

Studies of the Characteristics of AFDC Recipients

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Recently the Social Security Administration was given responsibility for the administration of the aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) program. The major source of national data describing AFDC recipients is a series of studies of the families that receive payments under the program. Eleven such studies have been conducted on an intermittent basis since the program began in 1936. The surveys have been made biennially since 1967 and have resulted in microdata files available for analytical purposes. Results of the study conducted for the May 1975 caseload indicate that AFDC families are becoming smaller, shifting from bigger cities to smaller ones, are likely to be headed by a woman, and are more likely to be white than black.

IN MARCH 1977 the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare announced a reorganization of the Department that transferred the program for aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) from the Social and Rehabilitation Service to the Social Security Administration. This article discusses recipient characteristic studies of the AFDC program in the past. Special attention is given to findings from a 1975 study of the program and to changes that have occurred since 1973.

Since 1948, the AFDC program has been the subject of national studies of its demographic and program characteristics and its financial circumstances. Surveys were conducted in one or more months in 1948, 1953, 1956, 1958, 1961, and biennially since 1967. The most recent survey for which data are available was the one conducted in 1975. A study is currently in progress using March 1977 as the survey month.

STUDY SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

The methodology and content of the AFDC studies has changed and expanded as the program changed and data needs increased. Table 1 shows the items included in each of the studies since

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1967. Most of the data elements listed have been included in more than one study, and many items—such as the basis for eligibility, race, number in assistance group, and amount of grant—were in all the studies. The AFDC family was the primary focus for each of the studies.

Some study changes resulted from program changes. The organizational separation of services and payments, for example, required the use of two separate survey schedules for each study case. New items such as those on child support have been incorporated in recent studies. Furthermore, it has become possible to obtain information on all fathers associated with a case rather than identifying the status of only one father—mainly because of the added flexibility associated with computer processing.

Another important change was in the method of obtaining information. Before 1967, information was reported by State agencies in summary reports, in effect providing only macrodata on recipient characteristics. For studies conducted in 1967 and after, States were required to submit a survey schedule for each family in the study sample. Processing of these more recent studies has resulted in a report series and microdata files that continue to be available and utilized.¹

Variations in the sample size among the surveys are shown in table 2. The 1967 study is the most recent that provided estimates for all State AFDC caseloads that were published by the National Center for Social Statistics (NCSS), the statistical arm of the defunct Social and Rehabilitation Service. The study now in progress will provide AFDC caseload estimates for all States. In 1973, States were given the option of supplementing the minimum sample to produce publishable State data. Only for the largest States were the sample sizes sufficient for data to be tabulated by the NCSS for all years.

For the 1969 and 1971 studies, a sample size of 350 cases was considered sufficient by NCSS to publish State data separately. With a confidence

¹Copies of these computer tapes have been provided to government agencies on request and are available for purchase from the National Technical Information Service.

level of 95 percent, the sample would measure a difference greater than 1 percent. For State data to be published separately for the 1973 study, the sample was designed to measure, at the 95-percent confidence level, that a characteristic of 0.5 percent was significantly different from zero. The same criteria were used for the 1975 AFDC study.

The characteristics studies rely upon administrative records as the source of information. One of the problems with such a study is that the range of information that can be gathered is directly limited by the information generally found in the case record. This problem has become even more acute with the introduction of the simplified method of eligibility determination. This method limits the available information only

