Do Welfare Sanctions Increase Child Protection System Involvement? A Cautious Answer

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This study assesses the relationship between various types of welfare grant reductions and subsequent child maltreatment reports in a sample ($N = 1,260$) of recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Results show that receipt of TANF sanctions increases the rate of having an investigation for neglect but does not bear a statistically significant relation to having an indicated report of neglect or abuse. Receipt of other types of grant reductions, however, is positively associated with the rate of having indicated reports. The statistically significant findings persist with the application of fixed-effects techniques, which reduce the potential for omitted variable bias.

One critical unanswered question related to welfare reform is whether imposing sanctions on recipients' welfare benefits increases the risk that parents will maltreat their child. The answer to this question is important for state Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. A heightened risk of child maltreatment would constitute an unintended outcome of welfare reform, an outcome that carries substantial costs for children and families, as well as for state and local social service systems.

The present analyses use survey and administrative data from the Illinois Families Study (IFS) to assess relationships between reductions

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in welfare grants (including sanctions) and involvement with the child protection system (CPS) within a sample of TANF recipients. Four hypotheses are tested: (1) the application of TANF sanctions increases the risk of being reported to CPS, (2) the application of other grant reductions increases the risk of being reported to CPS, (3) the application of sanctions and other grant reductions is more likely to predict neglect reports than other types of maltreatment reports, and (4) the application of sanctions and other grant reductions is unrelated to indicated reports of maltreatment.[1] Analyses control for employment and other public benefits, as well as for a host of predictors associated with both sanctions and CPS intervention.

Background

Historical Connection between the Welfare and Child Protection Systems

It has long been known that children from poor families are overrepresented in the CPS (Gil 1970; Pelton 1981, 1994; Drake and Pandey 1996; Waldfogel 1998; Lindsey 2004).[2] There also is evidence of a strong association between welfare receipt and CPS involvement (Russell and Trainor 1984; Shook 1998; Needell et al. 1999; Shook 1999; Goerge and Lee 2000; Geen, Kortenkamp, and Stagner 2002; Billings, Moore, and McDonald 2003; Paxson and Waldfogel 2003; Slack et al. 2003). Several hypotheses have been advanced to explain why welfare receipt is related to CPS outcomes (e.g., Shook 1999; Hutson 2001; Waldfogel 2004). One is that some of the characteristics of clients who receive welfare are also associated with CPS intervention. A second is that welfare receipt occurs when clients suffer extreme economic hardship; such hardship undermines caregivers' abilities to provide sufficient food, shelter, and other basic necessities to children. This hardship may also heighten levels of stress or depression that affect the client's ability to provide care. A third explanation is that welfare receipt is associated with heightened surveillance by potential maltreatment reporters. This heightened surveillance may occur due to the client's involvement in multiple public or social service systems (Coulton, Korbin, and Su 1999; McDaniel and Slack 2005).

Figure 1 depicts the historical association in the United States between the size of the average monthly welfare caseload (adults and children) and the rate of investigated and confirmed allegations of child maltreatment. The represented time period is from 1990 to 2004. The figure suggests that, prior to the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA; U.S. Public Law 104-193), there was a close association between the child maltreatment rate and the number of recipients on the welfare caseload. Previous individual-level analyses of CPS intake trends demonstrate that

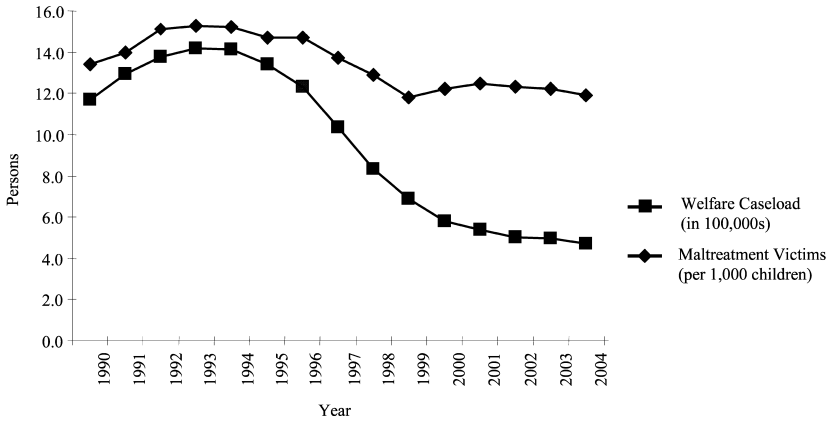

FIG. 1.—U.S. trends in welfare caseload size and child maltreatment victimization, 1990–2004. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2003).

over half of child victims of maltreatment were from families that received welfare during or shortly before the period under study (Shook 1998; Goerge and Lee 2000). Since the passage of PRWORA, the rates have diverged. Although the size of the national welfare caseload has leveled off, the overall rate of child victimization has increased (Slack et al. 2003), raising the possibility that those leaving welfare have high rates of maltreatment. Yet, the rate of CPS intervention among those remaining on welfare also increased significantly (Slack et al. 2003).

