

WELFARE RECEIPT AND FAMILY STRUCTURE: EVALUATING THE EFFECTS ON CHILDREN'S READING ACHIEVEMENT*

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This paper examines the impact of public and private support systems on cognitive outcomes for children born to adolescent mothers. The data for this analysis were drawn from the 1979 to 1988 rounds of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The sample consists of 1382 children who were between the ages of six and ten in 1988. The key inputs for this analysis are four indicators of private support: average family income, extensiveness of mother's employment, presence of grandparents and presence of a significant other. Additionally, I use one indicator of public support: average number of survey years that the family received welfare benefits. All five indicators are averaged over the life span of the child. I also control for maternal resources -- intellectual skills and self-esteem.

Overall, the findings indicate that private support systems are important in shaping children's cognitive achievement but these effects are contingent on the levels of maternal resources available. These results also suggest that total family income is a more important predictor of reading achievement than is a history of welfare receipt. Rather than focusing solely on the potential negative effects of welfare receipt on children, researchers and policy analysts should also be concerned with how maternal resources may interact with available private support systems to affect child development.

Much concern and research have centered on the fate of young women who bear children during adolescence. The disadvantaged situation in which they bear their children often places their offspring in a precarious position. This subset of young women and their children typically lack the economic and emotional resources that are more likely to be available to older mothers. In addition, adolescent mothers have a higher likelihood of raising their child without the father, thus losing the possible economic and emotional support that the partner may have provided (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994).

Often, young mothers who face the considerable economic burden of raising a child approach government programs such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children for support. Although welfare programs can provide important sources of food, supplemental income and medical care to both mother and child, they may have

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some negative consequences. Some regard mothers who use the assistance of welfare programs as unwittingly participating in a cycle of dependency that ultimately extends to negative effects for their children (Antel 1988).

Scholars and politicians alike call for the development and implementation of policies that will reduce the negative effects of anti-poverty programs and single parenthood on child development. Before such policies can be implemented, we need to have a deeper understanding of how public and private support systems combine to impact children. The purpose of this paper is to investigate these relationships. The sample for this analysis is 1382 children aged six to ten years old who were drawn from the 1988 Merged Child-Mother sample of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). Within this research, I highlight the experiences of children of *adolescent* mothers.

In the past, the vulnerable position of mothers on welfare has been widely studied (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn and Morgan 1987). How welfare itself affects child development has yet to be completely established. Much of the extant research on child development has focused on factors within the family such as family structure and parent-child interactions. More research is needed that examines not only factors within the family, but also external factors such as welfare support and other public assistance. In this paper, I focus on the relative contributions of welfare support, the presence of male spouses or partners, the presence of grandparents and the extensiveness of the mother's employment. In particular, I am concerned with the question of whether welfare receipt significantly worsens a child's environment for learning, as measured by reading skills.

This paper can be seen as an extension of previous attempts to investigate the impact of welfare support on child adjustment (Hao 1992). Where prior research using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79) has studied aggregate educational outcomes, I focus specifically on reading achievement. Achievement measures have been a focus of a recent debate concerning the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. While a significant proportion of the national discussion has centered around issues of race (Herrnstein and Murray 1994; Jencks and Phillips 1998), the relationship of youthful achievement test scores to later socioeconomic attainment has been highlighted in the process (Hauser and Huang 1997). In general, available research demonstrates that achievement tests often prove to be a powerful marker for continued success in achievement realms that are linked to desirable adolescent and early adulthood outcomes (Dunn and Markwardt 1970). Children's reading achievement should also be sensitive to deficiencies present in a child's life such as lack of maternal economic and personal resources. The pressing question is whether mere participation in anti-poverty programs such as welfare can negatively affect children's achievement.

In the last decade, the United States has witnessed a dramatic increase in the proportion of children being raised in poverty. The official poverty rate for children increased from 15.8 percent in 1988 to 20 percent in 1997. Nearly 50 percent of this increase is accounted for by the increase in female-headed households (Eggebeen and Lichter 1991). Approximately half of single-mother families have been on welfare, and substantial percentages have long spells of welfare dependency (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986). Previous research has suggested that long-term negative consequences may exist for children brought up in poverty. Specifically, these children are

more likely to have low academic achievement, drop out of high school, experience teenage pregnancy, engage in delinquent behaviors and finally be trapped in poverty and welfare dependency (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986; Furstenberg et al. 1987; Zill et al. 1991).

In recent years, there have been key changes in the welfare system, resulting in lower proportions of children receiving support. The decade of the 1980s was not kind to welfare recipients, particularly for young female-headed householders with children. By 1984, average government cash transfer payments had declined. During a decade that saw an increase in economic inequality at all income levels, those families with incomes falling below the poverty line were especially hard hit (Noonan and Bowen 1991). While "Reaganomics," and its legacy, reduced and weakened the welfare state, supply side tax and spending policies have intensified poverty, unemployment and inequality (Abramovitz and Hopkins 1983).

