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Literature Review: Lessons and Recommendations from Research Studies on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in Puerto Rico, 1998-2009

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis based on literature review of the studies carried out for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) during 1998 – 2009 in Puerto Rico. The most important findings included are based on program eligible criteria, in order to document the transition from dependency to self- sufficiency. A global sociodemographic profile leads to describe TANF participants in Puerto Rico, and the institutional barriers that impinge successful transition to the labor market. Research gaps were identified to determine the existing and non - existing scientific knowledge in order to recommend future research agenda regarding program effectiveness in informing policy decisions and programmatic best approaches. The major conclusion revealed that TANF participants are heterogeneous in the following categories: educational levels, developmental life stages, residential zones, types of neighborhood, non traditional family structures, work history and program experiences; particularly the lack of social services support in non metropolitan areas, such as child care, transportation and educational services to meet children’s special needs. The majority were unemployed and had low occupational skills for successfully entering the labor market. Further research is needed to continue exploring the impact of TANF families and children quality of life beyond poverty conditions, in the context of Puerto Rico fiscal, social, economic, political and cultural configuration.

Introduction

One of the main objectives of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 was to assist program-eligible U.S. citizens in the transition from welfare dependency to workforce. This policy eliminated the Aid to Families with Children (AFDC) and created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The reform differs from previous ones because it imposes a five-year lifetime limit on receipt of benefits and stricter work participation requirements for welfare participants (Nieves-Rosa, 2003). This law gives states, broad flexibility in the design and implementation of their welfare programs. This article looks closely at PRWORA, its conceptual framework, and its implementation in Puerto Rico; documented in research studies conducted between 1998 and 2009. In this context, the authors examine the experiences and opinions of TANF participants regarding successful transition from welfare to work. Institutional barriers to success are a major factor considered.

Method

Nine different research studies are included in the literature review, capturing a rich and detailed account of TANF implementation and participation in Puerto Rico for over a decade. As will be noted, this corpus also reveals significant gaps in scientific knowledge about poor families and TANF participants on the island. Works reviewed were TANF program studies conducted between 1998 and 2009, either published by the Puerto Rico Department of Family, or filed in fulfillment of the Master's degree at the University of Puerto Rico. Assessment of research methods applied in each instance helps to identify gaps in scientific information, and allows the authors to establish base line data and key questions for future research on PRWORA in Puerto Rico.

Research Studies

The following table summarizes the nine studies by author, date, title, sample and methodologies applied per APA manual. Refer to Appendix A for the most important findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

TANF Research Articles by Author and Date 1998 to 2009				
Author Year	Article Title	Population or Sample	Methodology	
			Quant.	Qual.
1. Marín, R.C (1965)	A Comprehensive Program for Multi-Problem Families Report on a Four Year Controlled Experiment. A pioneering project conducted in the San Juan municipality .	<p>814 families from La Perla, Barrio Sabana and the largest families were concentrated in Luis Llorens Torres, public housing project from San Juan. The sample was 240 families, 120 in the experimental group and 120 in the control group.</p> <p>The characteristic of the families follows: family composition- 6 members out of whom four were minors in the 5-17 years old bracket. The head of household was 46 years old and illiterate with a month of income of \$122. In half of these families there was no male spouse. The 50% was constituted by single parenthood, women with their children and other relatives.</p>	X	
2. Ortiz-Pico, S. & Pagán-Santos, R. J. (1998).	Social welfare reform in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican woman	<p>The sample was composed of thirty-one (31) women based on non-probabilistic sample from the housing projects Jardines de Country Club and San Martin (Rio Piedras) and subsidized housing projects Monserrate Tower y San Anton (Carolina).The sample characteristic was mother's heads of households and social assistance recipients.</p> <p>Female 25-34 years of age.</p> <p>Nearly one-third 29% had an educational level between one to five years of college. Near the half 48% had high school diploma. Around two thirds 71% had work experience. The family structure consisted of the mother and their children. The number of children runs</p>	X	