Because of the historical overlap between the populations of the public welfare and child protection systems, many family advocates, policy makers, and researchers raised concerns in the late 1990s about the implications that welfare reform policies might have for CPS (Meezan and Giovannoni 1995; Shook 1998, 1999; Waldfogel 1998; Courtney 1999; Geen and Boots 1999; Romero, Chavkin, and Wise 2000). These concerns were linked to several specific components of PRWORA. In particular, it was argued that time limits (including lifetime limits) on assistance and a heightened reliance on sanctions (i.e., cutting welfare assistance in response to noncompliance with welfare rules) carry the potential to adversely affect a family's overall income. If declines in income lead a family to make sacrifices in meeting basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, and clothing), or if such declines exacerbate other family problems, more children could experience CPS involvement (Shook 1998). Furthermore, mandatory work requirements for the vast majority of welfare recipients heighten the possibility that children are left unsupervised or placed in low-quality child-care situations. Lack of supervision and quality care may, in turn, increase the risk of CPS intervention.

Despite these gloomy predictions, there is very little evidence that

CPSs have been overrun, or even greatly strained, by the policy changes resulting from the passage of PRWORA. A leading explanation for this lack of fallout considers the state of the U.S. economy. In the years following the act's passage, employment rates were high, and incomes increased among families affected by welfare reform (Waldfogel 2004). Research also demonstrates an inverse association between employment rates and CPS caseloads (Jones 1990; Fryer and Miyoshi 1996), although it is also worth noting that the rate of single-mother employment is positively associated with the rate of CPS involvement (Spearly and Lauderdale 1983; Paxson and Waldfogel 2002).

Previous Research on Welfare and Child Protection System Overlap

A number of studies discern a heightened risk of CPS involvement among families that receive welfare. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) receipt is known to be associated with the probability of a maltreatment report or with a foster care placement (Needell et al. 1999; Geen et al. 2001). Prior to 1996, states with welfare policies akin to those embodied in PRWORA (e.g., sanctions, immediate work requirements, and time limits) also had high rates of CPS involvement (Paxson and Waldfogel 2003). More recent research shows that child recipients of TANF are more likely to have substantiated reports of maltreatment while receiving welfare than to have such reports after exiting welfare (Goerge and Lee 2000), and unemployed parents on TANF have a greater risk of being reported to CPS than do parents who stopped receiving TANF (Slack et al. 2003). Results from another recent study suggest that welfare receipt is unrelated to CPS reports (Courtney et al. 2005). Multiple cohort studies show that those who left the TANF rolls in recent years were at greater risk for a child maltreatment investigation than were those who exited TANF closer to the passage of PRWORA, and children who entered foster care after the passage of PRWORA returned home more slowly than children who entered foster care prior to welfare reform (Ovwigho, Leavitt, and Born 2003; Wells and Guo 2006). The differences are partly due to parents' loss of welfare income. To be sure, those studies do not directly address the relation between welfare sanctions and child maltreatment. Indeed, these studies are nonexperimental in nature, so little can be concluded about the causal effect of welfare receipt on CPS outcomes. In the only experimental evaluation to investigate associations between general welfare reform policies and CPS outcomes, researchers find that the group exposed to mandatory work requirements, sanctions for noncompliance, expanded health insurance, expanded child-care coverage, and earnings disregards policies experienced a higher rate of substantiated neglect reports than did members of the control group, who were subject to policies that were consistent with the state's AFDC program (Fein

and Lee 2003). Still, this evaluation is unable to pinpoint whether sanctions, or even specific policy components, play a role in this association.

Overview of the Illinois Welfare Policy Context

Illinois, the locale studied here, has a state TANF plan that involves a mixture of work incentives and penalties for welfare-rule noncompliance (Slack et al. 2003; Lewis et al. 2004). Incentives include a generous income-disregards policy. Two-thirds of earned income is disregarded indefinitely in determining TANF benefit levels. The state also has a so-called stopped clock policy, under which the clock for the federal 60-month lifetime limit stops for recipients who work a minimum number of hours. Illinois has a broader definition of work activities (to include education) than many other states. An institutionalized appeals and reconciliation process is available for recipients who believe that they were treated unfairly under state welfare policies. Several of the state's TANF policies may also be considered punitive. Illinois TANF policy initially included a family cap, but the provision was repealed in 2004 (Lewis et al. 2004).[3] To address certain situations of noncompliance, state policy provides for reductions in food stamps and loss of Medicaid coverage (for head of household only).[4] The state's TANF policy also includes a full-family-grant sanction that can be imposed for a third episode of noncompliance (unless the recipient can demonstrate good cause for not adhering to welfare rules and regulations).[5] First and second instances of noncompliance result in a 50 percent grant reduction. Reasons for a sanction include noncompliance with work requirements, noncooperation with the child support enforcement process, school truancy issues involving a dependent child, and failure to provide evidence of a child's immunizations. There is evidence that Illinois imposes full-family-grant sanctions judiciously. Previous analyses by Bong Joo Lee, Kristen Slack, and Dan Lewis (2004) show that partial-grant sanctions comprise the vast majority of TANF sanctions associated with participants in the IFS.

