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Punitive Welfare Policies on Single Mothers**

Gabrielle Martello

May 2019

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CAPSTONE TITLE: THE BURDEN OF CHILD CARE COSTS: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE
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AUTHOR: Gabrielle Martello

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Abstract

Since Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed into law in 1996 under President Clinton there has been a sharp increase in federal and state rules and regulations surrounding work requirements to be able to receive financial benefits. This poses a challenge for single mothers as it requires putting their children in child care which is a notoriously expensive burden. To mitigate this problem, I propose subsidizing child care so mothers have more freedom to pursue work or education. In turn, this will have a positive impact on child development as it has been proven that children that have access to quality early childhood care and education are more likely to graduate from high school and continue on to college. Furthermore, this would be beneficial to single mothers by increasing independence and creating more professional and personal opportunities.

Introduction

The United States welfare system had imbedded many stigmas and flaws since its inception. This reached a boiling point in the 1970s as there were two schools of thought regarding the future of US welfare. On the one hand, many believed that social safety nets were not sufficient, and allowed too many people living in poverty to fall through the cracks, never getting the assistance they needed. The opposing view believed that recipients of welfare were lazy, and unfairly draining the taxpayer, who were actually working to support those receiving benefits. The latter of the two opinions on the system won out in 1996 when President Clinton and a Republican Congress passed PRWORA, which sought to decrease dependency on government assistance and get those receiving welfare back to work by imposing work requirements in order to be eligible to receive their monthly check.

A large factor for why many were advocating for a strict welfare reform was due to the concept of the “welfare queen” A welfare queen is a woman (particularly black) who is single, has several children, and is receiving welfare to care for her family. These women were heavily villainized and thought of as lazy, thieving, and promiscuous, and thereby unworthy of help. Hence, the need for a work requirement, so they would not be able to freely ride the system and steal from the hard-working American.

Concurrently, the cost of child care has risen astronomically over the years, making it difficult for low-income single mothers on welfare assistance to access adequate care for when they are completing their hours to receive benefits. States will typically have a voucher system to help cover the expense of care, but they are hard to obtain, and do not cover all of the cost.

This paper seeks to examine the narrative of the welfare queen, as well as explore alternative policy reform to PRWORA as regulations implemented as a result have not helped reduce the poverty rate, and have only increased the stigma surrounding women seeking welfare.

Problem Statement

Since PRWORA was passed into law in 1996 under President Clinton there has been a sharp increase in rules and regulations surrounding work requirements to be able to receive financial benefits. This poses a burden for single mothers as it requires putting their children in child care which is a notoriously expensive burden. To ameliorate this obstacle, I propose creating universal child care so mothers have more freedom to pursue work or education. In turn, this will have a positive impact on child development as it has been proven that children that have access to good early childhood care and education are more likely to graduate from high school and continue on to college. This is beneficial to single mothers by increasing financial and social independence and creating more opportunities.

Having an inflexible and punitive system of this nature makes it hard for women to further education, keep a decent job, or allow them to purchase other necessities once their income has been severely diminished by the cost of child care (Ahn, 2015). Having no disposable income leads to a poverty of choice. Creating access to child care for single mothers would alleviate some of these unforeseen consequences, and allow women more financial agency and freedom to pursue an education or career (Cassiman, 2006).

An attempt at addressing this issue is the child care voucher program. Vouchers for free or low-cost childcare are available, but difficult to obtain. To qualify, parents must also be receiving cash assistance (such as TANF or TAFDC in Massachusetts), meaning that if a family does not meet the low-income threshold, they will not qualify to receive childcare assistance (Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, 2019). In Massachusetts, if a parent does meet the criteria, they must obtain a Child Care Referral from their DTA caseworker in order to make an appointment at their county's Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. Since there is only one CCR&RA in each county, this may pose a travel hardship depending on where the person seeking this assistance lives (Massachusetts Child Care, 2019). While childcare centers are required to hold a few spots for children on the voucher, many will only offer the bare minimum because it is more profitable for the childcare center to have parents that pay out of pocket. Often the Department of Early Education and Care will have a waitlist to receive such assistance because they are in such high demand.

Furthermore, in Massachusetts, whether a family is granted a voucher or not, the policy that is currently in place will terminate a child from the program if their parents are unable to pay their bill in full (Department of Early Education and Care, 2019). The policy also mandates that no other child care center takes that child until the balance at the previous center is paid in full. This means that if a family cannot make ends meet in a given month, it will impact them for many months following as they struggle to find a way to manage the piling bills, and are forced to make choices about what necessities to prioritize (Cassiman, 2006).

This system still works against mothers because of the income requirement. To be eligible, a family must initially be at or below 50% of the State Median Income (Department of

Early Education and Care, 2019). This means that even if they do receive vouchers because once their child is able to go to daycare and they can pursue education, or work full time, the more money they make, the less they receive in benefits, and they are back to where they started. Premilla Nadasen's 2002 article in *Feminist Studies* points out that "a job does not necessarily mean an adequate income" (Nadasen, 2002, p. 284) and as such, a parent transitioning back into the workforce in a minimum wage position will not be earning enough to continue to afford the childcare subsidized by the voucher. At the time of publication of Nadasen's article, the federal minimum wage was \$5.15 per hour. In 2009 the federal minimum wage was raised to \$7.25 per hour, where it has stayed for the last ten years, although some state minimum wages are much higher, such as Massachusetts, where the minimum wage was raised to \$12 per hour in 2019. On average, the cost of a one-bedroom apartment in the US is \$1,200 per month. This makes it impossible to afford rent, let alone childcare, if someone in this situation is working one minimum wage job 40 hours a week. The system does not allow sufficient time for families to achieve self-sufficiency before transitioning out of the welfare system, again leaving families with the heavy burden of childcare costs.

