

Impact of Separation on Community Social Service Utilization

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This experiment indicates that AFDC recipients who received public welfare social services under the format of separation of services from financial aid are more likely than recipients in the combined condition to use social services from other agencies in the community. A manipulation designed to impact service utilization by providing greater information about these services had no effect. An earlier report indicated a decline in recipients' use of financial services from the AFDC program and lower client and worker satisfaction under the separated condition. While these findings represent one study in a single agency, they suggest possible service delivery problems arising from the separation of services and income maintenance.

Since 1968, when public welfare agencies began to separate financial aid from the provision of social services to public assistance recipients, little empirical research has been undertaken on the impact of the change. Two exceptions to this absence of interest can be found in the literature. In 1976 Piliavin and Gross reported the results of an experiment in Minneapolis that tested the effects of separation on AFDC recipient demands for, and satisfaction with, social services.¹ A later paper by McDonald and Piliavin, based on the same experiment, summarized worker response to separation.² These two papers reported similar findings: The first indicated that AFDC recipients made higher demands for, and voiced greater satisfaction with, the pre-separation format of service delivery; the second indicated that service workers

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rated clients and the quality of their interactions higher, and believed that recipients were more satisfied when the social service worker was free to initiate contact with the client than when initiation was solely the responsibility of the client.

This report presents additional findings from the Minneapolis study which involve the impact of separation on recipients' use of alternative community social service agencies.

Sample, Design, and Procedures

The design of the Minneapolis (Hennepin County) project is discussed in detail elsewhere.³ In this study three factors were experimentally manipulated, two reflecting the basic attributes of separation and one having to do with the amount and quality of information provided to welfare recipients regarding the availability of the health and social services they might require. Specifically, the three manipulations comprised the following:

Functional integration versus functional separation.—This manipulation refers to the character of the relationship between the AFDC grant monitor and service provider. In the integrated condition, workers who provided social services also monitored grants. They carried out functions in the manner of public welfare workers before the implementation of the separation policy. In the separated condition, workers who provided social services did not monitor grants. This was done by an agency eligibility technician.

Client initiation of service versus worker initiation of service.—This dimension concerns the actor whose decision leads to the provision of services to recipients. In the client-initiated service condition, clients were told that if they required assistance with nonfinancial, personal, or family problems, they could simply request this aid from a social service worker assigned to them by the agency. In the worker-initiated condition, clients were not only told how to request services but were also informed that an agency social service worker would visit with them once every two months.

Information on available services.—The third manipulation in the field experiment concerned the communication provided to recipients on health and social services they might require. Under the standard statement condition, recipients were simply told during the initial interview about the types of services available. In the normative statement condition, recipients were not only told about these services but were also informed that they had a right to these services and should demand them if they desired. In addition, recipients in the normative condition

were given a pamphlet prepared by project staff describing available services in the community.

Some additional comment is warranted about the service information manipulation. This variable was included in the study primarily because of its social policy relevance. Organizations representing welfare recipients have contended that their constituencies have a right to full information about the various health and social services for which they are eligible. These organizations also contend that public welfare agencies typically provide recipients only minimal information about service entitlement out of a fear that full information on entitlements will lead to increased—and perhaps nonessential—use of services and greatly increased costs. Since we are not aware of any research on the consequences of a full information policy, we included these manipulations in the research design. The full information manipulation is also of interest as an attempt to overcome some of the problems deriving from separation in linking services to clients. If separation leads to less use of social services by AFDC recipients, certain forms of communication, such as the normative format employed in this study, may serve to maintain recipients' knowledge of these services and comfort in using them.

The design of the Hennepin County experiment, then, comprised the eight experimental treatments represented by the cells in figure 1. In order to obtain a relatively homogeneous sample, the AFDC recipients selected for the project included only (1) female heads of families who had not previously been welfare recipients as family heads or spouses in Hennepin County; (2) residents of Minneapolis; and (3) families that at the time they became eligible for public assistance were not what the welfare agency formally defined as "problem" cases (e.g., neglect, child abuse, and adoption cases) and for whom, therefore, social services had to be provided by law. The third qualification was included because problem cases were assigned to special, nonproject social service workers, making it impossible to monitor the client-

		Contact Initiated by Client Only		Contact Initiated by Client and Worker	
		Maximum Service Information	Standard Service Information	Maximum Service Information	Standard Service Information
Income Maintenance and Service Functions	Combined				
	Separated				

FIG. 1.—Experimental treatment cells

worker interaction. As detailed elsewhere,⁴ these constraints on the project participants, as well as the location of the experiment, led the Hennepin County sample to be unrepresentative of the national AFDC population. In particular the study sample tended to be younger and more educated with fewer blacks.

