefits drop and their total income lower (Cancian et al. 2002). The lack of wage growth and high rates of return to AFDC shows that mothers cannot sustain low wage jobs without earning benefits to reinforce and assist them in care of their families (Harris 1996).

Single mothers may also have a harder time transitioning from TANF to work than a woman who is married because families who have dual incomes are more likely to remain off of TANF (Fletcher et al. 2008). Even though dual income families are more

likely to remain off of welfare, they may still hover above the poverty line working full time because their wages are low and there is little wage increase or job advancement. Whether the leaver's are single mothers or dual earners, leaving TANF does not ensure financial stability or job consistency because the jobs people enter are low skilled service sector jobs where employment fluctuates with the economy (Litt et al. 2000).

Recently, the nation has experienced an economic downturn with a slow recovery and job growth. This makes it particularly difficult for single mothers earning a low wage to maintain their financial status (Kahne 2004). The primary job market working conditions differs from the TANF working conditions. Welfare leavers often have a low income and many deprivations that people in the primary job market have, such as health insurance, greater income and benefits (Siegal et al. 2007). This can raise many questions: is having any job a solution to better quality of life; what kind of low-income jobs are welfare leavers entering and how is it affecting them and their family?

Work exits from TANF are suspected to be highly unstable routes because jobs do not result in large earning increases (Harris 1996). Many studies show that people leave TANF because they find employment; however, because they typically go into low wage jobs due to lack of skills, they do not maintain one job over a long period of time (Lichter and Jayakody 2002). Families that leave TANF typically go into low wage, service sector jobs due to the overabundance of service work because the economy has shifted from one of making products and goods to being centered on the delivery of services (Blank 2009; Hennessy 2005; Wharton 2009).

Because most welfare leavers have little skills, 46 percent of leavers enter the service industry and have little chance of upward mobility (Acs and Loprest 2004).

The service industry offers welfare leavers wages ranging from \$7.50 to \$8.74, and this makes families join the working poor with a new set of challenges (Fletcher et al. 2008; Scott et al. 2004). Leaving TANF does not ensure financial stability or job consistency because the jobs people enter are low skilled service sector jobs where employment fluctuates with the economy (Litt et al. 2000). Welfare leavers can have stable employment and remain off of TANF if they gain education or acquire a skill (Fletcher et al. 2008; Lim, Coultan and Lalich 2009).

Gaining Upward Mobility

Gaining education seems to be the only way towards true upward mobility, job advancement and independence from TANF (Fletcher et al. 2008). A welfare leaver's hourly wage is more likely to be higher if they have a high school diploma, obtain a degree or learn a new skill while on TANF (Lim et al. 2009). Welfare leavers with previous employment experience and those who are connected to the labor market through social organizations also have a better chance towards upward mobility and income stability (Lein and Schnexnyder 2007). Although education can help welfare leavers gain upward mobility, sometimes that is not an option for people.

There are welfare leavers that are considered "hard to serve" because they have been on TANF for two years or longer and have not worked in two plus years (Loprest and Zedlewski 2002). These leavers did not leave for work, and it may be hard for them to find jobs or obtain an education. Although employment opportunities play a role in obtaining a job for welfare leavers, the more education someone has the more likely they are going to be able to leave TANF and remain off TANF (Hofferth et al. 2000). These hard to serve leavers may not be able to obtain an education because of disabilities or

special circumstances, and this may be problematic when leavers are trying to gain upward mobility.

Leavers are more likely to have a lower wage if they enter the service industry rather than a management or professional job (Lim et al. 2009). But how can leavers acquire a professional or managerial job without an education or special skills? The less educated workers will be most affected by changes in the economy because those workers are in the service sector where job opportunities fluctuate with the economy, so the more education someone has, the less likely they are to lose a job due to economic down turns (Blank 2009). Welfare leavers are the less educated workers in these service sector jobs, so they experience job losses that makes them cycle on and off TANF. Leavers have a better chance of permanently exiting TANF by obtaining an education instead of just entering the labor market at a low skilled job (Harris 1996).

Getting an education allows welfare leavers more job opportunities and a greater chance for higher wages and upward mobility. Many studies have shown that leavers with more education and work experience tend to have a less chance of returning to TANF (Bennett et al. 2004; Harris 1996; Scott et al. 2004; Strother 2003). Women who have had work experience when leaving TANF have better incomes and less money problems than women without work experience. Hourly wages are higher if the welfare leaver has a high school diploma or is going to school to obtain a degree while working, and wages are going to be higher if they enter a management or professional job (Lim et al. 2009). Leavers also manage to maintain stable in the job market, which increases their wages and lessens their hardships over time (Scott et al. 2004.) Getting an education

and having prior job experience allows welfare leavers more job opportunities and a greater chance for higher wages and upward mobility.

Some welfare leavers reported they could not go to work or get an education because of caretaking responsibilities, domestic violence or language barriers (Loprest and Zedlewski 2002). TANF promotes working and self-sufficiency but does not take into consideration these hard to serve populations that have permanent barriers to an education and employment. Forty percent of leavers left because of administration issues, and people with significant barriers to work are not eligible for Social Security Insurance (Loprest and Zedlweski 2002). So while gaining an education or acquiring a new skill may help some TANF leavers, it will not help them all, especially the hard to serve.

Conditions of Low Wage Work

Welfare leavers have high levels of employment but low wages and poor quality jobs (Lim et al. 2009). Having a low wage is not the only consequence of working in the service sector part of the economy. Nonstandard work hours, transportation and childcare are all issues that may come up for women who work for low wages. Service work has increased the demand for evening, early morning and weekend shifts (Henly et al. 2006). This could mean that more low income working mothers are working early morning and nights which may produce an unstable routine for children. In Roy, Tubbs and Burton's (2004) study, 41 percent of mothers worked the second shift with hours between late afternoon to midnight or later. Working nonstandard hours interferes with non-work roles such as preparing meals, bedtime routines and family activities (Henly et al. 2006). Regular changes in work schedules are also common in low wage work and this can also hinder family routine, especially when it comes to childcare. Because most

childcare agencies operate between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., many low income mothers rely on relatives, friends or multiple people a day to care for their children (Henly et al. 2006). Scheduling doctor or social service appointments can also be difficult with a nonstandard work schedule because low wage workers cannot take time off with pay, so many mothers must choose between work without pay or children's appointments (Roy et al. 2004). Some women feel like there are not enough hours in the day to get everything done, their days are very long or they do not get any down time because their work hours are late at night (Roy et al. 2004).

Relying heavily on public transportation may also be necessary for low wage workers. The physical transition between work and home can be stressful, especially if mothers do not own a car (Roy et al. 2004). Not having a car makes it necessary to rely on other people for transportation such as public transportation, family, friends or coworkers. Planning transportation and work schedules have to be precise for low wage workers in order for them to get to and from work on time (Roy et al. 2004). Many mothers worry about their safety and their children's safety when traveling by bus or train because they have to walk through neighborhoods with criminal activity (Roy et al. 2004). Weather can also be an issue when relying on public transportation because waiting in the snow or rain for a bus could cause health problems. Waiting long hours on public transportation can interfere with time that could be spent with the family, household chores or preparing meals (Roy et al. 2004). Having a vehicle would provide mothers with more flexibility in their schedule, and they may even be able to spend more time doing family oriented things; however, this luxury may not be feasible for mothers who work a low wage job (Roy et al. 2004)

Working in a poor quality, service job can be stressful and alienating (Wharton 1999). People who interact with customers in service jobs typically have little job skills, lack power and have no autonomy on the job; employers controlling their workers interactions can threaten their identity (Wharton 2009). Jobs involving a lot of interaction with customers are thought to require great amounts of emotional labor because it makes the employees align their private emotions with normative behavior that is expected of them (Wharton 2009). “Emotional labor refers to the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines” (Wharton 2009:147). Uniforms, scripts and regulations about demeanor are all part of service work and this can have psychological impacts on a person’s identity (Leidner 1991). For example, Leidner (1991) studied service work at McDonalds and found that all the employees had different routines and scripts depending on their job title. Cashiers and window workers were told how to talk and how to dress for work. They were also given scripts for different situations when interacting with customers. Tattoos and piercings had to be covered at all times and all the employees were supervised, not only by a manager, but also by customers. In order to keep their jobs, these McDonalds service workers had to behave a certain way to make the customers feel like they were receiving fast and friendly service. When customers became angry about their service or food, the employees were not allowed to become angry, they had to suppress their emotions and fix the problem the customer had. Their tasks were to serve customers and to control and suppress themselves psychologically (Liedner 1991). Service jobs depend very heavily on employees and their ability to manage their emotions so they have returning customers, and employers have tried to control this

process by “transforming emotion management into emotional labor as a formal job requirement” (Wharton 2009:149). Employees may have to hide their frustrations on the job, and hiding feelings of agitation on the job is associated with greater levels of burnout, and having to hide or control emotions on the job is a key element in the jobs that TANF leavers take (Erickson and Ritter 2001). TANF leavers may feel like they have no control over their jobs or their emotions while they are working, so they get irritated and quit their job for another one. Having a script to act out to customers has also been found to heighten employees’ feelings of depersonalization as well as reducing accomplishments (Grandey 2003). Stress and lower job satisfaction has also been linked to surface acting, and many of the jobs TANF leavers take require acting out a script, emotion or behavior on the job (Morris and Feldman 1997; Pugliesi 1999).

