

Missouri TANF White Paper: Barriers and the Time Limit

A major study of current and former welfare recipients in Missouri found that many faced multiple barriers to employment. Certain barriers reduced work effort and increased the probability of remaining on or returning to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The study was based on interviews conducted in 2001 and 2002 with approximately 500 persons who left the TANF rolls 1997 and 360 who had been on TANF continuously since 1998.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 limits the receipt of TANF benefits to 60 months over a person's lifetime. Persons who exhaust their time limit may remain on the caseload only if they are granted an extension by the state. The federal government limits such coverage to 20% of the average monthly caseload. States may "stop the clock" on the time limit by granting exemptions for a short period of time.

As of December 31, 2002, 1,764 Missouri TANF cases had lost benefits because they had exhausted their lifetime limit on assistance.

In January 2003, Missouri was extending assistance for less than 2% of the caseload, far below the federal 20% limit.

- Missouri extends assistance for recipients with 6 situations: an open child welfare case, good cause to believe that work would place them at risk of domestic violence, in treatment for a substance abuse issue, diagnosed and in treatment for mental health reasons, a family crisis, or when the case management team decides the recipients are not yet ready to leave assistance.

As of December 2002, 6% of the TANF caseload was exempted from the time limit—their clock had stopped.

- Missouri exempts recipients from the time limit when: they are over age 60, they are permanently and totally disabled, they are a teen parent attending school, or they are needed in the home to care for a disabled individual.

Knowing the characteristics of persons who are likely to stay on the caseload for long periods of time will help Missouri (1) provide information that could be used in the assessment process and (2) manage the exemption and extension process.

- TANF recipients with 3 or more employment barriers are likely to remain on the caseload for long periods of time and may be in jeopardy of exhausting their time limit.
- Barriers that are significantly related to remaining on the caseload for at least 36 months include:
 - Transportation problems
 - Child care problems
 - Not receiving child support
 - Low mastery¹
 - Not being married
 - No other adults in the household
 - Physical health limitations
 - More than 4 children in the home
 - Low cognitive ability
 - Low educational attainment

The four barriers that are most predictive of long stays are²:

- **Transportation problems³**
- **Not receiving child support**
- **Child care problems**
- **Low mastery**

Educational attainment, marital status, and number of children also play important roles.

Missouri provides services to help TANF recipients achieve reliable transportation and childcare, and also provides assistance in enforcing child support orders.

¹ Mastery refers to the feeling of being in charge of one's own life. It is closely related to the concepts of locus of control and self-esteem.

² The sample for this study was based on three types of persons with welfare experience. Leavers were former TANF recipients who left the caseload in the 4th quarter of 1997 and had not returned to TANF by mid-2001. In some studies, these are called successful leavers. Cyclers also left the TANF caseload in the 4th quarter of 1997, but they had returned to TANF at least once before mid-2001. Stayers had been on the TANF caseload for a minimum of 36 months by January 2001.

³ Includes not having a car, not having a driver's license, or having experienced lost wages, lost jobs, or lost job opportunities due to unreliable transportation.

Figure 1 shows how the probability of being a long term recipient increases with additional barriers.⁴

- The most important barrier predicting who would be a long term recipients was having a transportation problem—51% of people with transportation barrier were long term recipients, compared with just 23 % of those without a transportation barrier.
- Child support receipt makes an important difference in keeping people from being long term recipients. Of those who had a transportation barrier, a child care barrier, less than 14 years of education, and did not receive child support, 62% were long term recipients. If they did receive child support, just 22% were long term recipients.
- Of those who did not have a transportation barrier, did not receive child support, and had low mastery, 66% were long term recipients. If they had high mastery, only 25% were long-term recipients.
- Those least likely to be long term recipients (9%) were persons who did not have a transportation barrier and received child support.

Policy Implications

- Consider establishing exemptions from the time limit or extensions for recipients who do not have reliable transportation or child care. The state should also consider strengthening child support enforcement.