Recently, welfare has been reformed yet again. Specifically, the AFDC program has been all but abolished. In its place is the Temporary Family Assistance block grant called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, or TANF that will provide the states with a fixed amount of federal money. States are then expected to replace AFDC with a state-specific public assistance program for low-income families. The states are not completely free to design their own program, however; there are several federal guidelines that the states must follow. In particular, each state must insure that there are work requirements imposed on more than 50 percent of their caseload. Additionally, any federal funds must be time limited for individual families, with five years being the cap on lifetime support (Blank 1997). Even though these new behavioral requirements will require greater administrative costs and maintenance by caseworkers, many governmental policy makers believe that these changes will be positive. This is because welfare is widely believed to be too expensive, even though with Medicaid expenses excluded it only represents roughly 8 percent of the national budget (U.S. Office of Management and Budget 1995). This new system is argued to be an important advance because it will presumably "break" the cycle of dependency by young unwed mothers. This is widely believed even though research shows that among the women who enter AFDC, 27 percent will use it only for one year, and that 52 percent will use it for three years or less (Pavetti 1993). Politicians argue that breaking the cycle of dependency through work requirements and time limits will not only be positive for the country but also for families on welfare, most notably young mothers and their children. While it will be hard at first, the common rhetoric is that these women will gain eventual economic and psychological benefits from their imposed self-sufficiency that will be translated into positive gains for their children's development. Given that the welfare system is currently being overhauled in favor of a more stringent system, it is important to fully document whether the prior system was as damaging to children of young mothers as is widely believed.

WHY SHOULD PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS IMPACT CHILDREN?

Poverty and family structure are closely associated. Adolescent mothers are especially likely to be the sole providers for their families. Single parents face many responsibilities in caring for their children. To provide economic, social and emotional

support for their children, these mothers often need external support. However, the public support typically available includes only a fairly low level of material assistance. One valuable exception to this is the potential social support offered by Head Start programs. Private support is also necessary to promote childhood achievement. One valuable form of private support is the presence of the spouse in the home. If a spouse is not present, a mother may still have a male partner present in the home. While the effects of a male partner in the home may vary somewhat from the effects of a spouse or father on children's achievement, the contributions of either should be positive for the child's emotional, social and physical development. The support of kin can also be very important to a young mother's efforts to support her child's development. For example, previous research has noted that having access to kin can enable a young mother to be more likely to participate in the labor force (Parish, Hao and Hogan 1991).

Research on welfare and children has noted the misperceptions about the degree and timing of welfare effects on children. Children whose adolescent mothers receive welfare support may not be immediately threatened. Furstenberg's (1987) work reveals that children receiving AFDC initially appear to be unaffected by welfare but may be more vulnerable to lagged effects of such receipt. Their scholastic achievement is quite similar to other children in early assessments. However, they tend to lag behind other children, as they become older. Much may depend on whether children remain on welfare. We need to move beyond cross-sectional comparisons of children's current welfare status and consider the cumulative experience of being on welfare on children's achievement and academic success or failure.

Longitudinal data are also important to investigate the nature of mother-child trajectories; changes in mothers' experiences affect their children. Both transitions into single parenthood and transitions into a two-adult household may impact the child's development. Typically, there has not been enough research on how public support systems in conjunction with changes in mothers' personal lives impact their children. For example, prolonged receipt of welfare may have an impact on a mother's self-esteem, and thus influence key choices she makes later in life about such things as partners and childcare practices. These choices may in turn impact her children.

EFFECTS OF PUBLIC SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Theoretical models within the sociological and public policy literature have been developed to consider the potential impact of welfare receipt on children. One of the most prominent argues that welfare receipt breeds a maladaptive "culture" in families and neighborhoods (Lewis 1966; Murray 1984) that will harm children more than it will help them. In particular, Murray has argued that children who grow up in homes that rely on public support are more likely to adopt their mothers' implicit devaluation of traditional work and marriage. Partially through examples set by parents and by direct incentives, welfare receipt will motivate children to devalue school and traditional measures of achievement.

Proponents of the welfare culture model (Mead 1992) make the key assumption that welfare receipt changes parents', neighbors' and children's values, attitudes and behaviors. Parents, neighbors and youth eventually become "trapped" in poverty and dependency because of their deviant values and dysfunctional behaviors. In this view,

time limits on welfare use would be actually helpful, because welfare itself is the culprit (Corcoran 1995). This model would suggest that welfare receipt would translate into lower levels of achievement among children.

Advocates of the welfare culture model would additionally suggest that receipt is likely to undermine program participants' self-esteem and sense of control (Butler 1990). Because of the potential effects on maternal emotional well being, welfare may negatively affect parenting skills. Additionally, welfare mothers are stigmatized in large part because many people are pessimistic about the overall value of welfare programs. Ellwood (1988) argues convincingly that this is because welfare brings some of our most precious values such as individual autonomy and the virtue of work into conflict. As a consequence, people who are dependent are devalued in society's view.

Another important perspective on this issue can be gleaned from the "new home economics" model (Becker 1981), as it pertains to child achievement. The resources of time and money operate as constraints for household production. One of the more important outcomes of household production is child development. According to this perspective, the more time and money are invested in children, the better their environment and development. Following from this, welfare receipt could bring in money to the household, and would free mothers to invest more of their time in rearing their children. While welfare support may bring in cash and services to the family, it might not increase the family income to a significant degree since the family has to maintain its eligibility for service. Aid from welfare allows families more time together but deficient monetary resources may diminish the quality of this time. Yet, this model suggests that increased welfare benefits may be positive in some situations.

Despite this possibility, much of the available research has investigated the potentially negative effects of welfare assistance on mothers and their children. This research suggested that mothers who were on welfare as a child have an increased likelihood of being on welfare during the first five years of their child's life. Children whose mothers were on welfare scored lower on a preschool reading inventory than children who did not live in welfare families (Furstenberg et al. 1987). This finding could be interpreted by welfare culture proponents to imply welfare receipt causes parents to teach their children to devalue traditional achievement goals.

