

Examining the Impact of the Family Violence Option on Women's Efforts to Leave Welfare

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Objective: The establishment of the Family Violence Option (FVO) in 1997 was met with some controversy, as critics believed waivers from time limit and work requirements would hinder women's ability to leave welfare and find employment. Method: Using administrative and interview data from Maryland, multivariate equations analyze if domestic violence disclosure, administrative documentation, or waiver use had a statistically significant affect on one year employment and welfare use outcomes of individuals. Results: Waiver holders did not differ from nonvictims, but victims who are not documented received fewer months of welfare and earned less income. Conclusions: Findings do not indicate that FVO waivers encourage women to stay on welfare longer. However, the poor outcomes of undocumented victims indicate that some individuals may be slipping through the cracks of a well-intentioned policy.

Keywords: domestic violence; Family Violence Option; welfare receipt; employment

In 1997, while reforming federal welfare programs, the U.S. Congress established the Family Violence Option (FVO) to prevent reforms from adversely affecting those welfare recipients who are domestic violence victims. The FVO requires states that choose to adopt the option to screen and identify abuse victims, make service referrals, and offer waivers from program requirements that may unfairly penalize or endanger current or former victims of abuse. This research investigated if known domestic violence victims, and in particular those who received an FVO waiver, remained on the welfare rolls longer and worked less than other welfare recipients, as many critics speculated.

The purpose of the research was to assess what difference the FVO, in practice, has made on women's ability to leave welfare and find employment. The major research question investigated whether an experience of violence or, more specifically, one's classification as a waiver user, waiver nonuser, or narrative discloser affected individual

self-sufficiency as reflected by participation in cash assistance programs and securing employment. In other words, controlling for a number of individual, agency, and community characteristics, did the welfare or employment outcomes of domestic violence victims, including those who held an FVO waiver, differ from those of other welfare recipients?

BACKGROUND

Theoretical approaches and anecdotal accounts suggest that domestic violence is a substantial barrier for many welfare recipients in achieving self-sufficiency. Sociologists and psychologists, in particular, have offered extensive studies showing that battered women face a multitude of barriers in escaping the violence in their lives and gaining economic independence (Kantor & Jasinski, 1998; Pagelow, 1981; Walker, 1979). Lacking financial resources or the control of those resources, abused women are often faced with the dilemma of choosing violence or poverty (Davis, 1999; Raphael, 1996). Although it is commonly accepted that escaping domestic violence often forces women into poverty, lesser known are the reasons why these experiences perpetuate poverty even after an escape, or prevent women from leaving welfare and entering work.

In addition to the time and energy needed to resolve legal matters related to orders of protection, divorce, and child custody, research in psychology and family studies has determined other direct and indirect consequences of intimate partner abuse that complicate the process of

Authors' Note: A previous version of this article was presented at the 8th Annual Society for Social Work and Research Conference on January 16, 2004. An expanded version of this study was also presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Maryland, College Park, in July 2002 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The dissertation was completed by Andrea Hetling under the direction of William A. Galston, School of Public Affairs, University of Maryland, College Park. The research was supported by funding from the Maryland Department of Human Resources. Correspondence may be addressed to Andrea Hetling, PhD, Family Welfare Research and Training Group, School of Social Work, University of Maryland, 525 West Redwood Street Baltimore, Maryland 21201; e-mail: ahetling@ssw.umaryland.edu.

Research on Social Work Practice, Vol. 15 No. 3, May 2005 143-153

DOI: 10.1177/1049731504272908

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achieving independence. Abuse may harm physical or mental health, and severe beatings can cause injuries that necessitate immediate medical attention (Straus, 1986). Additionally, mental health problems, most notably posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), may cause difficulties that interfere with work and training efforts (Brush, 2000). Difficulties may include an inability to leave the house, to consider the future, to concentrate or to learn new tasks, and to have social interactions (Murphy, 1997). Even when women are physically and mentally able to participate in either training or work, narrative evidence suggests that many abusive partners and former partners are threatened by these actions and attempt, often successfully, to sabotage these efforts (Brandwein, 2000; Raphael, 2000).

As a result of the effect of abuse on both health and work, many formerly battered women lack the necessary education or work experience to find adequate employment. Women who have recovered from injuries and have completely broken free from their abusers, those who have settled legal matters, and those who are safe from further violence may continue to have a difficult time achieving self-sufficiency because of paltry work histories and lack of education and training (Raphael & Tolman, 1997; Shepard & Pence, 1988).