President Clinton's welfare policy reform did not reform work policies to allow for a flexible schedule, paid family leave, or even a livable minimum wage. The changes in policy names themselves speak volumes. Politicians want these programs to *temporarily* aid a family as they *transition* to self-sufficiency. This arose out of the concept of "dependency culture" which asserts that a dependency on welfare is pernicious, only feeding a vicious cycle of poverty (Hancock, 2004). This idea erases the very real truth that poverty is entrenched in

many facets of our society and cannot be undone by obtaining a minimum wage job while trying to support a family (Rank, 2018).

This has a profound impact on children and leaves a lasting impact on them throughout their lives. TANF/TAFDC are not the only welfare programs that require 30 hours of job training. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid also mandate work or job training in many states. If a parent is unable to meet the basic needs of their children, the cycle of poverty is likely to continue. When children do not have access to a nutritious diet and are subjected to food insecurity, they are more likely to develop developmental and cognitive delays, causing poor performance in school (FRAC, 2018).

Penalizing these women and reducing benefits has not made a dent in the poverty rate, or decreased the rate of out of wedlock births (Hancock, 2004). President Clinton's attempt to "change welfare as we know it" claimed that what we needed to do was incentivize welfare recipients to go back to work. While this claim is not inherently bad, it becomes problematic because it ignores the realities of poverty. Not only is poverty an economic problem, it is a social problem as well. A lack of money also means a lack of power, which is to say that an individual living in poverty does not have an array of opportunities or choices. At the end of the month, when faced with the decision to pay the electric bill or buy groceries, there is a clear choice: the children need to eat. Living in poverty is full of financial and social ultimatums, not made any easier by the assumptions the public has about low-income families that often create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The high cost of child care is only one piece of the puzzle, but alleviating this burden on low-income families would open more opportunities.

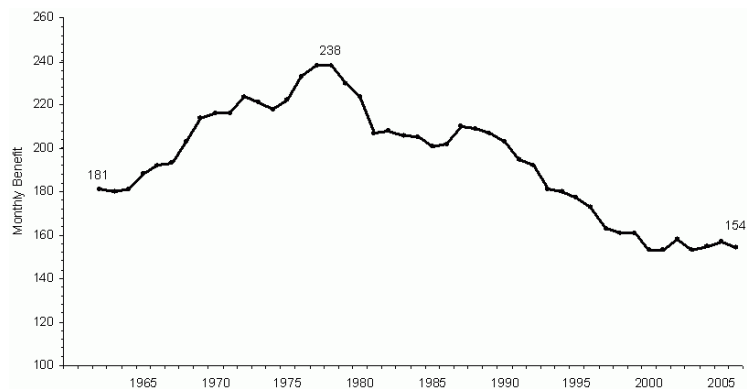
Historical Context

First established during The Great Depression by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, welfare policy was created to aid those most impacted by the stock market crash in 1929 to help meet basic needs. The New Deal created several social welfare programs, but the first significant government program in the United States for families signed into law was Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in 1935. The objective of AFDC was to protect impoverished families and allow widows to maintain possession of their households and care for their children (Winkler, 1998). Additionally, the Work Projects Administration was formed to create public works jobs to stimulate the economy by putting primarily unskilled men to work. At the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s there was a push to recognize the prevalence of blacks in poverty, and to no longer see this as an issue only impacting whites (Shaefer and Edin, 2018). At that point, there had been significant “White Flight” from the cities, leaving minority groups, who were often poor, to live in cities with a diminished tax base. Overtime this caused decay in infrastructure, underfunded public schools, and an increase in violence and crime, particularly in areas with a concentration of poverty (Ahn, 2015). From the 1950s into the early 1960s there were stringent eligibility criteria for AFDC, and it was difficult for low-income families to access the benefits they needed as funds had been cut from welfare at that time (Nadasen, 2002). This contributed to the launch of the War on Poverty as President Lyndon B Johnson’s Great Society emerged in an effort to correct the flaws in the system and lift up those living in poverty. To combat poverty, Johnson began funding programs like AFDC, and created the programs Jump Start and Head Start, the first government funded early education programs (Ahn, 2015).

Subsequently, the shift in focus from whites in poverty to blacks in poverty became the target of the news media, portraying poor blacks as lazy and undeserving of government assistance (Reisch, 2014). The idea of welfare fraud first arose in the 1960s and a majority of known offenders were male. First seen in Readers Digest and Look magazine, in 1974 the media coined the derogatory term, “welfare queen” when covering a story about Linda Taylor, a woman from Illinois who was apprehended for insurance fraud, and later also indicted on several counts of welfare and social security fraud totaling a \$150,000 untaxed annual income under various names and addresses. Taylor served seven years in an Illinois state prison for her crimes. In the 1970s, the Census Bureau reported that half of all poor families were female-headed households (Pearce, 1978). In a 1976 presidential campaign rally, Reagan brought the term “welfare queen” into public discourse, using it to stigmatize single mothers and assert that they were a drain on the hardworking American taxpayer, citing Taylor’s case as evidence of a nation-wide welfare fraud epidemic and arguing that said “welfare queens” should not be rewarded for their laziness with funds to buy lavish items (Bisignani, 2015; Hancock, 2007). The stigmatization continued through the Reagan Administration in the 1980s as single mothers became a scapegoat for the high poverty rates and a stagnating economy. The rhetoric of welfare queens went so far as to claim that all women applying for these benefits would lie to maximize their entitlements, or irresponsibly have more children to increase benefits they were already receiving. The concept of the “welfare queen” was used as a tool to rally support for welfare reform under the notion that if the tax base does not fund the habits of welfare queens, the economy would improve (Brady, Finnigan, and Hübgen, 2018; Hancock, 2004).