		from 2 to 6 children.		
3. Agosto-Márquez, Y., De Jesús- Márquez, L. L., & Figueroa- Rivera W. I. (1998)	Adolescent mothers and the Welfare Reform.	399 adolescent mothers of 18 years or less, participants of Supplementary Nutritional Program (WIC). A non-random convenient sample was selected of 150 adolescent mothers of the eastern area of Puerto Rico (Caguas, Juncos, Las Piedras and San Lorenzo).	x	
4. Boujouen-Ramírez, N. (2001).	<i>Welfare reform implementation in Puerto Rico. A status report.</i>	Secondary source The data for this report was taken from various sources: HHS TANF reports, Puerto Rico State Plan for statistical Reports, case Management Reports, Puerto Rico Welfare – to – Work Plan (1999), Census 1990 and estimates for recent years, Department of Labor, and other sources of information. In addition, several key informant interviews were conducted with TANF administrative staff, and relevant information was included. This report revealed a general radiography of TANF program five years after PRWORA legislation approved.	x	
5. Hernández-Angueira, L. (2001)	Puerto Rican woman, welfare, and globalization: destroying stigma.	Women from four different counties in Puerto Rico (San Juan, Guaynabo, Cataño and Arecibo) who were participants of AFDC program during the years 1994-95.	X	
6. Guzmán, C. A. & Guemárez, C. L. (2002)	Welfare Reform, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) former recipients, households who were placed on employments by delegate agencies.	A random sample of 74 female households was selected in San Martin and Las Gladiolas communities. Fifty participants constituted the final sample.	X	
7. Nieves-Rosa, L. (2003).	Globalization and gender: exploring the effects of welfare reform in Puerto Rico	The sample consisted of 30 women heads of household who were either participants or ex-participants of TANF program. At the time of the interview 15 women were beneficiaries of the TANF program. Another 15 women were interviewed who were no longer in the program either because they no longer fulfilled the requirements of participation or because they had reached the five year lifetime limit to participate in the program. All participants were drawn from the San Juan Metropolitan area, specifically lower class neighborhoods such as: Canteras, Barrio Obrero, Puerto de Tierra, Llórens Torres and Villa Palmera, among others.		X

8. Guzmán, C. A. & Guemárez, C.L. (2009). Puerto Rico	Evaluative study of ex participant's beneficiaries from the Way to Self-Sufficiency project on TANF program.	Out of a total 2895 participants, a stratified sample of 340 was selected in all Family Department regions. An additional 84 cases were selected for a total 424. A total of 285 participants were interviewed	X	X
9. Rodríguez-Martínez, A. (2009).	Governmental factors that affect needy families transition to labor market: an evaluative study of TANF program.	Puerto Rico government employment and unemployment rates and official data on TANF participants and other social programs in the Department of Family..	X	X

It has been more than eighteen years since the passage of 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), and an extensive critical literature on the subject has followed at the national level. But in Puerto Rico little has been produced to build an empirical basis for policy decisions, program implementation, best practices, and documentation of PRWORA, and what has been produced by way of research, has not seen sufficient circulation and critical examination.

Since 1998, there have been a number of valuable master's theses completed on various aspects of welfare reform in Puerto Rico. Pagan-Santos (1998) studied the impact of welfare reform among Puerto Rican women. Agosto-Marquez (1998) researched impacts of program participation on a group of adolescent mothers. Boujouen (2001) analyzed welfare reform implementation. Nieves- Rosa (2003) explored how TANF participants internalized the ideological underpinning of PRWORA discourse and how this affected their experience of success in the program. Guzman & Guémarez (2002, 2009) conducted two empirical studies regarding TANF families and evaluated a project known as "The Way to Self-sufficiency". Rodriguez-Martinez (2009) studied how PRWORA and TANF implementation influenced participants' quality of life, and also how they influenced local government's policy on poverty.

