

A STATISTICAL MICRO-DATA SOURCE ON AFDC RECIPIENTS

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Introduction

The National Center for Social Statistics (NCSS) of the Social and Rehabilitation Service (SRS) and its predecessor organizations have conducted detailed studies on the aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) program on an intermittent basis since 1948 covering demographic, social, and program characteristics and financial circumstances of recipients. AFDC, the nation's major Federal-State cash assistance welfare program, provides public assistance to needy families with children who are deprived of parental support and care, including those with fathers who are unemployed. (Reference 1) Since its inception in 1936, the AFDC family caseload has increased from 162 thousand in December 1937 to 3.6 million families in March 1976.

This paper provides key information on the only National source of AFDC "micro" data and observations on the 1975 AFDC study. Study results have been used as basic information on AFDC recipients, benchmarks to evaluate household survey data, and as policy oriented research material (References 2, 3, and 4). AFDC studies are conducted primarily for program administration, e.g., to analyze how long AFDC assistance is received and reasons for eligibility. The 1973 and 1975 studies have provided basic data on child support enforcement and the provision of services such as family planning. State agencies use data from these studies to make inter-State comparison. Also, many research agencies have used the micro-data computer tape files for modeling purposes.

Historical Perspective

AFDC studies were conducted with one or more study months in 1948 (June), 1953 (November), 1956 (January, February, March, or April), 1958 (October, November, or December), 1961 (December), 1967 (November or December), 1969 (May), 1971 (January), and 1973 (January). The 1975 study has a May study month. Chart I shows the timing of these studies relative to the AFDC recipient caseload. Although studies have become known as a biennial series because of their frequency since 1967, there is no mandate that the studies be conducted at any specified time. A study is conducted based on need and availability of resources, not necessarily following a period of caseload growth.

Over time, the methodology and content of the studies have changed and expanded as the program changed and data needs increased. These changes, of course, do impart on the comparability of data. A list of items included in the various studies since 1967 is available on request. Most of the data elements have been included in more than one study while many items have been included in all studies, e.g., basis for

eligibility, race, number in assistance group, and amount of grant. The primary focus of these studies was the AFDC family.

With respect to program changes, the recent separation of services and payments necessitates the use of two separate survey schedules for each sample case. New items such as those on child support have been recently incorporated. In addition, it has been possible to obtain information on all fathers associated with a case rather than identifying the status of only one father; resulting from more flexibility allowed by computer processing.

Another important difference, especially to the researchers, is that information prior to the 1967 study was reported by State agencies in summary reports, in effect providing only macro-data on recipient characteristics. For studies conducted in 1967 and thereafter, States were required to submit a survey schedule for each family in the study sample. This has resulted not only in a report series but also made available public use micro-data files. Of course, all case-specific identifying information such as names and case number have been removed from these public-use files. NCSS has provided copies of these public-use tapes to government agencies and to the National Technical Information Service.

Table I provides the sample size utilized in these studies. The 1967 study is the most recent that provided published estimates for all State AFDC caseloads. In 1973, States were given the option to supplement the minimum sample required to yield publishable State data. Only for the largest States were the sample sizes sufficient for data to be published for all years.

For the 1969 and 1971 studies, a sample size of 350 or more cases was considered sufficient to separately publish State data. With a confidence level of 95 percent, the sample would measure a difference greater than one percent (i.e., 49.5 & 50.5 percent). For State data published separately for the 1973 study, the sample was designed to measure that a characteristic of 0.5 percent was significantly different from zero (at 95% confidence level). For more details, see reference 2.

The 1975 AFDC Study

The 1975 AFDC Study is currently being completed. Due to State reporting delays and additional processing time needed, a completed computer file should be available at the end of September 1976.

As with other NCSS reports, this study picks up available administrative records in the State/local welfare agencies as the information source. Hence, information to be collected in the study is limited by the information contained in the

case record. This constraint has become more acute with the introduction of the simplified method of eligibility determination which has limited available information only to those data items required for such a determination or retained as an historical caseload management record.

The sample frame for the 1975 AFDC study was similar to that utilized in prior studies. A minimum of 0.5 percent was required (allowing for six States to be published separately) with the option of supplementing the required sample to allow for reliable State estimates (exercised by 24 States).

As in 1973, the sample size was such that a characteristic of 0.5 percent was significantly different from zero (at 95% confidence level). Each State that chose the optional size sample computed the exact sample size for the study month using the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+00116879N}$$

where n= number of families in the sample, and
N= number of families in the caseload in
in the study month

This sample size is designed to measure a characteristic for each State using the same precision as the national sample.

