The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 27
Issue 4 *December*

Article 5

December 2000

"Welfare Reform: A Social Work Perspective for Assessing Success"

Dennis D. Long
Xavier University

"Welfare Reform: A Social Work Perspective for Assessing Success"

DENNIS D. LONG
Xavier University

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 has instituted major changes in providing for the poor in the United States. This article examines the importance of evaluating the impact of this legislation from a social work perspective. Using Mannheim as a theoretical orientation, welfare reform is examined in relation to dominant ideologies of the 90's. The salience of social work research, particularly qualitative research, in evaluating welfare reform outcomes is explored. Social workers are encouraged to challenge current ideology and utilize social work expertise to conduct research and disseminate information documenting the achievements and misfortunes of clients as a result of welfare reform.

INTRODUCTION

Although The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 was enacted nearly half a decade ago, the impact of this major piece of social legislation is still being felt nationwide. Welfare reform has prompted major changes in how Americans attend to the needs of the poor in each of our communities. The consequences of welfare reform are numerous, involve multiple systems, and will require evaluation over an extended time period.

Using the writings of Karl Mannheim for theoretical guidance, this article examines dominant ideological tenets that gave rise to The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. An utopian based, social work perspective for analyzing the effects of welfare is offered emphasizing the value of qualitative research. Various modes of disseminating research

and information describing the effects of welfare reform for clients are provided.

WELFARE REFORM

Coined as "new federalism" and couched in a spirit of self-sufficiency, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 represents a major change in the provision of benefits for the poor in the United States. In addition to spending reductions in low-income programs, estimated at 55 million dollars over six years, this historic piece of legislation continues to shift social responsibility for the needy from the federal level to state and local jurisdictions.

As the various tenets of Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 become enacted, social workers are seeing the consequences of the law for clients. Unfortunately, the ramifications of welfare reform for the poor are many and difficult to ascertain as state and local programs vary in their definition of welfare policy and implementation of welfare programming. Field research and qualitative data from communities and agencies can provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of welfare reform for poor families and supplement national, state, and county findings focusing on welfare expenditures and enrollment figures. The problem for social workers is that qualitative research is time consuming and expensive and requires a conscious, concerted effort to implement in the context of contemporary social work practice.

As a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has been replaced with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), a new federal block grant. Although eroded over the years by inflation, AFDC cash assistance has been the stalwart welfare program for poor parents and children in the United States for the past five decades. In recent years, and as a prelude to welfare reform legislation, some states received special waivers to experiment with various AFDC provisions, mainly work incentives and mandates. TANF extends this "customizing of programs by waiver" logic by providing states and locales with even greater discretion in determining eligibility requirements and income assistance levels for poor families and children.

In theory, welfare reform is implemented in a reductionistic manner. States develop strategic plans for using TANF block grant monies that are consistent with federal guidelines and mandates concerning work requirements and payment levels. States, in turn, ask local areas (often counties) to create service delivery plans, compatible with federal and state regulations, to address the needs of local constituents. The net result is a proliferation of state and local initiatives, each unique in name and substance, that reinforce the two main federal directives emphasizing employment and time limits on financial assistance.

MANNHEIM'S IDEOLOGY AND UTOPIA

Welfare reform, like any legislative act, constitutes a product of a social time and place. To more fully grasp the meaning and consequences of welfare reform requires an appreciation of the social-psychological context and setting from which it arose. Just as politicians create and enact laws using the logic and terminology of the time, researchers approach evaluation of social legislation influenced by the prevailing forces and attitudes that define life.

When attempting to analyze the sociology of knowledge, the work of Karl Mannheim is particularly helpful in facilitating a wider, structural view of knowledge acquisition. For Mannheim (1952), the meaning of a phenomenon "can be determined only with reference to the conceptual system to which it belongs" (p. 9). Ideas, concepts, and measures are not seen as isolated, self-contained units but are viewed as parts of a wider social structure.