There is a limited and fragmented literature that documents the impact of TANF programs on public policy goals and objectives in Puerto Rico, and the resulting formulation of best practices. There is a significant shortage of research on these subjects, and in particular on how they affect poor families eligibility or participating in TANF. Little is known, for instance, about individuals who are denied services, or who choose not to participate, relative to those who enter and exit TANF programs successfully. Not enough data is collected on persons who have hit PRWORA time and eligibility limits, or who fail to overcome routine bureaucratic and other institutional barriers. It is highly likely that at least some qualifying applicants are unable to access TANF due to solvable but unrecognized challenges, legitimate life circumstances, and the increasing complexity of the application process itself (Riccio & Hanselnd, 1996; Myers & Lurie, 2005; Ridzi & London, 2006; Gonzalez & Acket, 2007; Ibarra, 2011 cited by Cancian, Noyes & Ibarra, 2012).

More studies, data collection, and analysis supporting a thorough understanding of poor families in Puerto Rico are needed. Survey and administrative data that would allow for better targeting of services and programs are required from primary and secondary sources alike. For instance, there is anecdotal information but little empirical data on the availability of services to TANF program-eligible poor families in different regions of the island. One of the areas of greatest deprivation is the central west region that includes a significant rural and agricultural population. According to the U.S. Census, this geographic area has the highest unemployment and poverty rates, and the lowest access to health and social services in Puerto Rico (2010). For these reasons, the central west region needs special attention in terms of research on the delivery of social services to the most vulnerable families. Research studies can and should provide detailed information on poor families and poor communities in a nuanced way that informs policy,

programmatic decisions, funding priorities, service infrastructures, and formulation of best practices.

The nine studies reviewed in this article identify major findings of the first decade of PRWORA implementation. This review points to existing gaps in scientific knowledge and the contextual, institutional, and personal variables —macro or micro— that limit the likelihood of participation and success in TANF programs. In so doing, the authors also identify future research priorities and an improved approach to the application of field knowledge to policy.

Historical Background

On June 1962, a pioneering study on welfare-dependent, multi-problem families was sponsored by the School of Social Work of the University of Puerto Rico, and funded by the Puerto Rico Department of Health in Puerto Rico and U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW). Conducted in the San Juan municipality by Dr. Rosa Celeste Marin, the project laid the foundation for contemporary understandings of poor families receiving economic assistance and other governmental services from HEW on the island. The project had a research phase and a demonstration phase. Its interdisciplinary approach engaged individuals and groups via casework and community social work methods. The findings were published and widely discussed among scholars, researchers, legislators, and high-level administration for local government.

Out of 814 families accounted for in the municipality of San Juan, the Marin study sample engaged 240, selected by simple random assigned into four segments of 60 each. 120 families were part of the experimental group, and 120 families were part of the control group.

The experimental variables were the family centered social work treatment: that is, social casework, social group work, and social work with the community, used in a sequential cumulative pattern and focused on the family as a social system.

A tentative typology of the families was developed by the Director of the Demonstration Center with six classes fully described and labeled in ascending order of complexity: families with minimal impediments, (26 percent); pseudo effective families, (19 percent); violent families, (3 percent) ; negative families, (5 percent); families with severe psychological disorders, (31 percent); and impotent families, (16 percent).

The Marin study made a significant contribution to scientific knowledge and analysis of poverty conditions in Puerto Rico in the second half of the 20th century. In making poor families the center of its inquiry, the study also suggested strategies for intervention. Nor surprisingly, its findings called for reformulation of social welfare policies in the context of poverty.

The Rios family in Oscar Lewis's *La Vida: A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty*, his widely disseminated and influential ethnographic study, published in 1966, was based on a sample from the Marin study (1965). Today, Lewis's book remains vital to a multivalent understanding of how the everyday experience of poverty affects the everyday lives of poor families.