Feeling stressed, exhausted or overwhelmed are all feelings that low wage working mothers experience while working nonstandard hours (Roy et al. 2004). Mothers may feel tired, overwhelmed or stressed because they are on their feet for long periods of time at work, they rarely get breaks at work or they are thinking about how to get to and from work in a timely manner. Mothers working for a low wage may also stress about money because their income is so little. Being psychologically stressed can hinder a child’s development because of low maternal responsiveness (Evans et al. 2008). Mothers with low incomes tend to be less responsive to their children than mothers with higher incomes and this can have negative affects on their children (Bradley and Corwyn 2003). Many working mothers with low wages tend to feel tired after working long hours, and they may be less likely to help their children with homework at the end of the day (Bradley and Corwyn 2003). Evans et al. (2008) found that it was not just low wages that

caused mothers to be less responsive to children; it was the psychological stress of having a low income. This means that mothers who work for low wages may be less responsive to their children because of the stresses they may have from work. They may be stressed about an array of things including money, transportation and childcare, and this may hinder their parenting skills. Children living in poverty may also be exposed to certain stressors that other children are not exposed to like harsher living environments, family dissolution, stressed parents and less healthy foods (Conger and Donnellam 2007; Evans 2004). The stress a child in poverty faces may lead to chronic stress and negative consequences later in life (Evans and Kim 2013). Stress on a family in poverty might have more consequences for that family than stress of a family who is not facing poverty. There are several unique factors that low income families face, such as government housing and food stamps, that other families might never experience and this may cause poor families to lead more stressful lives.

Low Wage Working Conditions and Family

The literature about mothers' employment effects on children has been mixed. Some researchers say employment has no effect or a slightly positive effect; other literature states that stressful low wage jobs can be harmful for children because if mothers are not happy with their jobs the home environment can be stressful (Scott et al. 2004). When TANF leavers enter service jobs that produce emotional labor, the stress, loss of identity or loss of control the leaver feels on the job may transfer to a stressful environment at home. Some research says that sufficient income and job stability do benefit families and children; however, studies show single mothers without sufficient income can negatively affect children (Siegal et al. 2007). People who argue for work-

based welfare argue that families, particularly women who are working, benefit children in the long term because having a job raises their mothers' self-esteem, and it gives children a stable daily routine with a chance to exit poverty (Hofferth et al. 2000; Lichter and Jayakody 2002).

Scott et al. (2004) found that when a head of household had jobs with odd hours and low wages their children had behavior problems. They found negative consequences associated with low wage service jobs because parents were home for shorter periods of time at odd hours during the day. If parents spend less time at home at not standard hours, this may cause their family routine to change weekly or even daily. Parents with unpredictable work hours may translate into an unstable routine at home, and this can make it difficult to make a set time to schedule meals and family time (Henly et al. 2006). Sheely (2010) found mothers who work full time low wage jobs spend less time reading to their children. When mothers work low wage service jobs, their hours can change regularly and this can cause children to have a fluctuating bedtime (Sheely 2010).

Mothers who work low wage jobs are also concerned about being able to afford good quality childcare and their children's safety when they go home from school by themselves (Scott et al. 2004). In order to relieve mothers stress about their childcare and their safety after school, it is important for mothers to find kin networks for cheap, reliable childcare so they can manage their odd hours and low wages (Scott et al. 2004). London et al. (2004) found mothers admitting they were not meeting their family obligations because they were working long hours to make sufficient income. Working more hours can produce higher wages, which is beneficial to the family; however, it will also cause the caregiver to be home less, and this can impact the children's routine

(Sheely 2010). Sheely (2010) also found mothers who work long hours kept their children up later at night so they could spend more time with them. So working longer hours may have an impact on the type of childcare mothers have to choose from, children's safety and sporadic bedtime schedules, and this may put stress on the family. Working night shifts and weekends tends to put more stress on the family because the low wageworker has spillover stress from work (Davis et al. 2008). Stress from work may translate into the home and cause a significant other or child to also be stressed.

Lichter et al. (2002) argue that the majority of the low-income population is the working poor and we do not know yet if low wage jobs translate into a positive long-term outcome or if it promotes better work and family values for children. Research does agree that families who leave TANF and have dual incomes are better off, and their children are better off because they have dual earners to increase household income, which gives them a better chance to exit poverty (Fletcher et al. 2008). Not only can dual incomes be better for families leaving TANF, so can more education. Bennett et al. (2004) found that changes in the economic well-being of poor children depend greatly on the kind of education their parents have. They point out that all poor families exiting TANF do not experience transitioning the same way because of different backgrounds. Children who have parents with little education, especially no high school diploma, have the hardest time transition off of TANF and are affected the greatest (Bennett et al. 2004).

CHAPTER III

Gaps in Literature

Most studies focus on welfare leavers from 1996-2000 or researchers study how the 1996 welfare reform has affected leavers differently from the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) welfare policies. Looking at welfare leavers past 2000 would help us get a better grasp on how people leaving TANF or cycling on and off are doing. With new economic conditions and welfare policies established, future research should focus on how leavers are faring in today's economy.

Focusing on the type of work welfare leavers are doing should also be included in future research. Instead of just focusing on personal wages and losing TANF benefits, researchers should look at the emotional labor and working conditions of the leaver. How does their work affect their personal life and family life? Does the leaver think their situation was better on TANF or off of TANF, not just economically, but also personally and psychologically? Are they treated differently at work because of their past TANF status? What are their specific daily job duties? These are all questions that should be asked in future research.

“Any job is a good job” does not coincide with the circumstances of many families that have relied on TANF, nor does it reflect how families meet responsibilities once they have exited TANF (Hennessy 2005). There needs to be more attention brought to the types of jobs welfare leavers enter and how these jobs can help to meet or hinder their responsibilities. This study is going to bring attention the types of jobs, quality of leavers' working conditions and wages that leavers are getting into. Research has indicated that if a welfare leaver has negative employment experiences through low

wages and long hours, it is likely to have a negative effect on children, so it is important to find out how welfare leavers' jobs are affecting them and their families (Scott et al. 2004). I will be filling a gap in literature by giving an updated view on welfare leavers today in an economic downturn. There has been little research on welfare leavers and how they are faring after the 2008 recession and if this became another barrier to finding employment (Lein and Schexnayder 2007). I will also be focusing more on the types of jobs welfare leavers enter, what kind of wages they receive, their working conditions and the emotional labor these jobs may produce. I will focus on their job duties, wages, hours, quality of job conditions and emotional labor and ask how this affects their family and children. The types of jobs welfare leavers enter are typically low wage, low quality service jobs, and I will want to see if the stress of their working conditions translates to stress at home (Hennessy 2005). Most welfare leavers enter service work and most service work produces emotional labor, which may cause burnout and job instability, and it is important to see if this emotional labor plays a role in welfare leavers' lives (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Litt et al. 2000).

Sociologists should pay more attention to the types of jobs and working conditions of welfare leavers because it may show us another reason as to why leavers lead an unstable employment path and even cycle back on TANF. Emotional labor may cause welfare leavers to question their identity in the workplace and this may hinder their personal and home life (Wharton 2009). We already know that welfare leavers have a hard time maintaining a sufficient income for their families because of the low wages, lack of benefits and costs of childcare; however, we are unsure of how welfare leavers are

emotionally and psychologically because of the types of jobs they get into, the conditions of these jobs and the possible emotional labor they may produce.