The manner in which a person conceives of a notion or a phenomenon is partially a consequence of one's social and historical setting. Social and political processes affect thinking and behavior in a multitude of ways. Consequently, to grasp the prevalent outlook or perspectives of the time is to identify the various invisible forces underlying thought, concern, and action.

To assist in understanding contemporary opinions and positions, Mannheim (1936) describes two main categories of ideas, ideology and utopia. From an *ideological view*, ideas are seen as a function of the person(s) who holds them and one's position in a social structure (p. 56). Ideology "signifies that the politician's

feeling for reality took precedence over and displaced the scholastic, contemplative modes of thought and of life" (p. 72). Ideological thinking can be full of deception and distortion and works to prohibit true recognition of situations which are incongruent with a person or groups own interests. Ideological thinking is often offered by a dominant social-historical group or class and "means opinions, statements, propositions, and systems of ideas are not taken at their face value but are interpreted in the light of the life-situation of the one who expresses them" (p. 56).

Utopia refers to visionary thinking, void of the bonds of an existing order, that is less responsive to time and social place. Utopia represents freedom from political and economic evaluations and rule. An utopian outlook "seeks to understand and interpret particular insights from an ever more inclusive context" (Mannheim, 1936, p. 105). Utopian thinking breaks away from the perspectives of the status quo in an attempt to "bring the conceptual system and empirical reality into closer contact with one another" (p. 200).

Written to challenge the logic and validity of knowledge, the writings of Karl Mannheim serve as a reminder that the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 is a product of a group of politicians promoting popular beliefs in a particular social historical time and place. Mannheim (1952) can be an important influence in recognizing that ideology influences policy formation and analysis, and can be traced to "concrete groups, their aspirations, and their interactions" (p. 20).

DOMINANT INTERESTS OF THE 1990'S

Any attempt to analyze the social world in which one lives and works should be considered from the onset as partial and incomplete. Thus, the hope is to identify and describe some of the more salient social or psychological forces that have served to underlie and shape individual and collective thought and behavior during the decade.

One approach is to identify the presence of dominant interests, also known as ideologies or sets of beliefs, in a social structure. Ever-changing, ideological beliefs guide thought and help convince people of the righteousness of specific ideas and actions.

Ideological tenets sway scientists in their approach to a research topic and the manner in which a particular substantive domain is conceptualized. Ideologies are important vehicles for transmitting the values of the prevailing social order to individuals and groups.

Several dominant belief systems can be identified concerning the formation and implementation of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996. These positions include:

Fiscal Responsibility—Emphasis is placed on decreasing the number of welfare recipients for the purpose of reducing spending on welfare. This is an accounting-business perspective that seeks to cut people off welfare to curtail the expenditure portion of governmental ledgers (Kilty, Richardson, & Segal, 1997).

Self Sufficiency—Efforts to reduce dependency on public assistance are stressed. Proponents differentiate between short-term recipients, long-term dependents, and repeat users of income maintenance programs. Public assistance is perceived as a temporary commitment. Long-term and repeated use of public assistance are viewed negatively (Bane & Ellwood, 1994).

Less Eligible—Requirements and procedures surrounding receipt of public assistance are conceived in ways so that individuals do not enjoy receiving welfare (Garvin and Tropman, 1992, p. 8). This incorporates a punitive tone suggesting only those in dire financial circumstances should even consider applying for public assistance.

Traditional Families—Marriage and two-parent child rearing practices are encouraged. Welfare reform is viewed as a means of reinforcing traditional family relationships among the poor while discouraging out-of-wedlock pregnancies and child rearing (Blank, 1996).

The Primacy of Work—Employment in the private workplace is a goal for all. Parents with dependent children need to find and maintain work to provide sustenance for the family. Availability of jobs and mediating factors that constrain employment (e.g. the lack of education, the absence of employment experience, the age or special needs of dependent children, or the presence of disabilities or special needs) are de-emphasized.