However, research focusing on poverty levels, rather than welfare receipt, has found negative relationships between poverty and children's scholastic achievement. Specifically, poverty was associated with lower math and scholastic aptitude scores among school age children of the NLSY79. In addition, exposure to risk factors such as poverty status can also be linked with a greater vulnerability to adjustment problems. Protective factors such as the quality of the home environment enhanced children's achievement even when controlling for risk factors (Dubow and Luster 1990). This would suggest that causative mechanism is not how economic resources are obtained but the structural constraints to childhood achievement that exist when these economic resources are deficient.

Still other research (Edin and Lein 1997), focusing on adult experiences rather than child outcomes, finds little evidence for the viability of the welfare culture model as an effective means of explaining the behavior of welfare recipients. Instead, they cite the structural barriers single mothers face in maintaining employment. Despite

this evidence, the welfare culture model persists as a prevalent explanation of the likely effects of welfare receipt on participants and their children.

There are other forms of public support that are perceived by researchers and politicians to have more unequivocal benefits for children. In particular, public programs such as Head Start are geared to provide scholastic and practical support to low-income children and their parents. The gains from participating in this program for children's achievement have been documented by various researchers (Zigler et al. 1982; Lee, Brooks-Gunn and Schnur 1988; Lee et al. 1990). Children who attend Head Start show gains in general achievement, social skills and motivation for learning. Because of this, Head Start is viewed as a mechanism by which some of the negative developmental effects of welfare status could be lessened. It should be noted, however, that some researchers contend that without continued scholastic support, initial gains afforded to children by Head Start programs may decrease over time. Some have demonstrated that the effects of Head Start decline each year as the child proceeds through public school (McKey et al. 1986; Haskins 1989).

EFFECTS OF PRIVATE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

One valuable form of private support is the presence of significant others in the home. Additional adults could be beneficial in contributing to a child's achievement. Coleman's (1988) theory of social capital suggests that support from significant others may be a positive resource. Social capital, or the relationship between the parent and the child, determines whether or not a child can take advantage of whatever financial and human capital the adult caregiver may have. This could be potentially extended to other caring adults in the home. To the extent that parents and other adults are available and willing to interact with the children present in the home, then the potential for healthy development is enhanced and stronger child achievement skills may result.

Another valuable contributor to the overall level of family social capital is a grandparent who may be living in the child's home. Grandparents could potentially ease the economic and psychological child raising burden of mothers, particularly in homes when the father is not present (Kellam et al. 1982). For example, they can directly provide effective interaction with the child as well as providing the mother more time to spend with each child.

The extensiveness of maternal employment can also be an important form of private support. If a young mother is able to obtain a job and maintain a history of regular employment, she can achieve more independence. This increased financial independence could factor into a better learning environment for her child. One consequence of more consistent female employment is a higher annual family income, another important form of private support. It is important to note however that excessive work hours can also be a potential stress factor in a young mother's attempts to provide a stimulating environment for her child. However, the focus here is on the potential benefits afforded by a history of consistent employment, not excessively long hours per weeks worked.

Drawing from research based on stress-buffering models, I also consider the likelihood that the effects of private support systems are potentially non-additive in their effects on children's reading achievement. Stress-buffering models (Ensel and

Lin 1989) predict that resources may combine in compensatory ways, with these supports serving to buffer the effects of difficult family situations such as larger numbers of children under the care of relatively youthful mothers and potential shortfalls in emotional resources. This theoretical model was initially developed to explain how social and psychological environments simultaneously impinge on adult well-being. Ensel and Lin argue that a buffering or interacting effect is said to have taken place when the joint presence of two exogenous factors impacts an individual's well-being. A model of this kind would posit that if one encounters social or psychological stress, then the *absence* of social resources would have a detrimental effect on the outcome in question. This model could be modified to suggest that when one encounters social or psychological stress, then the *presence* of social resources would be *especially* important in avoiding a detrimental effect on a given outcome.

Applied to this present research, this model would suggest that the private support derived from regular employment and from both kin and significant others will be especially helpful resources when a young mother's personal resources are reduced. Prior research that focuses on the effects of community resources on adolescent problem behaviors lends support to the predicative power of this model. Specifically, selected community resources are especially important in deterring adolescent problem behavior when called upon in situations where a parent's own resources are comprised (Kowaleski-Jones 1998). This finding signals the usefulness of the stress-buffering model to describe the potentially contingent effects of private support on child outcomes.

In summary, the major aim of this paper is to determine the importance of public support such as welfare receipt, relative to the potential private support of mothers and other family members, on children's reading achievement. In particular, I evaluate the claim that participation in anti-poverty programs such as welfare ultimately translates into a detrimental learning environment for children. Both research and popular rhetoric have pointed to the potential for welfare receipt to erode maternal self-esteem and motivation and thus create an environment in which children are at a disadvantage in achievement. However, I expect that the positive effects of family income will be more important than the potential negative effects of participation in public support programs in affecting child reading achievement. Other research has pointed to the relative importance of other resources that are expended toward the healthy development of children. If there are additional available adults to invest their time and energy into the overall level of social capital present in the child's home, then the child will have a richer set of resources to aid in the development of achievement skills. Based on this reasoning, I expect to find evidence of the positive effects of private support provided by mothers and family members on child reading achievement. Moreover, I expect to find that measures of private support will be even more important to children in situations where there are shortfalls in maternal personal resources.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

To separate the effects of private and public support systems on children, I use the following strategy. First, I estimate the effects of maternal and child background characteristics on children's reading ability using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS)

regression techniques for weighted data. Second, I consider the potential private support of the presence of a male partner, the presence of grandparents and the extensiveness of maternal employment. I also evaluate the potential negative effects of larger family sizes. Because the average family income over the lifetime of the child is hypothesized to have an important effect on children's academic development, I include it into the overall model as a separate step. Comparison of these two models also shows whether the effects of family composition observed in the previous model are reduced when family income is statistically controlled.