Also of consequence for welfare programs is how common experiences of domestic violence are among recipients. Empirical research shows a high rate of domestic violence incidence among cash assistance recipients (e.g., Tolman & Raphael, 2000). Surveys demonstrate that between 20% and 65% of women on welfare are current or past victims of domestic violence (Allard, Albelda, Colten, & Cosenza, 1997; Browne & Bassuk, 1997; Curcio, 1997; Raphael, 1996). The rate is especially stark in comparison with the general population whose reported prevalence rates are 1.5% for abuse within the past 12 months and 24.8% for lifetime domestic violence occurrences (Tjaden & Thoennes, 1998).

If it is the case that the populations of domestic violence victims and welfare recipients significantly overlap and that the barriers created by domestic violence are substantial, then for welfare reforms to succeed, these programs should be designed to meet the unique needs of this group of women. It is with these theories in mind that the FVO was included in the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The FVO, a voluntary state level option in the legislation, obligates states to screen for domestic violence victims, requires them to offer services and referrals to local battered women's organizations, and permits states to exempt battered

women from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program requirements (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 1996).

Critics of the FVO claimed that FVO waivers take away incentives to become self-sufficient, leading waiver holders to stay on welfare longer and forgo opportunities to gain employment experience. Moreover, the language may be too broad and could allow for very minimal reasons to be accepted as exemptions from working or encourage false claims of domestic violence (Satel, 1998). Last, critics claim that the FVO is unnecessary because in cases of severe violence, the law, without the option, provides enough leeway to include those cases as hardship exemptions (Satel, 1998).

Reality, however, has not borne out either the large prevalence numbers put forth by proponents or the number of false claims feared by critics. Studies based on welfare program administrative data indicate that very few women, approximately 1% of the active caseload, disclose domestic violence to their caseworkers and even fewer have opted for FVO waivers (Lennett, 1997; Raphael & Haennicke, 1999). There is a discrepancy between the prevalence of domestic violence among welfare recipients based on disclosures to researchers and domestic violence advocates, with conservatively one in every four women estimated to be experiencing abuse, and the rate at which the FVO is used, with about one in every hundred women receiving services, and this discrepancy has led to concerns. Questions regarding the appropriateness of the legislation itself as well as the variety of ways it is being implemented locally are spurring research evaluating the policy and its screening and service delivery practices (Angelari, 1998; Burt, Zweig, & Schlichter, 2000; Raphael & Haennick, 1999). In addition to this research, an understanding of the characteristics and outcomes of the women who have used the FVO is critical in deciphering who the policy is reaching and what effect it is having.

Because of mostly data restrictions and confidentiality concerns, very few researchers have been able to examine the demographic characteristics or outcomes of women who disclose and receive services or waivers under the FVO. Research based on women identified through surveys have examined the welfare outcomes of domestic violence victims and indicate that women who have experienced recent abuse have poorer employment experiences (Tolman & Rosen, 2001). However, comparable work on women who have disclosed to welfare caseworkers and thus are recipients of FVO services is not yet available.

The presented research evaluated the effect of the FVO on self-sufficiency outcomes using measures of employment and welfare use of FVO waiver recipients, other known domestic violence victims, and nonvictims. Based on findings from violence research showing that abused and formerly abused women may have difficulty in rapidly attaining financial self-sufficiency, we hypothesized that all domestic violence victims would have poorer welfare and employment outcomes than other welfare recipients. Considering the leeway offered FVO waiver recipients under the law, we hypothesized that these women may fare even worse than victims who did not hold a waiver especially considering that they may be in a more severe or recent relationship to have qualified for a waiver.

METHOD

Using Maryland state administrative data for March 1998 to June 2001 and interview data collected from welfare personnel, individual-level outcomes related to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participation and employment were examined for four groups: (a) domestic violence victims who were administratively marked and held FVO waivers, (b) victims who were administratively marked but did not hold waivers, (c) victims who were not administratively marked but whose case narratives indicated abuse, and (d) TANF recipients with no indication of abuse.