Two innovations were introduced into the sample frame for the 1975 study. The first provided longitudinal information on AFDC families. Sample cases of the January 1973 study that received a payment in May 1975 were incorporated in the 1975 study sample. These cases which received a payment in January 1973 and May 1975 represent the universe of cases that received AFDC at two points in time spanning a 29 month period. These same cases which have been receiving AFDC over a period of several years are included in the regular 1975 AFDC Study sample along with cases that started receiving assistance after January 1973. Thus, the 1975 sample consists of "old" cases, which comprise the longitudinal segment, and "new" cases. Because the sample is drawn by the States, no allowance is made for interstate transfers of cases, i.e., an approved AFDC case discontinued because of a move to another State would not be included in the longitudinal segment.

The second innovation was to include AFDC-Quality Control (QC) sample cases for May 1975 in order to check reported data. After completion of the study, comparisons will be made between QC review data and study data to evaluate the accuracy of the reporting. Items which can be compared are as follows:

- . Time of most recent opening
- . Most recent action is approved application or redetermination

- . Number of persons in assistance group (total, children, adults) and in household (total, others not in group)
- . Deprivation factor
- . WIN program registrants and participants
- . Current employment status of caretaker relative and spouse included in assistance group
- . Presence of nonassistance income and/or resources, by type
- . Amount of AFDC payment

Although the primary effort for developing and conducting the study is with NCSS, considerable guidance is provided by State public welfare agencies because of the Federal-State relationship. In addition to State comments, study schedules were pretested in the Arlington, Virginia, Department of Human Resources. Also recommendations on content were provided by Federal agencies, e.g., OMB.

Preliminary Observations from the 1975 AFDC Study

Some observations are gleaned from preliminary edit reviews on the collection of data for several items relating to time on assistance and number of persons in the household. Additional data on prior openings for AFDC have likely resulted in more accurate reporting on date of most recent opening. For the AFDC study, caseworkers were instructed that payment lapses of three months or less were not to be counted as discontinuances and subsequent reopenings. For a number of cases, the additional data indicated the instruction was not properly followed but it was possible for corrections to be made.

In regard to number of persons in the household, prior studies reported numbers of persons in the AFDC assistance group and of other persons in the household. In addition, the 1975 study also obtained a separate listing of all adults and children in the household. Here the results are more obscure in regard to improved accuracy of the detailed listing versus the summary numbers in those few instances where the data were inconsistent. In some instances, some individuals were not listed while to a much lesser extent some individuals had not been included in the household summary but were listed independently. A concern of any such study is possibly that those individuals a caseworker was reluctant to list as a household member may have been excluded from both the household summary and the detailed listing. Such reluctance may carry over from the man-in-the house era or as a result of the present emphasis on an individuals privacy. In instances where inconsistencies occurred, State agencies were requested to provide the corrected data.

Some areas of concern regarding these studies are as follows. The biennial frequency of the study causes the data to be outdated for some purposes after a period of time prior to availability of

results from a subsequent study. Conducting the studies during one month precludes analyzing seasonal variation of the data. Since the study universe includes only AFDC families currently receiving assistance, data on cases discontinued and those eligible and not receiving assistance are limited. The use of administrative records prohibits questions not directly related to the welfare process such as information on non-recipient household members or opinion type response of recipients. Hence, need exists to institute supplementary household surveys covering target populations in order to obtain required data.

Selected General Findings

As an example of information obtained from the studies, the following is provided:

- . In line with the general population, AFDC families are more likely than not to live in metropolitan areas.
- . The proportion of families that are black has been increasing.
- . The size of the AFDC family has been decreasing and typically includes only a mother and two children at the present.
- . Mothers that are not employed have a greater than even chance of having children under age six; fathers are most likely to be incapacitated for employment when not working.
- . The proportion of families with children whose father was not married to the mother has increased while that for families with orphans has decreased.

Future Efforts

Closely associated with the characteristics studies is a major effort in SRS to develop a statistical data base of recipients of the various social welfare programs. Briefly, such a system, known as the Recipient Statistical Reporting System, will identify individuals and families in one or more programs, e.g., AFDC, food distribution, social services, Medicaid, etc., resulting in a micro-data file containing demographic and program characteristics. Such data can be used in the analysis of separate programs or of the receipt of multiple benefits.

The next characteristics study will be conducted in the spring of 1977. We appreciate the continued support of researchers and other interested data users in the development of these studies.

References:

1. Studies in Public Welfare, Paper No. 20, Handbook of Public Income Transfer Programs: 1975 Joint Committee Print, December 31, 1974.
2. Findings of the 1973 AFDC Study:
 - Part I Demographic and Program Characteristics (June 1974)
 - Part II-A Financial Circumstances (September 1974)
 - Part II-B Financial Circumstances (September 1975)
 - Part III Services to Families (October 1974)
 - Part IV Discontinuances for AFDC Money Payments During 1973 (January 1975)Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, National Center for Social Statistics
3. Income Transfers As A Public Good: "An Application to AFDC" by Larry Orr, The American Economic Review, June 1976
4. Child Support, Data and Material, Prepared for Senate Committee on Finance, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. November 10, 1975