TABLE 1—Studies of AFDC characteristics, by data element, 1967–75

Data element	1967	1969	1971	1973	1975
Assistance group and household					
County	x				x
Place of residence	x	x	x	x	x
Number of recipients	x	x	x	x	x
Number of persons in household	x	x	x	x	x
PA status of persons not in assistance group	x				x
Amount of PA for persons not in assistance group				x	x
Relationship of household members to recipient children	x			x	x
Race of payee	x	x	x	x	x
Spanish ancestry of payee	x		x	x	x
Housing arrangement (shelter)	x			x	x
Number of rooms occupied	x				
Number of months since most recent opening	x	x	x	x	x
Prior receipt of AFDC (may include time)	x	x	x	x	x
Year AFDC received for first time	x	x	x	x	x
Number of different fathers and mothers	x	x	x	x	x
Whose account OASDI benefits are drawn against	x				
Public housing			x	x	x
Head of household (relationship to youngest child)				x	x
Year of move to current living quarters				x	x
AFDC children					
Age group of children	x	x	x	x	x
Date of birth	x			x	x
Sex	x			x	x
School attendance	x			x	x
Highest grade of school completed	x				
Receipt of medical examination	x				
Various physical or mental impairments	x				
Number illegitimate		x	x	x	x
Whether employed				x	x
Nonrecipient children					
Age group of children	x	x	x	x	x
Date of birth	x			x	x
Sex	x			x	x
Highest grade of school completed	x				
Status of child's father	x				
Receipt of medical examination	x				
Various physical or mental impairments	x				
Why not in assistance group				x	x
Mother (in the home)					
Status/employment status	x	x	x	x	x
Age	x	x	x	x	x
Place of birth	x	x	x		
Education attainment	x	x	x	x	x
Usual occupation	x	x	x	x	x
Receipt of AFDC as a child	x				
Date of last move into State	x	x	x		
Last residence before move to State	x	x	x		
Consumption of alcohol	x			x	x
Use of drugs	x			x	x
Date left last job (unemployed)		x	x	x	x
Date began current job (employed)				x	x
Whereabouts (current residence)				x	x
Money payment status				x	x

See footnotes at end of table

TABLE 1—Studies of AFDC characteristics, by data element, 1967–75—Continued

Data element	1976	1969	1971	1973	1975
Father (in the home)					
Current status with respect to eligibility	x	x	x	x	x
Diagnosis of major impairment	x				
Age	x	x	x	x	x
Place of birth	x				
Consumption of alcohol	x			x	x
Use of drugs				x	x
Whereabouts (current residence)	x	x	x	x	x
Receipt of AFDC as a child	x				
Education attainment	x	x	x	x	x
Usual occupation	x			x	x
Date last left home				x	x
Employment status				x	x
Money payment status				x	x
Date left last job (unemployed)				x	x
Date began current job (employed)				x	x
Child support enforcement					
Child support (series)				x	x
Support enforcement					x
Paternity					x
Financial items					
Income budgeted (earned, program benefits, other)	x	x	x	x	x
Disregards budgeted	x	x	x	x	x
Amount of AFDC grant	x	x	x	x	x
Amount of WIN incentive payments (CETA) †				x	x
Current value of resources				x	x
Amount paid for shelter, fuel, and utilities				x	x
Services					
Number receiving EPSDT *				x	x
Service plan development			x	x	x
WIN referral/enrollment (registration/certification)			x	x	x
Food distribution program participation	x	x	x	x	x
Vocational rehabilitation program (detail)	x			x	x
Child care arrangements	x	x	x	x	x
Social services (various details)	x	x	x	x	x

† Data elements identified with more than one study may not be comparable from study to study

* Comprehensive Employment and Training Act

† Early periodic screening and diagnostic treatment program

to those data items required for the determination or retained as an historical caseload management record

1975 AFDC STUDY

The sample frame for the 1975 study was similar to that in all the studies. A minimum of 0.5 percent was required (six States met this criterion) with the option of supplementing the required sample to allow for reliable State estimates (exercised by 24 States). In addition, two innovations were introduced into the sample frame.

The first innovation provided longitudinal information on AFDC families. Sample cases of the January 1973 study with a 1975 payment were included in the 1975 study sample. These cases, which showed a payment in January 1973 and May 1975, represent the universe of cases that received AFDC at two points in a 29-month period. The same cases, which have been receiving AFDC for several years, were included in the

regular 1975 AFDC study sample along with those that started receiving assistance after January 1973. Briefly, the 1975 sample consists of "old" cases, which also comprise the longitudinal segment, and "new" cases. Because the sample is drawn by the States, no allowance is made for interstate transfers of cases. If a case received AFDC in one State in 1973, was discontinued because of a move to a different State, and then was approved for assistance in the new State, it is not included in the longitudinal segment.