Sample

Three domestic violence victim samples and one nonvictim sample were identified as the analytic groups of interest using the official Maryland state automated administrative data system, the Client Information System (CIS), for cash assistance program participation. All four groups were comprised of households headed by women receiving TANF in Maryland for one or more months between March 1998 and June 2000. Each household included an adult female payee or casehead in whose name the benefits were paid as well as children and other adults in the household, most of whom were included in the TANF grant. March 1998 was chosen as the beginning date for the sample because conversion to a new administrative data system was completed during that month and the previous system did not record any information on domestic violence.

First, the universe of Maryland welfare recipients who were administratively marked as domestic violence

victims between March 1998 and June 2000 were identified ($n = 554$). Administrative markers include: a yes or no field for domestic violence, a shelter field with a value indicating that the individual was living in a domestic violence shelter, and three program exemption fields with values indicating that the exemption reason was domestic violence. Women with at least one administrative marker were then divided into two groups: waiver holders ($n = 261$, exempt from at least one of the three program requirements—time limits, work requirements, or child support requirements—with or without the other administrative fields marked) and waiver nonholders ($n = 293$, those with only a domestic violence mark or domestic violence shelter value).

Second, a 5% random, proportionately stratified sample ($n = 3,781$) of all other welfare recipients from the same time period was drawn, ensuring a representative sample of seven regions of Maryland, the six regions defined by the Maryland Department of Planning, and Baltimore City, which was treated as a separate region because of its size. Individual case narratives were read and coded to identify abuse within this sample. Case narratives are typed notes entered by the welfare caseworker. In the automated system, caseworkers can access a free form space in which they can annotate an ongoing narrative on each welfare case and their interactions with caseheads. Cases with narrative indication of abuse were flagged and comprise the third victim sample ($n = 184$) and are referred to as narrative disclosers. For comparison purposes, all other cases in the random sample were kept as a fourth analytic group. Although members of the comparison group were not marked in either the administrative system or in their case narratives as having disclosed domestic violence and are referred to as nonvictims in the article, it is important to recognize the possibility that they did experience domestic violence but decided not to disclose the experience or that their caseworker did not take note of it. Table 1 presents the description and size of the four samples, which, together, constitute a total study sample of 4,335 cases.

Statistical Models and Outcome Variables

Multiple regression statistical models explored 1-year postdisclosure outcomes and were designed to explain employment and welfare use during the 1-year follow-up period. Specifically, the models were constructed to examine if being identified as a domestic violence victim can explain variation in the achievement of economic self-sufficiency and were analyzed using Stata 7.0. The models were based on the following equation:

TABLE 1: Description of the Four Samples

Group	Definition	Type	Size (n)	Percentage of Active Caseload
Waiver holders	Victims who are administratively marked and hold waivers	Universe	261	0.31
Waiver nonholders	Victims who are administratively marked and do not hold waivers	Universe	293	0.35
Narrative disclosers	Victims who are not administratively marked as victims but whose narratives indicate violence	Sample	184	Represents 5.12
Nonvictims	Welfare recipients with no indication of domestic violence	Sample	3,597	Represents entire caseload

$$\text{Outcome} = \alpha + \beta_{\text{Waiver}} + \beta_{\text{Nonwaiver}} + \beta_{\text{Narrative Disclosure}} + \beta X_{\text{Dem}} + \beta X_{\text{Agency}} + \beta X_{\text{Juris}} + \varepsilon.$$

Waiver, nonwaiver, and narrative disclosure variables represent the inclusion of the three domestic violence victim groups in the model. The nonvictim group served as the control or reference group and was thus not included in the model. The effect of an FVO waiver, administrative documentation, and domestic violence disclosure is explained in comparison to the outcomes of sample members in the nonvictim group. The results as discussed in the text and presented in the tables reflect this design. The matrices of demographic, agency, and jurisdictional variables were included in the model as important independent variables that likely influence the outcome variables and are discussed in more detail later on in this section. The statistical significance and effect size of these variables are not discussed in the results section or in the corresponding table, however, but noted simply as controls because they are not central to the research question or hypotheses.

Variations of the model were used to explain follow-up cash assistance program participation and employment experiences. Three measures of cash assistance use were constructed using the CIS database. First, the months of receipt variable captures the total number of months of benefit receipt in the 12 months following the study month and ranges from 0 to 12. Mean months of receipt for the entire sample is 7.34 months. After a number of tests, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used in this analysis. Initially, a skewness-kurtosis test of the variable indicated nonnormality. A number of transformations (e.g., log, exponent, reciprocal) were attempted to yield a more normal distribution, but none were successful. Thus, an ordinal logit model was used to test the robustness of the model. Given the similar results of the model, the use of OLS regression models to explain the number of follow-up months of TANF was deemed sufficient. The raw coefficients are straightforward in this case and are interpreted as a one unit change in the

independent variable leads to an x unit change in the outcome or dependent variable.

