

Welfare Reform Disparities: Is Economic Fairness and Productivity Possible?

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Abstract

In the wake of welfare reform initiatives there is a rising trend in regional/local administrators' ability to determine the distribution of resources (i.e., childcare, medical, food, and income subsidies, etc.) in exchange for work. Often the shortages of adequate employment opportunities have promoted administrators to "shift" resources in an attempt to enhance economic fairness and productivity among welfare recipients. This paper will look at the impact of administrators' use of discretion in potentially facilitating social welfare disparities.

Introduction

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA) fundamentally changed the American welfare system by devolving federal welfare program authority to state and local government under the Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) program. While PROWA still requires that eligible families include a minor child and that states meet "maintenance of effect" requirements, states have dramatically changed their policies and practices on a number of different dimensions, such as the size and number of benefits, as well as the nature of work requirements, exemptions, and time limits (Johnson et al., 2004).

The implementation of new welfare reform policies such as TANF is complicated by the dependence of policymaking principals on the frontline staff of social programs. Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy suggests that administrators and frontline staff in large public bureaucracies create policy through the use of discretion and autonomy embedded in day-to-day decision-making. In the case of devolving authority to implement welfare reform, the duties of administrators and frontline workers were expanded to include eligibility determination, assessment, case management, and service linkage (Johnson et al., 2004; Gais & Nathan, 2001; Brodtkin, 2000; Morgen, 2001; Hagen& Owens-Manley, 2002; Lurie, 2002; Riccucci, 2002).

The understanding of race and culture on which administrators and frontline workers base their decision-making processes relative to the disbursement of resources to children and families receiving welfare benefits is one that dates back more than thirty years. Research conducted prior to welfare reform provides some insight into the experiences and perceptions of administrator and frontline staff during a time of changing welfare policy (Johnson et al., 2004), but do not address the issues associated with disparity in the equitable administration of welfare policies.

This lack of systematic examination is problematic because it significantly reduces our ability to access how welfare reform disparities have continued to grow in the wake of PROWA. This paper will seek to look at the impact of administrators' use of discretion in potentially facilitating social welfare disparities. The paper will begin by offering an important overview of the relationship between welfare reform disparity and discretion, and economic fairness. Next the paper will examine the findings from a case study on administrators use of discretion in administering child care policy in the state of Ohio. The case study from Ohio provides an

indirect observation of the influence of discretion on welfare policy implementation in the wake of PROWA to suggest researchers, policymakers, and administrators should not assume there is consistency in administering welfare programs. Instead, they should routinely collect empirical data to examine the influence/impact administrators and frontline workers use of discretion plays in perpetuating disparities in welfare reform. The paper concludes by reflecting on whether economic fairness and productivity are possible in light of welfare reform disparities and the impact/influence of administrators and frontline workers use of discretion in the wake of PROWA.

Welfare Disparity and Discretion

The relationship between race and welfare has been important for more than thirty years. Within the child welfare system the issue of disparity (one group of children experiencing inequitable treatment or outcomes as compared to another group of children) plays a significant role in how decisions are made by professionals (Johnson et al., 2009; Hill 2006).

In the United States, racial politics shapes public policy (Hero 1998)—especially social welfare policy. How race influences public policy is determined by the administrative structures that policymakers adopt for implementation (Keiser, 2003; Lieberman 1998). One important administrative structure that influences the experiences of racial minorities in the welfare state is the level of devolution of administrative control between the national government and state and local governments (Keiser, 2003; Lieberman and Lapinski 2001). Concern exists that higher levels of devolution and bureaucratic discretion will lead to a loss of equity in the treatment of minorities participating in government programs (Keiser, 2003; McConnell 1966; Key 1949).

The historical treatment of minorities in highly localized welfare programs prior to the 1970s suggests that this concern is well justified (Keiser, 2003; Schneiderman, 1972; Katz 1989; Lieberman 1998; Piven and Cloward 1977). State and local governments have gained more discretion in the implementation of welfare policies during the 1990s with waivers granted by the federal government and with the passage of federal welfare reform act in 1996, but little attention has been paid to the impact of race on the implementation of these welfare reforms.

According to Keiser (2003) Race may affect the treatment of welfare clients in two ways. First, the race of an individual client may affect the interaction the client has with street-level bureaucrats. Street-level bureaucrats may have a tendency to favor clients who resemble themselves and discriminate against those from different class or racial backgrounds (Lipsky 1980). Second, the racial context in which policy implementation takes place may also impact how clients experience public programs.