State and Local Control—A strong desire for home rule has emerged in America. The notion that states and local jurisdictions should

define and address their own needs is prevalent. Oversight and governance at the state and local levels is preferred over federal intervention.

These are popular beliefs from American culture embraced in the formation of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. Note how the legislative title alone signals the importance of individualism and work in the statute.

To understand the perspective of politicians in constructing welfare reform necessitates the consideration of key ideologies, such as those noted above, that undergird the form and substance of the law. Mannheim refers to this as "relationism" where ideas expressed are related "to the concrete situation which led to their expression" (Mandelbaum, 1938, p. 76). Thus, using Mannheim's orientation, the Welfare Reform Act of 1996 represents a piece of social legislation connected to a social order and its beliefs.

A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

Human service professionals strive for objectivity in scientific inquiry and research, but like other people are vulnerable to personal motivations, social pressures, and the political context of an era (Kilty & Meenaghan, 1995). While specific attitudes vary, social workers share interests with many citizens in reinforcing fiscal responsibility in government, promoting effective administration of human services, enhancing self-sufficiency, preserving family life, and encouraging meaningful work experiences. Core cultural values, in one fashion or another, act upon all of us.

One way social workers can be distinguished from others involves their adherence to long held professional ideals. Most notable are commitments to social-economic justice and human dignity. Social workers hold a common bond in believing that people deserve fair and reasonable access to basic resources (e.g. food, housing, employment, education, and health care). Control over resource allocation and a just distribution of resources are important considerations in social work practice (Reid and Billups, 1986). Social workers, reflecting utopian ideals, often approach human strife in a *client driven* fashion with primary consideration given to the needs of clients—placing human distress above the

ability to procure goods or services. This contrasts markedly from a *resource driven* approach where client needs are cast in terms of the availability of existing resources and services (Long & Holle, 1997, p. 231). In the 90s, the resource driven outlook appeals to the interests of the dominant social order and represents an ideology based mentality.

From the onset, social workers have been skeptical as to how welfare reform would protect the poor from a predominantly low wage, part-time U.S. labor market and improve "access to jobs, medical coverage, quality child care, and paid family leave" (Piotrkowski & Kessler-Sklar, 1996, p. 546). Social workers question whether these, and other structural flaws in the economy, constitute serious constraints for recipients hoping to break away from public assistance programs, escape poverty, and establish quality living (Poole, 1996).

Given social work's humanitarian commitment, emphasis on the social environment, client-centered focus, and utopian mentality; evaluating how large scale policy initiatives like welfare reform effect the dignity of human life is a logical mandate for the profession. Without such a commitment, social work practice could be readily reduced to simply helping clients survive and cope with the "micro aspects of human strife" or what Meyer (1993) describes as "the least complex, narrowest, most 'doable,' private or internal aspects of cases" (pp. 6–7).

Unfortunately, a call for social worker practitioners to engage in research examining the ramifications of welfare reform needs to be tempered by current "realities" in social work practice. Social workers laboring in the trenches of day-to-day practice often find themselves overwhelmed by large caseloads, multi-need clients, paperwork, and severe time constraints. Consequently, inclinations toward the study of welfare reform by colleagues engaged in direct service stand the risk of being relegated to an ancillary professional obligation or pushed to "off-work" hours. It is reasonable to expect that front-line social workers, who directly observe the ramifications of welfare reform for their clients, will consider giving little priority to research on this topic or political-policy issues in general (Domanski, 1998).

Given the hectic state of social work practice, the real risk is that practice based research will become under-represented in

the post-welfare reform research literature. If this occurs, many of the trials and tribulations experienced by social work clients as a result of welfare reform could escape scientific scrutiny in favor of research driven by those in power and their ideological base (Powers, Meenaghan, & Toomey, 1985, p. 4).