The State agencies, under a quality control review process, sample the AFDC caseload to assure that eligibility and the amount of the AFDC grant are correctly determined. The second innovation was to include the AFDC sample cases for quality control for the study month to facilitate a quality check of reported data. After completion of the study, comparisons will be made between the quality control review data and the study data to evaluate the reporting accuracy. Many of the most important variables in the study are among those that can be compared: Time of most recent opening of the case, most recent action (approved application or redetermination), number of persons in assistance group (total, children, adults) and in household (total, others not in group), deprivation factor; work incentive (WIN) program registrants and participants, presence of nonassistance income and/or resources, by type, and amount of AFDC payment.

STUDY FINDINGS AND CHANGES SINCE 1973

Assistance History

Period of assistance—The proportion of families who had received assistance for a period of 5–10 years increased. These families began receiving AFDC around the beginning of the decade when caseload growth was greater than now. The proportion of families who had received AFDC for 18 months or less through the study month decreased from 40.8 percent to 36.3 percent since 1973.² A decline in new cases means relatively fewer families in the short-term categories of time on assistance. The total number of AFDC families

² Increases or decreases in families with specific characteristics refer to changes in proportions.

TABLE 2—Studies of AFDC characteristics, by size of sample, 1948–77

Year and survey month	Number of AFDC families	Sample size		States with data tabulated
		Minimum requirement	Number	
1948 (June)	449,202	(1)	(1)	50
1953 (Nov)	541,353	(1)	(1)	52
1956 (Jan–Apr)	* 610,070	(1)	(1)	52
1958 (Oct–Dec)	* 746,401	(1)	(1)	51
1961 (Dec)	915,559	0.01	(1)	51
1967 (Nov–Dec)	* 1,285,040	.03	67,000	53
1969 (May)	1,652,006	.01	16,000	13
1971 (Jan)	2,558,094	.01	25,000	21
1973 (Jan)	3,142,800	.005	35,000	33
1975 (May)	3,481,363	.005	32,000	29
1977 (Mar)	3,624,720	.0033	24,000	53

¹ Information not available on sample size for early studies.

* Average for study month.

increased by two-thirds during 1969 and 1971, by 21 percent during 1971 and 1972, and 8 percent during 1973 and 1974. About one-fourth of the families in 1975 had received AFDC before their current time on assistance.

Reason for assistance—In 1975 almost two-thirds of the families experienced a change in income or resources resulting in the most recent opening of the case for AFDC. Of these case openings, half were the direct result of the father's leaving home and stopping or reducing financial support. The father who had not been in the home for some time but who recently stopped or reduced support accounted for 10 percent of these families. Where no recent change in the financial well-being of the family occurred, two-fifths of the families had been living below the agency standards but for some reason had not received assistance.

AFDC Family and Household

Size of family and number of children—The percentage of small-size families increased. The proportion of AFDC families with one child increased from 33.8 percent to 37.9 percent. The proportion with two or three children remained constant for the 2-year period 1973–75—about 26 percent and 16 percent, respectively. The average size of the families decreased from 3.6 to 3.3 persons.

Residence—The proportion of families living in a metropolitan area remained the same. The concentration of AFDC families shifted, however, from cities of 1 million or more population to

smaller cities In both 1973 and 1975, nearly 4 in 5 families lived in metropolitan areas Families in the six largest cities—Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Philadelphia—each with 1 million or more, decreased from 20.5 percent to 18.8 percent

Tenure and type of housing—Most families lived in private housing, but the families living in public housing increased from 13.6 percent to 14.6 percent In 1975, 75.3 percent of families rented either public or private housing, and 12.2 percent lived in a home owned by a member of the AFDC family About 8 percent had an arrangement for rent-free living quarters

Race and ethnicity—The proportion of white families receiving AFDC rose from 46.9 percent to 50.2 percent The proportion of black families dropped slightly, from 45.8 percent to 44.3 percent The proportions of those of Spanish heritage and American Indians remained about the same. Race and ethnicity are combined in the 1975 figures that follow.