In the 1990s President Clinton vowed to “end Welfare as we know it” by putting mothers on welfare to work and ending childhood poverty (Skocpol, 1996). The result of this promise was the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act passed in 1996, which altered the structure of payments to recipients and added new criteria for states to receive funding from the federal government, and shrank the budget which was reflected in welfare check benefits (Soss and Schram, 2007). This ultimately replaced AFDC with TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, in some states now Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children) which encouraged states to require individuals to actively search for work or join a workers training program in order to get their payments. There are few exceptions to the new policy, however, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, and women that had just given birth

were not subject to those requirements while applicable. TANF imposed a new policy that did not allow families to increase their monthly benefits with the



Source: Google Images

addition of a new baby. This means that if a mother with two children is receiving TANF benefits and gives birth to a third child, the monthly entitlements will not increase to care for an additional family member. The new program also stipulates a five-year limit on cash assistance, making the parameters supporting the “welfare queen” lifestyle essentially inoperative as no one can freely ride the system and never have to work to support themselves. Strict work requirements still exist in many states today, regardless of political leanings of that

state. There is a 20 to 30-hour minimum work requirement per week, depending on the age of the children in the family that are in the care of the adult collecting the benefits (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). Additionally, before receiving any payments, eligible individuals have 60 days to find an approved work activity (Department of Family and Children's Services: Georgia, 2018; Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, 2018). There is much debate over the impact that President Clinton's 1996 welfare reform policy has had on alleviating poverty and keeping individuals from abusing the system, but tensions over how to address poverty in America have only flared.

The framework and ideology behind President Clinton's welfare policy change has not waivered. Proposed cuts to the federal budget often begin with welfare programs, with varying degrees of success. For example, every time the Farm Bill budget needs to be passed, conservatives attempt to make cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) and propose stricter qualifications and regulations for recipients (Gomez, 2017). These propositions operate off of stereotypes of those living in poverty, instead of addressing the root causes of the issue to find a lasting and dynamic solution.

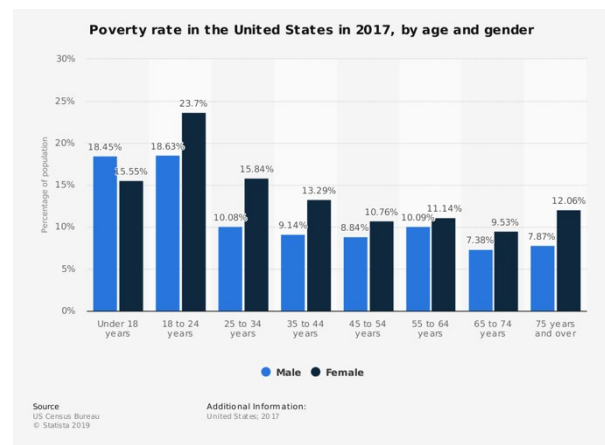
Literature Review

This literature review will explore some of the many social, political, and economic factors that have led American welfare policy to where it is today through a feminist theory lens. It will also draw on Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality as a prism for understanding the complexities of the ways in which issues of class, gender, and race compound to create even more oppressive circumstances (Crenshaw, 1990) The assessment of welfare policy before and after the Clinton reform of 1996 seeks to understand the impact that

such policies have had on single mothers and unpack the welfare queen stereotype that has given these public assistance programs such a bad reputation. To do so, this paper will examine studies on past feminist movements surrounding welfare reform, gender bias in the workplace and in the institution of family, and the economic motivations to keep this system in place. As a means of addressing the aforementioned problems, this paper will explore current childcare practices and propose policy solutions to the rising costs of care as a means of mitigating one of the struggles that families living in poverty face on a daily basis that inhibit self-sufficiency and success.

The Feminization of Poverty

Since the 1970s the faces of poverty are increasingly female as the income gap between men and women widens due to insufficient income and economic deprivation both socially and politically. The graph to the right is from the 2017 US Census Bureau data and underscores the issue by showing the poverty rate in the US broken down by gender and age. Females face a higher poverty rate than males in nearly every age group, particularly in the 18-34-year-old range when Americans are typically out on their own trying to start a career, and beginning their families.



Women's role in the workplace has been systematically devalued since the end of World War II. While the men were off fighting, women took over the jobs left behind on the home front. However, when male soldiers returned from the warfronts and sought to reclaim the jobs

they held before they left to fight, they wanted to push women back into their traditional roles as housewives (Jones, 2018). Pushing women out of the work place at this point has inhibited gender equality in the workplace, and when compounded with other social issues impedes women's ability to make progress in their professional lives, which poses social and economic implications.