CHAPTER IV

Methodology

Most studies identify welfare leavers as being off cash assistance for about two months, and they follow leavers as they cycle on and off of TANF (Rodgers 2003). In this study I identified what I call “established welfare leavers” who have a job and have been off of cash assistance for nine months or longer. Focusing on families who have been off of cash assistance for nine months or longer revealed more independent welfare leavers. These leavers are more independent because they rely less on government assistance programs than recent welfare leavers, and they are established in the labor market. I interviewed seventeen mothers who had been off of TANF for nine months or longer and are currently employed in central Texas. The interviews took place in their homes, local restaurants or at the home of a social organization they were a part of and lasted between thirty minutes to two hours. These established leavers were employed and had at least one child. In order to find out what types of jobs these established welfare leavers had and if their jobs produced emotional labor, I conducted and recorded face-to-face interviews and asked questions about the specific work they did. I also asked how their daily work activities affects their personal and family life. I focused on what specific job they had, what they did daily on the job, the hours and days they work, how their job affects their family, if they think having this job is better than TANF, how they were treated on the job because they were previously on TANF and how their job affects them emotionally and physically.

Because this population may be hard to locate or may lack incentive to fill out a mailed survey, qualitative research allowed me to access this hard to reach population by

connecting with social groups and sitting down to interview the established welfare leavers (Rogers-Dillon 2005). Using qualitative methods allowed me to capture a day in the life of the established welfare leavers from their point of view. Qualitative methods were especially useful for engaging the welfare leavers' personal lives and how their work was a part of it. Qualitative research allowed me to capture the women's emotions because I was physically talking to them and not handing them a survey to fill out (Rogers-Dillon 2005). This helped me capture their daily job duties and how it may affect their lives and family. I was also not constrained to certain categories because qualitative research allows the women to talk freely instead of picking one answer, and this provides me more depth in research (Rogers-Dillon 2005). I conducted semi-structured interviews because they allowed me to explore topics openly and let the established welfare leavers convey their opinions in their own words, which made each interview tailored to the leaver (Esterberg 2001). I wanted to hear the established welfare leavers' stories and personal job experiences and semi-structured interviews seemed to be the most effective way to understand their perceptions of the way their lives were after TANF. Semi-structured interviews allowed a freer exchange and made the interview feel more like a conversation; this helped the established leavers relax and made them feel like they could share their stories with me. Face-to-face interviews also helped me gain trust in a vulnerable population and allowed me to see any emotional reaction an established leaver had to a question.

I mailed and hung fliers on doors and community rooms in government housing to get potential face-to-face interviews. I also used specific organizations that help people

leave TANF such as churches and nonprofit organizations to help me connect with women participating in the organization and women who are alumni of the organization. Before I did face-to-face interviews, I did a quick phone screening that consisted of a few questions that helped me determine if the person qualified as an established welfare leaver. They must have had a job, been off a TANF for nine months or longer and had children in order for me to conduct a face-to-face interview.

The snowball technique is used to target the same population by links in contacts (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Snowball sampling is useful for my study because mailing and handing out fliers may not have been enough for me to reach potential interviewees. Because I was looking for a specific type of welfare leaver that had been off of TANF for nine months, had a job and child, it may have been difficult to find people to interview, and snowball sampling was a good technique to gain more access to this population.

The initial snowball sample yielded six participants. In order to expand my sample I contacted local social organizations that help welfare leavers gain education and obtain jobs. Eleven participants were part of a social organization that helped them obtain an education, job or job skills. Welfare leavers that participate in or graduate from a social organization program are more likely to obtain upward mobility (Lein and Schnexnader 2007). Social organizations can help welfare leavers' transition off of TANF by providing them with social support, education or job skills. Welfare leavers that are part of a social organization are also less likely to cycle back on TANF because of the skills or education the organization has provided them (Lein and Schnexnader 2007).

Some disadvantages of using a snowball technique were the lack of diversity and sampling bias. I did not randomly select people to interview; I used contacts from previous interviews and this could hinder any generalizations about the population my sample could make. Although my sample may not be generalizable, it will still be a good contribution to welfare leaver research because I am filling gaps and other researchers can build from this study. Another gap in this study is the location; I studied welfare leavers from Texas and because TANF guidelines vary between states this study cannot be generalized to welfare leavers across state lines.

I transcribed each interview and looked for themes of working conditions, wages and how their job conditions may affect their family. I used open coding when first analyzing the data to get a clearer picture of what the themes could be, and once I established recurring themes, I used focused coding to develop three themes: characteristics of low wage work, how their jobs impacted their family and how mental and physical stress affected the established welfare leavers (Esterberg 2001). I also looked for themes of emotional labor based on Wharton's definition: "Emotional labor refers to the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines" (Wharton 2009:147). I analyzed the types of jobs the established leavers had and how their job and emotional labor may affect their children or family at home. I organized the interviews by types of jobs and compared job types and experiences, working conditions and wages and emotional labor between the established welfare leavers. Because education is important for welfare leavers to maintain a stable path off of TANF, I took into account how much education each established leaver had to see if it benefited them and their family.

The established welfare leavers I interviewed signed a consent form that told them the interview was being recorded and that their personal information remained confidential. In order to maintain my established leavers' confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms, and I will not reveal any address or phone numbers. To remain ethical and allow the established leavers to feel comfortable with the interview process, I explained the consent form and made sure they understood before I started the interview. I also reminded them they could stop the interview at any time or refuse to answer any questions.

CHAPTER V

Findings

All these mothers, except for one, work in some form of service industry job. When asked if their transition off of TANF was stressful, answers varied from “not stressful at all” to “very stressful” depending on the circumstance of the woman. All of the mothers I interviewed seemed to be protective of their children and still money conscious. Most of the women had full time jobs; however, some only worked thirty hours a week. Their wages ranged from \$9.00 per hour to \$16.75 per hour and only one woman I interviewed was on salary.

Table 1. Established Welfare Leavers Demographics

| Names | Age | Race/Ethnicity | Education | Marital Status | Approximate Annual Income |
|--------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Jessica | 29 | Hispanic | Associates Degree | In a Relationship | \$34,000 |
| Kristin | 49 | White | Some College | Married | \$30,000 |
| Tiffany | 26 | African American | GED | Single | \$27,000 |
| Sarah | 27 | African American | Less than High School | Single | \$26,000 |
| Terry | 40 | White | High School Diploma | Single | \$24,500 |
| Lauren | 22 | Hispanic | GED | Single | \$24,000 |
| Amanda | 31 | African American | GED | Single | \$23,000 |
| Courtney | 39 | White | High School Diploma | Married | \$22,000 |
| Molly | 28 | White | GED | In a Relationship | \$22,000 |
| Nicole | 28 | White | Less than High School | In a Relationship | \$21,000 |
| Meredith | 34 | White | GED | Single | \$20,000 |
| Stephanie | 26 | African American | GED | Single | \$19,000 |
| Regan | 30 | African American | GED | Single | \$19,000 |
| Rachel | 27 | African American | GED | In a Relationship | \$18,500 |
| Erin | 30 | White | GED | Cohabiting w/ Boyfriend | \$18,000 |
| Danielle | 26 | White | High School Diploma | Single | \$18,000 |
| Bethany | 33 | Hispanic | Some College | Single | \$16,500 |

Many women still needed food stamps to get by and about half of the women I interviewed lived in government housing. Only four established welfare leavers did not need food stamps and three of them were living with a significant other. Fifty-nine percent of the established welfare leavers were single. The maximum number of children these welfare leavers had was three, and the average number of children per household was two. Their ages ranged from 22 to 49 and the average age of an established welfare leaver was 30. Eighteen percent were Hispanic, 47 percent were white and 35 percent were African American. Based on this sample, the major factor impacting their experiences after TANF was the quality of their jobs and education. There did not seem to be a difference in success based on race or age; the only major difference was in education and job experience. Some immediate themes I noticed between the stories of these women were: they all seemed to have very physical job duties, the women believed their jobs impacted their family positively and their job duties tended to wear on them whether their duties were physical or mental.