Although scholars and policy makers devote much attention to TANF sanctions, other types of welfare grant reductions have long been in place at the state level. Such grant reductions can occur for a myriad of reasons. For example, a grant decreases as a recipient's income rises or as her children reach age 18 (at which age they are no longer considered dependents). Grant reductions can also occur for administrative reasons. Recipients may fail to file required paperwork or miss an appointment with a welfare worker, and reductions may result from worker error (Brodkin 1986; Cherlin et al. 2002; Kalil, Seefeldt, and Wang 2002). These types of grant reductions may not be officially coded as sanctions within administrative tracking systems, but they may be experienced as a real income loss if a family does not have resources to

offset the loss (Shook 1999). Mark Courtney and colleagues (2005) do not find an association between being sanctioned while receiving welfare benefits in Wisconsin and having a subsequent child maltreatment report. Chi-Fang Wu and colleagues (2004) find that sanction spells in Wisconsin tend to be short, and most recipients with full-grant sanctions have their grant reinstated in the first month after the sanction. In general, it is important to move beyond a narrow view of sanctions, assessing the relation between child maltreatment and a wide range of grant reductions. It is also important to analyze the implications for child maltreatment of the grant reductions within the context of family income and to take into account the reinstatement of grant amounts when reductions occur.

Methods

Study Design and Sample

The IFS is a longitudinal panel study of a random sample ($N = 1,899$) of Illinois TANF recipients from nine counties. Together, these counties represent approximately three-quarters of the state's welfare population.[6] The sample was stratified by region; half was drawn from Cook County (Chicago area); the other half was drawn from the collective caseloads of eight other counties with midsized and smaller cities as well as rural areas.[7]

In the first survey wave, conducted in late 1999 and 2000, in-person interviews were completed with 1,363 sample members (72 percent response rate). Administrative data from the Chapin Hall Center for Children's Integrated Database on Child and Family Programs in Illinois were then linked to survey data through a probabilistic matching process (Goerge, Van Voorhis, and Lee 1994).[8] For the present analysis, the sample includes 1,260 wave 1 respondents who gave consent to researchers for the purpose of linking their survey information with administrative data. Administrative data pertaining to welfare receipt (including sanctions and other grant reductions), employment, and child protection events were extracted for each quarter from the quarter preceding the wave 1 interview date through the first quarter of 2003. Employment data only pertain to the respondent, who is the designated head of household. Welfare receipt is captured for the entire grant on which the respondent is the designated head, and CPS events relate to either the respondent (as the alleged perpetrator) or her dependent children (as the alleged victims, regardless of the identity of the alleged perpetrator). Respondents who consented to linking survey and administrative data are compared with those who did not give consent. Analyses assess the two groups on a wide range of survey measures. These measures indicate that there are only three statistically significant

mean differences. Consenters are, on average, more likely to have been teenagers at the birth of their first child (61 percent vs. 49 percent of nonconsenters), to have a dependent child under age 5 (55 percent vs. 33 percent of nonconsenters), and to have at least three dependent children (41 percent vs. 30 percent of nonconsenters). The implications of this potential selection bias are raised in the discussion below.

Measures

Dependent variables.—Three CPS outcomes are modeled: reports of child neglect, reports of physical abuse, and indicated reports of maltreatment.[9] Each dichotomous outcome is assigned a one for every quarter of occurrence.[10]

Welfare and work covariates.—The majority of welfare and work covariates are time varying, dichotomous in nature, and lagged by 1 quarter relative to the CPS events. In the measure of grant reductions, information on the monthly grant amount is used to determine whether there is a decline in cash welfare benefits by 50 percent or more from 1 month to the next.[11] If administrative data indicate that a respondent's record bears an official sanction code, the grant reduction is considered a sanction; if the reduction is not associated with a sanction code in the same month as a grant reduction, it is categorized as an other grant reduction. In cases of sanctions or other grant reductions, the coding also indicates whether a respondent replaced lost resources by acquiring supplemental income from other sources. Specifically, if the amount of the grant reduction is offset by the combination of earnings and food stamps, reductions are coded as supplemented. If the reduction was not offset by income from these sources, it is coded as unsupplemented. An additional indicator examines whether a grant is reinstated after a sanction or other reduction. The measure of grant reinstatement assigns a one if the TANF grant is increased by an amount equivalent to the reduction amount in the month following that reduction.

Analyses also control for whether a respondent's TANF grant was relatively stable in the previous quarter (i.e., no grant reductions of 50 percent or greater), whether the respondent lacked earnings (derived from unemployment insurance data) of at least $300 in the previous quarter, whether the respondent's food stamps were reduced by half in the previous quarter, and whether the respondent's Medicaid coverage was stopped for 1 or more months in the previous quarter. An additional time-varying variable captures the count of the person-quarters between the wave 1 interview quarter and the first quarter of 2003. Inclusion of this variable controls for unobserved effects of the passage of time on the risk of being reported to CPS.

Other covariates.—All other covariates are time invariant. A count variable tracks the cumulative number of months of AFDC and TANF

receipt between 1980 and the end of 1998. The variable, cumulative quarters with earnings, 1995–98, measures the number of quarters with earnings of $300 or more during that period. A dichotomous indicator tracks whether the respondent or any of her dependent children was associated with an indicated CPS report between 1980 and the respondent's wave 1 interview date. Since some portion of the TANF caseload is exempted from work requirements (and, thus, not subject to work-related sanctions), a dichotomous variable indicates whether a respondent reports being told by a welfare worker that she was exempt from participating in TANF's work requirements. Demographic variables include region of residence (Cook County or downstate), race and ethnicity (i.e., two dummy variables categorize respondents as non-Hispanic white, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic black), whether the respondent cohabits with a spouse or partner, whether the respondent was under age 20 at the birth of her first child, whether the respondent has three or more dependent children (under age 18), whether the respondent has any dependent children under age 5, and whether the respondent has a high school degree or general equivalency diploma (GED). Two dichotomous measures capture whether the respondent has a health condition that limits work activity and whether she has any children with an activity-limiting condition. A dichotomous variable indicates whether the respondent reportedly engages in informal work activities (e.g., babysitting and house cleaning) that may generate earnings not captured by the state's unemployment insurance system.