La Vida presents a full-length portrait of the Rios family, residents of the slums of la Esmeralda, San Juan and New York, especially the Bronx. The book was among the most significant and controversial of its time. For Lewis, the culture of poverty represents a response to an economy,

characterized by high unemployment, low wages, and failure to provide economic, social, and political organizations for the poor.

La Vida examined an extended Puerto Rican family living in the San Juan and New York City. The book is credited for fueling numerous debates about race, class, and public policy, including U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson's War On Poverty, and the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States. Whatever the flaws and limitations of his "culture of poverty," Lewis's ideas keep resurfacing today, even after a period of backlash and outright rejection in the 1970s (Steven 2011).

FINDINGS

Little empirical evidence exists to document TANF program effectiveness in terms of its expected outcomes. Quantitative studies vastly outnumber qualitative ones, and the required correlation in support of robust scientific understandings is yet to be done. Some existing studies do combine quantitative and qualitative method to chart the range of TANF prospective and actual participant experiences in Puerto Rico (see table on pages 3, 4).

TANF participants in Puerto Rico are a diverse group with heterogeneous profile in at least five concrete categories: (1) developmental age stages: adolescence, early adulthood, and intermediate adulthood; (2) educational level: elementary, intermediate, high school, post-secondary, and college level; (3) place of residence: urban, suburban, or rural, and regional distribution per north, south, east, or west; (4) types of neighborhood; (5) non-traditional family structures: single-parenthood with woman head of household, adolescent mothers and children

living with next of kin or with consensual partner. TANF family size median of three members is consistent with island overall as reported on the U.S. Census (2010).

Work history was characterized by few employable skills, low-skill occupations, low-paying salaries in the service sector, irregular work hours, part-time, and unstable jobs. With median family income below poverty level, the transition from dependency to self-sufficiency is even more daunting. For the unemployed majority, contextual, institutional, and personal variables and barriers are only partially accounted for. This finding is consistent with Rodríguez-Roldán (2014); Cancian, Noyes & Ibarra (2012); Harris & Parisi (2008); Froker, Levy & Pérez (2004); Larrison & Risler (2001); and Cancian, Havema Kaplan & Wolfe (1999).

Barriers identified were grouped in the following categories:

a. Social support systems

Lack of access to childcare services during daily and night hours.

Lack of transportation.

Cost of services – unmet needs in regards to services funding.

School transportation in isolated communities for children with special needs.

Lack of community work for advancement of support networks and solidarity.

b. Work context-services sector

Limited number of working hours

Part-time jobs

Low salaries

Irregular work hours

Family's responsibilities

Oppressive and discriminatory work practices

Geographical jobs and training placements

c. Training and employment

Educational school level lower than high school diploma

Employment and training opportunities available in their geographical places

Participant profile vs. employment supply and available trainings

d. Family problems

Children health problems

Main caretakers of fragile and dependent adult family member

e. Health

Physical and mental health conditions (depression)

Asthma and special health conditions

f. Collaborative networks

Lack of networks between public agencies and non-governmental organizations

Lack of coordination between Head Start, Early Head Start and TANF Programs.

Research findings contribute to understand the patterning of environmental factors and transitions over the life course as these affect and are affected by social factors such as: employment and training opportunities, child services, housing, and transportation, among others. A systemic-structural analysis of those factors that contribute to perpetuate poverty conditions is not available in this literature review for further policy analysis and decision making related to best practices and approaches in the delivery of services. For these reasons,

evaluative research studies to determine the effectiveness of program approaches, strategies and best practices are needed to determine their impact in families and children toward empowering them to become active actors in their natural settings. In other words, research studies will focus in identifying those significant successful programs in terms of how they attain the transition from welfare social reform services to self-sufficiency through a permanent job by nontraditional approaches in the context of Puerto Rican society in the XXI century. To this end, empirical studies will be developed to document how Head Start can enhance physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of children, strengths parents care giving, language and literary skills, and support the economic independence of parents. At this moment, the program provides family support and developmental services in a variety of early childhood settings, but we do not know the effectiveness of the interdisciplinary interventions in both programs levels compared with regular children in the educational system of Puerto Rico.