At this point, I consider interactions, motivated by stress-buffering models, between private support systems and characteristics of the mother and the child. Previous research (Menaghan, Kowaleski-Jones and Mott 1997) suggests that the combination of potential stressors and resources is important in explaining academic outcomes in early adolescents in the NLSY79. Given that this sample is comprised of children born to adolescent mothers who may be likely to have lower levels of personal resources, I expect these types of relationships to be especially likely to occur.

Finally, I evaluate the effects of welfare receipt over the child's life span, a measure of public support. By building the model in an additive manner, I am able to assess how much additional support welfare contributes to children's achievement. This type of modeling will also allow a direct examination of claims, based on previous research (Furstenberg et al. 1987), that sustained welfare receipt places children at a disadvantage in their cognitive development. It is important to note that data are weighted to correct for the oversampling of non-White and Hispanic respondents in the NLSY79 and for selective attrition from the NLSY79 between 1979 and 1988.

SAMPLE

Data for this analysis are from the 1988 data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY79). The youth cohort is a panel study of a national sample of youth who were 14-21 in 1979 (25-32 in 1988). The initial sample over-represented blacks, Hispanics and economically disadvantaged white youth. This cohort has been reinterviewed every year from 1979 to 1994. Children of the women in the NLSY79 sample have been interviewed and assessed on a number of dimensions including cognitive achievement and emotional and behavioral development every other year since 1986. The sample for this analysis is children who were born between the 1979 and 1982 surveys to adolescent mothers (defined as having their first child at age 20 or younger). Thus, the sample for this research is 1382 children who were between the ages of 6 and 10 in 1988. I choose to study this age range of children for several reasons. First, much of the extant research on the effects of welfare use on children has either focused on very young children's adjustment or the potential for intergenerational transfers from teenage mothers to their teenage children (Currie and Cole 1993; Currie 1995). Relatively fewer studies have focused on this period of middle childhood, which overall is an understudied segment of the life course. Second, studying children who are six to ten allows longer-term evaluation of the effects of welfare receipt than would be afforded by studying the impact of lifetime welfare receipt in early childhood. Yet, detecting effects in this age range will provide information at an important "midpoint" in the child's lifetime trajectory, well before the child will have to make adult decisions and transitions. Finally, 1988 represents

an important outcome year because it occurs well before the current legislative changes.

MEASURES

Verbal ability

As a measure of the child's academic achievement, I focus on the reading recognition sections of the Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) (Dunn and Markwardt 1970). The PIAT is a widely used measure of academic achievement for children aged five and older. Because of their high test-retest reliability and concurrent validity, the PIAT tests have been used extensively to measure academic achievement. The PIAT Reading Recognition assessment measures word recognition and pronunciation ability. This assessment contains 84 items, each with 4 options that increase in difficulty from preschool to high school levels. Skills assessed include matching letters, naming names and reading single words aloud. Children enter the assessment at an age-appropriate item and establish a "basal" by attaining five consecutive correct responses. A ceiling is reached when the child incorrectly identifies five out seven items. In this analysis, I use nationally normed percentile scores. To construct the percentile scores, the child's raw score was normed, on an age-specific basis, against a national sample of 2887 kindergarten through twelfth-grade children in the late 1960s. In the context of a multiple regression analysis, a one-unit change in an independent variable of interest is associated with a one-percentile point change in the child's reading recognition score. Table 1 presents the weighted means of the predictor variables and their correlations with the PIAT reading recognition test. The children in this sample performed within average levels on the PIAT reading recognition test; the average score was approximately within the 55 percentile.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

Public support is assessed by evaluating summary measures of welfare receipt. Welfare experience is measured by receipt of any type of welfare support from the birth of the child to the outcome year of 1988. This measure is a summary of the percent of survey years that the child's family received Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps or any form of supplemental income from the government in each survey year. Even though supplemental social income is most often issued to elderly recipients, I account for it in this research because it is also issued to individuals with disabilities that could encompass the mothers considered in this research.

This measure of public support is a general measure by design. My intent in this research is to establish whether there are baseline effects of participation in an anti-poverty program for children. It may be that accounting for the differential impact of food stamps, AFDC cash payments and supplemental income payments could afford some important refinements to the results I discuss in this paper. However, there are important collinearity problems with this strategy, given that those women eligible for AFDC are automatically eligible for participation in the food stamp program, although not every recipient chooses to participate. Additionally, I operationalize welfare

receipt as a summary of a dichotomous measure of whether a child's family received welfare support or not in a given survey year. I acknowledge that accounting for the amounts of payments might afford a somewhat different picture of the impact of welfare receipt. However, it is my aim to establish whether there are effects from lifetime participation in welfare, not from the degree of dispensation. The measurement of welfare receipt in this research is consistent with other recent investigations of the effect of public assistance receipt on children (Menaghan et al. 1998; Parcel and Menaghan 1997). Finally, I do not account for the effects of housing subsidies that mothers of the children in this sample might have received. This is an important form of public support but unfortunately this information is not available in the NLSY79 data.