It is important to note that social workers in academic or research settings, who by lieu of their positions are often one step removed from direct practice, frequently rely on survey research and secondary data analysis to empirically examine social phenomenon like welfare reform. Indeed, quantitative research can be helpful in identifying the characteristics of children affected by welfare reform (Smith and Yeung, 1998) and for determining welfare exit rates using subgroup analysis (Kost and Ersing, 1998). Yet, this kind of research yields limited insight into the daily lives of people encountering welfare reform.

The importance of generating grounded theory by social workers, especially concerning new phenomenon, should not be underestimated. *Grounded theory* is the enterprise of discovering concepts and formulating theory from systematically obtained and analyzed data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). It is common in scientific inquiry, often field research, to find that "one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 23). Welfare reform by definition denotes change and newness. Beyond the innovative rules and language of welfare reform, the lives of public assistance recipients are being altered. Without utopian based grounded theory, it will be difficult for scientists to begin to think about, conceptualize, or catagorize the experiences of public assistance recipients. As welfare reform is implemented, sensitivity is needed to both client hardships and achievements. Qualitative analysis of welfare reform by community and agency based social workers is needed to acquire grounded knowledge and to advance a thorough, more inclusive, conceptualization of needs.

EVALUATING WELFARE REFORM: OUTCOMES

Goals for evaluating program, policy, or legislative effectiveness are often stated in vague or grandiose terms, rendering them

difficult for use in outcome research (Rubin & Babbie, 1997). How would you respond if asked to identify the purpose of welfare and the goals of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996? Idealistically, social workers would hope that welfare programs would enhance the capability of clients to cope with life in ways that are satisfying and promote realization of aspirations (Compton & Galloway, 1975). At a macro-level, and irrespective of their political persuasion or strategy for promoting change, social workers seek welfare reform aimed at the elimination of poverty (Belcher & Fandetti, 1995).

Using Mannheim and the notion of ideology, one would expect the creators of welfare reform to utilize outcome evaluation stressing various accounting criteria: budgetary relief, cost-effective utilization of services, changes in the number of recipients on welfare rolls, and back to work ratios (Kilty & Meenaghan, 1995). Indeed, since the advent of welfare reform, news accounts seem to dwell on shrinking welfare rolls and the ability of states and counties to move welfare recipients into work.

However, if welfare reform is to be held to higher, humanitarian standards such as self actualization and the reduction of poverty, this research will need to be promulgated within and by the social work profession. Be assured, without a social work perspective, economic kinds of measures will render a restricted and distorted picture of the success of welfare reform.

Social workers, inspired by utopian ideals, dedicate their careers to promoting the well being of clients. Before welfare reform, social workers were skeptical and critical of the "safety net" approach for providing services (Ozawa & Lum, 1996). Now that welfare reform has occurred, the fate of disadvantaged families and children is even more uncertain. Social work is unique in that it is client-driven and as such dictates concern for client satisfaction. Thus, while ideological thinking points to employment of welfare recipients as an indicator of success in welfare reform, the more utopian (idealistic) social work perspective introjects interest in the type of jobs available, the prospect for long-term employment, benefit packages, and the size and commitment of companies hiring former welfare recipients.

Most will agree that "An informed public policy requires outcome assessments of programs initiated to resolve key societal

problems" (Gordon and Herson, 1998, p. 1). For social workers, it is the criteria and measuring systems that are set in place by various constituencies to gauge the success of welfare reform that constitutes concern. Decentralization and local control of social services allows states and communities great freedom and provides variability in evaluating the effectiveness of welfare reform.

With few exceptions, the selection of criteria by politicians and researchers in evaluation is inherently linked to the orientation of the actor, ideology or utopia. Consequently, it is essential that "In deriving outcome criteria, one should not be confined to the goals of a program or to its underlying theory [premises]. It is important to be aware of unintended consequences of a program . . . Thus, a wider perspective needs to be brought to bear, perhaps one informed by other theories [perspectives]" (Reid and Smith, 1981, p. 312). A comprehensive view of welfare reform includes assessment from different vantage points, sensitive to both the immediate and durable effects of the law, and emphasizes an unencumbered vision of the present life situations confronting the poor.