The situation previously described stems in part from the lack of national data of Puerto Rican children's analysis through a time series methodology, particular to TANF, that document a longitudinal analysis of the patterning of program services and outcomes. It is important to consider demographic shifts in family structures, especially the rise in single motherhood, nonresidential fatherhood, and grandparent custodians. This gap in scientific research knowledge, will be one of the main priorities in future research. To overcome these research gaps it is important to conduct studies that provide empirical data to explain the effect of an early intervention program on parents, children, and custodians in Puerto Rico. Current research on child development suggests that policy attention should focus primarily on situations involving deep and persistent poverty in early childhood. (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000)

In general, this literature review examines the state of current scientific knowledge regarding TANF programs in Puerto Rico, and it serves as a base line data to document future research to be developed. Additionally, the literature review revealed strong consensus related to TANF participants characteristics, barriers to employment, reasons to be employed or unemployed, the contextual variables that affect participants as it affected their family's quality of life and the need to bridge the gaps between TANF participants profile and labor conditions. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count (2015) examined a set of key indicators related to poverty conditions in United States and their territories. The study revealed the same picture described previously, but emphasized that Puerto Rico experienced some of the worst outcomes on many of the indicators tracked. The discrepancy between public policy, programmatic approaches, and socioeconomic conditions in Puerto Rico during the last two decades must be taken into consideration when discussing paths towards self-sufficiency and independence among TANF participants. In this same token, evaluative research will assess the effectiveness of best practices and approaches to inform policy and programmatic decision-making.

In order to advance existing research knowledge on low-income families and children in Puerto Rico, the literature suggests that more in-depth study is needed on the impact of early interventions in Head Start and Early Head Start, as well as on the contextual variables that generate poverty conditions. Harris & Parisi (2008) suggest that "one size fits all" welfare policies fail to address the major needs of low-income women attempting to move from TANF and that, until adequate policies are created, economic insecurity and poor families well-being will remain the norm for many former TANF recipients. On the other hand, Coulton (1996) questioned homogeneous welfare policies that are unable to assist a heterogeneous population within diverse settings and needs.

Empowerment and poverty as conceptual framework will guide program approaches and methods of interventions to assess participant's effectiveness in moving from welfare dependency to self-sufficiency. The active participation of recipients is a cornerstone to attain control of their lives and be productive. Women voices are important in an ongoing evaluative process because their experiences enrich the quality of services and programs and contribute to explore how poor women are socially constructed and assume this particular identity. Future research will focus not only on surveyed women, but also other TANF participants beyond the young female stereotype.

Based on this conceptual framework, new methodologies will provide a multidimensional view of the success of welfare reform, and recommendations for ways in which policy can improve the lives of poor people. Welfare policies emerged as an instrumental mechanism of change to address a heterogeneous population in diverse contexts.

These research findings suggest several options for addressing some of the current challenges facing stakeholders who are directly involved in policy decisions and implementation. This empirical evidence can be used as an effective tool for generating more interest and involvement of other researchers who can contribute with additional scientific knowledge for the development and improvement of TANF program, as well as others related programs in Puerto Rico. This literature review confirms the gap between the existing and non-existing scientific knowledge that will bridge the discrepancy between both levels of information.

Discussion

Assessment of TANF must take in consideration two general lines of inquiry: process and outcomes analysis. The first focuses on the role and the importance of human capital and the cultural context shaping employment decisions. On the other hand, outcomes analysis generally centers on five empirical measures: caseloads, employment, income, recidivism and standard of living (Underwood, Axelsen & Freisner, 2010).

One of the main changes occurring in the labor market employment is the increase in the number of women in the labor force. A recent study conducted by the World Bank (2012) found that women constitute around 40% of the world labor force. Ruiz (2012) points that it is a universal truth and a central key related to success. Women represented 45 % of Puerto Rico labor force during 2010. This situation contributes to women's transformation beyond their traditional roles. Ruiz affirms that women in the labor market are essential for their economic empowerment, and for the economic growth.