Second, exit is a dichotomous variable measuring the proportion of families that experienced a consecutive 60-day or longer exit from TANF during the follow-up period. Approximately half, 55.02%, of the entire sample experienced such an exit during the follow-up year. Third, among exiters, the recidivism variable indicates whether the individual returned to TANF during the 1-year follow-up period. Among all exiters, 10.19% experienced a return within the year. A probit model was used to examine these two dichotomous variables; the marginal effect of the variable is presented in addition to the raw coefficient for ease of interpretation. The marginal effect is interpreted as a percentage point increase or decrease in the outcome variable. Specifically, each additional unit increase of the predictive variables leads to an x percentage point increase or decrease in the outcome variable.

Turning to employment experiences, data were gathered from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS), the official state database of employment covered by Unemployment Insurance (UI). Again, three measures were analyzed. First, quarters worked is a count of the number of quarters an individual worked in a UI-covered job in Maryland during the four calendar quarter period following the quarter containing the study or focal date. In other words, it measures the number of quarters worked during a 1-year period, which begins with the calendar quarter immediately following (and not including) the study date. The range of values is 0 to 4, and the mean number of quarters worked for the entire sample is 1.64. Second, the number of employers ranges from 0 for individuals who did not work during the 1-year follow-up period to a maximum of 12 employers in a UI-covered job in Maryland. The average number of employers for the entire sample was 1.16 employers during the year following the study date quarter. Both variables, quarters worked and number of employers, were analyzed using the ordinal logit technique, commonly

used in modeling categorical dependent variables. The results of this type of model are similar to the probit model in that the raw coefficient is not sufficient in presenting a logical interpretation of the effect of the variables. In this case, the log odds results are presented in brackets to facilitate interpretation. In these models, the effect is interpreted as the odds of having more units of the outcome variable are $x\%$ larger or smaller for each additional unit of the predictor variable.

Third, the range of the annual earnings variable is from \$0 for individuals not employed during the follow-up year to \$73,679.94. The mean or average annual earnings during the follow-up year is \$4,269.47. *Earnings* is a continuous variable, but it is not logged as is conventionally done with earnings. Although it is common practice, because of a skewed distribution, to log annual earnings for the general population, this correction was not helpful here. The distribution of earnings for the four samples more closely approximates a normal distribution than the distribution for the general population. As the samples consist of welfare recipients, it makes sense that it is unlikely to find individuals earning sufficiently large amounts as to skew the distribution as drastically as in the case for the general population. The measure is analyzed using OLS.

Predictor Variables

Predictor variables fall into three categories: individual characteristics, agency characteristics, and community indicators.

Individual characteristics. Three state-automated administrative data systems were used to gather individual demographic, cash assistance program, and employment data. These were: CIS; the Automated Information Management System/Automated Master File; and the MABS. Measures of individual demographic characteristics included in the model were age, race, marital status, language, citizenship, disability, pregnancy, age at first birth, number of children, age of youngest child, child-only case, and two adult case. Previous studies have also shown that TANF and employment history are important indicators of the likelihood of exiting or returning to welfare; thus, individual measures of the months of TANF receipt out of the previous 60 and previous 12 months, the number of quarters employed during lifetime and in the past year, number of employers during past year, and earnings during past year were included in the models.

Agency characteristics. A series of telephone interviews was conducted with local department of social services personnel in each of the 24 jurisdictions, the 23 counties and the independent, and incorporated city of Baltimore to obtain specific information on how the FVO has been implemented and what effect they perceive it has had. The interviews were semistructured and had questions in seven main topic areas: (a) background and staffing, (b) trainings, (c) screening and disclosures, (d) waivers, (e) referrals and relationships with other agencies, (f) miscellaneous issues (including data entry and confidentiality), and (g) opinion questions.