Whether through case studies, content analysis, field interviews, life histories, or ethnography, social workers can champion efforts to delineate and document how the lives of welfare recipients have changed as a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. As social workers, "We bear an obligation to know. We have an obligation, to the best of our ability, to know the facts" (Ewalt, 1994, p. 246) and to report the stories that are unfolding across the United States as individuals and families leave welfare. This type of research is known as *action research*, where detailed portraits of human adaptation and strife can be used by social workers as a form of power to challenge the ideological tenets associated with welfare reform (Neuman, 1997, p. 23).

IDENTIFYING UNITS OF ANALYSIS

Researchers not only decide what to study but make choices concerning the level of social life to be placed under scrutiny. Irrespective of the research question, there are multiple units of analysis to consider. These include: individuals, families, groups,

organizations, neighborhoods, cities or towns, counties, nations, and social artifacts—"products of social beings or their behavior" (Rubin and Babbie, 1997, p. 117). It is important in each study that the unit(s) of analysis correspond to the research question(s) under examination.

Welfare reform, like other major social problems, is complex and involves multiple, interrelated systems. The unit of analysis can range from the individual level focusing on changes in personal characteristics of clients (duration on welfare, employment status, marital status, etc.) to examination of community or societal aspects (amount of spending, number of recipients, employment rates, etc.). Given this variability, studies may produce different, at times conflicting, depictions of the effect(s) of welfare reform. This occurs as research projects are often limited in scope and represent small (manageable) components of a larger social phenomenon (Glisson, 1994).

As an example, it is not surprising that quantitative data indicate that family income, on the average, increases substantially as parents move from welfare to part-time and full-time work (The Urban Institute, 1998, p. 3). While these findings are encouraging, this information provides little understanding concerning the plight of families and individuals, predominantly mothers, as they struggle to comply with the complex work requirements imposed by welfare reform. A broader, utopian mentality, embraces labor market, worker satisfaction, benefits, child care, transportation, housing, role conflicts, reliance upon others, family preservation, group support, community commitment, and the involvement of key organizations as important units of analysis to consider as persons move from welfare to work. Unfortunately, those who struggle are often an invisible lot and reliance on quantitative statistics, like family income, can be misleading and reflects a narrow (ideology based) view of the needy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Social workers practicing with the poor are afforded a special position for understanding and documenting the hardships and accomplishments of people experiencing welfare reform. Educated and trained to approach social issues in a client driven

fashion and sensitive to social-environmental determinants of poverty, social workers are uniquely prepared to conduct qualitative analyzes examining welfare reform from a more utopian based outlook.

A major contribution of Mannheim's work is to liberate the social worker from current ideological tenets (e.g. individualism, self-sufficiency, work, traditional family structure, fiscal responsibility, and local control of services) when conducting qualitative research. Social workers need not be bound to the ideological interests of the day when documenting the lives of people encountering welfare reform. The vivid, unencumbered insights of the practitioner can serve to heighten public awareness and correct misconceptions as to the everyday, life consequences of welfare reform.

Social workers can ill afford to be passive as others define and measure the success of The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 . The work of social work calls for us to advance the quality of life of clients (Mendelsohn, 1980). The overriding issue involves how social worker professionals can act, individually and collectively, to promote effective allocation and utilization of resources during an ideological era characterized by social reductionism. To assist practitioners, the following considerations are offered.

1. Challenge Current Ideology and Strive for Utopia

Mannheim emphasizes the importance of social-historical setting and ideology in conceiving constructs and ideas. The decade of the 90's has been characterized by a fiscal, accountability mentality. A major task for social workers is to use action research to actively contest this logic and find ways to move public discourse and the perspective of policymakers beyond a strict monetary approach to life when examining problems and issues confronting the poor.