Work vs. Welfare

These established welfare leavers left TANF for work because they were making enough money and were able to leave, or TANF was not providing enough for them to want to stay on it. Some of the women had a stressful transition off of TANF and others said that it was not stressful at all. One woman, Jessica, emphasized how stressful her transition was because she was not used to taking care of herself and her children alone. She and her husband divorced, so when she left TANF she became a single mother and juggling childcare, finances and a job was not easy for her. She said, "I am not stressed now, but if you would have asked me that when I left TANF I would have said I am the

most stressed out in my life.” She left TANF because her wages caused her cash benefits to lower so much it was not worth being on TANF anymore. Kristin, on the other hand, did not have a stressful transition because her wages and her husband’s wages were enough for her and her family to get by comfortably without TANF. She left TANF when she became the manager of a restaurant and her wages increased. She did not think she needed TANF anymore because she was making more money, and she had other people in her household that were also contributing to their household income. The women who experienced stressful transitions tended to make the least amount of money at the time they left TANF, and the women who did not have a stressful transition tended to make more money at the time of transition or had a significant other adding to their household income

Even though the majority of the women entered the service industry after exiting TANF, some women were more successful financially than others. The women who had the most education had the highest wages and the most stable routines. They also seemed to be the happiest in their job and life circumstance. The women with less education tended to have lower wages, and they still relied on food stamps, child support and government housing to get by. Their routines were more stable than when on TANF; however, their wages were still low and they seemed to be not as happy with their jobs. As a whole, the women in this sample do not seem to be better off economically off of TANF. About thirteen women still relied on food stamps, Medicaid or child support payments in order to maintain their lifestyle. Even though they no longer rely on TANF, they are earning a low wage and their economic status has only improved slightly if it has improved at all. When asked if their quality of life has improved since they have left

TANF, they replied with “a little bit” or “not really.” Even though their jobs pay higher wages than recent leavers, their wages are still low and many women still have to rely on other government services. There were a few women who are better off economically now that they are off of TANF, but they have more education and higher wages, and they were not the majority. When the women were asked if their quality of life was better while working and off of TANF, their answers varied depending on their job and what their wages were.

The women with higher wages agreed that their quality of life is better now than when they were on TANF. They think their quality of life is better for themselves and their family because they make more money and can provide more, and they have health insurance. The higher wage earners also think their jobs off of TANF are better than the jobs they had while they were on TANF. For example, Tiffany used to work at a donut shop and now she is an office assistant; she thinks her quality of life has improved because she does not have to “get up at the crack of dawn anymore and serve donuts.” She can take her children to school now and provide a stable routine for them. She could not do that when she was working while on TANF because her schedule always changed, and she was tired because of her early hours. Jessica, the highest wage earner, is a billing associate at a local electric company and she thinks she is off of TANF for good. She admitted that transitioning off of TANF was very stressful, but now her quality of life is better for her daughters and herself. She told me, “If you would of asked me that right when I got off welfare, I would of told you no.” She is able to provide health insurance, nutritious foods and spend more time with her daughters since she has been off of TANF

for three years. The women with higher wages all agreed that life working was more satisfying and improved their quality of life.

The women with lower wages agreed that their lives working while off of TANF weren't any better. They believed that their quality of life is the same off TANF as it was while they were on TANF. Bethany said, "Welfare didn't help much anyway, so I guess my life is the same." Danielle and Bethany told me that TANF was a hassle because of all the paperwork, and they would rather not have it because they can live off of their food stamps, wages and child support. None of the women told me their life was worse off of TANF which is interesting considering some of the women may have benefited financially if they were still on it. However, TANF was considered a hassle to keep and not worth having because they could manage without it.

Job Characteristics and Chances for Mobility

All of the women I interviewed, except for one, had some type of service job. One of the women, Courtney, has a manufacturing job and, although her job description does not involve interacting with people, she still received low wages and worked long hours. Many women worked in the food service industry and had to interact with customers every day. Lauren worked in a school cafeteria and had to prepare food and serve it to students all day. She said most days it feels like she is working nonstop because they prepare food for breakfast, serve it, clean up and then start all over again for lunch. Many of the women who worked in the food industry described feeling like their job was very tiring because of the cleaning, preparing food and interacting with customers. The women who did not work in the food service industry still described their

jobs as tiring because they had physical job duties and had to interact with customers all day.

Although these women are learning skills in service work and obtaining customer service experience, it is unlikely that these women will move into professional positions without more education. The chance for upward mobility in these positions is limited to the company they work for and their current positions. Terry, a machine technician, and, Kristin, a restaurant manager, were able to obtain upward mobility because they were promoted within their company. However, if they would have left the company they worked for to start at a new company, they may have experienced lower wages and fewer opportunities for upward mobility. Tiffany and Jessica obtained upward mobility because they obtained jobs with high wages due to their education and social organization connections. The women who have obtained education, skills and have connections with a social organization may be able to obtain upward mobility; however, if they leave the company they work for or do not have high wages to begin with, upward mobility may not be possible because if these women change jobs they may have to start with low wages all over again.

Most of these women found their jobs through social organizations they participated in or graduated from. These women utilized social organizations to obtain their GED or career guidance, and they were successful in finding jobs through these organizations. Tiffany said, “I would not be in the place I am if I didn’t turn to [a] [nonprofit] [organization] for help.” She believes she would still be working at her old job in a donut shop if she would not have contacted a social organization and went through their GED program. Many women felt the same way and gave credit to the social

organization they used. These women obtained education, learned new skills, made new connections and received career guidance, and they seemed very grateful for it. Many women called these organizations “life changing” because they felt like their lives would not have improved if it weren’t for these organizations. These established welfare leavers may not have been able to obtain jobs or education on their own, and these organizations may have helped prevent them from cycling back on TANF. These organizations also introduced the established welfare leavers to people who could help them with their career, and they may have never met these connections on their own. The majority of these women had low education and little skills, but social organizations helped them gain education and become more established in the workforce and obtain higher wages than minimum wage.

Most of the participants did not change jobs when they left TANF because they were afraid they would have to start all over again in a new position and receive lower wages. For example, Danielle has been in the same position at a fast food restaurant for about three years and she said she is afraid to leave because she will probably have to start all over again in a minimum wage position. She makes above minimum wage now, and she is afraid she will not be able to maintain her lifestyle if she changes jobs. Some women have changed positions but maintained working at the same company. Kristin started out as a shift leader at a restaurant and has since been promoted twice, so she has changed positions but has never left the restaurant. Five women I interviewed worked for school districts, and all of them felt like their job could be used as a catalyst for another position. Some of them aspired to be teachers, so they planned on keeping their jobs until

they were able to gain enough education to become a teacher because they felt like their position now will help them later.

How Their Job Affects Their Family

Many women thought their job had positively impacted their family because they could spend more time with their children, they could provide more material things and had health insurance. They tended to have a more stable routine, and they could afford childcare if they needed it. They thought that they were setting a better example for their children because they were off of TANF and working. Many women would mention how their job was physically exhausting; however, they were happy they could provide a better wage for their family.

I interviewed five women who worked in the same school district as their children and they all thought their work positively impacted their children because of it. They spent more time with their children because of where they worked. They were off on the same holidays as their children, and they did not have to work weekends. Erin, a school bus driver, said, “It helps pay the bills because I get the same holidays off as they do.” Referring to her children not having to go to a daycare because she can take care of her children when they are off from school now. Lauren, who also works for a school as a cafeteria employee, likes “how [she] can spend all day Saturday and Sunday with [her] daughter now.” She could not do that before because she was working at a restaurant and worked weekends and nights. Lauren thinks her new job positively impacts her daughter because they spend more time together and her daughter seems happier.

Sarah, a custodian, thinks her job positively impacts her family because it is allowing her to take GED classes, which will help her family in the future. She also

thinks it helps her family because it helps her buy nutritious food for her children. “I am buying less frozen meals and more fruits and veggies. I still have my food stamps but I can pay extra now for better things.” Sarah realized that her family will benefit even more after she gets her GED, and she believes that her current job positively impacts her family because of this. She is able to provide more for her family now, but knows she can provide even greater things for them in the future.

Many women were able to provide health insurance for their family now. Every woman that had health insurance mentioned that was one of the best parts of their jobs. Terry said, “Health insurance is probably the best part of my job. We never had that before.” Even though Terry has low wages and a very physical job, she is still able to provide health insurance for her son and she believes this is why her job positively impacts her family. The women with low wages and hard physical labor were able to ignore those negative aspects of their job and focus on the health insurance they provide to their family now. The women who were lacking health insurance would mention how they wish they had it. Bethany said, “I have a prescription for medicine for my injuries but I can’t pick it up because I can’t afford it because I don’t have health insurance.” Health insurance seemed to be a very important factor for these women and they were proud if they were able to provide it.