Race	Percent of families
Black	44.3
American Indian	1.1
Asian	5
Spanish ¹	12.2
White, other than Spanish	39.9
Other and unknown	2.0

¹ Includes persons whose race was reported as white, other, and unknown

Characteristics of head of household—The proportion of women who were heads of a household increased Families headed by a woman increased from three-fourths of all AFDC families to four-fifths Most of the women were natural or adoptive mothers or stepmothers of AFDC children Only 1 in 5 of the households was headed by a man In March 1975, about 87 percent of all families in the United States were headed by a man²

AFDC Children

Reason for deprivation—In both 1973 and 1975, nearly a third of all AFDC child recipients had

² Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports* (Series P-20, No 291), February 1976

parents who were not married to one another. The proportion increased for children with divorced parents from 17.7 percent to 19.4 percent while for those with separated parents it remained constant at about 29 percent The proportion of children with incapacitated fathers decreased from 10.2 percent to 7.7 percent Small percentages of children received AFDC because their fathers were absent for other reasons—deceased or unemployed—or because the children were deprived of the support or care of a mother but not a father (Children are eligible for AFDC when they have been deprived of parental support or care by reason of the death, continued absence from the home, or physical or mental incapacity of a parent In May 1975, 24 States exercised the option of providing assistance to children whose fathers were unemployed, as defined in Federal regulations)

Parentage—In both years, 25.9 percent of the children were in multifather families Relatively few families had children with different mothers

Age and sex—The distribution of AFDC children according to age changed little In both years, about one-third of the AFDC children were under age 6 The proportion of families where the youngest child was aged 1 or 2 decreased from 36.4 percent to 32.6 percent The proportion of families whose youngest child was aged 3, 4, or 5 increased, from 22.8 percent to 24.9 percent Boys were slightly more numerous than girls among AFDC children in 1975

Education and employment—Most school-age AFDC children attended school, some worked to augment the family income Children aged 18–20 who receive AFDC are required to be students regularly attending school or a course of vocational or technical training designed to prepare them for gainful employment Twelve States did not provide assistance to children after age 17. The following tabulation indicates the percentages

Age	Enrolled in school		Employed	
	1973	1975	1973	1975
5-11	96.5	89.8	(²)	(²)
12-15	97.4	97.8	1.0	1.4
16-17	91.2	89.6	3.2	4.2
18-20	87.1	88.2	6.6	6.6

¹ Aged 6-11
² Data not available
³ Aged 14-15

of AFDC children in school and employed at various ages

Mother in The Home

Public assistance status—In 1975, 91.1 percent of all AFDC families had a natural or adoptive mother in the home. Most mothers were AFDC recipients. More than 9 in 10 mothers in both 1973 and 1975 were included with the children in the AFDC money grant. A small number of mothers received assistance for the disabled (including the blind) under the supplemental security income program or general assistance only. About 6 percent received no public assistance—in some cases because of support by a stepfather in the home.

Employment status—More than 1 in 4 of the mothers was in the labor market. Sixteen percent were employed, 9 percent were actively seeking work, and 1 percent were awaiting recall from layoff. About half the mothers were needed as full-time homemakers or were incapacitated. Of the remaining 1 in 5 mothers, about half were registered for the work incentive (WIN) program and many of the others were exempted from WIN.

Usual occupation—Service work predominated among the mothers. The usual occupation of nearly a fourth of the mothers was service work. For a majority of the women this work was not in private households but in other types of service jobs, such as waitress or beautician.

Age—More of the mothers were under age 30 in 1975. For this age group, the proportion rose from 49.5 percent to 51.4 percent. One in 10 of the mothers was aged 45 or older.

Educational attainment—An eighth grade education was completed by 10.3 percent of the mothers. More than 25 percent had graduated from high school. Only 4.6 percent, however, had attended college.

Father in The Home

Public assistance status—In 1975, 10 percent of all AFDC families had a natural or adoptive

or legally responsible stepfather in the home. Fewer fathers received AFDC. The proportion of fathers receiving such payments decreased from 81 percent to 73 percent. About 15 percent received assistance for the aged and the disabled (including the blind) in both years.

Employment status—Incapacitation of the father was less frequent than in 1973. The proportion of fathers incapacitated for employment decreased from 53.8 percent to 47.3 percent. One in 8 fathers was employed. Of the employed fathers, two-thirds worked full-time and thus received no AFDC. One in 4 fathers actively was seeking work or awaiting recall from layoff.