As an illustration, other than initial savings in spending, it is important to consider the short and long-term ramifications of shrinking county and state public assistance rolls. Forcing people off public assistance does not necessarily result in self-sufficiency nor self-actualization. The disenfranchised, like other Americans, seek sustainable livelihoods characterized by meaningful

employment, medical coverage, and a "family friendly" work environment. Cutting welfare, while ignoring structural availability for gainful employment, can be a disastrous formula. The public should be forewarned that welfare recipients dismissed from assistance without sustainable work are forced, sometimes in desperation, to seek alternative measures to meet their needs.

While citizens may be impressed by a national reduction of over 5 million welfare recipients during the Clinton administration, it is also significant that most of our country's top 100 largest companies still have no plans for welfare-to-work programs (Meckler, 1998). Public sentiment against persons receiving welfare comes from the belief "that moral character of individuals, not inequities in the social and economic structure, is at the root of the problem" (Wilson, 1997, p. 161). Constructive dialogue and debate is needed that questions the various ideological premises underlying the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996 as well as the criteria and units of measurement utilized to appraise it's success.

Haynes and Mickelson (1997) point out that "Regardless of work setting, the practitioner continually encounters unmet needs, social problems, and gaps in or barriers to service. However, recognition of such needs and problems seldom results in collective, public activity by practitioners" (p. 72). Systematic dissemination of information describing unmet needs and gaps in service delivery is crucial for public conversation. Findings from field research and qualitative studies yield insight and are empowering when social workers act to enlighten the public and politicians to a view of the world based on a "grounded" reality.

Vignettes and human interest stories, based on practice experiences and constructed in a fashion to be distributed to media outlets (newspapers, radio, and television), can heighten awareness and prompt action concerning the ramifications of welfare reform. Brawley and Martinez-Brawley (1999) encourage social workers to develop mutually rewarding (working) relationships with representatives from the media for routine dissemination of information and as a means to facilitate advocacy efforts (pp. 74–75). Vignettes and case examples can be important mechanisms for documenting unbeknown types of human achievement and

suffering and powerful tools for informing the public and policy makers.

2. Utilize Social Work Expertise

Social work has a rich tradition of serving people who have relied upon public assistance. Social workers have familiarity and expertise in working with welfare recipients. Yet, using false ideological tenets, many Americans continue to conceptualize and stereotype welfare recipients as a single homogeneous group. Ignored is the variability and diversity that exists among persons labeled as welfare recipients.

Social workers are educated and trained to partition the needs of clients and to identify various population groups at-risk. For example, finding employment will be easier for some welfare recipients than others. Young, pregnant females who have never married and lack education or work experience are many times marginally employable (Bane and Ellwood, 1994). Persons with difficult to diagnose or undifferentiated mental and physical disabilities often suffer a similar fate. What are the consequences of welfare reform for these and other special population groups who struggle with employability? It is important for social workers to identify and describe salient characteristics of various subpopulations that are especially vulnerable and evaluate the consequences of welfare reform for these constituencies.

Agencies, specialized departments in larger organizations, and planning associations structured around well defined client populations may choose to construct their own tools to assess the effects of social change. Here, checklists, observational techniques, and structured interviews are customized to a target population and elicit information to monitor the well-being of clients as welfare reform and managed care influence delivery of service (Resnick and Tighe, 1997). In these instances, summary reports are written for distribution to funding sources and interested constituency groups to highlight the state of predetermined attributes (e.g. health insurance, child care, housing,) and to provide descriptions of changes observed with the client population.

At the community level, The League of Women Voters and other organizations publish information evaluating local politicians, grade cards and narratives, for distribution to newspapers,

television affiliates, and radio stations. Over the years, many citizens have learned to look for these types of news releases depicting the status of political candidates, school systems, and community desirability. In a similar fashion, local social service organizations and/or coalitions can publish yearly report cards and narratives to grade (A through F) and describe the current state of local conditions (infant mortality, prenatal care, and economic support) for the children and families (see, for example, Gregg, 1998).