The mothers also think their daily routine has an impact on their family. Most of the mothers routines changed on a daily bases because of their work schedules or because of their children’s activities. Many children were very active in school activities or extracurricular activities outside of school. The mothers were able to work around these activities or have friends and family help them. Many of them believed their job allowed

them to watch and participate more in activities with their children. Bethany described her typical daily routine as “never routine.” She said it is different every day because her daughters are in different activities at their school and her son plays sports. “I am able to do everything I do because I get off when the kids do and they help me so much. I am lucky because they are older and I don’t have to work at night,” she said. Because her children are older they help her cook, clean and maintain the household but they still “whine and complain sometimes” when she asks them to do chores. Because her children are older she does not have to rely on friends or family to help her, and she is able to shuffle her children between home and extra activities while still providing food and a clean house.

Even when the women’s work schedules changed on a weekly or monthly basis, they would still find time to take their children to and from school and activities or put them to bed. Terry relied on family to take her son to school when she worked early in the morning; however, she says, “I still find time to pick him up from school, or watch him play, or put him in bed.” She may not be able to do all three in one day, but she prides herself on being able to do at least one because she could not do that before. She relies on her family to watch him play sports if she cannot be there or to take him to and from school. Terry used to work at night but since she has switched jobs she does not have to work nights anymore. She thinks this positively impacts her child because she can spend more time with him even though she still relies on family occasionally.

Some women thought their jobs allowed their children to participate in extracurricular activities because they could afford it now. One of these women was Lauren, an employee at a school cafeteria. She said, “I love how I am able to afford dance

classes for my daughter now. She had been begging me to take them and now I can afford it.” Not only can these women participate and watch their child play sports, dance or perform, they can also pay for these activities. These mothers believed their children were happier because they were able to participate in things their friends participated in. Erin said her sons were “really happy when they found out they could play baseball this year.” She said her job is the only reason they could play this year because they could afford it now.

The women thought their jobs positively impacted their family because they could now manage a routine based on their children’s schedules and provide their children monetary funds that allowed them to participate in extracurricular activities. Because their work schedules were more routine, it allowed them to cater more to their children’s irregular routines, and the mothers believed this had a positive impact on their children.

One of the women had a very regular routine and she was very proud of it. Tiffany works from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and she really seemed to love her job. She takes her children to school and picks them up every day from the after school program. She used to work at a donut shop so it was hard for her to maintain a stable routine at night because she said she was “always too tired at night to do things with [her] kids.” She also had to get up at 4:00 a.m. when she worked at the donut shop so she could not take her children to school.

I have been trying to reading more to my kids before bed time ever since I got this new job because I am not as tired at night and I don’t have to get up at four in the morning. So I like to read to them because my GED classes taught me that a high school education is important and I do not think they can get through high school without knowing how to read good.

Since her more stable routine, Tiffany has been able to spend more quality time with her children helping them read at night. She believes this positively impacts her children because she is teaching them and spending quality time with them. If she did not have her current job, her routine would not be as stable and she would be spending less time with her children.

On the other hand, Courtney, who works at a national chicken factory, thinks her job as an assembly line worker negatively impacts her family because she comes home late at night and her “husband gets to spend all the time with [her] kids.” She works ten-hour days and only gets to spend a lot of time with her children on the two days she does not have to work. She said, “My kids always complain they don’t get to see me enough but I try to make it up to ‘em on the days I am off by taking them fun places like the park or something.” Bethany also thought her work negatively impacted her family because her children have to help her out so much around the house due to her injuries. She is worried about not being able to buy basic necessities because she is not working as much as she used to, and she has not been getting the correct amount of money in her workman’s compensation check. She said, “I feel like my kids know I am struggling and I don’t want them to worry. I also worry sometimes about putting food on the table. I thank God we finally got into public housing because that helps.” Because she is a bus driver, she has always been able to see her children on weekends and evenings which she thinks is a good thing for her children, but she thinks her circumstances right now negatively impact her children.

When it comes to childcare most of the women say they can afford childcare now; however, some of the women relied heavily on family members or friends to help with

childcare. Other women said their job did not really affect childcare because their children were older and could take care of themselves. Courtney especially relies on her mother and sister to help her with her children when her husband works at the same time as she does. Courtney said, "I don't want to have to pay for childcare 'cuz I know my mom and sister will help me if I need it, so why pay for a sitter when I have family?" Sarah relies on friends when she attends GED classes at night, and when she used to work nights she relied on her friends even more to take care of her children. When she worked nights she said,

I started work at 5:00 p.m. and got home around 1:00 a.m., so I would drop my kids off at her house at 5:00 p.m. when she got home from work and she would watch them and they would play with her kids until they fell asleep. At 1:00 a.m. I would come and pick them up. She gave me a key to her house so I could just go into her house and pick them up when she was sleeping.

She said she got lucky because after only two months of working nights she got promoted to days.

Overall, the women with more education seemed to have better life circumstances because their education helped them enter a higher paying job and therefore allowed them a seemingly more successful life. Some women were married or had boyfriends living with them and this special circumstance also gave these women an advantage because they lived in a dual income household. The women seemed to be at different stages of their lives and this impacted what type of job they had and how their job impacted their family. However, all of the women believed their job positively impacted their family for one reason or another. Many women were able to adjust their daily routines based on their children because these women not longer work on weekends,

nights or evenings. They are making more money now and able to provide their children with more material things, and they can provide their family with health insurance. Their jobs seemed to give them flexibility that they have never experienced before and it positively impacted them and their children.

How Their Job Affects Them Physically and Mentally

Overall, the established welfare leavers' jobs seemed to involve a range of physical labor. Their jobs ranged from very physical labor and little interaction with customers to little to no physical labor with a lot of interaction with customers. The women with the most physical job duties tended to focus on how tired or sore they were after work, and the women who had less physical job duties tended to focus on their interactions with customers when describing their work. Some women had to balance their physical job duties and interactions with customers because they had to perform both tasks simultaneously. These women had special challenges because even though they were physically exhausted, they still had to maintain a positive attitude towards customers, and they claimed that keeping a positive attitude while physically tired was the hardest part of their job.

Courtney and Sarah seemed to have the most physical job duties without customer interaction among these established welfare leavers. Courtney, an employee in a chicken factory, stands all day, lifts things and works with her hands. She works in an assembly line and helps clean, inspect and debone the chickens. This requires that she be focused and fast because, if a chicken gets ready for packaging and is not up to standards, she and her coworkers get reprimanded. She said, "Most of the time I am so tired at the end of the day I barely eat anything and just fall into bed." Courtney does not have to interact with

customers while performing her job duties, but she performs great amounts of physical labor daily and this makes her exhausted at the end of every work day.

Sarah works as a custodian in a school, so her job duties are also physical. She and her team mop, clean the restrooms and are “on call” during school days. She said, “We have walkie talkies and whenever a kid throws up or makes some kind of mess, they call us and we have to go clean it up.” She said lunch time is the worst part of her day because they have to set up and break down tables and clean up after the children.

We are very busy from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. because that is lunch time. There are different lunches for different grades and it’s like lunch mode ‘cuz all we do is clean up after kids. They are very messy and forget to throw things away, or spill, or are just messy eaters. After lunch is over we put the tables up and clean the whole cafeteria. It’s the most tiring part of the day because we are running around cleaning and putting heavy tables back. Most days I hate it.

Sarah performs heavy physical labor during the day; however, she does not have to interact with customers and maintain a positive attitude during her work day. She is around faculty, staff and students but she does not necessarily interact with them on a regular basis.

Courtney and Sarah have jobs that require a lot of physical labor; however, there were a few women who did not have to perform physical labor at their jobs at all. The women who did not have to perform physical labor tended to make the most money and be happier with their positions. Instead of performing physical labor, they interacted with customers all day. In their interviews they focused more on their interactions with customers and how much they enjoyed their routine. The women with more physical job duties explained that every day is different on the job, but the women without physical

job duties had a set daily routine at work. They always had certain tasks to perform every day and it never changed. These women were more chipper when talking about their jobs and seemed to be more satisfied with their situation.

For example, Jessica and Tiffany did not have to do very much physical labor because Jessica is a billing associate at an electric company and Tiffany works as an office assistant at a local community college. They both have service jobs; however, they work in an office environment. They interact with customers all day, but they do not perform any physical labor on the job. Neither of them mentioned any physical pain their jobs caused them; instead they focused on their interaction with customers and how happy they were in their positions.