Discretion, Welfare and Work Sanctions

Discretion may also play a role in how sanctions are applied. As scholars argue, even the most rule bound of bureaucracies provide opportunities for discretion, both positive and negative (Mashaw 1971; Handler 1986; Brodtkin, 1997; Fording et al., 2007; Lens, 2008). Particularly in bureaucracies with limited resources, workers may help those they think will succeed while treating harshly those clients they deem to be troublesome (Lens, 2008).

There is some indication that harsh treatment from workers correlates with client disadvantage. Studies show that sanctioned recipients are younger, have more children, and are more likely to have never married. Sanctioned recipients are also more likely than other recipients to have health problems, including alcohol and drug problems, and to experience domestic violence. Compared with other clients who are not sanctioned, sanctioned clients have less human capital. Research also suggests that sanctioned welfare recipients have lower levels of education, less work experience, and longer periods of time on public assistance. Logistical problems such as securing transportation or child care, are also more frequent among sanctioned recipients than among non-sanctioned ones (Lens, 2008; Fein, and Lee, 1999; Edelhoach et al., 2000; Koralek, 2000; Westra and Routley, 2000; Mancuso and Lindler, 2001; Cherlin et al., 2002; Kalil et al., 2002; Hasenfeld et al., 2004; Pavetti et al., 2004).

According to Lens (2008), these problems and disadvantages are difficult for workers to resolve because the issues are intractable, but progress is also impeded because workers lack necessary resources and skills (Meyers et al. 1998). Alternatively, workers may exercise negative discretion broadly, choosing to apply work rules stringently to most or all clients, with little or no attempt to distinguish the unwilling from the unable or the technical violation from a more serious infraction (Lens, 2008). In short, local offices may create the welfare-to-work version of an eligibility – compliance culture (Lens, 2008).

ECONOMIC FAIRNESS IN WELFARE REFORM

In the wake of welfare reform scholars have argued that the welfare state has become increasingly unfair (Gilbert, 1997). Although the Civil Rights Movement ushered in much less racism in eligibility determination, a reduction in racism in eligibility determination simultaneously resulted in less public support for welfare programs. In essence, as more black women joined the welfare rolls, public support for such programs declined (Gooden, 2006).

In a recent study Gooden (2004), examined black, Hispanic, and white welfare recipients experiences with welfare agencies along five key points (diversion, case-management, sanctioning experiences, reasons for exiting welfare, and dispute/resolution experiences), in four urban areas (Philadelphia, Cleveland, Miami, and Los Angeles). The study found significant monetary differences in the dollar amounts clients received. Across all areas, the negative impact of racial discrimination was most pronounced for blacks. The study also found that blacks had fewer possibilities of exiting welfare rolls than whites, and that blacks and Hispanics were more likely to be sanctioned than whites (Gooden, 2004).

WELFARE REFORM: THE CASE OF OHIO

This study was an assessment of factors that affected the 88 directors of the Ohio County Department of Job and Family Services (CDJFS) agencies likely use of administrative discretion based on resources available to implement child care policy (i.e., funding, staff, technical support and training, number of providers, years of experience as CDJFS director, and the number of hours per week spent implementing child care policy). Directors' use of administrative discretion

was analyzed using a qualitative (interview) and quantitative (survey) approach commonly referred to as *triangulation*. By combining the results of the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study, the researcher was able to gain relevant information regarding the directors' perceptions of their use of administrative discretion based on the resources they have available to implement child care policy in their county.

Among the many assumptions about the devolution of child care policy to states and then to county agencies is the idea that, given increased flexibility, administrative responsibility, and policy-making authority in the area of subsidized child care policies, county agencies should be able to adeptly implement child care services and programs in an objective fashion to ensure the unbiased fairness of families' eligibility for child care services and programming (Goggin, Bowman, Lester, & O'Toole, 1990). Instead, what has been seen is an increased reliance on the use of administrative discretion by administrators based on the resources available (Goggin et al., 1990).¹ The question that arises is how administrators' perceptions of the resources available for child care policy implementation determine their likelihood to use administrative discretion during the implementation process?