TABLE 1

WEIGHTED MEANS AND ZERO ORDER CORRELATIONS WITH PIAT READING RECOGNITION FOR A SAMPLE OF 1382 NLSY79 CHILDREN AGED 6-10 IN 1988

Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Correlation with PIAT Read
<i>Mother Characteristics</i>			
esteem in 1980	3.12	.39	.12 ^a
age in 1988	27.68	1.96	.05 ^d
dropout (1 = yes)	.45	.50	-.13 ^a
cognitive skills (AFQT)	60.00	20.22	.35 ^a
<i>Child Characteristics</i>			
Male	.50	.50	-.11 ^a
Black	.24	.48	-.11 ^a
Hispanic	.11	.39	-.08 ^b
age in 1988	7.85	1.30	.03
low birth weight	.08	.29	-.13 ^b
current health problems	.02	.13	-.04
head start participation	.18	.43	-.11 ^a
<i>Current Family Characteristics</i>			
number of older siblings	.99	.82	-.04
number of younger siblings	1.06	1.07	-.16 ^a
PRIVATE SUPPORT			
Extensiveness of Maternal Employment			
Average % of weeks worked, birth-1988	20.31	15.43	.18 ^a
Male Partner Present			
% of surveys present, birth-1988	.69	.39	.09
Grandparents Present			
% of surveys present, birth-1988	.16	.28	-.02
Total Family Income (measured in 1000s)			
Annual Average, birth-1988	17.67	9.03	.25 ^a
PUBLIC SUPPORT			
Welfare Received			
% of surveys, birth-1988	.37	.27	-.24 ^a
PIAT Reading Recognition	54.87	25.11	—

Note: a = $p < .001$, b = $p < .01$, c = $p < .05$, d = $p < .10$

Mothers, on average, received some form of welfare benefits in 37 percent of the survey years from the birth of the child to 1988. This assistance was significantly associated with lower scores on a 1988 measure of reading ability; stated somewhat differently, the higher the percentage of survey years that mothers received welfare benefits, the lower the child's reading score ($r = -.24$).

PRIVATE SUPPORT

To assess the potential effects of private support systems, I consider the impact of a spouse or a male partner in the household. This is determined by noting the presence of a spouse or male partner from the birth of the child to the outcome year of 1988. This is measured as a summary of the percent of survey years that a spouse or partner was present in the child's home. On average, a male partner was present in the child's home 69 percent of the child's life, and this was associated with higher reading scores ($r = .09$).

Average family income is considered to be an indicant of private support. Average family income in the household is measured by average income, earnings and benefits available to the family from the birth of the child to the outcome year of 1988.¹ Average family income generated over the child's life span was on average \$17,672, and was significantly associated with higher reading levels ($r = .25$).

The extensiveness of mother's employment is tapped by the average number of weeks worked per year worked from the birth of the child to the outcome year of 1988. On average, mothers worked about 20 weeks out of the year over the child's life; working more weeks per year was significantly associated with higher reading levels ($r = .18$). Additionally, I consider the potentially positive impact that the presence of residential kin support may have on children's outcomes. Specifically, I include a measure of grandparent presence in the home over the child's life span. Grandparent presence is measured by the average of the percent of survey years that either a grandmother or a grandfather was present in their home from birth of child to 1988. There is a possibility that grandparents may be more likely to enter households where a parent or child may be encountering emotional or academic difficulties. This factor should be kept in mind when interpreting the multivariate results. In this sample of children, grandparents were present in the home for an average of 16 percent of the child's life.

MOTHER CHARACTERISTICS

Within this analysis, I concentrate on several important maternal characteristics. The mother's cognitive resources are indexed by whether or not she was a high school dropout and by the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT), a standardized measure of cognitive skills that all NLS Youth completed in 1980. I include mother's own cognitive ability to account for the strong connection between mother's cognitive facility and her child's achievement (Moore and Synder 1991). A striking number of the mothers, almost half (45 percent), failed to obtain a high school diploma. This lack of education is significantly associated with their child's subsequent reading ability (r

= -.13). Higher AFQT scores on the part of the mother are significantly associated with higher scores on reading ability on the part of the child ($r = .35$).

Mother's self-esteem is also included and is measured by the Rosenberg ten-point index, completed by mothers in 1980. The rationale for including mother's self-esteem is based on stress-buffering models (Ensel and Lin 1991; Lin and Ensel 1989). Recall that these models suggest that maternal resources may interact with private support, with the positive effects of private resources becoming particularly important in households where the mothers have fewer personal resources such as positive self-esteem. For this sample of children, maternal self-esteem is bivariate associated with higher reading achievement scores ($r = .12$).

FAMILY AND CHILD CHARACTERISTICS

Child gender is coded one if male. Child health problems are considered present if the mother reports that the child has problems that affect his or her ability to attend school, play sports or play with other children. The child is considered to have had a low birth weight if the weight is less than 5.5 pounds. Ethnicity is measured by dummy variables to distinguish white, black and Hispanic children. Table 1 indicates that the majority of the sample is white (65 percent) but that there is a significant minority of blacks and Hispanics in the sample (24 percent and 11 percent respectively).