In a 1978 study, Diane Pearce coined the term "feminization of poverty" as a way of labeling the phenomenon of female-headed households living in poverty at a higher rate than male-headed or two-parent households (Pearce,

1978). In the study, Pearce examined various manufacturing industries that tended to be more male or female dominated. She then compared the weekly earnings in male versus female dominated fields, and found that the

	Average weekly earnings	Percent Female
Apparel manufacture	\$ 93	81
Transportation equipment	210	10
Malt Liquor	229	7
Motor vehicle sales	152	11
Construction	223	6
Transportation & utilities	196	21

Source: E. Waldman and B.J. McEaddy, "Where Women Work—An Analysis by Industry and Occupation," *Monthly Labor Review* May, 1974, p. 10.

more male dominated the field, the higher the average weekly earnings; the converse was true of female dominated industries. This table is difficult to reproduce with data from more recent years because women have gained access to most fields. However, certain occupations remain very female dominated: jobs such as school teachers, child care providers, and housekeepers. These jobs are typically very low paying because they are considered to be "women's work" and as such does not hold a high value in society. In other fields with a more even gender distribution, the gender pay gap remains meaning that often women that hold the same job as men make less money. On average, white women make 80 cents to a white man's dollar; however, that statistic is lower for women of racial minority, with black women earning only 61

cents to a white man's dollar, and Hispanic women only 53 cents (US Census Bureau, 2018). Moreover, women are less likely to get promotions, a phenomenon known as the glass ceiling (Jones, 2018). One explanation for the glass ceiling is the increased likelihood for women to take extended time off for maternity or family leave, and there are no federal policies in the US that protects someone from holding onto their position during an extended leave, thereby holding them back from the chance of advancement.

For a single mother, these economic factors pose additional barriers which means bearing the financial burden of children alone and being demonized by the court of public opinion, putting her at an even further disadvantage with less likelihood of receiving supports necessary to adequately care for her family. It also creates a self-fulfilling prophecy as society is telling low-income single mothers they cannot make it on their own, and so they must rely on a welfare system to make ends meet.

Feminist Theory and Welfare Reform

Though significant strides have been made to challenge tradition in recent years, men and women in the US are expected to adhere to certain gender roles. For example, women are thought of as the nurturer, which would make them better with children than a professional work environment. There is an expectation that women will abandon her career in favor of becoming a stay at home mother once she is married and has children because that is the traditional approach to family life. As previously discussed, women tend to be devalued outside of motherhood and homemaking. The idea that women are unable to provide for themselves or their children hinges on the belief that women's worth and financial stability lies within a heterosexual marriage (Gomez, 2017). At the intersection of race and gender, this is a

profoundly racist narrative as it specifically targets black women, drawing from stereotypes of laziness and hypersexuality (Hancock, 2004). The narratives surrounding black women create even more barriers to achieving an equal standing in society, particularly when they are of a low socioeconomic status.



Source: Google Images

The above cartoon depicts the negative perceptions of “welfare queens”. The woman featured is overweight, unattractive, has not shaved her legs, and has stink rays and flies swarming around her; however, she is well dressed, wearing a lot of nice jewelry, and allegedly able to afford two Cadillac’s. These perceptions stem from the narrative created by politicians and media that welfare recipients are all black single mothers that cannot care for themselves or adequately provide for their children, but rather expect the government to hand them funds to live a life of luxury they would otherwise never be able to achieve because of their poor habits and morals (Gomez, 2017). Repeatedly, single mothers’ sexuality is highlighted as evidence of their amorality, particularly if she is a black woman. There is an insidious cultural ethos that hypersexualizes black women, this is then targeted in the discourse about welfare

queens. These policies and unofficial rules function in a way that dehumanizes and strips welfare recipients of bodily autonomy. Contrarily, some men of the Black Power Movements of the Civil Rights Era rejected the idea of birth control and felt that black women should be doing their “revolutionary duty”, which is to say have babies and perpetuate the race (Tillmon, 1972). This is a clear example of Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality, as class, race, and gender meet to cause extreme disadvantage by complicating matters for an already disenfranchised group (Crenshaw, 1990).

The financial hardship single mothers frequently face is exacerbated by the fact that it is unlikely for fathers to pay child support. Many mothers do not want to go through the legal battle of obtaining a court order as it can be time consuming and very costly (Edin, 2018). In the instance of a court order for child support payments, there are laws in place to hold the noncustodial parent responsible for payments, such as revoking their rights to visitation, wage deductions, or even being held in contempt to court; however, these measures to enforce are

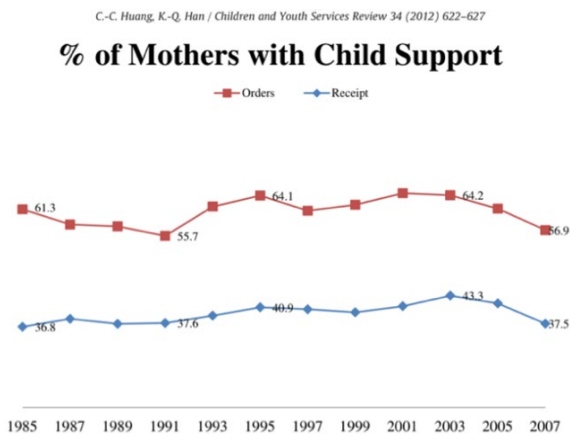


Fig. 1. Child support orders and receipt, 1985–2007.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, various years. Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support.

rarely taken (Guillen, 2019). In fact, there is a large disparity between court orders and payments. In 2007, 56.9% of parents had a court order in place for child support payments, but only 37.5%

of custodial parents actually received payments (Huang and Han, 2012). Fathers are not often regarded as the parent responsible for the child’s well-being outside of providing financially, and occasionally being the disciplinarian, but in the cultural ethos, fathers seem to be relieved of their parental duties if divorced,

separated or otherwise removed from the mother and child's daily lives. Instead, the responsibility is shifted to the mother, who is then shamed in the court of public opinion for not adhering to familial norms. Conversely, when a father is actively present in his child's life, he receives accolades for parenting, whereas this is merely an expectation of mothers.