Service personnel participating in the project were agency employees who were paid at overtime rates for their efforts in order to ensure rapid and full service. The general design of the project called for each service worker to receive a balanced caseload, that is, an equal number of cases from each sample cell. When workers lost cases as a result of moves, loss of eligibility, or other causes, new cases were assigned so as to maintain balance. A comparison of project workers with data from Shyne and Schroeder's 1977 survey(s)⁵ indicates that, at the time of the project, the Hennepin County workers were somewhat more experienced, more highly trained, and more job-stable than AFDC personnel found in most urban areas.

Recipients were randomly assigned to experimental conditions and then received an initial offer of service (IOS) from the service worker to whom they were assigned. At this time the worker explained that the public welfare office was using various service delivery approaches and that the recipient's family had been assigned to one of these. The procedures for service delivery under that condition were explained, and opportunity was given for the recipient to express dissatisfaction and request another assignment. In one instance a recipient did object to the assignment she received, and her case was reassigned to the recipient's preferred treatment condition. Data for this case were excluded from the analysis.

Recipients participated in the experimental program for a maximum of twelve months. However, since many recipients moved or became ineligible for welfare benefits before the end of the twelve-month period, the average time spent in the project was only slightly over nine months. The number of experimental recipients served by agency workers in the course of the project totaled 147, while an additional 155 recipients were officially assigned as controls.

Recipients were asked to complete a series of questionnaires at two different times. Shortly after they were found eligible for inclusion in the experiment they were visited by a member of the research team and asked to complete the questionnaires. The same questionnaires, supplemented by a number of items concerning recipients' views of the welfare agency and the service worker(s) as well as their use of other services in the community, were administered at the time the subject terminated involvement with the project. At this same time, each worker was asked to complete a termination report for each project sample member regarding the worker's impressions of the sample member.

Results: Alternative Community Agency Service Utilization

At the termination interview, each client was asked three questions about her use of social services in agencies other than the county welfare department. The first query simply asked whether or not the client had used any alternative social service agency in the past year, the second asked how many agencies the client had contacted during this period,⁶ and the third asked how many agency visits the client had made in her efforts to cope with the last problem for which she sought assistance. Responses to each question were analyzed using a two-way analysis of covariance model in which utilization rates were compared among the four experimental groups, defined by crossing the two factors comprising the dimensions of the separation policy (i.e., separation of services and source of service initiation).⁷ Pretest covariates were identified through a preliminary analysis carried out with a random sampling of 75 percent of the control group. This procedure used regression analysis to identify the best pretest predictor variables of the dependent variables for the 75 percent random sample. The variable or variables explaining the most variance for each of the dependent variables in this sample were then used as covariates in the analysis of the effects of the experimental manipulations on the dependent variables for the remaining cases.⁸ The remaining 25 percent of the control group was retained for comparison with the equivalent experimental group to test for possible placebo effects.

The covariance analyses indicated no significant differences among sample groups in terms of the use-no use and problem-specific use indicators. However, a significant effect was observed regarding the number of community agencies contacted by welfare recipients. Specifically, as shown in table 1, sample members in the separated condition used services from more community agencies than did those in the combined condition ($F = 8.32, n_1 = 1, n_2 = 58, P \leq .01$). This finding contrasts with the report by Piliavan and Gross that sample members in the separated condition made fewer requests for assistance from their public welfare service workers.⁹ In addition, as noted at the bottom of table 1, the level of agency utilization was also related to client knowledge at intake of community services. As might be expected, those with greater knowledge made use of more community services.

Finally, at both pretest and posttest project participants were asked a series of questions concerning their knowledge of and views on the importance of social services available in the community. An analysis of covariance on responses to these questions revealed no significant variation between the experimental conditions.¹⁰ Respondents general-

Table 1

EFFECTS OF EXPERIMENTAL MANIPULATIONS ON CLIENT UTILIZATION OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES

DEPENDENT VARIABLE	A		B	
	Combined (<i>N</i> = 32)	Separated (<i>N</i> = 34)	Client- Initiated (<i>N</i> = 39)	Worker- Initiated (<i>N</i> = 27)
Percentage of services recipient has used within the past year	6** (6) ^a	10** (10) ^a	8 (8) ^a	8 (8) ^a
Covariates	Beta		Significant Interactions <i>F</i>	
Pretest scores:				
Anomie	-.005			
Internal-external (scale 2).....	.032		None	
Internal-external (scale 3).....	-.006			
Knowledge of services010*			

^a Adjusted for covariates.

* $P \leq .05$.