Head Start participation is also controlled in this analysis and is measured by a dummy variable coded 1 if the child was *ever* in a Head Start program as of 1988. Approximately twenty percent of the children ever participated in Head Start. However, there was not the positive correlation between Head Start involvement and reading achievement that would be expected. This bivariate relationship ($r = -.11$) could be due to the fact that children who are steered toward Head Start are also children with low family income and fewer material supports. In many cases, Head Start participation could have occurred at a time temporally distant to the outcome year. This suggests the potential for fall-away effects, an issue currently under debate (Galper, Wigfield and Seefeldt 1997; Borden and O'Beirne 1989; Currie and Thomas 1995) by both scholars and politicians.

Finally, several family characteristics are controlled within this analysis; specifically, dummy variables for the numbers of older and younger siblings of the child are included. The sample was evenly split between girls and boys. Boys were at a distinct disadvantage in reading ability, at least as indicated by the significant correlation ($r = -.11$). On a bivariate level, sibling density is negatively associated with children's reading ability.

RESULTS

I estimate multivariate models to predict reading ability in 1988 as a function of public and private support systems. All analyses use weighted data, mean substitution and control for mother, child and family characteristics. Table 2 presents the unstandardized OLS regression coefficients.

TABLE 2
 READING RECOGNITION: EFFECTS OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC
 SUPPORT SYSTEMS. UNSTANDARDIZED REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS
 FOR 1382 NLSY79 CHILDREN AGED 6-10 IN 1988

Item	1	2	3	4
<i>Mother Characteristics</i>				
esteem				
dropout		-2.57 ^d	-4.54 ^b	-4.50 ^b
age	1.20 ^b	1.03 ^b	.85 ^c	.84 ^c
AFQT	.39 ^a	.36 ^a	.35 ^a	.35 ^a
<i>Child Characteristics</i>				
male	-5.60 ^a	-5.56 ^a	-5.57 ^a	-5.55 ^a
black				
Hispanic				
low birth weight	-7.76 ^b	-7.88 ^b	-7.78 ^b	-7.47 ^b
current health problems			-4.20	-3.81
* maternal esteem		-19.80 ^d	-19.53 ^d	
Head Start in 1988				
<i>Current Family Characteristics</i>				
younger siblings				
older siblings	-5.00 ^a	-5.30 ^a	-5.22 ^a	-5.00 ^a
PRIVATE SUPPORT				
Mother's Weeks Worked			.05	.02
* maternal esteem			-.24 ^c	-.24 ^c
Male Partner Present				-5.31 ^c
Grandparents Present	6.91 ^c		9.37 ^c	9.30 ^c
* maternal esteem			-15.47 ^c	-15.42 ^c
Total Family Income		.03 ^a	.04 ^a	.03 ^b
* younger siblings			.02 ^b	.02 ^b
PUBLIC SUPPORT				
Welfare Receipt				-4.56
R ² (Adjusted R ²)	.16 (.15)	.17 (.16)	.18 (.17)	.18 (.17)

$a = p < .001$, $b = p < .01$, $c = p < .05$, $d = p < .10$

Coefficients for variables that have non-significant effects on the dependent variable are not shown.

Panel one of Table 2 presents regression coefficients for the effects of private support systems on children's reading ability in 1988, controlling for background characteristics of the mother and the child and private support as indicated by family composition. In addition, this step considers the effects of number of siblings of the child on reading ability. Consistent across all models are strong positive effects of mothers' intellectual ability on their children's reading scores. Also consistent across all models are the negative effects of low birth weight on children's reading ability. Moreover, boys are persistently at a disadvantage, relative to girls, in reading ability.

The presence of grandparents affects children's reading development. Grandparent presence is a positive predictor of children's reading development, as measured by their performance on PIAT reading recognition tests. This finding is consistent with other research citing the importance of kin support as a resource in promoting

the kind of social capital likely to benefit young children (Stack 1974). Grandparents can be an important source of emotional and financial support that can be helpful to the development of children's achievement skills. Kin support has also been shown to be an important predictor of young women's success in achieving educational and occupational goals (Hao and Leibowitz 1994). It should also be noted that there is the possibility that kin support can exist even if the child's grandparent does not reside in the same household. Indeed, there is the potential for cross-household transfers of economic, emotional and childcare assistance provided by grandparents that remain untapped by these analyses.

Family size also has an effect on children's reading achievement. In particular, having older siblings negatively affects children's reading achievement scores. Recall that all of the children in this sample are born to teenage mothers. To the extent that these children have older siblings, this suggests a scenario in which mothers are starting their childbearing at even earlier ages than are the mothers of the other children in the sample. The implication is that the presence of older siblings in this case is proxying for potentially more disadvantaged home environments. Also, the effect of older siblings might also have much to do with the dilution of resources model that many scholars have used to explain the negative effects of larger family sizes. This argument suggests that greater numbers of children dilute the time, energy and economic resources a parent has to spend on any one child. Larger numbers of children in the family increase the demands on parents, and have been associated with poorer social and academic outcomes (Parcel and Menaghan 1990).

Annual family income was added in as a second step to see whether the effects of private support systems are contingent on the effects of income. Panel 2 of Table 2 indicates that this may be occurring in these data. Family income received over the life span of the child is a powerful predictor of reading facility. Moreover, once income is considered, the previous significant positive effect of the presence of grandparents disappears. This suggests that perhaps in some way the effects of grandparents being in the home are mediated via their contribution to the total family income.