By passing PRWORA, President Clinton validated claims about the "welfare queen" and reformed welfare with the intent to correct those perceived flaws in the policy. What imposed work requirements essentially imply is that people living in poverty don't want to work, and must be forced to do so (Pavatti, 2016). Research shows that only 11% of low-income mothers voluntarily are stay-at-home mothers (Cohn, Livingston, and Wang, 2014). It also yields an ideology that poverty in itself is deviant because it promotes the notion that the struggle of low-income people is a personal trouble rather than a societal issue (Winkler, 1998). There is a regular public outcry over the amount of taxpayer dollars that are being allocated towards funding welfare programs, and "although the public is aware that Social Security and Medicare are large, expensive programs, few are aware that for every \$1.00 spent on these two programs government spends 76 cents on assistance to the poor or means-tested welfare" (Rector, 2012). At its core, Clinton's welfare reform policy of 1996 was not trying to cut rates of poverty, or promote better social and economic stability for the disenfranchised. Instead, the goal was to cut the cost of funding such programs. The result has been further stigmatization of those in poverty, particularly the black single mothers fitting the "welfare queen" narrative.

Resulting policies of PRWORA leaves structural barriers to obtaining stable, decent employment unaddressed in the policy all together. In a 2016 article released by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, one of the major findings of the research showed that work

requirements had not succeeded in reducing poverty rates, or creating stable employment for recipients that participated in work training programs provided through welfare offices.

“Physical and mental health conditions that limit an individual’s ability to work or limit the amount or kind of work the individual can do are much more common among public benefit recipients than among the general population, research shows. With the right supports and enough time, many of these individuals likely would be able to work, but few welfare employment programs have created alternative pathways to work for them or devised effective assessment procedures that can identify them and ensure that they receive the supports and services they need to find and retain employment” (Pavetti, 2016).

Despite the research surrounding work requirements ineffectiveness in promoting self-sufficiency and thereby reducing poverty and government dependence, the requirements have remained (Haskins, 2018; Pavetti, 2016). This poses significant barriers to employment for single mothers for all aforementioned reasons, compounded with the fact that the need to meet a work requirement to be able to receive assistance means they need to be in a job market that does not provide the flexibility of hours to support working parents, let alone single mothers. Clinton’s reform put an emphasis on “taking responsibility” for yourself and not becoming dependent on government handouts, but the policy amendments made in an effort to combat so-called “dependency culture” have caused a new set of problems. There have been several propositions about how to best address these problems, such as subsidized childcare, and permitting the welfare work requirement to include class time in all states.

Structurally, women are faced with the mother-or-worker dichotomy. Women that try to raise a family and have a meaningful career are often seen as trying to “have it all”, which breaks the traditional ideals of family and motherhood as it threatens the norms. In fact, many institutions (e.g. organized religion) cite the marriage as the basis for a successful society, as it is thought to be in the best interest for children to grow up with a father who supports the family

outside the home with a full-time career, and a mother that does the child rearing (Winkler, 1998). The deviations of this norm are looked down upon and thought to be amoral, especially when raising children. The most widely recognized welfare program, TANF, has a long list of requirements for eligibility, one of which being the work requirement per week. In many cases, single mothers are not able to access adequate, affordable childcare necessary to meet job requirements. When women (particularly black women) have tried to address this flaw in the system they are met with a chorus of “lazy”, “promiscuous”, “welfare queen”. The way society treats the poor in this country largely rests on an arbitrary and archaic set of moral principles that do not hold our very system responsible (Brady, Finnigan, and Hübgen, 2018). There are plenty of causes for single motherhood (i.e. lack of access to birth control, or deadbeat father), and yet the only one recognized by this narrative is young, sexually deviant women making poor choices. Additionally, the break-up of the family structure had been seen as being directly encouraged by Johnson’s Great Society. Politicians felt that awarding more money to single mothers is what caused the spike in female headed households, disregarding all other explanations, and so that is another area that Clinton’s reform policy sought to address (Hancock 2014).

Since PRWORA of 1996 only imposed work requirements and did not give attention to any necessary reforms in the workplace to make this possible, there was a struggle for single mothers to meet such requirements because of child care schedules and work day schedules not matching up. In many feminist circles, the decision to work or mother full-time is considered a “freedom of choice issue”; however, for many women, their financial situation does not allow them to make that decision. In the 1990s, a feminist group in Sweden, the

Federation of Social Democratic Women (SSKF) and other liberal feminists critiqued the freedom of choice narrative and advocated for a universal reduction of the workday from 8 hours to 6 hours for the entirety of the workforce to better align with the school day and increase the amount of time that parents would be able to spend with their children. They also advocated for tax deductions on childcare costs to help with the financial burden. Instituting a universal 6-hour work day would establish an environment conducive to a worker/parent balance for women and men, rather than a system that actively works to have a husband as the sole breadwinner (Winkler, 1998).