Institutions such as RAND, the Urban Institute, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office have conducted what this researcher calls "first-tier devolution research" to study the impact of devolution on child care in light of the shifting of policy formation, finance, and programming responsibilities from federal to state government (Beckett, Hawken, & Jackowitz, 2001; Ebener & Klerman, 1999; GAO, 2003; Long & Clark, 1997). However, there appears to be a gap in implementation research, specifically, how administrative discretion impacts the implementation process. Discretion theorists find administrative discretion particularly interesting because scholars are searching for an advanced understanding of the ways in which people reach decisions and how economic factors (i.e., funding available for programming) act on the exercise of choices when it comes to the use of administrative discretion related to policy implementation (Hawkins, 1992).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

This issue merits attention because child care policy research up to this point has not explored what this researcher refers to as "second-tier devolution research" regarding the impact of devolution from state government to the county level. Specifically, this issue merits attention because there appears to be a gap in scholars' exploration of how the level of state resources that are available to counties affects the use of administrative discretion in the implementation of child care policy at the county level. For years, scholars have recognized that the use of administrative discretion depended on the presence or absence of resources. In *Implementation Theory and Practice: Toward a Third Generation*, Goggin et al. (1990) stated that the presence

¹ For the purpose of this paper, administrative discretion is defined as the freedom or leeway of an authority to make decisions utilizing alternative courses of action regarding the implementation of child care policy given the amount of resources available (Davis, 1969; Galligan, 1986; Gelsthrope & Padfield, 2003; Goggin et al., 1990).

or absence of resources determines whether a policy will be implemented according to the law or whether the implementer will seek alternative approaches based on the availability of resources to assist with the implementation process (Goggin et al., 1990; Downs, 1967).

According to Goggin et al. (1990) and Downs (1967), if adequate funds are available, administrators are less likely to use administrative discretion and implement the policy according to law. If inadequate resources are available, administrators are more likely to use administrative discretion and seek alternative approaches to implement the policy. The alternative approaches that administrators use to implement the policy do not adhere to the intentions stated by the law and often include looking for alternative resources to assist with the implementation of the policy. For example, in a situation in which there is a lack of subsidies for child care programming, counties have used their TANF dollars to supplement child care programming. Theorists have identified four components of resources in this area: (1) funds available for programming, which promote the straightforward implementation of a policy according to the federal law or the rules and regulations of a state (Goggin et al., 1990); (2) staff devoted to assisting clients in accessing services (Goggin et al., 1990); (3) technical support for staff training (Simon, 1976); and (4) the types of providers offering child care services to low-income families (Cohen, 2001).²

According to Galligan (1986), the resources available to agencies are limited and therefore affect both the substantive decisions that are made and the form which decision-making follows. As a result, discretionary power is often characterized in terms of the authority to choose among alternative courses of action. So, according to the paradigm of administrative discretion, the power holder is faced with a choice among actions X, Y, and Z, where his or her discretion is said to be the freedom of choice among those actions based on the resources available to implement a policy (Galligan, 1986).

The implication of Galligan's argument is that, given the level of resources available for the implementation of a policy, an administrator may or may not be likely to use administrative discretion when implementing a policy. Based on the argument presented by Galligan regarding the substantive effect resources has on administrators decision making capabilities the researcher determined that for the purpose of this study the term administrative discretion should be used as the dependent variable to measure the impact of the availability of resources to counties on the implementation of child care policy.

Because administrative discretion is based on an individual's perception and cannot be measured using traditional enumeration methods, the researcher developed a series of four questions to capture the administrators' possible use of discretion based on the availability of resources to implement child care policy in their county. The questions developed to capture administrators' likely use of discretion were based on four scenarios in which directors might be inclined to use administrative discretion:

² For the purpose of this study, the definition of the term "resources" was expanded to refer to the *inputs that counties need to implement child care policy for low-income families.*

1. When adequate funds are available to provide child care services
2. When seeking alternative funds to bridge gaps in their counties' child care funding
3. When determining staff access to technical support and training in house or at the state level
4. When determining provider reimbursements associated with the implementation of child care policy
- 5.

METHODOLOGY

Using SPSS, this study employed content and regression analysis to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data collected from interviews and questionnaires administered to the 88 directors of the Center of Children and Family Services. The assessment included an overview of the devolution of child care policy implementation from the federal to state government, the relationship between implementation and the exercise of administrative discretion, and current research on child care policy implementation.