3. Disseminate Information and Publish Research

The Urban Institute has established a $30 million dollar initiative, the "Assessing New Federalism" project, to monitor the effects of new national policies that shift social responsibility from the federal to the state level (NASW News, 1997). Topics examined include: health care, income security, job training, as well as social services. The Urban Institute's project includes: a household survey, studies of policies in 13 states, and a database with information on all states and the District of Columbia. In addition to quantitative findings, examining factors such as family income and wage rates, The Urban Institute also sponsors forums where experts meet to address the progress of welfare reform (The Urban Institute, 1998, p.1).

An important "watchdog" effort, the "Assessing New Federalism" project represents just one source of information on welfare reform. While social workers should monitor these findings and contribute to the Urban Institute's data base, other forms of printed work and distribution of information are also important to consider.

Formal dissemination of findings through publication in scholarly works (practice based forums, monographs, books, and special editions of journals) is critical. While quantitative studies describing the impact of welfare reform have begun to emerge, qualitative information is needed to document the real life circumstances experienced by the poor. Using pre-welfare reform data, Edin and Lein's (1997) work is a good example of qualitative research aimed at identifying and describing the daily struggles of welfare recipients. Based on 379 semi-structured in-depth interviews, Edin and Lein (1997) offer a beginning look

at survival strategies and the various ways impoverished single mothers attempt to "make ends meet". Generating this type of information from the welfare reform era will be useful for future policy and legislative considerations, and will protect Americans against glib conclusions claiming the success of welfare reform using ideological measures (e.g. number of recipients and amount of spending).

Publication of practice focused research via informal, non-academic pieces is also needed. Newsletters, magazines, and internet web sites provide a plethora of information to both a professional and a general readership. Editors of these types of publications often seek informative materials and human interest stories. Being careful to protect confidentiality, social workers can provide these sources with case examples illustrating both the fortunes and misfortunes that have accompanied welfare reform.

CONCLUSION

Mannheim suggests that when utopia occurs "it is customary to speak of a forerunner" or pioneers that prompt new views (1936, p. 206). Taking a leadership role in evaluating welfare reform is consistent with social work's long-standing commitment to social and economic justice for the poor and oppressed. In a time that places increasing value on billable hours of service, it is particularly important that the profession strives to move beyond the roles of counselor and psycho-social therapist (Glisson, 1994). It is a responsibility for social workers to apply a broader, visionary view for analyzing the impact of social legislation on societal problems and to seek ways for disseminating practice focused findings to other professionals, policy makers, and the public.

Life on AFDC and welfare for clients, as many remember, provided only rock-bottom support for basic needs (Gross, 1997). Few would argue that change was not needed. However, the extent to which states and local municipalities provide for the needs of the poor and promote human dignity as a result of welfare reform is yet to be determined. Placing political persuasion aside, "the least we owe the consumers of our services is to find ways

to make the new reforms work for them" (Gross, 1997, p. 133) while documenting both the accomplishments and misfortunes experienced as a result of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

REFERENCES

Bane, M. J. & Ellwood, D. T. (1994). *Welfare Realities: From Rhetoric to Reform.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Belcher, J. R. & Fandett, D. V. (1995). Welfare entitlements: Addressing the new realities. *Social Work,* 40(4), 515–521.

Blank, R. M. (1996). Policy watch: The 1996 welfare reform. [On-line] http://www.library. nwu.Edu/publications/nupr/blank2.html, 1-30-98, 1–7.

Brawley, E. A. & Martinez-Brawley, E. E. (1999). Promoting social justice in partnership with the mass media. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare,* 16(2), 63–86.

Compton, B.R. & Galaway, B. (1975). *Social Work Processes.* Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press.