Economic violence is defined as one larger group preying on the economically disadvantaged by using the threat of taking away a job, or another source of income with the intent to punish the individual. This tactic has been deployed towards welfare recipients, particularly black women since the inception of the welfare queen, and through to the present day. (Cassiman, 2006). Prior to the Clinton reform, in the 1970s around the time that the War on Poverty was declared, in some states it was legal for AFDC caseworkers to show up at a recipient's home at any time of the day, unannounced, to check in on their clients and determine if they were engaged in unethical behavior or truly worthy of receiving government assistance (Nadasen, 2002). Around the same time, there was an emergence of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) as part of the feminist movement. The NWRO pointed out that the narrative of the welfare queen villainizes women for being "too lazy to work" but entirely supports and praises the lifestyle of housewives (Nadasen, 2002). When women are boxed out of the workforce, and are unable to obtain gainful employment, how is it that women on welfare carrying a social stigma are going to be able to land a decent job to support

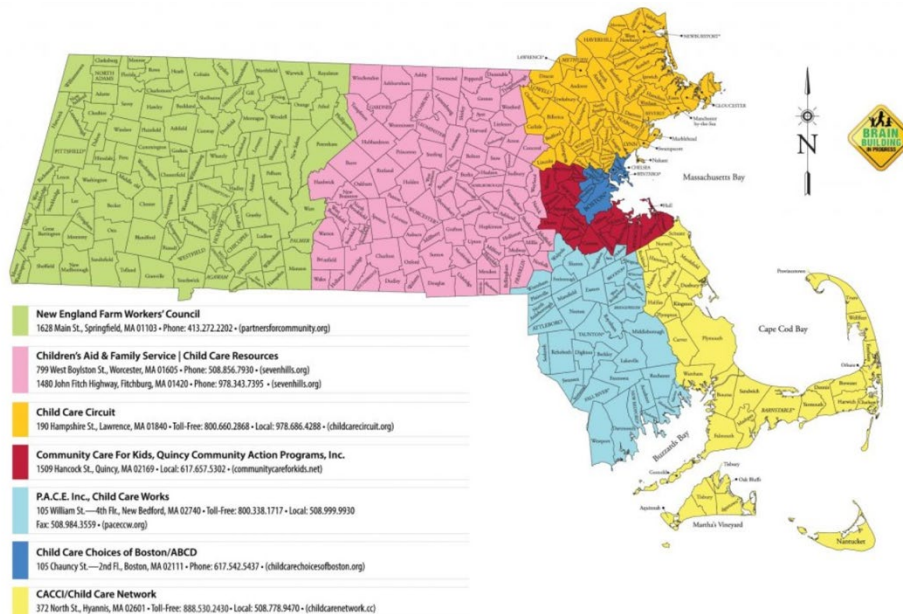
themselves? The NWRO also advocated for assistance paying for childcare, one of the heftiest expenses for parents regardless of socioeconomic status. For poor single mothers, the high cost of child care means that they have less disposable income, and thereby less freedom. However, Johnnie Tillmon, a black feminist woman writing at the time of the movement warned against allowing the fight for universal childcare to create a “reservoir of cheap female labor” as this would obviously actively work against its own mission (Tillmon, 1972).

Childcare costs in the US have been steadily rising over the last few decades. In Massachusetts, the most expensive state in the country for childcare, the average weekly cost of an early learning center for two children is \$800 – more than in state college tuition, multiplied, this is \$40,000 per year that a family must spend on childcare (Kane, 2014). The rate of stay at home mothers has increased in the last few years, reaching 29% in 2014, where it has more or less remained (Cohn, Livingston, and Wang, 2014). The cost of childcare places low-income single mothers in a particularly difficult position because as previously stated, the 1996 welfare reform that imposed strict work requirements did not address the implications those requirements would have vis-à-vis childcare. A single mother will not be able to work if she cannot find adequate, accessible care for her children, a fact that is especially problematic because of the 30 hour per week work requirement, an issue that has been discussed since the 70s with no sustainable solution (Ahn, 2015).

Current Voucher System

In Massachusetts, since it is recognized that childcare is such a heavy cost, there is a voucher system in place to help families in need cover the expense. Vouchers are available through Massachusetts Early Education & Childcare are difficult to obtain. To qualify, a family

must be currently receiving some other welfare assistance program as a means of vetting that family’s eligibility. A family can discuss this with their Department of Transitional Assistance



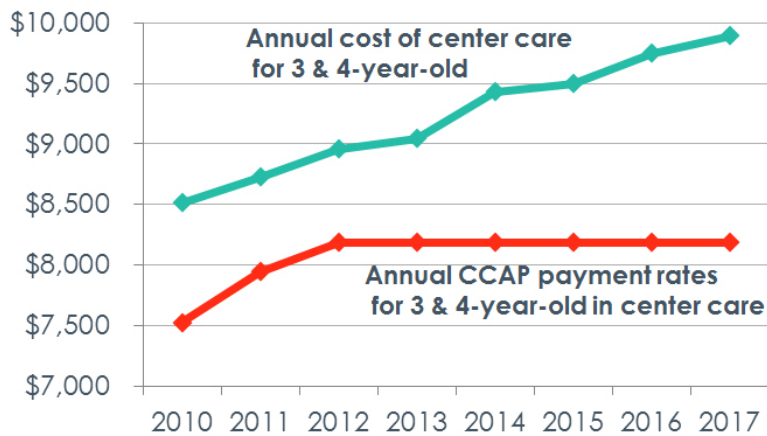
Source:
Massachusetts
Childcare
Resources Online

Child Care Resource and Referral Coverage Area

caseworker, who will then refer them to the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&RA), of which there is one per county. Depending on where a family seeking assistance lives (especially in Berkshire and Worcester Counties), and their access to transportation, this system could pose a travel hardship as appointments must be conducted in person.