DATA COLLECTION

Interviews

The qualitative portion of the study consisted of interviews with 11 CDJFS directors who were randomly selected from a list of 88 directors secured from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Directors Association. Using content analysis, the results of the interview phase yielded relevant information regarding the directors' perceptions of the resources available to them, as well as insight into their perceptions regarding their predisposition to use administrative discretion based on the resources they have available to implement child care policy in their county.

Survey Instrument

In the quantitative phase of the study, a survey instrument was developed, and mailed to the 88 CDJFS directors in Ohio. The objective of the survey was to gather data regarding the directors' perceptions of their use of administrative discretion based on the level of resources available to them for the implementation of child care policy. Data generated from the survey instrument were used to assist the researcher in quantifying the directors' perceptions of and predisposition to use administrative discretion based on the resources available for the implementation of child care policy in their county.

To ensure validity and reliability of the survey instrument, the survey instrument was pre-tested with the 11 directors who participated in the interview process. The survey consisted of four sections: Section I focused on the level of resources available to the directors for the implementation of child care policy in their county; Section II focused on the directors' perceptions of their use of administrative discretion based on the availability of resources for child care policy implementation; Section III concentrated on gathering demographic information from the participants (i.e., sex, education, group membership, ethnicity, religion, and

respectability); Section IV centered on the directors' perceptions of their county's programmatic success at implementing child care policy.

Administrative Discretion and Lack of Resources Index

Utilizing SPSS, two indices were created for this study (1) administrative discretion index, and (2) lack of resources index. The administrative discretion index was created based on the responses gathered from the four questions in Section II (Administrative Discretion) of the survey instrument. The scale on the administrative discretion index ranged from 5 to 13, where a minimum index score of 5 was interpreted as "using discretion" and a maximum index score of 13 was interpreted as "not using discretion" to implement child care policy. The second index, lack of resources, was created by combining the responses from Section I (Resources) of the survey instrument. The lack of resources index scale ranged from 7 to 18 with a minimum index score of 7 being interpreted as "lacking resources" and a maximum score of 18 interpreted as "having resources."

DATA ANALYSIS

Content analysis was used to analyze data collected from the interviews conducted with the 11 directors of CDJFS pre-test while regression analysis was utilized to analyze the data collected from the survey instrument and secondary data collected from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Bureau of Child Care Development Information Analysis Unit.

FINDINGS

Interviews

An examination of the results obtained from the content analysis from this case study revealed that the CDJFS directors used administrative discretion to implement child care policy, but their use of administrative discretion was limited by the number of staff they had available to assist with child care policy implementation and the number of certified providers certified in their county. Although the regression analysis did not yield significant results, more than half of the CDJFS directors interviewed, indicated they were likely to use administrative discretion to implement child care policy based on the availability of resources.

Survey Instrument

The quantitative data collected from the survey instrument and secondary data indicated there was a corresponding increase in directors use of discretion based on their years of experience and their overall perception regarding their counties lack of resources relative to the lack of resources index variable created from Section I of the survey instrument.

Though the qualitative and quantitative data failed to identify overlapping information relative to administrators' use of discretion based on the availability of resources, utilization of a qualitative and quantitative approach did indicate varying facets associated with the data collected. According to Simon and Burstein (1985), the occurrence of varying facets associated with data collected from qualitative and quantitative approaches is not uncommon. During the

course of interviewing, researchers are often required to go beyond the written questions to “probe” for answers and underlying reasons for participants’ responses to the interview questions. Because the researcher is able to probe deeper for answers and underlying reasons the interview process tends to yield the most useful sources of information for a researcher (Welch & Comer, 1988).

Regression analysis was used to analyze the linear relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. In designing the regression model utilized in this study, the researcher identified two control variables; years of experience and hours dedicated to implementing child care policy that may also influence administrators’ use of discretion. The linear relationship between the dependent variable, independent variables and control variables are illustrated in the following regression model designed for this study:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \beta_7 X_7 + \varepsilon$$

- Where:
- Y = Administrative discretion
 - X_1 = Funding
 - X_2 = Total staff
 - X_3 = Technical support (1 = yes, 0 = no)
 - X_4 = Total providers
 - X_5 = Years of experience
 - X_6 = Hours dedicated
 - X_7 = Lack of resources index
 - ε = Disturbance/error term

The summary of the regression analysis results are as follows:

$$Y = 4.671 - 3.68E-08 + .609 - .430 + 1.275E-03 + 8.762E-02 - 5.51E-02 + .280.$$

The figures in the regression equation were derived from the unstandardized regression coefficients calculated from the regression analysis. Table VIII summarizes the results from the regression equation predicting administrators’ use of discretion based on the resources available to implement child care policy.