A three-item measure, adapted from a study by Dennis Orthner and Peter Neenan (1996), captures the respondent's perceptions concerning the availability of social support. A high score on this measure indicates negative perceptions of available social support. An eight-item parenting stress measure created for the Women's Employment Study is also included (Dunifon, Kalil, and Danziger 2003). It incorporates items adapted from the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin 1983). Depressive symptoms are captured by the 12-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber 1983). Alcohol or drug use prior to the interview is captured with a dichotomous measure that tracks whether a respondent reported having more than five drinks in a day on three or more occasions or using marijuana, heroin, cocaine, or any other illicit drug at least once in the year prior to the interview. Another variable captures whether the respondent told interviewers that she encountered severe domestic violence victimization in the year prior to the interview. The measure defines severe domestic violence as being hit, slapped, kicked, or threatened with a gun or knife. A dichotomous measure indicates whether the respondent reported having a learning disability. Food hardship in the year prior to the interview is assessed by a measure composed of five items that are adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Core Food Security

Table 1

DESCRIPTIVES FOR TIME-VARYING MEASURES (N = 1,260)

Independent Variable	Percentage*	SD
Any investigated child maltreatment report	18	
Any investigated neglect report	10	
Any investigated physical abuse report	6	
Any indicated maltreatment report	7	
Any sanction during observation period†	20	
Any sanction without income supplementation	12	
Any sanction with income supplementation	11	
Any other grant reduction†	61	
Any other grant reduction without income supplementation	39	
Any other grant reduction with income supplementation	40	
Any grant reinstatement	8	
Average quarterly earnings (mean dollars)†	1,466	1,826
Any loss of Medicaid coverage	53	
Any food stamp reduction of 50% or more	86	
Quarterly income from earnings, TANF, and food stamps (mean dollars)†	2,065	1,726

NOTE.—TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
* Results are presented in percentages unless otherwise noted.
† The measure offers additional descriptive information on the sample but was not included as a control variable in the multivariate analyses.

Module (Price, Hamilton, and Cook 1997). Examples of items include "In the past year, how often did you cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?" and "In the past year, how often were you unable to feed your children a balanced meal because there wasn't enough money for food?" Response options are never, sometimes, or often. The higher the score, the higher the level of food hardship. Housing hardship in the year prior to the interview is assessed with a dichotomous measure that assigns a one if the respondent reported any major housing difficulties (e.g., eviction, doubling up with other families, and inability to pay rent).

Table 1 depicts the sample characteristics for time-varying measures. Almost one-fifth of the sample (18 percent) was investigated by CPS during the study observation period (i.e., the wave 1 interview date through March 2003). Ten percent of families in the sample were investigated following a neglect report, 6 percent were investigated after a physical abuse report, and 7 percent were the subject of a maltreatment report that was indicated upon CPS investigation. Twenty percent of respondents were sanctioned during the observation period; 12 percent had a sanction that was not offset by supplemented earnings or food stamps (i.e., sanction without income supplementation) during the period, and 11 percent experienced a TANF sanction that was offset by supplemental income from these sources.[12] Over 60 percent of respon-

Table 2

DESCRIPTIVES FOR TIME-INVARIANT MEASURES (N = 1,260)

Independent Variable	Percentage*	SD
Cumulative months on AFDC and TANF before wave 1 (count)	78	35
No. of quarters with earnings of $300 or more, 1995–98 (count)	4.1	4.7
CPS involvement prior to wave 1 (1980–wave 1)	18	
Exempt from work requirements	12	
Reside downstate (central or southern Illinois)	10	
Hispanic	11	
Non-Hispanic white	8	
Non-Hispanic black	81	
Living with spouse or partner	5	
Under age 20 at birth of her first child	61	
Respondent has three or more children under age 18	41	
One or more children under age 5	55	
No high school diploma or GED	42	
Informal work activity	9	
Health condition that limits work activity	23	
Any child with activity-limiting condition	25	
Social support (score range 0–6; 6 = less support)	1.4	1.7
Parenting stress (score range 8–29; 29 = more stress)	15.3	4.3
Learning disability	5	
Depressive symptoms (range 0–36; 36 = more depressive symptoms)	5.9	8.1
AODA issues in year prior to interview	5	
Severe domestic violence in year prior to interview	6	
Food hardship in year prior to interview (score range 5–15; 15 = more food hardship)	5.98	1.78
Housing hardship in year prior to interview	45	

NOTE.—AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; CPS = child protective services; GED = general equivalency diploma; AODA = alcohol or drug abuse.

* Results are presented in percentages unless otherwise noted.

dents experienced a grant reduction other than an official sanction; 39 percent experienced other grant reductions (i.e., not sanctions) that were not offset by supplemented earnings or food stamps, and 40 percent offset grant reductions by supplementing these other income sources. Eight percent of sample members had their grants reinstated in the month following a reduction. Average quarterly earnings during the study observation period were $1,466, and average quarterly income from earnings, TANF, and food stamps was $2,065.