Domanski, M. D. (1998). Prototypes of social work political participation: An empirical model. *Social Work,* 43(2), 156–167.

Edin, K. & Lein, L. (1997). *Making Ends Meet.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Ewalt, P. L. (1994). On not knowing. *Social Work,* 39(3), 245–246.

Garvin, C. D. & Tropman, J.E. (1992). *Social Work in Contemporary Society.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory.* Chicago: Aldine.

Glisson, C. A. (1994). Should social work take greater leadership in research on total systems of service? Yes. In W. Hudson & P Nurius (Eds.), *Controversial Issues in Social Work Research.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Gordon, A. R. & Herson, R. J. L. (1998). A methodology for a common measure of welfare program. Executive Summary [On-line], http://wdhfs.state.wy.us/~sross/p45.HTm, 4-14-98, 1–4.

Gregg, B. G. (1998, February 1). Despite efforts, children's plight virtually unchanged. *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* pp. A1, A14, & A15.

Gross, E. (1997). Is there life after welfare? *Areta,* 12(2), 133–135.

Haynes, K. S. & Mickelson, J. S. (1997). *Affecting Change: Social Workers in the Political Arena.* New York: Longman.

Kilty, K. M. & Meenaghan, T. M. (1995). Social work and the convergence of politics and science. *Social Work,* 40(4), 445–453.

Kilty, K. M., Richardson, V. E., & Segal, E. A. (1997). A legislative update. *Journal of Poverty,* 1(2), 1–4.

Kost, K. & Ersing, R. (1998). Note on research: Options and obstacles of county-level data in planning and monitoring welfare reform. *Social Service Review,* 72(3), 402–420.

Long, D. & Holle, M. (1997). *Macro Systems in the Social Environment.* Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.

Mandelbaum, M. (1938). *The Problem of Historical Knowledge.* New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Mannheim, K. (1952). *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul LTD.

Mannheim, K. (1936). *Ideology and Utopia.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc.

Meckler, L. (1998, May 26). Welfare-to-work increases most companies still not hiring former recipients. *The Cincinnati Enquirer,* p. A5.

Mendelsohn, A. R. (1980). *The Work of Social Work.* New York: New Viewpoints.

Meyer, C. (1994). *Assessment in Social Work Practice.* New York: Columbia University Press.

National Association of Social Workers (1997). Project will watchdog welfare law. *NASW News,* 42(4), 5.

Neuman, W. L. (1997). *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Ozawa, M. N. & Lum, Y. (1996). How safe is the safety net for poor children? *Social Work Research,* 20(4), 238–254.

Piotrkowski, C. S. & Lessler-Sklar, S. (1996). Welfare reform and access to family-supportive benefits in the workplace. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 66(4), 538–547.

Poole, D. L. (1996). Welfare reform: The bad, the ugly, and the maybe not too awful. *Health and Social Work,* 21(4), 243–246.

Powers, G. T., Meenaghan, T. M., & Toomey, B. G. (1985). *Practice Focused Research: Integrating Human Service Practice and Research.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Reid, P. & Billups, J. (1986). Distributional ethics and social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education,* 22 (1), 6–17.

Reid, W. J. & Smith, A. D. (1981). *Research in Social Work.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Resnick, C. & Tighe, E. G. (1997). The role of multidiscplinary community clinics in managed care systems. *Social Work,* 42(1), 91–98.

Rubin, A. & Babbie, E. (1997). *Research Methods for Social Work.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.

Schutt, R. K. (1996). *Investigating the Social World.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Smith, P. K. & Yeung, W. J. (1998). Childhood Welfare receipt and the implications of welfare reform. *Social Service Review,* 72(1), 1–16.

The Urban Institute (1998). Does work pay? An analysis of the work incentives under TANF. [on-line], http://newfederalism.urban.org/html/occa9.html, 11-5-98, 1–34.

Wilson, W. J. (1997). *When Work Disappears.* New York: Alfred. A. Knopf.