Table II. Regression Equation to Predict Administrators’ Use of Discretion		
Variable	Regression Coefficient	T-value
Funding	-3.68E-08	-1.593
Total staff	.609	.880
Technical support	-.430	-1.565
Total providers	1.275E-03	1.106
Years of experience	8.672E-02	2.485*
Hours dedicated	-5.51E-02	-1.039
Lack of resources index	.280	2.658*
Note: Intercept = 4.671; $R^2 = .206$; $F = 1.928$		
* Significant at $\alpha = .05$		

Output summarized in Table II indicated that the years of experience and lack of resources variables were statistically significant at .05 related to their impact on the dependent variable (administrative discretion). More specifically, the results suggested that as an administrator's years of experience increased, he/she was more likely to increase their use of administrative discretion when implementing child care policy.

The results also indicated that when the directors perceived a general lack of resources exists, their use of discretion also increased. Taking into consideration the results obtained from the regression analysis, it may be inferred that as administrators' years of experience increased, their use of discretion also increased and may be linked to (1) their perception of job security and (2) the programmatic success of their agency's child care programming, identified from the results obtained from Section IV of the survey.

The R^2 value calculated for the regression model explained 20.6% of the variation in the model can be ascribed to the independent variables (funding, staff, technical support, providers, and lack of resources), while controlling for administrators years of experience and the hours they dedicated to the implementation of child care policy. The F statistic was used to determine whether the model was useful in predicting resources that may influence directors' use of discretion (SPSS, 1997).

The F statistic calculated (1.928) indicated that the model was not statistically significant. Though the F statistic (1.928) indicated that the model was not significant, there was not enough evidence to reject the hypothesis that funding, staff, technical support, providers, years of experience, hours dedicated, or lack of resources increased administrators use of discretion given:

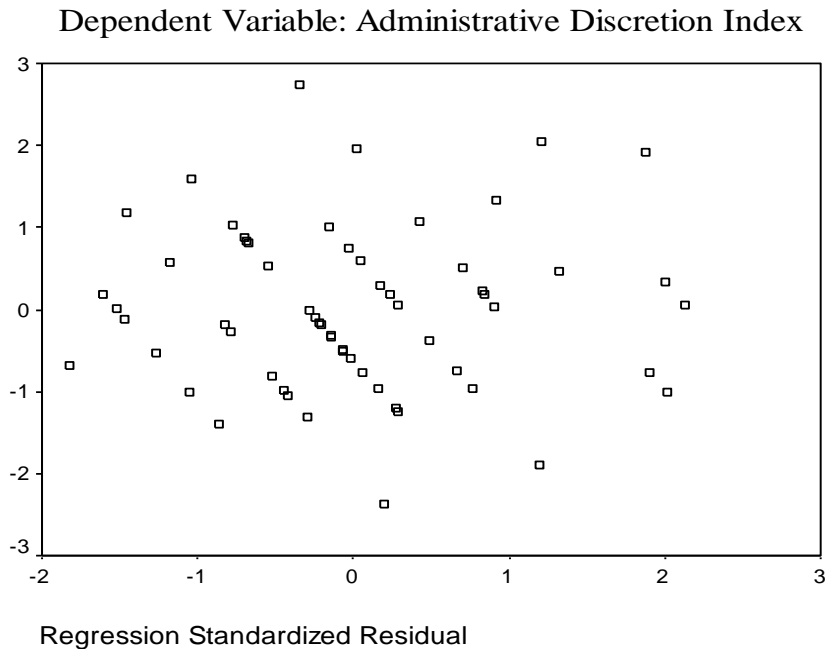
$H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = \beta_6 = \beta_7 = 0$, even though $F < F .05$.

The lack of evidence to reject the hypothesis was based on the results obtained for the regression coefficients calculated for the years of experience and hours dedicated variables, which suggested that there is a relationship between the availability of resources and the use of discretion in child care policy implementation. Refer to Table II.