Table 2 shows the means and percentages for time-invariant measures associated with the sample members. On average, respondents had 78 cumulative months of AFDC and TANF receipt from 1980 through 1998. They reported 4 quarters of employment from 1995 through 1998. Eigh-

teen percent had CPS involvement prior to the wave 1 interview. Twelve percent reported being told that they were exempt from TANF work requirements. Ten percent of sample members resided downstate, 5 percent lived with a spouse or partner, 41 percent had three or more dependent children under age 18, and over half had at least one child under age 5 at the time of the wave 1 interview. Sixty-one percent were under age 20 when their first child was born, and 42 percent lacked a high school degree or its equivalent. Nine percent report engaging in informal work activities (i.e., work activity that is not captured in data from the state's unemployment insurance system), and nearly one-quarter report having a health condition that limited their ability to work. The majority of sample members are non-Hispanic black (81 percent). Eleven percent are Hispanic, and 8 percent are non-Hispanic white.

Analytic Strategy

Two methods are used to model the various CPS outcomes. First, event history analysis techniques are used to predict the first occurrence of each CPS outcome. Specifically, Cox proportional hazards models are estimated, allowing for the inclusion of time-varying covariates and time-invariant covariates. The model predicts the hazard for person i at time t, given that the outcome did not already occur (Allison 1996). The Cox strategy is used in several other analyses predicting CPS outcomes with welfare and work covariates (Shook 1999; Slack et al. 2003; Courtney et al. 2005). In the equation, $h(t)$ is the hazard function of having a CPS outcome at time t; $\mathbf{x}_i$ is a vector of time-invariant explanatory variables; $\mathbf{W}_{i(t-1)}$ is a vector of time-varying welfare and work covariates that are lagged by 1 quarter relative to the outcome; $h_0(t)$ represents the baseline underlying hazard function that is constant over time:

$$\ln h(t) = \ln h_0(t) + \mathbf{x}_i + \mathbf{W}_{i(t-1)}. \quad (1)$$

Due to the nonexperimental nature of the study, there may be important omitted variables, and such omissions may lead to bias in the event history estimates. Respondent-specific fixed-effects models also are analyzed to account for these factors. By modeling change over time, the models effectively control for unobserved time-invariant respondent characteristics that may be associated with the welfare and work variables as well as with CPS involvement. Time-invariant measures are dropped from the fixed-effects models. Specifically, these analyses use a fixed-effects logit (i.e., conditional logit) to estimate the log odds of the occurrence of a CPS outcome as a linear function of work and welfare variables, other covariates, and a respondent fixed effect. The models take the following form:

$$\ln [\Pr (\mathrm{CPS}_{it} = 1|\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{W}_{it}, \alpha_i)] - \ln [1 - \Pr (\mathrm{CPS}_{it} = 1|\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{W}_{it}, \alpha_i)]$$
$$= \beta'\mathbf{x}_i + \delta\mathbf{W}_{it} + \alpha_i, \quad (2)$$

where $\mathrm{CPS}_{it} = 1$ indicates the occurrence of a CPS outcome for respondent i at time t, $\mathrm{CPS}_{it} = 0$ indicates no occurrence of the CPS outcome for respondent i at time t, $\Pr (\mathrm{CPS}_{it} = 1|\mathbf{x}_i, \mathbf{W}_{it}, \alpha_i)$ is the conditional probability of the CPS outcome occurring, α_i is a respondent fixed effect, and β and δ are parameters. Because all time-invariant observed ($\mathbf{x}_i$) and unobserved factors are differenced from the model when it is estimated across time periods, β will not be estimated. Conditional maximum likelihood is used to estimate δ.

The model provides an unbiased estimate of δ to the extent that all unobserved factors correlated with both the CPS outcome and the explanatory (welfare and work) variables of interest are constant over time and have constant effects over time. Essentially, the model uses each respondent as her own control. It identifies effects by taking advantage of intrarespondent change over time on the work and welfare variables.

In these models, the observation period is not censored at the first occurrence of a CPS event. Rather, the full observation period is used, and multiple CPS events of the same type, within each family, can be included in the analysis. The goal is to model change in the probability of a CPS outcome as a function of changes in welfare and work covariates.

Base weights correct for sample stratification and nonresponse in the IFS. These weights are constructed using sampling frame data on employment, welfare receipt, food stamp use, Medicaid enrollment, and key demographic characteristics. These weights are applied to all analyses.

Findings

Results from the event history analyses are depicted in table 3. The emphasis here is on statistically significant relations. Relying on that emphasis, the table suggests that sanctions, regardless of whether they were accompanied by income supplementation from work or food stamps, are positively associated to a statistically significant degree with the rate of having an investigated neglect report. However, sanctions are not associated with the rate of having an indicated report of child maltreatment. Having some other type of grant reduction (i.e., other than a sanction) is associated with an increased rate of having a neglect report, but this association is only statistically significant when the reduction is not accompanied by income supplementation from earnings or food stamps. The occurrence of other grant reductions without income supplementation is related to indicated reports of maltreatment.

