



Center for Advanced Studies
in Child Welfare

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Sanction and Educational Outcomes for Children in TANF Families

Welfare reform and accountability

Under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), PRWORA (or Welfare Reform), changed the consequences of noncooperation with work requirements by parents in households receiving assistance. Sanctions, varying in severity (ranging from a variety of partial sanctions to full sanctions), are imposed on families who do not meet work requirements (Wu et al., 2006).

Noncompliance with training and job requirements often results in families receiving sanctions. However, not all families have equal probability of receiving sanctions. Studies have shown that large numbers of factors increase the risk of receiving sanctions. For instance, women with more than three children, a history of welfare use, mental health problems, less education, less formal employment experience, and whose primary language is not English are much more likely to experience sanctions than women without these characteristics (Wu et al., 2006). In addition, there has been small, but growing body of knowledge on how TANF sanctions impact children's lives. Cleaveland (2007) revealed that women who are eventually sanctioned off of TANF find other means of supporting their families, some of which are illegal and may lead to putting the custody of their children at risk to child welfare involvement. According to Gourdine (2007), some caregivers experience depression and choose to turn their children over to a relative (essentially creating a child-only TANF case) as a way to secure ongoing benefits for their children when they receive sanctions.

Little else is known about the effect of sanctions on children. Given the importance of educational attainment to positive human outcomes and the need to encourage poor children to break free from cycles of poverty, it is essential to build upon the work of others who have examined outcomes of TANF children by

incorporating the experience of sanctions upon children.

Purpose of the study

In an effort to better understand the impact of sanctions on children's educational outcomes, the current study addressed the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the families who experience sanctions?
- What is the relationship between sanction experiences and educational outcomes of school attendance and enrollment disruptions for children in elementary, middle and high school?
- What is the relationship between sanction timings and negative educational outcomes?

Methods

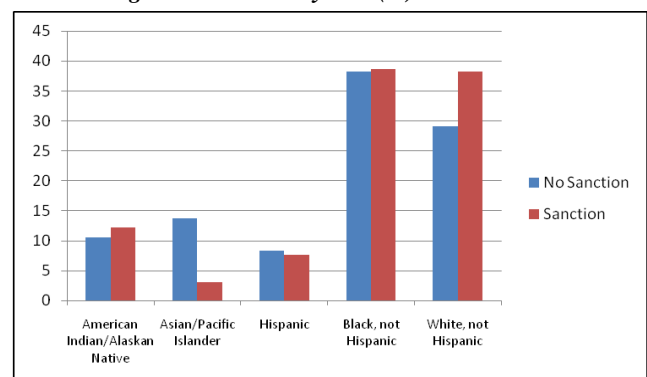
This study utilized administrative data from the Minnesota Department of Human Services and the Department of Education. Data was obtained for all families receiving MFIP as of December 2005; sanction status data ranged from January 2005 through December 2006. Because sanctions are attributed to family heads, one school-aged child was randomly selected per family to eliminate bias due to family size. In order to understand if there was a relationship between the timing of sanctions and the timing of negative enrollment disruptions for students, a time difference variable was calculated for each student, taking into account the difference in months between the date of the disruption and the date of sanction. Timeframes between sanctions and disruption dates were also coded into groups by three-month intervals to describe the clustering of events.

Findings

Racial characteristics associated with sanctions

Twenty three percent of all students' families experienced at least one sanction in the 24 month period under review.

Figure 1: Sanction by race (%)



As can be seen in Figure 1, Asian/Pacific Islander children were much less likely to experience sanctions, while White and American Indian/Alaskan Native children were more likely to experience sanctions, as compared to other groups ($\chi^2=440.850,4,p<.001$). American Indian/Alaskan Native, Hispanic, and White children were from families experiencing disproportionate *numbers of sanctions* compared to Asian/Pacific Islander and African American children, with means of 3.54, 3.27, and 3.18, respectively ($F=11.436,4,p<.001$).

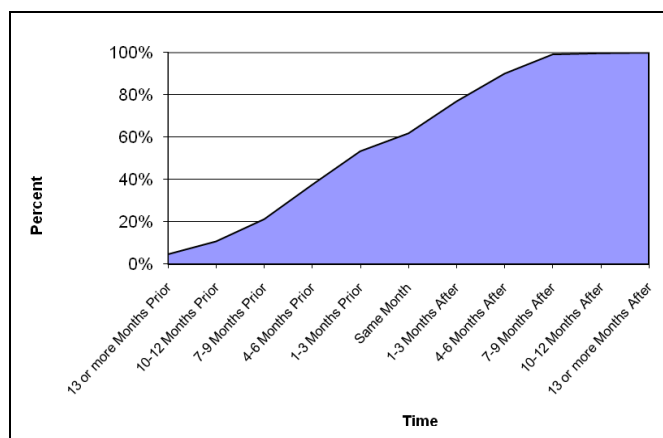
Enrollment disruptions and attendance

As compared to elementary and middle school students, high school students proportionally experienced more disruptions, with 75% of high school students experiencing at least one enrollment disruption. Older students were more likely to enter care or treatment programs (0% elementary, 2% middle school, and 4% high schoolers) and correctional facilities (0%, 1%, and 3%, respectively) and more likely to leave for unknown, social, or family environment reasons as compared to elementary and middle school students. Students from families with no sanctions had significantly fewer disruptions ($mean=.495$) than did students from families with at least one sanction ($mean=.548$) ($F=12.940, 1, p<.001$).

Enrollment Disruption date and sanction

Student disruptions could occur in the months prior to the sanction month, the same month as the sanction, or months afterward. By the month of sanction, more than half of disruptions had already occurred, and by the post-sanction (four to six month) mark, 90% of all disruptions had occurred. See Figure 2.

Figure2: Disruption date and sanction



Limitations

This analysis utilized data from a broader cross-sectional study of child outcomes and, as such, only a very narrow time period of data was available. This narrow timeframe limited the analytical options and prohibited the use of discrete event-history analysis methods that are more ideally suited to detecting causality over time. However, some important conclusions can be drawn.

Discussion points

- Students whose families experienced sanctions were more likely to be White or American Indian/Alaskan Native than students from families that did not receive sanctions. Additionally, American Indian/Alaskan Native, White, and Hispanic children received disproportionate numbers of sanctions.
- Children from families that were sanctioned had lower attendance and significantly more enrollment disruptions than children from families that were not sanctioned.
- Challenges experienced by families that result in sanction may be highly correlated with negative educational outcomes for children.
- Greater scrutiny, using more rigorous time- event history analysis with a broader time period, needs to be conducted to identify the family conditions that interfere with the student's school enrollment and the TANF caregiver's ability to comply with program requirements.

References

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- Cleaveland, C. (2007). Without wages of benefits: Disconnected TANF recipient's struggles to achieve agency. *Journal of Women and Social Work*, 22(4), 321-333.
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For the original full report and complete list of references, visit the CASCW web site at <http://cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/> and follow the link to Minn-Link.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) is a resource for child welfare professionals, students, faculty, policy-makers, and other key stakeholders concerned about child welfare in Minnesota. Minn-LInK is a unique collaborative, university-based research environment with the express purpose of studying child and family well being in Minnesota using state administrative data from multiple agencies.

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