Where possible, questions were coded as quantitative variables, usually dichotomous measures, and individual sample members were then coded as having visited an agency with the specific characteristic. The variables hypothesized to influence self-sufficiency outcomes, either directly or indirectly, included measures of an individual's experience with an agency's FVO personnel, training, screening, and waiver policy. The first variable measures whether the sample member visited an office with an in-house FVO expert. The second variable reflects the type of organization that conducted the domestic violence training at the individual's agency (local organization vs. state personnel or no training). Third, screening methods were also deemed potentially important. Thus, the next four variables are the type of staff who conducted the screening (team led vs. an individual screener), the screening tools (state-designed questions vs. locally designed ones), when the client was informed of FVO waivers (before vs. after disclosing abuse), and whether written material was distributed. Last, two measures of waiver practice, specifically who granted the waivers (individuals vs. consultations and teams) and whether waivers were granted automatically, were included.

Community indicators. To control for important socioeconomic community characteristics of sample members' place of residence, data on Maryland's 24 jurisdictions were compiled from a variety of sources. Data on sociodemographic and economic variables were gathered from the Maryland Departments of Planning; Human Resources; Labor, Licensing, and Regulation; and Health and Mental Hygiene; the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis; and the Uniform Crime Report of the U.S. Department of Justice. These data contained information on housing, crime, vital statistics, and human capital.

Because of the large number of variables and the extent of multicollinearity among them, the creation of more succinct and manageable meta-indicators was deemed

necessary (Hetling-Wernyj & Born, 2002). Based on the results of correlation analyses, two meta-indicators (sociodemographic risk and economic risk, composed of the sociodemographic and economic variables respectively), were constructed. In terms of the sociodemographic meta-indicator, infant mortality rate, proportion of the population more than age 25 with a bachelor's degree, high school dropout rate, percentage of female-headed households, and three crime rates (murder, robbery, and breaking and entering) were taken into account. For the economic meta-indicator, both macroeconomic opportunity (i.e., the variables of unemployment rate, poverty rate, and job growth rate between 1994 and 1999) and personal economic well-being (i.e., average weekly wages, median household income, average per capita income, cost of living index, and fair market rent) were considered. The measures were used to assign each jurisdiction to one of three overall risk categories (high, medium, or low). If a jurisdiction fell in the worst third of values on the majority of the variables (e.g., top third for unemployment rate, bottom third for median household income), it was classified as high risk. Likewise, jurisdictions in the best third were assigned to the low risk category, whereas those with the majority of values around the state mean or median or with mixed values were assigned to the medium risk category.

Using these two measures, a metarisk indicator was then created. Jurisdictions with at least one low ranking, and no high rankings in either the economic or sociodemographic meta-indicators were designated low risk. The second category, neutral risk, includes counties with both medium economic and medium sociodemographic risk indicators. Finally, jurisdictions with at least one meta-indicator in the high risk ranking and neither in the low risk ranking were grouped into the high risk category. Individual sample members were then coded as having resided in a low, medium, or high risk county.

County-level data on community resources related to domestic violence were gathered from a variety of domestic violence hotline data and information clearing houses. These domestic violence community service variables were analyzed and used to create a domestic violence service indicator. A four-tiered categorization was created based on whether a domestic violence service provider existed in that jurisdiction, the number of shelter beds per 1,000 residents in the county or region if no provider existed in that county, and the number of domestic violence arrests per 1,000 residents. Jurisdictions with an in-county agency, more than 0.1 shelter beds per 1,000 residents, and more than 4.0 arrests per 1,000 residents were classified as having a very high level of domestic

violence services. Jurisdictions meeting two of these three criteria were considered to have a high level of services. Medium level jurisdictions exceeded the cut-off value on only one criterion, and low level ones met none of them. Individual sample members were then coded as having resided in a county with a very high, high, medium, or low level of domestic violence services.

RESULTS

Table 2 contains the results from six models addressing various aspects of self-sufficiency of the sample members one year after the study date. Columns 1 to 3 present results on three measures of welfare dependency: months of TANF receipt, exits, and recidivism. Three measures of employment status—the number of quarters worked, earnings for the poststudy date year, and the number of employers an individual had—are presented in columns 4 to 6.

Cash Assistance Program Participation

Measures of participation in Maryland's TANF program comprise the first three models of outcomes in the follow-up period. Specifically, months of TANF receipt and whether an individual exited welfare were explored for all individuals. Recidivism was also investigated for those individuals who experienced a 60-day exit during the follow-up period. These three measures together provide a thorough picture of welfare dependence during the year following disclosure.