Table 3

PREDICTORS OF MALTREATMENT REPORTS: EVENT HISTORY ANALYSIS

Independent Variable	Neglect Report (Person-Quarters)		Physical Abuse Report (Person-Quarters)		Indicated Report of Child Maltreatment (Person-Quarters)	
	HR	SE	HR	SE	HR	SE
Sanction without income supplementation (lagged)	4.40**	.52	3.48	.83	…[a]	…
Sanction with income supplementation	3.91*	.65	3.12	.86	2.16	.84
Other grant reduction without income supplementation (lagged)	2.06*	.39	1.03	.72	3.74**	.38
Other grant reduction with income supplementation (lagged)	1.03	.67	1.25	.75	1.38	.69
No TANF reduction of 50% or more in qtr. prior to interview (lagged)	1.48	.23	2.19**	.29	1.34	.28
No earnings of $300 or more in qtr. prior to interview (lagged)	1.47	.21	.64	.26	1.28	.24
Respondent's Medicaid stopped (lagged)	.71	.46	1.48	.45	1.08	.46
Food stamps reduced by 50% (lagged)	1.18	.21	.92	.28	.96	.25
Person-quarter (time varying)	.94*	.03	1.02	.04	.96	.03
Exempt from work requirements	1.57*	.23	1.59	.31	2.32**	.26
Cumulative months on AFDC and TANF before wave 1	1.00	.003	1.00	.004	.99	.004
No. of quarters with earnings of $300 or more, 1995–98	.99	.02	1.01	.03	1.01	.03
CPS involvement prior to wave 1	3.34**	.20	1.88*	.27	1.76*	.25
Reside downstate (central or southern Illinois)	.89	.32	.75	.44	.89	.37
Hispanic (ref. is non-Hispanic black)	.54	.41	.93	.43	.43	.48
Non-Hispanic white (ref. is non-Hispanic black)	2.26**	.29	2.84**	.40	2.67**	.33
Living with spouse or partner	1.45	.34	.98	.47	1.38	.39
Under age 20 at birth of her first child	.99	.21	1.27	.28	.74	.24
Respondent has three or more children under age 18	1.63*	.21	1.96*	.28	2.46**	.26
One or more children under age 5	1.34	.21	1.30	.27	.75	.24
No high school diploma or GED	1.13	.21	.88	.27	.19	.24
Informal work activity	.85	.35	1.16	.40	1.68	.34
Health condition that limits work activity	.81	.24	.26**	.40	.85	.27
One or more children with activity-limiting condition	1.30	.21	.98	.28	.79	.26
Social support	.97	.06	1.18*	.07	1.18*	.07
Parenting stress	1.06**	.02	1.00	.03	1.05	.03
Learning disability	1.58	.32	3.91**	.39	2.24*	.36
Depressive symptoms	1.01	.01	1.03*	.01	1.00	.01
AODA issues in year prior to interview	1.11	.39	3.09**	.41	1.78	.42
Severe domestic violence in year prior to interview	2.91**	.28	2.62**	.38	1.82	.37
Food hardship in year prior to interview	.97	.05	.88	.08	.89	.07
Housing hardship in year prior to interview	.91	.21	1.92*	.28	1.32	.25
Constant	.001**	.61	.001**	.78	.003**	.68
N	13,291		14,169		14,007	

NOTE.—AFDC = Aid to Families with Dependent Children; TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; CPS = child protective services; GED = general equivalency diploma; AODA = alcohol or drug abuse; qtr. = quarter; HR = hazard ratio; ref. = reference group.

[a] There was insufficient variation on this measure in the model predicting indicated reports. As a result, the measure was dropped from the analysis.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Having a stable TANF grant (i.e., no grant reduction of 50 percent or more) is associated with an increased rate of having an investigated report of physical abuse. Being exempt from TANF work requirements is positively associated with both neglect investigations and indicated maltreatment reports.

Other covariates have statistically significant associations with all three CPS outcomes. These include having a history of CPS involvement prior to the wave 1 interview, being non-Hispanic white, and having three or more dependent children under age 18 in the home. All of these factors increase the likelihood of a CPS event. In addition, respondents who reported having a work-limiting health condition were less likely than those without such conditions to have a physical abuse report. Scores on the scale for depressive symptoms are positively correlated with the likelihood that a respondent or her child will encounter a report of physical abuse: the higher the depression scores, the greater the likelihood that a respondent or her child will be associated with a report of physical abuse. Compared to respondents who did not report alcohol or drug abuse (AODA) issues, experience of severe domestic violence, or housing hardships, those who reported such an experience are more likely to have a physical abuse report associated with themselves or their children. Severe domestic violence is also associated with an increased likelihood of a neglect report. The social support measure, which captures respondents' perceptions of available support, is also associated with the rates of physical abuse and indicated maltreatment reports: the higher the score, the more negative the respondent's perception of available support and the higher the rate of reports. As the scores on the parenting stress measure increase, the likelihood of a neglect report also increases. Having a learning disability is associated with increases in the rate of physical abuse and indicated reports.

Findings from the fixed-effects analyses are presented in table 4. The table suggests that sanctions, if they are not offset by income supplemented from earnings or food stamp benefits, are positively associated with the likelihood of having a neglect report. The positive association between sanctions with supplementation and neglect reports in the Cox model, as well as the absence of such an association in the fixed-effects analysis, indicates that unmeasured, time-invariant characteristics may bias the finding in the Cox model. Other grant reductions, if they are not offset by supplemented income, are positively associated with the rate of having an indicated report of child maltreatment.