Jessica interacts with people all day whether it is over the phone or in person, and she performs the same duties daily. She said she has a chair she can sit in if she wants, or she can stand if she gets “tired of sitting down.” She receives utility payments and talks to angry customers about power outages due to insufficient payments. Jessica has worked in an office setting for several years and is used to interacting with customers while performing no physical labor. Tiffany was in a unique situation because she went from a very physical job to sitting down and interacting with students all day, and although she said it was an adjustment, she would much rather do what she does now than go back to the donut shop. She recognized how much better her office assistant position was than her old position at the donut shop. She said, “It’s a lot nicer working area than working at the donut shop. I get to sit down instead of stand up and I don’t have to clean anything or heat up donuts.” She is less tired and feels like she has more energy at the end of the day to spend with her children. Tiffany seemed to be the only established welfare leaver in

the position to compare her old low wage physical job to her new higher wage nonphysical job. Because these women did not perform physical labor at their jobs, they were less tired at the end of the day, and they felt like they had more energy in the evening to spend time with their families.

Although there were women on either side of the continuum of physical labor, the majority of them women fell somewhere in the middle. Most of the established welfare leavers performed physical labor and interacted with customers at the same time. They had to balance the two tasks simultaneously and some women found this task difficult.

Terry, a Machine Technician at a local hospital, found the task of interacting with customers while performing physical labor particularly difficult because her job duties included pushing medical equipment to patients' rooms while maintaining a positive attitude towards the patients and their families. She said the equipment is very heavy and it's tiring "lugging it around everywhere." Terry sometimes found it difficult to put a smile on her face for patients and families because she was worn out from moving medical equipment all day. When she goes home her back hurts because she has been pushing and pulling machines all day or her feet will ache because she does not get to sit down very much. Not only does Terry have to push machines all day, but she also has to be happy and polite to every patient and family member she sees. She was taught how to interact with patients' families when she brings in machines because most families she encounters are experiencing a sensitive time in their lives. Terry seemed to find interacting with patients and their families difficult at the end of her day. She said, "When I push machines around all day and then have to deal with a family going through a bad time, it's hard because I am so tired and don't want to have to put on a happy face."

Her job involves very physical labor, and she is so tired at the end of the day sometimes she feels like she cannot handle talking to families.

Danielle, a fast food worker, mentioned she hated cleaning at the end of her shift. Kristen, a restaurant manager, also had to be on her feet all day and maintain a positive attitude towards customers. She said her feet and her back would hurt at the end of the day because she was standing all day and sometimes her job duties include unpacking boxes of inventory. Because she was a manager she handled a lot of complaints with angry customers, and she said it was harder to be nice to the customers when she has had a tiring day. Lauren worked in a school cafeteria and she also said her back and feet were sore from bending, lifting food boxes and cleaning the cafeteria kitchen. Lauren also described occasions when she would come across disrespectful students that would be rude or make fun of her and her staff. Even though she does not have to be polite to those students and can report them to the principal's office, she said, "It makes the day more tiring when you have to deal with a disrespectful brat." She explained it takes more time out of her day to report a rude student to the principal's office and sometimes her days last longer because of it. Even though these women do not perform heavy physical labor while interacting with customers, they are still just as tired as the women who do.

The women who perform physical labor and interact with customers simultaneously tended to only focus on their physical job duties. This may be because they immediately feel the affect of their physical labor because they feel pain or it makes other responsibilities more difficult at the end of the day. The way their jobs affected the established welfare leavers physically was clear because they described the pain and the action that caused the pain; however, when asked how their job affects them mentally,

they were often confused on how to answer. When asked how their job affects them mentally most of the women said, “I am not sure how it affects me mentally” or “I don’t think it does.” I had to reword the question sometimes because they did not understand what I was asking.

Terry mentioned she could get affected when sick children come into the hospital and do not get better, but she did not think it affected her too much. She said, “When they order a machine for a child and then the child dies a few days later, I get really depressed sometimes because it makes me think of my kid.” She told me she hugs her son “extra long” on days she sees sick children and it gets to her. Tiffany told me that sometimes she has to deal with rude students and she “used to let the rude people ruin [her] whole day but [she] doesn’t let that happen anymore.” Jessica mentioned that she gets annoyed with angry customers when they call her after their lights have been turned off, but she says she normally “laughs it off.”

The women who had to interact with customers constantly told stories of how annoyed or frustrated they can get when having to talk to an angry customer, but they did not think interacting with angry customers caused them stress or affected them emotionally in anyway. When asked if rude customers affected her mentally or emotionally, Stephanie, a sales associate at a local department store, said, “I don’t really think it does, it just annoys me because most of the time they are not right, I am!” Meredith is a customer service associate at a local hardware store, and she handles returns and exchanges. When I asked her if it affects her mentally or emotionally when she has to help a rude customer, she said, “I don’t think my job affects me mentally at all. I just work, go home, and get up and do it all over again. It’s tiring, yea, dealing with

people all day, but most of the time when I deal with rude people I just get over it and move to the next person.” It seemed like these women were not recognizing how these situations could cause emotional stress. They would just ignore the possible mental stress and do their jobs and move on. This could be their way of coping with the stress of an angry customer or they may not recognize emotions the customer may have created.

Bethany, a bus driver, felt like she was affected physically and mentally at her job because she got injured while working and her injury has affected her emotionally.

Bethany got injured on the job because the bus seat she was sitting on hurt her neck and back and the conditions of the road were bad. She said the “steering wheel on the bus injured my left hand and just the road conditions had been injuring my neck and back.”

Bethany found it difficult to keep her eyes on the road and avoid the potential bad road conditions while watching the children behind her. “It is hard because, like, I have to keep one eye on the road and one eye on the kids.” She was in a lot of pain during the interview, and she told me she could barely finish her physical therapy or sleep at night because she is in so much pain. Bethany really focused on how her job affected her emotionally because of all she has been through lately with her injury. She said, “I feel like an old lady,” and “I don’t feel comfortable there anymore.” She told me she feels like her boss treats her differently since she was injured on the job, and she feels like he is punishing her by making her work in the mechanic shop. She has asked to start working inside at the bus barn but her boss tells her one thing and human resources says another.

I asked them if they could put me somewhere inside when it is 30 degrees outside but they told me they didn’t have anything else, but I had been hearing from the office that they were backed up and they should put me inside. So I think and still

think they are trying to punish me until I leave so they don't have to pay for the doctor anymore or whatever.

She likes being a bus driver because she likes working with children and she hates that she does not interact with children anymore. She got emotional during the interview because she is so frustrated with her situation and does not know what to do at this point. Bethany was the only woman who realized her job was affecting her emotionally. Would Bethany have been so emotional during this time if she had not been injured? She may have believed she was treated fairly and only focused on the physical pain of driving a bus if she was not injured.

The women had many stories about how their job physically affected them and were often perplexed when asked to find a situation where they were affected mentally or emotionally. However, they would describe many situations where they would have to deal with angry customers and the women would have to be polite and make the customer happy even when they knew the customer was wrong. The women did not think covering up their emotions or being yelled at by a customer affected them personally. They believed it did not affect them at all or they admitted it used to affect them, but they have learned to cope and now it does not affect them. Jessica coped with angry customers by laughing it off, and Terry would hug her son when she felt depressed after work. These actions made the women feel like their jobs were not affecting them emotionally, but did it help them? Maybe these women have developed coping strategies, but they are still affected mentally in their jobs in certain circumstances.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion

All of the established welfare leavers I interviewed left TANF for work. They exited TANF because they were either making enough money and did not need TANF anymore or they thought TANF was too much of a hassle and not helping their situation so they could live without it. Like many welfare leavers, the majority of the women I talked to found themselves in low wage jobs due to lack of skills and education (Lichter and Jayakody 2002). Even though all of the women entered the service industry after exiting TANF, some women were more successful financially than others. The women who had the most education had the highest wages and the most stable routines. The women who had less education tended to have lower wages and a more physical job. They also still relied on food stamps, child support payments and other services to help them get by monetarily. Many of these women believe TANF did not help them very much when they were on it, and they think they make enough money to manage without it. In some ways, the established welfare leavers' lives while working were not better than TANF because their work did not provide enough money for them to live comfortably, they had low quality working conditions and many of them were mentally or physically exhausted at the end of the day. However, these established welfare leavers believe their jobs have positively impacted their family now that they are off TANF.

Bethany said TANF did not help her much when she was on it two years ago, so she has chosen not to reapply while she is struggling through her injuries. She thinks she can get by with her job, food stamps and child support. She admits that if she was not living in government housing she might have to reapply for TANF, but for now she

thinks she is fine. Many families who leave TANF for work enter the working poor and have choices to make like Bethany (Acs and Loprest 2004). Bethany and other women I interviewed had to resort to income packaging because their wages were not enough to get by and this is common among welfare leavers (Harris 1996). Bethany told me “my life now and being on welfare is basically the same” which hints that she had no financial gain now that she has left TANF. Hennessy (2005) and London et al. (2004) found that some families do not experience financial gain after they exit TANF because their wages are so low and Bethany may be experiencing this.