CHART I
 FREQUENCY OF AFDC STUDIES RELATIVE TO THE
 NUMBER OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS OF AFDC MONEY PAYMENTS,
 JUNE AND DECEMBER OF EACH YEAR, 1936 TO DATE

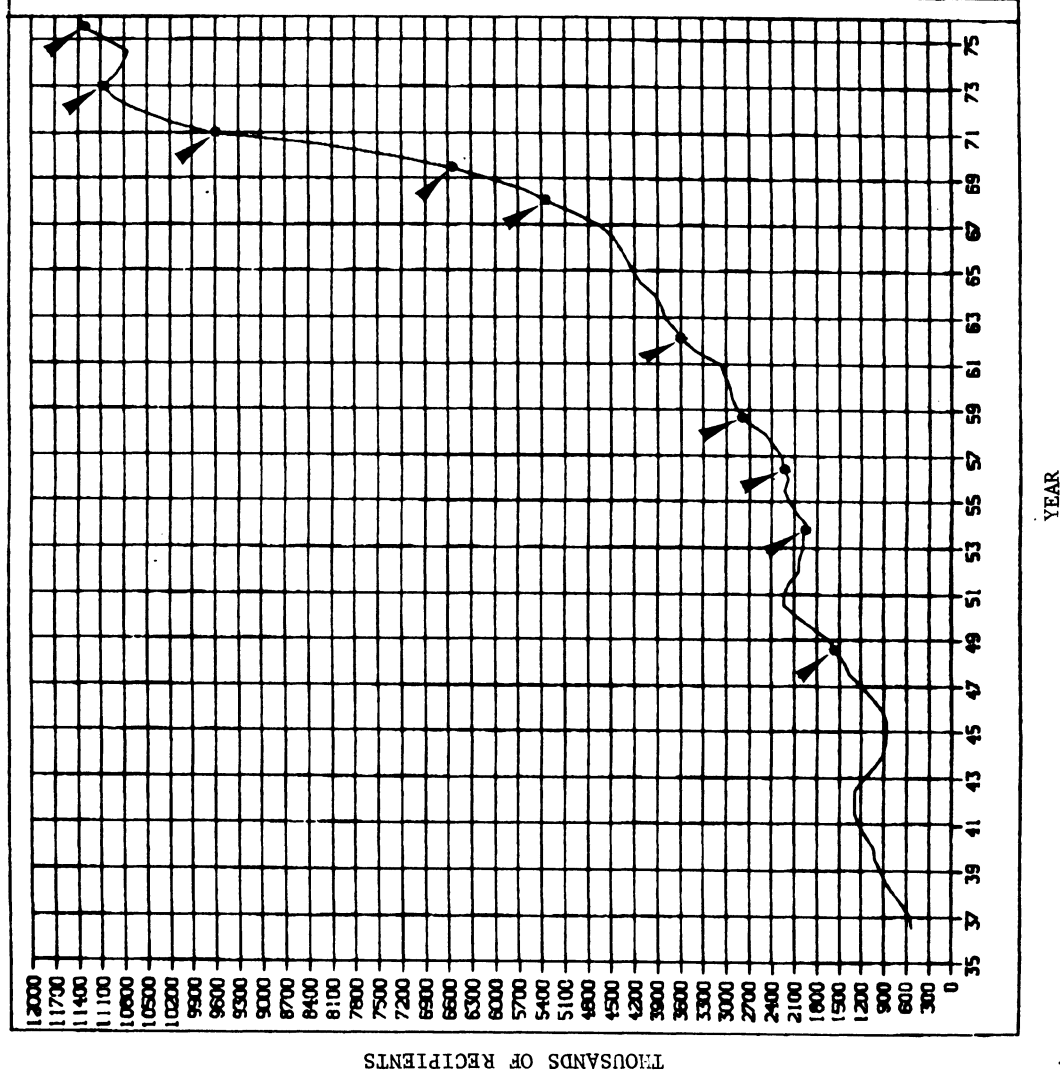


TABLE I

AFDC Characteristics Studies

<u>Study</u>	<u>Number of AFDC Families</u>	<u>Sample</u>		<u>Number of States Published</u>
		<u>Minimum requirement</u>	<u>Number</u>	
1948 (June)	449,202	**	**	50
1953 (Nov.)	541,353	500**	**	52
1956 (Jan.-Apr.)	610,070*	**	**	52
1958 (Oct.-Dec.)	746,401*	**	**	51
1961 (Dec.)	915,559	.01 or 500	**	51
1967 (Nov.-Dec.)	1,285,040*	.03 or 500	67,000	53
1969 (May)	1,652,306	.01	16,000	13
1971 (Jan.)	2,558,094	.01	25,000	21
1973 (Jan.)	3,142,860	.005	35,000	33
1975 (May)	3,481,363	.005	32,000	29
1976 (Jan.)	3,573,038			

* Average for the study months.

** Limited information is available on sample size for early studies. For example, the only reference for the 1953 study reads: "Reports for most States were based on samples of the caseload including a minimum of 500 families."