Discussion

Because analyses adjust for changes in earnings, food stamp amounts, and Medicaid coverage, it is plausible that the estimated effects on child maltreatment reports associated with grant reductions stem from real

Table 4

PREDICTORS OF MALTREATMENT REPORTS: FIXED-EFFECTS ANALYSIS (N = 14,640 Person-Quarters)

	Neglect Report		Physical Abuse Report		Indicated Report of Child Maltreatment	
Independent Variable	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
Sanction without income supplementation (lagged)	3.02*	1.54	.62	.53	…[a]	…
Sanction with income supplementation	1.26	.85	2.04	1.78	1.44	1.28
Other grant reduction without income supplementation (lagged)	1.41	.59	.59	.36	3.97**	1.54
Other grant reduction with income supplementation (lagged)	.53	.35	.47	.36	.76	.56
No TANF reduction of 50% or more in qtr. prior to interview (lagged)	1.12	.25	1.32	.32	1.26	.34
No earnings of $300 or more in qtr. prior to interview (lagged)	1.15	.31	.75	.22	.75	.27
Respondent's Medicaid stopped (lagged)	.70	.25	.95	.35	.98	.41
Food stamps reduced by 50% (lagged)	1.33	.24	1.22	.24	.78	.19

NOTE.—TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; qtr. = quarter; OR = odds ratio.

[a] There was insufficient variation on this measure in the model predicting indicated reports. As a result, the measure was dropped from the analysis.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

declines in income and from the cash portion of the benefit package (i.e., TANF grant, food stamps, and Medicaid) for which most TANF recipients are eligible. An important caveat is that, for the current analyses, data are not available on the full range of monthly income sources potentially tapped by sample members. For example, such sources may include partner's earnings, child support amounts, and Supplemental Security Income. It is possible that these and other income sources fluctuated in response to, or in anticipation of, TANF grant reductions. The omission of these sources from statistical models may therefore bias the findings.

In light of the finding that sanctions are associated with an increased likelihood of a neglect report, it also appears that sanctioned recipients are coming to the attention of the CPS in Illinois. Furthermore, only sanctions without income supplementation are associated with neglect reports in the fixed-effects analysis. This suggests that the observed relationship is a function of worsened conditions of poverty. However,

sanctions are not associated with indicated reports of maltreatment. To the extent that sanctions are associated with increased economic hardship, as previous research repeatedly demonstrates (Cherlin et al. 2002; Kalil et al. 2002; Pavetti, Derr, and Hesketh 2003; Lee et al. 2004; Reichman, Teitler, and Curtis 2005), it can be argued that CPS is appropriately distinguishing reports related to poverty from those related to other circumstances associated with neglect and, thus, with indicated maltreatment reports. A critical question, though, is whether families reported for maltreatment in the wake of a sanction need assistance in providing basic necessities for their children. The type of assistance required may fall outside of the scope of CPS, but it is unclear whether other systems or services are available to address the needs of such families.

Another interesting finding is that, apart from sanctions, other types of grant reductions are associated with having an indicated report of maltreatment. This finding is unexpected in light of the assumption that income declines due to grant reductions of any type would be viewed by CPS investigators as an indication of worsened poverty and not of problematic parenting, an unsafe environment, or unacceptable conditions. Since poverty in and of itself is not typically considered a sufficient cause for substantiating abuse or neglect, this finding raises the question of whether other (unmeasured time-invariant) characteristics explain it. Another interpretation is that, in some cases, other grant reductions can impose real hardship on families, and this hardship manifests in terms of compromised child safety.

In the proportional hazards model, but not in the fixed-effects model, TANF recipients with stable grants (i.e., no grant reduction of 50 percent or more) have a higher rate of physical abuse reports than sample members who were not receiving TANF. This finding suggests that recipients who remain on TANF and do not experience significant fluctuation in their grant amounts may be characterized by certain omitted variables. In other words, those who remain on welfare, particularly those whose grants remain relatively stable, may differ substantially from those whose benefits fluctuate and from those who leave the TANF rolls. The special characteristics of recipients with stable grants also may be associated with reports of physical abuse.

In the present analysis, efforts to deal with potential selection bias include the incorporation of a host of covariates known to be associated in the proportional hazards models with both sanctions and CPS outcomes. Such efforts also include the application of fixed-effects techniques, which implicitly control for time-invariant characteristics of the respondent or family. However, the nonexperimental design makes it difficult to assess the causal effect of welfare sanctions and other grant reductions on subsequent CPS events. The findings thus must be characterized as correlational despite efforts to overcome selection issues

introduced by omitted variables, nonresponse to the initial survey, and refusal to consent to administrative data linkages. Indeed, results of difference-of-means tests that compare respondents who consented to administrative data access with nonconsenting respondents suggest that consenters tend to have younger and larger families. They also tend to have started their families at earlier ages. Unmeasured factors related to these characteristics may bias the findings.

Another limitation to the study is the focus on a single state. It can be argued that Illinois, with its relatively generous balance of welfare policy carrots and sticks, is a conservative benchmark for states with more stringent welfare policies. However, states differ not only in terms of their welfare policies but also in terms of their child protection practices, their socioeconomic environments, their service context, and their demographic composition. In terms of the relationship between the welfare and CPS systems, such differences make the results of cross-state comparisons murky at best.

The present study does not inform a larger question about the mechanisms linking welfare sanctions to CPS outcomes. In the absence of measures of parenting and other risk factors that vary across the same time intervals as welfare covariates, work covariates, and CPS outcomes, findings cannot definitively pinpoint the role of poverty or worsened economic situations in the statistical associations that emerge. The present study also is unable to shed light on whether welfare reform affects rates of child maltreatment. The present analysis focuses on CPS involvement; such a focus does not capture all situations of abuse and neglect. Although it may be assumed that increased rates or odds of CPS intervention signify an underlying increase in child maltreatment, there may be other factors that influence CPS intake and that are independent of actual child maltreatment trends (e.g., improved reporting, CPS capacity and resources, and high profile cases of maltreatment in the media).