Only four established welfare leavers did not have to depend on food stamps, and three of those four had a husband or boyfriend living at home with them. These women in dual earner households seemed to be less stressed about money and childcare than the single mothers. Single women may have a harder time remaining off of TANF than a woman living in a dual income household because there is more money to save or push them out of poverty (Fletcher et al. 2008). Erin admitted that if her boyfriend did not live with her and help her so much with bills and childcare she would have to return to TANF because her wages as a bus driver were not enough. She has three children and one of them is not in school yet; she said, “It’s too expensive to raise kids on your own these days, I don’t know what I would do if my boyfriend didn’t help out so much.” Rearing children is especially difficult if the wages the women receive do not increase steadily on a regular basis. All of the established welfare leavers had wages higher than minimum wage, but Danielle, a fast food employee, mentioned that she might be able to do more for her family in the future if her raises were better. Many welfare leavers have a low increase in wages over time and Danielle really felt the effects of that (Cancian et al.

1999). She has been working at the same restaurant for almost three years and has only gotten a one-dollar per hour raise. She wanted to move up and become a manager of the restaurant but in the interview she was noticeably frustrated with her situation because she was trying to decide if she should stay or quit and go somewhere else. She feared if she got another job she would have to start out with even lower wages.

Leaving TANF does not guarantee financial stability (Litt et al. 2000). Bethany and Danielle do not make a lot of money but they still try to save money when they can. The women who made more money also talked about saving for their future and their children's future. All of the women I talked to seemed to be aware of their money situation and were very money conscious. Many women mentioned health insurance. Jessica, Terry, Kristin and Tiffany were all proud that they could provide health insurance for their family and children. When I asked them what the best part of their job was all of these women responded with "being able to provide health insurance for my family." However, many welfare leavers lack things that people in the primary job market have like health insurance or vacation time (Siegal et al. 2007). Jessica, Terry, Kristin and Tiffany also were the highest wage earners of the women I interviewed, so their conditions may be unique.

The national wage average for welfare leavers is typically between \$7.50 to \$8.74 per hour in service industry jobs; however, the established welfare leavers were earning between \$9.00 to \$16.75 (Fletcher et al. 2008; Scott et al. 2004). Why is this? It may be because the women I interviewed had been off of TANF for nine months or longer and they have been in the workforce for longer periods of time. It also could be because most of the women were involved in some sort of social organization that helped them gain

education and find jobs. Even though most women had an organization help them obtain a job, they were still entering service jobs like most leavers, that have low wages and not management or professional jobs that earn higher wages (Lim et al. 2009). Gaining an education or acquiring a skill helps welfare leavers remain off of TANF. All of the women, except two, had a high school diploma/GED or higher education; and the women who do not have their high school diploma were taking GED classes at the time of the interview (Fletcher et al. 2008; Lim et al 2009). Gaining an education also seems to be the only way toward true upward mobility; the women with the highest paying jobs were also the women with the most education (Fletcher et al. 2008). These women also had health insurance, more stable routines and they seemed to be the happiest with their life and job circumstance. Education helped them gain upward mobility and maybe even pushed them into the primary labor market.

Welfare leavers who have previous employment experience and those connected to the labor market through social organizations also have a better chance towards upward mobility (Lein and Schnexnader 2007). Most of the women I interviewed were an active part of a social organization that helps people in poverty obtain education and jobs, or they were alumni of the organization because they obtained jobs and education through the organization. So the established welfare leavers seemed to be attached to the labor market through social organizations or previous employment. I have found that social organizations help welfare leavers find jobs and obtain a GED; however, leavers have a better chance of not returning to TANF if they get a higher education rather than entering a low skilled service job and trying to work their way up (Harris 1996). Danielle

could be an example of this because she has been working in a low skilled service job for three years, has had minimal raises and has not been promoted.

Wages are not the only concern we should have about welfare leavers jobs, they also have poor working conditions. Most of the established welfare leavers had very physical job duties and this affected their body on a daily basis. They were often tired at the end of the day and had muscle aches. Nonstandard work hours and childcare are also issues that women have to deal with when working for low wages. Six of the women I interviewed had sporadic work schedules and struggled to get their get work hours during the day when their children were at school. Several women interviewed had changes in their schedules week-to-week and relied on family members and friends for fast, cheap childcare. Terry, in particular, relies heavily on her extended family to help her with her son when she works the afternoon and night shifts. She says she cannot afford a babysitter all the time, and she is grateful to her family for helping her. Terry is one of the many women I interviewed who is not monetarily independent. The majority of the women I interviewed still relied on food stamps, government housing, child support payments, kin networks and social organizations. Becoming independent from TANF did not make them completely independent from other programs. They were unable to transition of off government and social programs because their wages were still too low.

Even though the women I interviewed were in low wage service jobs, five women worked in school districts and two women had jobs with hours from 8:00 a. m. to 5:00 p.m., so these women had standard hours and felt like they did not have to worry about childcare as much as the women who had sporadic work schedules. The women who worked in the school districts put their children in after school care because it was

cheaper for them or free. Some welfare leavers cannot work when their children are in school because they have to work at night or on weekends and this can offset their wages because they have to pay for childcare (London et al. 2004). The women who work in the schools had the luxury of being off of work when their children were off of school so they did not have to pay for childcare while they were working. I think this is unique among welfare leavers because most welfare leavers work low wage service jobs with nonstandard hours (Henley et al. 2006; Litt et al. 2000). The women who did work for the schools thought this was a positive thing for their children and thought their children seemed happier because they got to spend more family time together. The two women who worked in offices were proud that they could eat dinner as a family and were always at home when their children went to bed.

Low quality working conditions is also an issue when working for low wages. Many of the women's jobs involved a lot of physical labor and standing. When asked how their jobs affected them mentally and physically, women who had more physical jobs focused on their physical body hurting and most of the women did not know how their job affected them mentally. Women said they were exhausted from work because they would have to lift or bend things all day. All the women, except for two, had some type of physical labor to do while on the job, from pulling and pushing medical equipment to opening boxes of clothes and standing all day, the women I interviewed seemed to work very hard for the little money they made. Stephanie, a waitress at a local restaurant, admitted to being so exhausted some days she did not want to have to take care of her children. "Some days I am so exhausted and I think to myself... I have to go home and take care of my kids now...crap." She uses her mother as a babysitter when she

works and is thankful when her children are already asleep when she has a really demanding day.

When asked how their jobs affected them mentally most of them responded with “it doesn’t” however, when they described their job duties some women would describe dealing with customers as “irritating,” “frustrating” or “annoying.” People who interact with customers in service jobs usually lack power and their employers control their actions on the job (Wharton 2009). Jessica worked with customers all day, and she has a script she works from to answer questions if she needs it. She admitted to getting frustrated with angry customers but she did not think it affected her mentally or emotionally. She just thought it was part of her job description. Jessica is forced to control her emotions on the job when angry customers call about their lights being off. According to Wharton (2009:147) this could be emotional labor because “emotional labor refers to the process by which workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with organizationally defined rules and guidelines.” Kristin is a restaurant manager and also said, “The worst part of my job is dealing with mad customers because I always have to be nice even when they are wrong.” Kristin also has to control her emotions regularly at work; however, she also did not think her work affected her mentally. She focused more on how tired she was at the end of the day because of her physical job duties. Many women described circumstances that could be considered emotional labor, but it was often invisible to the women. They did not think their jobs affected them mentally at all, and if they felt like they were getting a little emotional they came up with coping mechanisms to help them. Some women laughed off angry customers and others would go home and hug family members to make them feel better

about what happened on the job. So are these women experiencing emotional labor even though they do not think their jobs affect them mentally and emotionally?

Many low wage employees may have to hide their frustrations on the job and Danielle has to hide her anger about not getting raises or promotions (Erickson and Ritter 2001). Danielle was on the verge of looking for a new job because she was so frustrated with her situation. She may have felt like she was losing control so she needed to find a new job to gain control back. However, Danielle also did not think her job affected her mentally and only mentioned the physical aspects that affected her on the job. She was clearly frustrated and stressed about her current situation, but she did not believe her job affected her mentally.

Why is it that these women do not think their jobs affect them emotionally?