As noted earlier, it is likely that the effects of private support systems depend in part on parental resources and characteristics. For ease of interpretation of interaction coefficients, I center all continuous variables to zero means before constructing multiplicative interaction terms (Aiken and West 1991). Panel three of Table 2 presents coefficients that consider the interactions between private support systems and family characteristics. In previous models, the extensiveness of female employment failed to have a significant effect on children's reading achievement. However, interaction coefficients suggest that the effect of mother's employment depends on her emotional resources. Specifically, the weak positive relationship between mother's weeks worked and children's reading ability becomes stronger when mothers' emotional resources are lower. Family income continues to matter for children's reading development. However, adequate family income is especially important when family sizes, as indicated by higher numbers of younger siblings, are larger.

This same type of interactive relationship also exists for the presence of grandparents in the home. Having grandparents in the home is positive for children's development but is especially positive, on average, when mother's emotional resources are low. This seems to suggest that while kin support is generally helpful to children,

it is especially helpful when it is called upon in situations where the mother has fewer personal resources, which is likely to be the case among many adolescent mothers.

Finally, welfare receipt, as a measure of public support available to children, was introduced into the model in order to identify what additional impact it may have on reading achievement. While the effect of welfare receipt is negative, it fails to reach significance for this sample of children. The implication of this result is that when evaluating the relative impact of private and public support systems, welfare receipt, net of the private support variables, *does not* significantly impair children's reading achievement.

It is also interesting that bivariate correlations shown in Table 1 suggest that there is a significant positive relationship between having male partners present in the home and children's reading ability but this relationship does not hold in multivariate analyses. In fact, once welfare receipt is considered in the model, male partner presence becomes a significant negative predictor of children's reading ability. This may be due to the fact that male partner presence and welfare support may often be competing support systems. If a male partner is present, then his additional income may cause the child's mother to be ineligible for welfare receipt. The cases where male partner presence does not disqualify the child's mother for welfare receipt might be situations in which where the male partner might be disadvantaged in other ways that could be detrimental for children's development.

In interpreting these results, several factors must be noted. First, a fair number of the independent predictors fail to have a significant effect on reading achievement. For example, these analyses do not reveal significant direct effects of maternal self-esteem on children's reading achievement. Instead, maternal self-esteem influences children's achievement indirectly via its effects in combination with the extensiveness of maternal employment and the presence of grandparents in the home. In particular, maternal self-esteem conditions the effects of maternal employment such that more extensive maternal employment is a more powerful resource when mother's emotional resources are deficient. Similarly, maternal self-esteem conditions the effect of grandparent presence such that kin support is especially important in situations where mothers are experiencing shortfalls in self-esteem. Further, these analyses do not reveal significant effects of race on children's reading achievement or of ever participating in Head Start. However, these analyses do reveal an interesting pattern of results. While some of the coefficients may be modest, they suggest that private support available to women does have some important, albeit contingent, effect. Moreover, the measures of goodness of fit are modest at best, but certainly consistent with reported proportional reduction of error measures reported in research using similar data and measures.

Overall, these findings suggest that private support systems are important in shaping the course of children's reading achievement but these effects are sometimes contingent on the levels of maternal resources available. Grandparent presence is a positive force in the home especially for mothers with lower emotional resources. Mothers' employment is also particularly important for their children's reading achievement. What seems to be most important to children born to adolescent mothers are the effects of private support systems either as main effects or in combination with mother's resources and family characteristics. Specifically, family income is extremely important to children. These results suggest that total family income is a more

important predictor of reading achievement than is a history of welfare receipt. Taken together, these results suggest that rather than focusing on the potential negative effects of welfare receipt on children, researchers should be investigating the ways in which adolescent mothers who rely on welfare may not have adequate personal or economic resources. In addition, future research should address how this lack of resources may interact with available private support systems to impinge on child achievement.

DISCUSSION

The original question guiding this research was does welfare receipt have a negative impact on children's achievement? Among this sample of children born to adolescent mothers, welfare receipt, by itself, failed to have a significant negative effect on children's reading skills. What appear to be more important to children are the effects of average family income. This suggests that poverty may be the force that constrains children's achievement. Much attention, especially by proponents of the welfare culture model, has been given to the issue of welfare and its potentially harmful effect on its recipients. The research that exists has produced mixed results. Previous research has indicated that welfare receipt has negative effects on children's achievement (Furstenberg et al. 1987). The present research, using welfare information gathered over the child's life span, has failed to confirm previous findings of a negative link between welfare receipt and children's achievement.

The empirical work on the intergenerational welfare effects has been criticized on a number of points. First, data constraints have resulted in most analyses only measuring welfare use during a child's adolescence, rather than throughout childhood. Thus, the effects of welfare use may be overestimated in many studies (Furstenberg et al. 1990). Second, many researchers have expressed concern that potentially omitted variables have tainted the results of studies estimating the effects of welfare receipt on youth outcomes. This has to do with the fact that there are potential variables that might influence both the likelihood of poverty and the likelihood of taking up welfare benefits. If this problem is not accounted for in statistical estimations, then the estimates of parental welfare use might be artificially inflated. Researchers have attempted to address this issue by using statistical methods such as instrumental variable modeling techniques (Zimmerman and Levine 1993) as well as a variety of other methods (Duncan and Yeung 1994; Caspary 1998). However, the results have been inconsistent across research efforts, with the effects of parental welfare dropping from some studies (Hill and O'Neill 1992) but not in others (Duncan and Yeung 1994; Caspary 1998). Also, one of the key assumptions of the welfare culture model is that welfare receipt changes parental and child attitudes and motivations. Few research efforts have had the data needed to directly test the effects of welfare receipt on a change in relevant attitudes.