Several strengths of the present study are also worth mentioning. The IFS involves a large sample that is representative of one state's welfare caseload in the years immediately following PRWORA's implementation. Data include repeated measures of key predictors and outcomes. The panel design also affords a prospective assessment of CPS outcomes at the family level. This approach, combined with a rich array of survey and administrative data on welfare, work, and CPS events, offers insight into the risk and protective factors that are associated with child protection intervention. Regardless of their causal role, such factors at least identify the types of characteristics and circumstances that social service systems may need to address in order to prevent ongoing or escalating threats to child safety.

Taken together, the findings suggest that although sanctions may elevate the risk of a CPS report, this risk does not rise to a level that

warrants more intensive involvement from the CPS system. However, sanctions and other welfare grant reductions should be viewed as potential signals that a family needs assistance. Because assistance to address hardships associated with sanctions or other grant reductions may not be systematically available in child welfare or public welfare systems, important policy questions include where and how such families are best served in the network of social service systems.

Because sanctions and other grant reductions are associated with various hardships, including CPS outcomes, welfare and CPS systems may benefit from coordinated monitoring procedures to ensure that such hardships do not rise to an unacceptable level for child safety. Welfare and CPS systems should work together in supporting families that experience increased risks in the wake of a benefit reduction but do not have safety issues that rise to the level of a child maltreatment finding. Strategies might include integrated service systems (Erhle, Scarcella, and Geen 2004), alternative response models in CPS (Waldfogel 1998; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2003), and dedicated emergency assistance funding (Eamon and Kopels 2004) for families that come to the attention of CPS following a loss of benefits.

Conclusion

Findings from this analysis suggest that sanctions and other grant reductions should be viewed as signals of family hardship, particularly when the reductions cannot be offset by income from other supplemental sources. To the extent that the welfare system causes such hardship, it may be argued that this is an acceptable consequence for TANF families that require an extra push toward self-sufficiency. If it is assumed, however, that very few families strive to become involved with CPS, the association of child maltreatment investigations with sanctions and other grant reductions should generate concern.

This analysis also demonstrates that the receipt of sanctions is associated with being investigated for neglect, but it is not associated with having an indicated report. In short, it is possible that welfare reform policies have led to a kind of social service no-man's-land, where families that fall through the TANF safety net are not detected by the CPS system or are screened out of this system because the family's hardship does not pose a sufficiently high risk to the safety of the children. Whether such families are or should be the responsibility of the CPS system, the welfare system, or some other service system is one of several questions requiring further debate. What role should economic dependency play in child welfare policy and in definitions of child maltreatment? What are the key components of the current social welfare safety net, and should the CPS system function as the ultimate safety net for families that are unable to follow the work-first requirements of the national

welfare system? Whether the findings presented here indicate that sanctions cause certain hardships or simply indicate that those who receive sanctions are also those who face the most difficult transition to self-sufficiency, a discussion of how to improve welfare sanction policy is warranted. Welfare sanctions probably do not cause child maltreatment, but sanctions, as well as other types of welfare grant reductions, do appear to be associated with severe hardships for some families. Deciding who intervenes and how to intervene when such hardships occur constitutes a critical social welfare policy frontier.

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Notes

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1. The term "indicated" refers to reports of maltreatment that child protection workers have investigated and determined likely to have occurred. Some states use the terms "substantiated" or "founded" to refer to cases in which evidence of alleged maltreatment is identified.

2. The term "child welfare system" refers to the broad set of services (e.g., screening and investigation, in-home services, out-of-home care, and adoption) for children who are abused or neglected. The term "child protection system" refers only to the intake end of the child welfare system (e.g., screening, investigation, and case finding).

3. Prior to the passage of PRWORA, the amount of a family's welfare benefit increased with the birth of each additional child. Family caps place restrictions on those increases.

4. For example, reductions occur if a caregiver does not cooperate with child support enforcement and does not show good cause for the lack of cooperation. A caregiver's Medicaid coverage is not stopped if she is pregnant or postpartum.

5. Although sanctions were imposed in Illinois prior to the passage of PRWORA, they were limited to the adult recipient's portion of the grant.

6. Ninety-five percent of the IFS survey respondents are mothers.

7. These eight counties (Fulton, Knox, Marshall, Peoria, St. Clair, Stark, Tazewell, and Woodford) are collectively referred to as downstate counties, reflecting their geographic location relative to Cook County.

8. For information on the Integrated Database on Child and Family Programs in Illinois, see http://www.about.chapinhall.org/work/chss.html.

9. Sexual abuse reports and emotional maltreatment reports occurred too infrequently within the study risk period to warrant their inclusion as separate CPS outcomes.

10. Although records of CPS events specify the dates of occurrence, one of the key

predictors (earnings) was available only in a quarterly format. Thus, person-period observations are defined in terms of quarters.

11. Covariates related to TANF were available in a monthly format, and events (e.g., grant reductions) were determined based on changes from 1 month to the next. Once computed, the information is aggregated to quarterly units.

12. The sum of the percentages for supplemented and unsupplemented sanctions (and other grant reductions) exceeds total percentages due to multiple occurrences of each event within a family.