Months of cash assistance receipt. Column 1 in Table 2 contains results from an OLS model exploring the factors associated with the number of months of TANF receipt during the follow-up period. Controlling for other individual and macrolevel factors, waiver holders received 2.11 fewer months of TANF than nonvictims, but this difference is not statistically significant. In contrast, waiver nonholders and narrative disclosers received more than eight fewer months of TANF than nonvictims, and these differences are statistically significant. Although waiver holders are the only group of domestic violence victims not to receive statistically less cash assistance in the follow-up period, they also do not receive more months than nonvictims. Thus, one can conclude that, even after controlling for a number of background characteristics, the receipt of a waiver did not increase the probability that a welfare recipient remained on welfare longer than a nonvictim.

TABLE 2: Individual Self-sufficiency Outcomes

Variable	Cash Participation Models						Employment Models									
	Months of TANF Receipt (1)		Exit (2)		Recidivist (3)		Quarters Worked (4)		Number of Employers (5)		Annual Earnings (6)					
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Marginal Effect	Coefficient	SE	Marginal Effect	Coefficient	SE	% Change	Coefficient	SE			
Waiver holders	-0.211	0.286	-0.012	0.091	-0.005	0.284	0.147	0.051	-0.234	0.135	-20.9	-0.074	0.150	-7.1	-91.06	382.30
Waiver nonholders	-0.823***	0.281	0.027	0.091	0.011	0.380**	0.142	0.071	-0.035	0.132	-3.4	0.061	0.146	6.3	599.16	415.45
Narrative disclosers	-0.895**	0.330	-0.009	0.104	-0.003	-0.040	0.181	-0.006	-0.051	0.141	-5.0	0.230	0.158	25.9	-794.19*	406.64
Demographic controls	Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes		Yes	
TANF and employment history controls	Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes		Yes	
Agency FVO controls	Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes		Yes	
Jurisdictional controls	Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes		Yes	
Baltimore City control	Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes			Yes		Yes	
Log likelihood				-2761.6			-722.4			-5743.2			-5690.1			
Pseudo R ²				0.074			0.080			0.114			0.105			
Sample size	0.123	4,335		4,335			2,385			4,335			4,335		0.468	4,335

NOTE: TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; FVO = Family Violence Option. The models in columns 1 and 6 are ordinary least squares regression models; those in columns 2 and 3 are probit models. The models in columns 4 and 5 are ordinal logit models. All standard errors have been corrected for heteroskedasticity. Dependent variables are outcome measures for the 1-year follow-up period. Controls include variables measuring demographic characteristics (age, race, marital status, language, citizenship, disability, pregnancy, age at first birth, number of children, age of youngest child, child-only case, and two adult case), TANF and employment history (months of TANF receipt out of previous 60 and previous 12 months, number of quarters employed during lifetime and in the past year, number of employers during past year, and earnings during past year), agency FVO implementation (local domestic violence provider training, team-led screenings, Maryland Department of Human Resources—designed questions, waivers granted before disclosure, general DV info distributed, waivers granted without consultation, and waivers granted automatically), jurisdictional characteristics (average monthly caseload per 1000 residents, population size in the thousands, risk metaindicator, and domestic violence service indicator), and a control for residence in Baltimore.

*p > .05. **p > .01. ***p > .001.

Exits. A probit model was constructed to estimate the effect of domestic violence and waivers on TANF exits and to hold other individual and macro level variables constant. These results are presented in column 2 of Table 2. The effect of receiving a waiver, not receiving a waiver but being administratively marked, and disclosing domestic violence but not receiving a waiver or being administratively marked was very small and statistically not significant. Waiver holders were 0.5 percentage points less likely to experience a 60-day exit during the follow-up period. Waiver nonholders were 9.1 percentage points more likely to experience an exit. And, narrative disclosers were 0.3 percentage points less likely to exit than nonvictims. Again, none of these differences were statistically significant.

Recidivism. The last model of Table 2, presented in column 3, is a probit model that explored the effect of domestic violence on recidivism among exiters. Among TANF exiters, neither waiver recipients nor narrative disclosers had a statistically significant increase or decrease in their likelihood to recidivate. Waiver nonholders, on the other hand, had a 7.1 percentage point increase in their likelihood to recidivate as compared to nonvictims.

Employment Experiences

The set of outcomes is presented in columns 4 to 6 of Table 2. These multivariate models examine the effect of domestic violence classification on employment while controlling for the individual, agency, and jurisdictional variables included in the models described previously.