Furthermore, there are a number of documents a family must be able to produce, such as proof of residency, birth certificates, and other legal documents. Once this long process is completed, and it is determined that they meet all criteria, they will be placed on a long wait list to actually get a spot at a child care center or early learning center (Mass. Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, 2019). This is due to economic motivations on the part of the care centers. Many only hold the minimum number of voucher spots required, 25% of a center’s capacity, and of those voucher spots, there are varying degrees of cost deduction based on a family’s needs (Department of Early Education and Childcare, 2019). Moreover, the

amount of money a voucher covers has not been keeping up with the rise in childcare costs. The graph to the right shows the plateau of the Child Care Assistance Program voucher coverage in



Source: Google Images

Washington State. The voucher coverage has stayed the same since 2012. This means that it is likely that a voucher recipient will still need to pay out of pocket (Community-Minded Enterprises, 2019). If and when a family does receive a voucher, it will be taken away once they get a job that allows them to move away from the poverty threshold, no matter how small a step it is (Mass Department of Transitional Assistance, 2019). Finally, The Department of Early Education and Childcare in Massachusetts mandates that if a parent has an outstanding balance on their childcare bill, the child will be terminated from the program and they will be unable to enroll in any other program in the state until the remaining balance is paid off (Department of Early Education and Childcare, 2019). This policy is frequently counterproductive as it does not allow families time to achieve financial stability, causing them to once again turn to welfare assistance, rather than creating a system that allows for true self-sufficiency: these programs stated goal.

Benefits of Subsidized Daycare

Beginning in the 1950s, the nuclear family became the most important institution to Americans. Families started becoming self-sufficient and did not rely on extended family

members. This also helped to solidify gender roles within the home. The fathers work to support the family and mothers stayed home to care for children and the home (Coontz, 2001). As the job market shifted, and more and more women began to enter the workforce, the need for childcare facilities arose, especially since there was a de-emphasis on strong ties with extended family to help with such necessities and avoid the burden of heavy childcare costs. Since extended family care is not an option for many parents, they must turn to professional centers. Since there is a demand for the service, care centers are able to set high costs for care (Kane, 2014).

Benefits for Mothers

As stated earlier in this paper, work training programs mandated for welfare recipients has proven to be largely unsuccessful in helping participants achieve long-term stable employment. However, an assessment on the impact of childcare available on college campuses for student parents disseminated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in 2016 found that access to education has actually increased long-term employment success (Eckersen, Talbourdet, Reichlin, et. al., 2016). The assessment looked at the issue state by state and found that a large percentage of parent students are single mothers at 43% and majority of those single mothers are low income at 89%. About half of states provide childcare at 41%-100% of their public two- and four-year institutions, but this is simply not enough. Nationwide, on campus childcare centers have declined by roughly 10% overall due to the expense the institution must bear to fund the childcare programs, a decision which is counter to the success rates of their student parents. The research indicates single mother students with access to adequate and affordable childcare are 3 times more likely to graduate than student parents that do not have the same

access to care (Eckersen, Talbourdet, Reichlin, et. al., 2016). However, there are still barriers to student's success. In 11 states, time spent in class does not count towards the 30 hour per week requirement to receive childcare benefits, and they are required to work up to 20 hours on top of their course loads (Eckersen, Talbourdet, Reichlin, et. al., 2016). Additionally, these low-income mothers still need to find a way to fund their education, which is daunting as the cost of college has also been significantly rising.

Providing access to childcare for women in school and the workforce is positive for both the economy and their personal well-being. Adding knowledgeable and skilled workers to the workforce will help stimulate the economy, and get more women back to work. However, there are social supports necessary to make this possible (Eckersen, Talbourdet, Reichlin, et. al., 2016). Providing supports and prioritizing the success of women in both their careers and educational pursuits will begin a process of correcting the systematic devaluation women have faced when they attempted to veer from the traditional homemaker path.

Benefits for Children

In the early years of a child's life, stability is important to a healthy development. In order to provide that stability to their children, parents need a stable income, which likely means they need a source of childcare. In a 2018 study released by the Food Research and Action Council, when children lack consistent housing and nutritious foods, their physical and cognitive development are hindered, which will later impact their performance in school (FRAC, 2018). Moreover, if a child attends childcare or early childhood education centers, they are guaranteed at least one meal a day. Studies have also shown that children that attend early childhood education centers are less likely to face grade retention and more likely to graduate

high school and go to college, a fact that will help reduce occupational inheritance in low-income families (McCoy, Yoshikawa, Ziol-Guest, et.al., 2017).

Policy Recommendations

There is a significant problem in the US with regard to the way single mothers are treated like a problem, rather than people worthy of help. Numerous study statistics illustrate repeatedly through the War on Poverty, Reagan's "welfare queens" and especially since the Clinton Administration's passage of PRWORA that punishing those that need welfare have not made a dent in the poverty rate, or curbed the rate of single mothers in this country. Globally, in other rich democracies, it is not more likely that single mothers will be poor as a direct result of those countries social policies on the matter (Brady, Finnigan, and Hübgen, 2018). There is no reason that United States welfare policies cannot follow these models, and in fact, the evidence suggests that the US would be better for it socially and economically (Liegghio and Caragata, 2016). In a 2017 report released by the Brookings Institute, author Russ Whitehurst suggests that the country should be subsidizing daycare to help families (particularly women and single mothers) thrive both personally in their careers and improve the country's economic standing. To pay for this, it is recommended that the US eliminate its current welfare system and reallocate those funds to a system of subsidized daycare for all (Whitehurst, 2017). However, this is not a feasible solution. Removing the current welfare system overnight in an effort to provide childcare would only address the need for childcare, putting low income families in a bind as they would have one large cost taken care of, but that ignores the struggle to meet other basic needs, a problem that will not automatically be solved with the introduction of