Our analysis looks closely at how TANF implementation was developed, especially the geographical locations of those gender-based cultural patterns and employment opportunities. These structural variables shape workforce composition and wages, which transform job tenure, wage progression, and escaping poverty (Underwood et.al 2010). Zafa (1998) study illustrates how women on the workforce make the transition from private to public sphere. She analyses the myth of the male breadwinner in patriarchal systems. She shows how women's work is made to seem stronger at home than outside of it. This insight may be applied to workplace conditions for TANF participants, especially for women who encounter gender bias despite advancing in the workplace. Women continue to earn less than men in every age group.

Ruiz (2009) examined a group of studies related to wage gaps by gender and found that there are consistent findings in the labor market which favor the conclusion that women still face a differential treatment for the jobs performed. He also indicates that evidence points towards the existence of discrimination, although it is very difficult to determine precisely how much of the differential in female wage ratio to male wage ratio is caused by discrimination and how much is a matter of choices and preferences made by men and women. The unexplained differences in the gap can be an indirect crude measure of discrimination. The economist concludes that the unexplained differentials in the gap can be cultural factors and occupational preferences selected by women and can be taken as an indirect but crude measure of discrimination

According to the Kids Count (2015) study, the inequality produces the following profile: 84% of children live in high poverty areas, 56% are from single-parent families, 55% of parents don't have regular employment, 17% of parents don't have a high school diploma, and 44% of children don't have access to preschool education. Teens who leave and do not become part of the workforce run a high risk of experiencing negative outcomes as they transition into adulthood.

Research on the effects of poverty in child development suggests that policy attention should focus primarily on situations involving poverty that occurs early in childhood. It is crucial to track rates of poverty among children, especially deep poverty occurring early in childhood, to inform policy discussions regarding children's well-being (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Two well-known poverty researchers Duncan & Magnusom have shown that poverty among young children not only slows them in school but also shrinks their earnings as adults. Welfare-to-work programs and other anti-poverty experiments suggest that income plays a causal role in booting

younger children's achievement in preschool and elementary school (cited by Floyd, Pavetti & Shott, 2015). These last authors stated that instead of providing the help families need when they fall on hard economic times, TANF has put poor families—and especially their children—at risk of much greater hardship with the potential for long-term negative consequences. TANF does little to educate families on how to mitigate their need for assistance.

The studies examined suggest the importance of assessing the implications of these findings in terms of socioeconomic conditions in Puerto Rico, and to consider fiscal policy in the last years. Puerto Rican society is facing a serious fiscal crisis that affects the cost of living, especially for the most vulnerable populations, such as poor families and children, the elderly, single mothers, and unemployed youth, among others. These structural conditions have led to increases in the poverty level among Puerto Rican families. Kids Count (2015) reported that fiscal deficit and the economic situation of Puerto Rico contribute directly to poverty conditions in Puerto Rican families and children. Specifically, it revealed that poverty is more prevailing, more intense, and more chronic, especially among children in marginal areas, with 57% subsisting below the poverty level. These findings are consistent with Rodríguez-Roldán (2014).

Today these macro conditions in Puerto Rico are worse than the last decade due to the decreasing tendency in federal and local funds to face the fiscal situation that deserves public consideration in the budget distribution. In the protracted aftermath of the national mortgage bust; according to the Oficina de Instituciones Financieras (OCIF), in the last five years 26,985 families have lost their homes, and 57,568 are at risk of losing their property. (Caro - Gonzalez 2016).