Quarters employed. The most obvious measure of employment, and most fundamental employment factor to influence self-sufficiency, is employment status, or in other words, whether an individual was employed. Column 4 of Table 2 contains the results of an ordinal logit model with quarters worked during the 1-year, or four-quarter, follow-up period as the dependent variable. Examining these results, all domestic violence victims worked fewer follow-up quarters than nonvictims did, but none of these differences were statistically significant. Specifically, the odds of having worked more quarters were 20.9% smaller for waiver holders than nonvictims, but only 3.4% smaller for waiver nonholders and 5.0% smaller for narrative disclosers than nonvictims.

Number of employers. The number of employers during the follow-up period is the dependent variable of the

ordinal logit model presented in column 5. The model included both individuals who worked during the follow-up period and those who did not. Thus, the dependent variable included 0 for those who did not have a job and goes up to 12 employers on the high end of the range. In this model, waiver holders were more likely to have a slightly smaller number of employers as compared to nonvictims, but this was not statistically significant and was probably accounted for by this group's smaller likelihood of working at all. Both waiver nonholders and narrative disclosers had a slightly greater likelihood of having a larger number of employers. None of these differences, however, were statistically significant.

Average quarterly earnings. Results from an OLS regression modeling annual earnings are presented in column 6 of Table 2. In this model, narrative disclosers, on average, made \$794.19 less than nonvictims did, and this difference, as opposed to the results of the other two employment models, was statistically significant. In light of the nonsignificant findings in the quarters worked model and the number of employers model, this result is especially interesting. Although narrative disclosers were not significantly more likely to work less or to have fewer employers, they did make significantly less money according to these data. Waiver holders made slightly less (\$91.06) than nonvictims, and waiver nonholders made more (\$599.16) than nonvictims. However, neither of these two differences was statistically significant.

DISCUSSION AND APPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

The multivariate models show that, after controlling for important individual and macrolevel variables, differences between domestic violence victims and nonvictims were rarely statistically significant. The lack of difference between the groups may be attributed to two factors. First, the possibility that victims were included in the nonvictim group is strong and discussed further as a study limitation. Second, domestic violence is not the only barrier faced by welfare recipients; substance abuse, learning disabilities, and mental health issues, to name just a few, may also affect a woman's ability to become self-sufficient.

Given these possible explanations for the lack of statistical significance on many measures, the differences that are statistically significant become more interesting and deserve consideration. In terms of employment outcomes, only the annual earnings model showed a

difference between nonvictims and any of the three victim groups. In this model, narrative disclosers earned significantly less in the 1-year follow-up period. Turning to cash assistance participation outcomes, although all victims received fewer months of assistance during the follow-up period, this difference was statistically significant only for waiver nonholders and narrative disclosers. Considering intergroup differences, it seems as if the outcomes of waiver holders do not differ at all from nonvictims. Similarly, waiver nonholders differ very little with slightly fewer months of TANF receipt in the follow-up period but a higher likelihood of returning to welfare after exiting. However, the outcomes of narrative disclosers seem worse than those of nonvictims in that they are both statistically more likely to earn less and to receive fewer months of TANF in the follow-up year.

Admittedly, these analyses would have benefited from the inclusion of perspectives from the victims themselves and from frontline caseworkers. However, based on the breadth of administrative data available and the time, effort, and skill necessary to analyze these data well, the process of also conducting extensive personal interviews or focus groups with either victims or frontline welfare workers was deemed unfeasible. The decision to not collect data from the victims and caseworkers limits the ability of these analyses to consider fully the complexity of individual trajectories, decision making, and discretion. It also contributed to the possibility of our inclusion of domestic violence victims in the nonvictim group. Because it is likely that a number of women chose not to disclose abuse to their caseworker, these women would have been mistakenly, but unavoidably, categorized as nonvictims. Thus, our analyses are limited to understanding the outcomes of known, and not all, domestic violence victims. A second data limitation relates to the employment data used in the study. Because employment data come from the MABS and do not include under-the-table employment, self-employed individuals, and employment in other states or the federal government, the figures presented likely underestimate slightly the true labor force participation of the sample.