In addition to calculating the F statistic, additional tests: (1) t -test, (2) multicollinearity, and (3) heteroscedasticity were run to determine the significance of the results (Gujarati, 1995). Examination of the t -values (-1.593, .880, -1.565, .492, 2.485, -1.039, and 2.658) presented in Table II indicated that the years of experience and lack of resources variables were statistically significant at .05 and influenced directors use of discretion. However, the t -values failed to yield any significant results regarding the funding, total staff, technical support, total providers, and hours dedicated variables. As was the case with the results computed for the F statistic, the t -test failed to yield significant evidence to reject the hypothesis $H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = \beta_6 = \beta_7 = 0$. The multicollinearity test called for the examination of the R^2 , F , and t -values. Examination of the R-square value (.206), F -value (1.928), and t -values (-1.593, .880, -1.565, .492, 2.485, -1.039, and 2.658) failed to indicate the presence of multicollinearity or evidence to reject the hypothesis $H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = \beta_6 = \beta_7 = 0$.

Based on Gujarati’s (1995) suggestion, a scatterplot of the residual statistics was run to determine whether heteroscedasticity was present in the model. According to Gujarati (1995), the scatterplot of the standardized residual and standardized predicted variables could be used to check that the data is normally distributed. When data is normally distributed, heteroscedasticity is not present (Data and Statistical Services, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the results of the standardized residual and standardized predicted variables scatterplot.

Figure 1. Scatterplot Dependent Variable: Administrative Discretion



Note: Graph was created using SPSS.

Examination of the scatterplot in Figure 1 indicated that heteroscedasticity was not present in the model and did not provide sufficient evidence for the researcher to reject the hypothesis $H_0: \beta_1 = \beta_2 = \beta_3 = \beta_4 = \beta_5 = \beta_6 = \beta_7 = 0$.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this paper was to examine the impact of administrators use of discretion in potentially facilitating social welfare disparities and to determine if economic fairness and productivity were possible in the wake of welfare reform. The study was designed around prior research conducted on administrators use of discretion in the implementation of child care policy from a case study conducted on administrators use of discretion in implementing child care policy in the State of Ohio, in an effort to explore alternative variables (i.e., funds, staff, technical, support, and administrators years of experience), which may contribute to broadening the disparity gap relative to the disbursement of resources to children and families receiving welfare benefits.

The study of welfare disparity and discretion has been well documented in the literature. Race and culture influence on the development and implementation of public policy is determined by the level of devolution of administrative control from the national to state level (Keiser, 2003; Lieberman and Lapinski, 2001). Devolution brought with it a change in the financial and administrative responsibilities for child care policy from national, to state and local governments. As a result of devolution, states were able to design and target their child care assistant programs to address their states specific child care assistant needs. Galligan (1986) pointed out the major assumption behind the devolution of child care policy from the federal to state and subsequently county government, was that given increased levels of administrative responsibility, and policy-making authority administrators would be more likely to use discretion to implement child care policy.

Implementation and the exercise of discretion has also been well documented in the literature, however there appears to be a gap in the implementation research related to child care policy implementation and the use of discretion. Baumgartner (1992) and Galligan (1986) contended that the limitation of resources (i.e., funds, staff, technical support, providers, years of experience, and hours dedicated) influenced administrators' use of discretion during the implementation process. While, the underlying premise of literature relevant to current research on child care policy implementation indicated federal government had taken a "hands-off" approach to the implementation of child care policy, and were deferring to the states to take the helm when it came to determining child care programming (Beckett, Hawken, & Jacknowitz, 2001; GAO, 2003; Long and Clark, 1997).

Utilization of results obtained from the case study on Ohio administrators use of discretion was used to provide the researcher a vehicle to compare interview, survey, and secondary data related to the subject of welfare reform and the economic impact on productivity in widening the disparity gap in the distribution of welfare benefits. Examination of the results obtained from the qualitative phase of the study revealed that directors perceived they exercised discretionary authority, but in a limited capacity to determine matters such as:

- ◆ Provider certification and licensure
- ◆ Child care unit staffing needs
- ◆ Collaborative efforts with community partners

The quantitative data collected from the survey instrument and secondary data indicated there was a corresponding increase in directors use of discretion based on their years of experience and their overall perception regarding their counties lack of resources relative to the lack of resources index variable created from Section I of the survey instrument.