Meredith told me that she just does her job and goes home. Kristin was just happy to have health insurance, and Jessica loved her stable routine she could provide for her children. I think these women are just happy to be able to afford the lives they are living and provide for their children; they do not think about the mental effects their job may have on them. Some of the women were still worried about being able to provide basic necessities for their children or having enough energy to get up the next morning, and other women were happy with their jobs and the money they were providing for their family. These women may not have the luxury to quit one job because they are unhappy to go find another because of their lack of education, skills and income. If they were to quit because their job affected them mentally they may have to return to TANF or start over in a different position with even lower wages. Maybe these established welfare leavers purposely block out emotions that may appear in certain situations on the job so they are

able to stay in that job. They focus on the more positive aspects of their job so it is easier to keep their job and stay in their current situation rather than going backwards. So even though some of these women had jobs that could produce emotional labor, it is hard to determine if they were affected by emotional labor.

The women in my study are somewhat unique because five of them worked in school districts and did not have to worry about childcare. Two of them had stable hours and worked in office settings and one of them had a salary job; they had education and their wages started at \$9.00 instead of \$7.50. I used government housing agencies, social organizations and snowball sampling to reach women for my interviews. Most of the women I interviewed were alumni from social organizations that helped them obtain education and find jobs, and I snowballed off of these women. Using social organizations to find established welfare leavers could be one reason as to why these women seem to not have as many issues with the labor market as most welfare leavers because the women I interviewed had help entering the labor market. The social organizations helped them become attached to the labor market and after they graduated from a GED program these organizations helped them find jobs. Lein and Schnexnyder (2007) found that welfare leavers who are connected to the labor market through social organizations have a better chance towards upward mobility. Maybe the women in my sample gained more education and greater wages because they were connected to the labor market through a social organization.

The women I interviewed were also more established in the labor market than typical welfare leavers because they had been off of TANF for nine months or longer. The least amount of time a woman I interviewed left welfare was one year and the

longest amount of time a woman had been off of TANF was five years. Even though these women were off of TANF, some were still using food stamps and Medicaid. These women may have higher wages because they have been in the labor market for longer periods of time than recent leavers. Jessica shared with me her struggles when she first got off of TANF, and she said it was the most stressful time of her life because she was trying to manage her children, money and job at the same time without the TANF benefits she was used to. As she learned how to manage her new life off of TANF she became less stressed and soon after that she was getting raises on a regular basis. She has been off of TANF for two years and changed jobs three times during that time, but she told me she does not think she will be returning to TANF. Recent welfare leavers may generally have lower wages than more established welfare leavers simply because established leavers have been in the workforce for a longer period of time.

CHAPTER VII

Future Research

Although this research addresses a gap in the welfare literature by focusing on jobs established welfare leavers have and how their jobs may affect their family, future research is still necessary. Sociologists need to find out even more about welfare leavers and how to help them become more established in the labor market. Studying social organizations that help populations like this may give us a better understanding of exactly what they do to help welfare leavers and how many leavers are actually successful. Even though the welfare leavers in my sample tend to have higher wages and education than most welfare leavers, they may just be the successful ones of social organizations. There could be many welfare leavers that utilize programs like these and do not succeed and cycle back on TANF. Tracking women on TANF while in social organizations may help us better understand what it takes to succeed. Interviewing women about a social organization they were a part of and asking how it helped them, or did not help them would also give us a better glimpse of how to improve these programs.

Emotional labor in welfare leavers also needs to be analyzed better because it does seem that many women get into jobs that can produce emotional labor; however, these women do not recognize it. If they do not recognize it, is it considered emotional labor? Maybe these women block out their emotions so they can do their jobs well or maybe they really are not affected emotionally on the job because they have greater things to worry about. Analyzing emotional labor in welfare leavers will help us better understand if it exists in this population and if it does exist, how can we address the negative consequence of emotional labor?

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusion

Past research has shown that welfare leavers have a high employment rate after they leave TANF; however, the types of jobs these welfare leavers have has been overlooked (Rodgers 2003). Many welfare leavers move in to low wage work that provides less monetary funds than their cash assistance (Hennessy 2005). This study examined established welfare leavers and the types of jobs they were in and how those jobs affected themselves and their family. This study has filled gaps because it focuses on the types of jobs welfare leavers enter and it focuses on their job duties and what affect their jobs have on their families. Like past research has shown, the established welfare leavers in this study were employed in the service industry; however, I have found the service jobs these welfare leavers enter are very physical and wear on their bodies. I have also found that established welfare leavers tend to make more money than recent leavers, and have a more steady routine. This study may have began the discussion of emotional labor in welfare leavers because the jobs these leavers get into tend to produce emotional labor, but the women do not recognize it.

My sample of welfare leavers tends to be unique because of their high education and wages, but this could be because they have been off of TANF for longer than nine months and are more established in the labor market or their connections to social organizations. Using qualitative research has limitations because my unique sample of women cannot be generalizable. I used snowball sampling and this may be why I had such a unique sample because people tend to gather with people like them. Because snowball sampling was used instead of random sampling, these results may not

accurately describe the whole population of welfare leavers. My sample is a unique snapshot of what might be happening to established welfare leavers. I also could have such a unique sample because I worked with social organizations that helped these women gain education and obtain jobs. Research has shown that women who are involved in a social organization while on TANF and transitioning off TANF have a better chance towards upward mobility and remaining off TANF (Lein and Shnecnayder 2007). Connecting with these social organizations may have made my sample of welfare leavers more successful than the typical welfare leaver. The welfare leavers I interviewed were also off of TANF for nine months or longer, so they were more established in the labor market than welfare leavers who are only off of TANF for three months.

Even though these established welfare leavers had higher wages and more education, their jobs were still exhausting and challenging for some women. All of the women except for two seemed to have a very physical job, and they would describe how tired they were when they got home. Some were so tired they did not want to have to do their daily non-work roles like cook meals and childcare. These women's wages started at \$9.00 an hour which is a little higher than usual for a welfare leaver; however, some women were only able to work 30 hours a week, and most of the women were still on food stamps and living in government housing. Some women struggled with nonstandard work hours and had to rely on kin networks for childcare because childcare elsewhere was too expensive. However, many women mentioned how proud they are to have a job that allows them to provide for their family even if their jobs were exhausting. Two of the established welfare leavers worked in an office environment and had a stable routine, and

they especially seemed to like their jobs and how they could spend more time and money on family.

The most recent leaver I interviewed had been off of TANF for one year and the leaver that had been off of TANF the longest was off of it for five years. This research poses some interesting questions for policy makers and future research because these women were more established in the labor market than recent welfare leavers, but they still were working service jobs with scripts and earned low wages. Nine dollars an hour is higher than the typical welfare leaver wage; however, for most women it was not a livable wage unless they lived with a significant other. Women who have been off of TANF for a year or longer are still struggling to push themselves out of service jobs and into professional ones. The two women who worked in an office environment also had the highest education in my sample, and one was connected to a social organization. Maybe education and help from social organizations is better for recent welfare leavers to become more established. However, as this study shows, established welfare leavers may make higher wagers than recent welfare leavers, but they still have the same struggle with wages, childcare, exhaustion and sporadic work schedules. Future research should examine how nonprofit organizations can help welfare leavers obtain education and jobs. Even though established welfare leavers seem to be more successful than recent welfare leavers, they still have a long way to go to become completely independent from monetary issues.

APPENDIX SECTION

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Tell me your story of how you transitioned off of welfare...was it stressful on you or your family?

Do you have a job?

What kind of job?

Is it the same job since you have left welfare, or have you had multiple jobs?

If you have had multiple jobs, what has caused you to change jobs?

Do you have any side jobs? For example, babysitting, doing hair etc.

Describe your typical daily routine.

Describe any scripts, uniforms or behaviors you have on the jobs.

What are the hours and days you work?

What are best parts and worst parts of your job?

Has this job helped your family maintain your welfare leaver status?

How does work impact your family?

How does this job affect childcare?

How does your job affect you mentally and physically?

Do you think your quality of life has improved since you have been off of welfare?

Do you think you are off of welfare for good?

What would your ideal job be like?

Survey

Background Information

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: _____

Current Telephone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Age: _____

Race/Ethnicity (Please Circle):

White

African American

Hispanic/Latina

Asian/Pacific Islander

Other: _____

Education Level (Please Circle):

Less Than High School

High School Degree/GED

Some College

College Degree

Marital Status:

Single (Never Married)

Married

Divorced

Long -term Relationship

Long-term Relationship and living together

Do you have children?

YES

NO

If you have children, how many? _____

Age of Children _____

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION

Current Employer: _____

Job Title: _____

Hourly Wages: _____

How many hours do you work a week? _____

What days and time of day do you work?

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