A final study limitation concerns difficulties with selection bias. Selection bias occurs when it is not the policy but rather the characteristics of the individuals who choose or are assigned to the treatment that are affecting outcomes. Unfortunately, experiments with matched pairs and implementation of instrumental variables estimation were determined to be unfeasible alternatives to test the robustness of the findings. Although the original research plan included such models, the available information from individual and macrolevel data made the use

of these methods impractical. Specifically, the difficulty in locating suitable instruments for domestic violence and waiver use prohibited the development of this type of model. Likewise, significantly different demographic characteristics made matched pairs extremely difficult. Although the absence of these alternative models is a limitation of the study, it does not compromise the importance of the analyses as a whole. The purpose of the research was to explain the particular experiences of the four samples and assess the effect of the FVO thus far, not to predict the outcomes of other and future recipients. In this respect, the data and analyses used are appropriate and sufficient and also leave open the door to other researchers interested in these questions.

Even considering the study limitations, the findings presented here certainly do not indicate that abuse of FVO waivers has been occurring or that the FVO has encouraged women to stay on welfare longer and not address the issue of self-sufficiency. However, whereas waiver use does not seem to have negative consequences in terms of self-sufficiency outcomes, the outcomes of victims who are administratively marked but do not use waivers are very similar. Although low disclosure and documentation rates may be troubling, a low waiver use rate may be more indicative of the number of victims who need or accept waivers than of an unwillingness to grant them. In some circumstances, waivers may not have been the appropriate service for some victims. As these women are marked in the administrative system, it is likely that they were told of the FVO and received domestic violence services other than an FVO waiver.

Of more concern than the low waiver usage rate are the poor outcomes of victims who are not administratively marked in terms of lower earnings and fewer months of TANF receipt. This combination of fewer earnings and less assistance points to disturbing prospects for those domestic violence victims whose experiences are not administratively documented. Perhaps when caseworkers do not administratively mark victims of abuse, the workers are also less likely to take the abuse seriously and offer help in these circumstances. Conversely, research has shown that the process of leaving abusive situations is often iterative (Choice & Lamke, 1997). Perhaps these women are not yet ready to fully accept help in dealing with the violence and choose to return to their abusers instead. It is unlikely that only narrative disclosers and not other domestic violence victims were more likely to be in this situation.

Because the outcomes of administratively marked victims seem positive, it is strongly recommended that the FVO should remain as part of the welfare legislation. The

FVO has potential as an important tool for identifying and serving domestic violence victims on welfare. The better outcomes of administratively marked victims (both waiver holders and nonholders) in comparison to narrative disclosers seem to point to a positive effect of identification and documentation on service provision and assistance.

The outcomes of victims who are not administratively marked, however, indicate that some individuals may be slipping through the cracks of a well-intentioned policy. This finding suggests that caseworkers must be more diligent in recognizing and recording domestic violence and that their ability to do so can increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for clients. Although social workers usually do not function as frontline welfare caseworkers and do not have the responsibility of documenting domestic violence among welfare recipients, their role can aid in identifying victims of domestic violence and ensuring that their information is marked in the narratives as well as the automated system. First, as integral parts of welfare agencies, social workers often assist in serving victims and training frontline workers. In serving their clients, social workers should work collaboratively with the welfare caseworkers and with their clients' permission advocate for FVO services on their behalf and confirm that the welfare caseworker is properly documenting the abuse. On a more macrolevel, social workers often serve as the resident experts on domestic violence. This role lends itself to training frontline staff in the complexities of domestic violence and to assisting with the development of screening protocols. Trainings should include an explanation of the benefit of services and the importance of documenting the situation. If trainings have not been conducted recently or at all, agency social workers may suggest their implementation.

Finally, the need for further evaluations of the FVO and research on the outcomes of domestic violence victims is great. It is recommended that future research include a more in-depth use of survey data from both welfare recipients and frontline workers. Qualitative research would serve to disentangle the questions of caseworker sensitivity and awareness of the issue versus individual willingness to disclose and be able to address more fully the distinct outcomes of narrative and administratively marked disclosers. Furthermore, continued monitoring and evaluation of screening, documentation, and service use is essential because the FVO and the implementation of the policy are, relatively speaking, still very new. Policies and practices have not yet been set in stone at the jurisdictional level. In this situation, especially, an understanding of what is happening on the frontlines is critical

in informing evaluations of the results as well as the development of improved training, screening, and perhaps service delivery methods and partnerships. Last, the analyses presented here do not exhaust the ways in which one could use existing administrative or other quantitative data. Considering the evolving nature of service delivery and the limited understanding of the long-term outcomes of clients, these data remain an important source.

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