The University of Kansas

The study summarized in these policy briefs was conducted by researchers at the University Kansas School of Nursing and KU Policy Research Institute for the Missouri Department of Social Services and the Local Investment Commission. Funding for this study was provided through grants (00ASPE350A and 01ASPE364A) from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services. The policy briefs were prepared by Nancy Dunton, Ph.D., Jan Moore, M.S.W., Byron Gajewski, Ph.D., David Burrell, Ph.D., Donna Ginther, Ph.D., Patricia Oslund, M.S., and Joshua Rosenbloom, Ph.D.

⁴ The important barriers were identified using a regression tree technique. Regression trees are used to classify study respondents into leaver/cycler or stayer categories, based on their barrier profiles. It is a technique that does not rely heavily on model assumptions. The tree probabilities were established using a training sample from the data set and verified using the remaining sample.

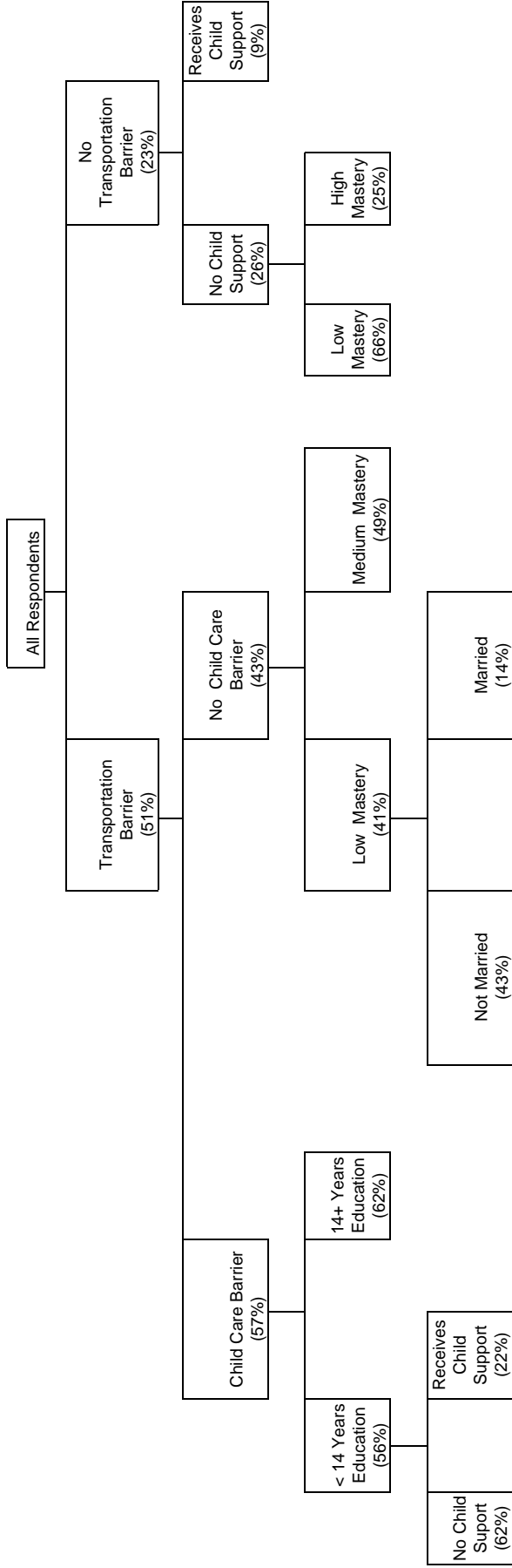
For more information contact:

Nancy Dunton, Ph.D.
KU School of Nursing
3901 Rainbow Blvd.
Suite 3069
Kansas City, KS
66160

Phone: (913) 588-1456
Fax: (913) 588-4531
Email: ndunton@kumc.edu

Issued January 2003

Figure 1
Probability of Being a Long Term Recipient



Source: Survey of Former and Current Missouri TANF Recipients