I respond to the first concern by measuring welfare receipt over the life span of the child, instead of focusing on current welfare receipt or receipt for a subset of years of the child's life. This allows a more long-term evaluation of the effects of public support receipt. I address the second concern, that of potential endogeneity, by taking advantage of the rich background information in the NLSY79 to include a wide variety of background controls in an effort to control for common factors influencing

both a propensity for poverty and welfare receipt. I am not able to test for the direct effects of welfare receipt on changes in work attitudes. The fact that I do not consider the potential indirect effects of welfare receipt on maternal and child attitudes toward public support systems suggests a potential overestimate of a potential effect of welfare receipt on children's reading achievement. Given that I find that welfare effects have a non-significant effect on reading achievement suggests that I am not overestimating a significant effect. In contrast, my findings suggest that welfare receipt, averaged over the child's lifetime, does not impart significant negative effects to the child's developmental potential, measured here with an assessment of reading achievement.

These analyses shed light on usefulness of the welfare culture model in predicting likely effects of welfare receipt on children. In the past, critics of this theoretical model have argued that it is not a culture of welfare use but instead persistent poverty that affects children (Zimmerman and Levine 1993). By observing larger effects of family income, as compared to a history of welfare receipt, results from this research contribute to a growing body of literature that casts doubt on the viability of this prevalent theoretical model.

Results from this study also motivate the need for more research on the potentially interactive effects of private support on child development. In this regard, insights from stress-buffering models are of interest. Stress-buffering models suggest that the adverse effects of difficult current conditions will be more severe for mothers with fewer resources (Lin and Ensel 1989). This type of reasoning has been recently considered in research on children to suggest that maternal stress levels interact with available social resources to affect child development (Menaghan et al. 1997). Mothers who are experiencing shortfalls in personal resources such as self-esteem might be particularly reliant on the private support provided by family members. A history of regular employment might also be particularly important in shaping their children's achievement potential if it represents a resource in an otherwise troubled personal profile. Family economic resources might be especially important for children's development when this resource is divided among a larger pool of other children. Stress-buffering models would predict that these forms of private support are especially important for children when they are combined with reduced personal resources. Results from this research appear to confirm these predictions. Among this sample of children born to youthful mothers, grandparent presence and a history of regular employment are particularly positive for children's reading achievement when mothers have lower self-esteem. Additionally, the private support that family income represents is particularly important in predicting reading achievement in situations where there are greater numbers of younger siblings in the home. Taken together, these findings suggest that stress-buffering models should be incorporated in research on the effects of private and public support systems on children's achievement.

Even though the findings presented in this paper do not afford complete closure on the immense national debate surrounding the effects of public and private support systems on child achievement, they do signal the importance of considering the often contingent effects of public and private support systems. These findings extend prior work on the effects of welfare support by highlighting the interactive role of maternal resources on reading achievement of children born to adolescent mothers. The experiences of children born to adolescent mothers may well depart from those of

children born to older mothers. For example, in Hao's (1992) research on NLSY79 children, she finds that presence of a single mother's partner improves the developmental environment that in turn may affect children's achievement. The findings discussed here demonstrate that those relationships may not hold in households headed by adolescent mothers.

In the larger debate concerning the effects of welfare, this research provides useful insight. In the past, welfare receipt has been linked to low achievement among children, suggesting that the "cycle of disadvantage" is still with us. However, it seems that the effects of being poor are confused with the effects of welfare as a program. Even though welfare has been linked to problems among children such as behavior difficulties (Garfinkel and McLanahan 1986), the mere fact of receiving welfare does not guarantee lower achievement among children born to adolescent mothers. Given that one child in every nine in the U.S. currently lives in a family that receives "welfare," it should be of interest to policy makers that empirical evidence does not confirm this hypothesized link between welfare receipt and children's achievement.

As we shift over to the new system represented by the Temporary Family Assistance Block Grant system, governmental leaders argue that the transition, while painful at first, will positively affect recipients in the long run. However, many researchers do not share this optimism. They argue that there will be more children in poverty, without health care and potentially homeless. These results underscore that the previous system, while having well-documented problems in several areas, did not significantly impair children's reading achievement in a sample of high-risk children born to adolescent mothers. As the old welfare system is phased out for the new system, it is important to keep this in mind.

Lori Kowaleski-Jones is a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University. Her current research considers the effects of family events on children's home environments and achievement outcomes during middle childhood. Other ongoing research evaluates the effects of participation in food assistance programs on early childhood outcomes. Her prior research has explored neighborhood influences on adolescent problem behavior.

NOTES

1. Family income is based on all forms of cash income to the family. In this regard, women who receive income from AFDC are likely to have higher incomes in states with higher benefit levels. For example, Mississippi paid \$120 a month to a family of three in 1994 while the highest of the contiguous states, Connecticut, paid \$680 to a similar family (Blank 1997). However, higher benefit levels were designed to account for a more expensive cost of living in a given state. In this regard, any relative advantage given to mothers residing in states with higher benefit levels is likely to be offset by increased cost of housing and other necessities. Much of the available research on the effects of benefit levels on individual behavior is centered on the effects of labor force participation, likelihood to report income and ability to set up an independent residence. In general, most of the research has suggested that the effects are relatively small (Blank 1997).

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