** $P \leq .01$.

ly indicated that the types of services provided at the types of agencies listed (day care, family counseling, and mental health) were important,¹¹ and roughly half of the respondents indicated that they knew what types of services were offered at day-care centers, family counseling centers, and mental health clinics.¹² Respondents indicated they had heard of 65 percent of twenty-seven agencies listed on the questionnaire.

Discussion

The major finding presented here indicates that AFDC recipients who received public welfare social services under the separation-of-services format were more likely than recipients in the combined condition to use social services from other social agencies. We have already noted that this finding contrasts with that suggesting members of this group of recipients were less likely to request public welfare agency social services than those in the combined service-grant monitoring condition. Thus it might be argued that the two findings reflect a balancing trend;¹³ that is, recipients in separated and combined conditions receive essentially the same amount of social services, but those under the separated format find it sufficiently difficult to obtain assistance within the public welfare agency that they find it necessary to seek help elsewhere.

The data suggest an interesting problem with this effort at substitution. As reported by Piliavin and Gross, the welfare agency social services that AFDC recipients were less likely to receive under separation in this study were those dealing with financial problems,¹⁴ yet the types of services they could receive from community agencies were those dealing with nonfinancial problems. It seems unlikely that receipt of the latter could adequately substitute for failure to receive the former. Thus, to the extent that AFDC recipients went to alternative agencies to obtain services for financial problems because they viewed their public welfare service workers as unsympathetic,¹⁵ separation may have made more difficult the recipients' efforts to cope with poverty. To our knowledge, the possibility of this problematic consequence of separation has not been previously considered.

Finally, we have noted (n. 7) that an information provision manipulation we imposed in this experiment had no effect on clients' use of social services. That manipulation varied from simply providing information to recipients about existing social services in the community to presenting them with a booklet which detailed available services and strongly argued the recipients' right to use such services. The failure of this manipulation deserves some comment. We have shown that knowledge about agency services influences future use. As just noted, however, our "strong" knowledge manipulation failed to influence use. Furthermore, as noted at the conclusion of our findings section, this manipulation failed to influence reported knowledge. Thus while our assumptions about knowledge and use seem valid, our manipulations were clearly too weak to have "real-life" impact. These results suggest the need for active case management and referral if people are going to find desired services. A catalog of services, a map of the city, and a friendly smile are not going to be of much help.

Notes

→ Irving Piliavin and Alan Gross, "The Effects of Separation of Services and Income Maintenance on AFDC Recipients," *Social Service Review* 51 (September 1977): 389-406.

2. Thomas P. McDonald and Irving Piliavin, "Separation of Services and Income Maintenance: The Worker's Perspective," *Social Work* 25 (July 1980): 264-67.

3. See Piliavin and Gross; McDonald and Piliavin.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Ann W. Shyne and Anita G. Schroeder, *National Study of Social Services to Children and Their Families: Overview* (Rockville, Md.: Westat, Inc., March 1978), pp. 25-26.

6. The list included the following 27 agencies: American Indian Movement, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Catholic Welfare Services, Catholic Youth Center, Day Care Centers, East Side Neighborhood Service, Family and Children's Service, Headstart, Hennepin County Mental Health Center, Kenny Rehabilitation Insti-

tute, Legal Aid, Lutheran Social Service, Housing and Redevelopment Authority, Health Department, Work Opportunities Center, Vocational Rehabilitation, Mt. Sinai Hospital Drug Abuse Center, Neighborhood Youth Corps, North Settlement Services, Planned Parenthood, Sabathani Community Center, The Way—Opportunities Unlimited, Inc., Welfare Rights Organization, YMCA/YWCA, Washburn Child Guidance Center, and Recipients Alliance.

7. The third experimental factor, which involved the amount and quality of information provided to welfare recipients regarding other available health and social services, was not found to be significantly related to any of the outcome measures. Thus, all categories discriminating the variations in this manipulation were collapsed.

8. No significant two-way factor or covariate-by-factor interactions were found.

9. Piliavin and Gross, pp. 398-99.

10. Where pretest scores for the same question were available they were always included as a covariate.

11. The scale score is the sum of the responses to three questions asking the subject if each type of service is important. Response categories for each are 1, "yes," 2, "not sure," and 3, "no." Scale scores, then, can range from 3 to 9, with lower scores indicating greater importance attached to these services. The mean response score for experimentals was 3.85.

12. The scale score is the sum of the responses to three questions asking if the respondent knows the services offered by each type of agency. Response categories for each item are 1, "knows," and 2, "doesn't know." Scale scores may range from 3 to 6. Dividing the mean response by the number of items yields a mean score per item of 1.54, indicating that on the average 46 percent answered 1, "knows" to each question.

13. Piliavin and Gross, pp. 398-99.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 399-401.