Though the qualitative and quantitative data failed to identify overlapping information relative to administrators' use of discretion based on the availability of resources, utilization of a qualitative and quantitative approach did indicate varying facets associated with the data collected. According to Simon and Burstein (1985), the occurrence of varying facets associated with data collected from qualitative and quantitative approaches is not uncommon. During the course of interviewing, researchers are often required to go beyond the written questions to

“probe” for answers and underlying reasons for participants’ responses to the interview questions. Because the researcher is able to probe deeper for answers and underlying reasons the interview process tends to yield the most useful sources of information for a researcher (Welch & Comer, 1988).

Shown in the overview of the research methodology, the researcher postulated that as administrators use of discretion increased there would be a corresponding decrease in:

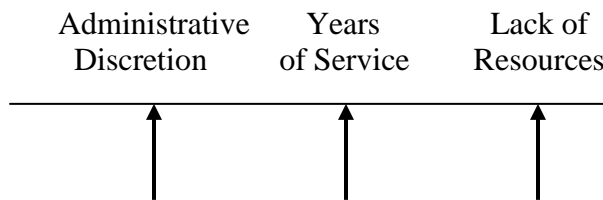
- ◆ Funding for child care programming
- ◆ Staff available to assist families access child care services
- ◆ Technical support from the state
- ◆ Providers available to provide services

Conversely, there would be a corresponding increase in:

- ◆ Administrators’ years of experience
- ◆ Hours dedicated to child care policy implementation
- ◆ Directors’ overall perception of the lack of resources available to implement child care policy in their county

Though the researcher had postulated how the directors were likely to respond to the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study, unexpected results occurred in the final analysis. Specifically, the results from the quantitative analysis, as shown in Figure 2, indicated that administrators with more years of experience and an overall perception that their county lacked resources were more likely to utilize discretion to implement child care policy.

Figure 2. Summary of Quantitative Analysis Results



The quantitative results supported Baumgartner (1992) and Babbie’s (1992) argument that an individual’s social identity (i.e., sex, education, group membership, ethnicity, religion, and respectability) influenced administrators use of discretion was supported by the results obtained from the study. However, the influence exerted by the lack of resources variable, created from combining the responses in Section I of the survey instrument, was unexpected. Identification of the lack of resources variable significantly influencing directors’ use of discretion was an indication that individual variables (i.e., funds, staff, technical support, and providers) may contributed to administrators use of discretion; however, administrators use of discretion was ultimately driven by a complex combination of the various facets contributing to

the individual factors comprising the term “resources” and administrators overall perception of their counties lack of resources.

Galligan (1986) argued that the resources available to an agency are limited and subsequently affect administrators’ use of discretion. The implication of Galligan’s argument is that given genuine or perceived scarcity of resources available to implement child care policy, administrators are likely to use discretion during the implementation process. Goggin et al., (1990) substantiated Galligan’s argument that administrators are more likely to use discretion when resources are scarce. Though the model for the study proved not to be significant, the significance of the results relative to the influence administrators’ years of experience and overall perception of their counties’ lack of resources failed to provide sufficient evidence to reject the hypothesis and provided evidence that administrators utilize discretion in the implementation of child care.

CONCLUSION

The implications of this study relative to welfare reform disparities: economic fairness and productivity can be looked at from the perspective of the administrator and the policy maker (politician). More specifically, this study may facilitate the enhancement of administrators understanding of (1) their specific use of discretion in the implementation of child care policy (i.e., provider certification/licensure, and staff needs), and (2) the influence resources (i.e., funds, staff, technical support, providers, years of experience, and hours dedicated) have on their ability to successfully implement child care policy while decreasing the welfare disparity in the distribution of goods/services to minorities.

Though research specifically designed to examine the impact of welfare reform disparities and economic fairness and productivity has not been conducted first hand, the results examined from the case study on administrators use of discretion in implementing child care policy in the State of Ohio provided evidence indicating administrators lack of resources (i.e., funds, technical support, staffing, and administrators years of experience) may contribute to widening the disparity gap in the administration of welfare benefits for minorities.

Conversely, further examination of this issue could be used to help policy-makers: (1) ensure funding is available to meet child care programming needs, and (2) formulate policy initiatives to improve current resources available for the implementation of child care policy, which may help enhance economic fairness and productivity in welfare reform initiatives.

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