Usual occupation—Blue-collar work was predominant among the fathers. The usual occupation of 54.5 percent of the fathers was some type of blue-collar work (craftsman, operative, or laborer, for example). More than half of those in blue-collar work had been or were employed as laborers. Almost all the fathers had worked at some time.

Age—More than a third of the fathers were aged 45 and older. The proportion of young fathers, those under age 30, increased from 22 percent to 24 percent since 1973. Only 1.6 percent were teenage fathers.

Educational attainment—One-third of the fathers had not gone beyond eighth grade. A slightly larger group had attended high school or graduated. College studies were begun by 3.2 percent. The educational level was not known for 26.9 percent of the fathers.

USES OF STUDY RESULTS

The uses made of the study data are an important consideration in the design of the survey. The data are valuable in administering the AFDC program at the Federal and State level. They provide a base for reporting to Congress and the public. Further, the study results can suggest what program changes may be needed and also influence the content of future studies.

The study data can be used independently or in conjunction with other studies. Three other

studies that identify the AFDC population are the Nationwide Food Consumption Study of the Department of Agriculture, the Current Population Survey of the Bureau of the Census, and the Survey of Income and Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare

The NCSS has published a series on the findings of the 1973 AFDC study that deals with demographic and program characteristics, financial circumstances, services to families, and dis-

continuances for AFDC money payments during 1973.⁴ These reports are available for responses to inquiries from the public and the press

⁴ See *Findings of the 1973 AFDC Study Part I, Demographic and Program Characteristics* (June 1974), *Part II-A, Financial Circumstances* (September 1974), *Part II-B, Financial Circumstances* (September 1975), *Part III, Services to Families* (October 1974), and *Part IV, Discontinuances for AFDC Money Payments During 1973* (January 1975), Social and Rehabilitation Service, National Center for Social Statistics Results for the 1975 survey are to be published during 1977

Notes and Brief Reports

OASDI Representative Payees, 1973*

Most social security beneficiaries receive their benefits directly. Another person—a “representative payee”—may be appointed, however, to receive the benefit when it appears to be in the best interests of the beneficiary. The Social Security Act authorizes the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare to designate a representative to receive the benefit in behalf of the beneficiary. The Social Security Administration determines the manner of payment—whether the benefit is to be paid directly or another person is to be selected to receive it. The designation may be made regardless of the beneficiary’s legal competency. For an adult beneficiary, positive evidence that the beneficiary is physically or mentally unable to manage the benefit must be submitted before a payee can be selected.

At the end of 1973, 1 out of 6 benefits in current-payment status was going to representative payees. Data on selected characteristics of those for whom a payee had been named has been obtained from the master beneficiary record of the Social Security Administration. To provide an overall view of the representative payee program from 1969 to 1973, information is presented here that includes the type of beneficiaries, their age, race, and sex, whether they are institutionalized, their

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relation to the beneficiary population; and the type of payee

As of December 31, 1973, representative payees were receiving benefit checks in behalf of about 5.1 million individuals or 17 percent of the 29.9 million individuals with benefits in current-payment status (table 1). The 5.1 million total represented a 4-percent increase over the figure at the end of 1972, but as a proportion of all beneficiaries it was virtually the same as in the preceding year.

TYPE OF BENEFICIARY

Children

Children constitute the largest group of those with representative payees—in 1973, almost three-fourths of all those for whom a payee had been

TABLE 1—Number of all beneficiaries and number and percent with representative payees, by type of beneficiary, at end of 1973

Type of beneficiary	Total number	Beneficiaries with representative payees	
		Number	Percent of total
Total	29,868,775	5,053,342	16.9
Retired workers	15,364,562	169,344	1.1
Disabled workers	2,016,626	168,997	8.4
Wives and husbands	3,189,075	13,586	.4
Widows and widowers	4,149,491	72,134	1.7
Disabled widows and widowers	78,769	6,299	8.0
Parents	24,813	960	3.9
Special age 72 beneficiaries	358,061	46,834	13.1
Disabled children aged 18 and over	319,988	267,885	83.7
Children under age 18	3,715,850	3,711,663	99.9
In custody of parent payee	-	3,445,900	--
Not in custody of parent payee	-	265,763	--
Students aged 18-21	651,540	595,640	91.4