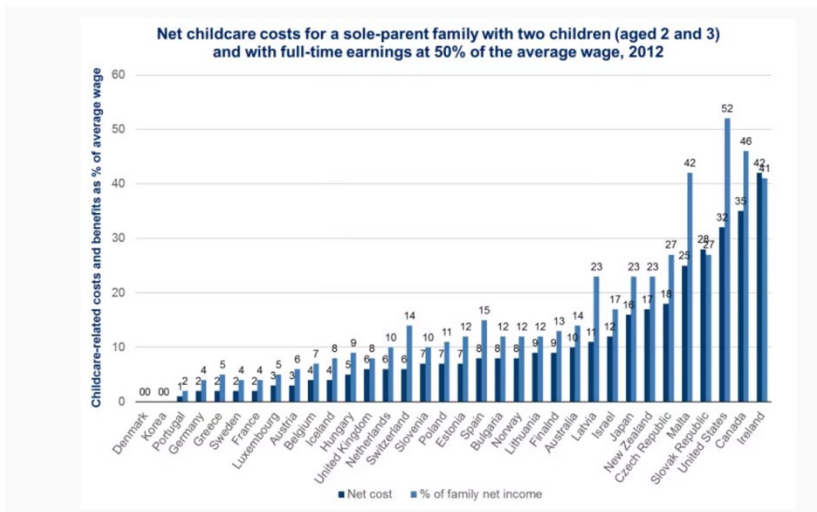
subsidized childcare. Eventually, some of the complexities of welfare may be replaced with a subsidized childcare program, but that cannot be the first solution.

Firstly, there needs to be a better, more guided transition off of welfare programs. If the goal of welfare programs is to promote self-sufficiency, there needs to be a period for families to transition off of benefits. As mentioned in the literature review, if a family is lucky enough to receive a childcare voucher and are able to move into the workforce, the voucher will begin to cover less and less of the care, until the family is left responsible for the entire amount, and it is unlikely that they will be able to cover the cost of care, along with other expenses right away. If a policy were put in place to change the abrupt removal of services to a more transitional period, families would be able to build savings to pay for it in the future. Government welfare agencies will need transitional assistance department would begin to have “exit counseling” to advise recipients financially, so as to gain an understanding of financial literacy. Ideally, the caseworkers in these departments would be trained to provide financial advice, as well as cultural competency and diversity trainings thus ensuring clients are receiving quality service from sensitive staff. This would help to reduce the stigma of minority single mothers seeking assistance.

Since it is widely known that welfare-to-work training programs are ineffective at helping participants find long-term, stable employment (Pavatti, 2016), these programs should be re-evaluated to find a way to become more successful. Alternatively, the funds for those programs could be redirected to assist low-income single mothers pay their tuition costs, as it is known that education is an effective means of helping people rise above their station in life (Eckersen, Talbourdet, Reichlin, et. al., 2016). Finally, at the federal level, there must be a policy

change so that time spent in class counts towards the 30 hour per week work requirement in all states.

As the welfare system evolves with increased spots for subsidized childcare, and single mothers are able to pursue their education and career goals, hopefully there will be less families seeking assistance so money can be diverted to subsidizing childcare as the report by Brookings suggests. The cost of childcare has been able to skyrocket over the last few decades because parents will need it if they do not have anyone to care for their children, especially as more women enter and stay in the workforce while starting their families. Since child care is more of a necessity than ever, US social policy makers must address this high-cost burden by subsidizing care across the nation for all families in the lower and middle class at care centers at a minimum. However, eventually the US should be working towards a universal daycare system akin to K-12 public schools. For a single parent in the US, childcare costs are around 52% of a family’s net income, however, in other rich democracies, childcare normally do not exceed 7% of a family’s net income (Whitehurst, 2017). There is no reason the US should not be able to



Source: Brookings Institute

mirror this practice. Early childcare and early learning centers set children up to be more successful in school, and later in life. Studies have shown that children that have access to early care,

education, and socialization at a center are more likely to graduate high school and go on to

college (Ahn, 2015). Promoting positive outcomes such as these will help to break the cycle of entrenched poverty in communities and lower rates of occupational inheritance for low income families. Subsidized childcare will also have a positive impact on single mothers because the alleviated worry of who will care for their children and how to pay for that care will allow for more diverse opportunities. Knowing that their children will be in quality care will afford women the independence to pursue education, job training, or a fulltime job.

The long-term goal of these policies must be a stigma reduction of single mothers. There is absolutely no evidence that the punitive system that is currently in place has made any difference in rates of poverty or the need for welfare support. By increasing access to affordable or even free childcare and affording women more opportunities to grow their careers, a message is sent that women must be valued in the workforce as much as men, and this message must be carried across policies. When women are involved in the economy, the GDP grows faster, boosting the economy for all Americans.

Hopefully, these policies will also move Americans towards a mindset resulting in a culture shift (e.g., fathers are accountable for child rearing just as much as mothers). In current discourse surrounding fatherhood, any amount of effort put in is praised, while that is simply expected of mothers. Furthermore, there must be an increase in understanding and enforcement of court ordered child support to keep single mothers from slipping into poverty in the first place.

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