An ample public discussion emerged from the Kruegers, Teja & Wolfe (2015) report, financed by public funds, regarding the state of the fiscal and economic situation of the government of Puerto Rico. Specifically, the report establishes that

“Puerto Rico faces hard times. Structural problem, economic shocks and weak public finances have yielded a decade of stagnation, \outmigration and debt. Financial markets once looked part of these realities but have since cut off the Commonwealth from normal market access. A crisis loans.(P.26.) They are convinced that structural reforms are critical to growth, and that without growth, the chances of success are dim. One of the main conclusions derived was that the debt crisis is not just a fiscal one but also reflects structural problems that have held back growth – both need to be tackled together. The problems of credibility of public debt – all cast a shadow on each other and must be tackled together.”

Nonetheless, in his presentation at the Senate of the Congress of United States, Marxuach (2015) points out that

“During the last decade Puerto Rico is facing severe economic problems. The economic is stagnated since 2006. The unemployment, poverty and inequality levels are extremely high in comparison with other continental states. The fiscal situation is related with the Government Health Plan as one of the main factors for the budget deficit in Puerto Rico. For this reason, special attention will be given to Medicare, Medicaid and the affordable Care Act and the Earned Income Credit in order to incentive poor families to work, and promote a saving culture The last program will provide a supplemental income to those working families in the Island and provoke a stimulus to the aggregated demand in the short run.”

Also, El Centro para la Nueva Economía reports that the fiscal situation must considered other key indicators to enhance the analysis geared to develop a comprehensive plan based on a holistic vision of the island’s situation. The analysis identified construction, banking, finances, and manufacturing, among other sectors required to meet desired outcomes in the short, medium, and long run.

Both reports stem from different visions and approaches regarding how to manage the critical situation faced by Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans in public finance and the overall economy. Despite differences identified, both reports point to variables that deserve a further consideration by scholars, researchers, public and private sectors, and the general public. Dire as it is, the situation is consistent with the lasting aftermath of the Great Recession elsewhere in the U.S. and abroad. Not since the 1950s, has the island experienced such drastic and dramatic change. Puerto Rican families are poorest today than yesterday, specifically TANF participants and children due to the prevailing socioeconomic conditions in Puerto Rico.

Another issue to consider in this analysis is the current political and policy environment in the United States and in Puerto Rico. This policy scenario probably remains unchanged because it is closely connected with exogenous variables over which local government has no jurisdiction. Even so, there is room to explore, within the endogenous horizon of action, innovative strategies that acknowledge the reality of TANF prospective and actual participants in Puerto Rico, and what it means for them to advance up the ladder from dependency to self-sufficiency.

Conclusions

The previous analysis leads to examine multiple factors and questions that deserve future research agenda about the impact of welfare reform on families in Puerto Rico. In the first place, it would be useful to investigate TANF recipient's experiences and views of welfare reform. This would contribute to identify their values, opinions, reactions to work requirements on time limits, particularly based on their socioeconomic geographical context, specifically the regional culture.

Another research gap to fill will include qualitative research designs such as multiple case studies to explore the impact of welfare reform on TANF families and children. This research method will provide empirical information from life narratives of TANF participants regarding their particular vision and social meaning of program experiences related to the improvement and enhancement of quality of life. Women's voices are a key element in the assessment of program outcomes and impact to inform policy decisions and programmatic best approaches.

The research findings revealed a strong consensus related to demographic and socioeconomic profile, barriers to employment, lack of available social support services such as child care, transportation, and training, and employment opportunities. Geographical contextual variables are central in the planning of an improved TANF participant services plan.

Recommendations

Recommendations were drawn based on the previous analysis.

1. Additional research of TANF implementation is needed, particularly by ADSEF 10 regions. Specifically, greater qualitative information from TANF participants related to worldviews, social meaning of program experiences regarding their transition to the workforce, as well as on the economic status of women who no longer receive TANF benefits.
2. ADSEF geographic regions profile must be considered in TANF planning process of training, work experiences, childcare and social services delivery system. Regions' socioeconomic configuration is a critical planning strategic variable towards the

development of a realistic and viable plan to address TANF participant's heterogeneous profile.

3. An in depth outcome and impact policy analysis will be done in the context of the current socioeconomic situation in Puerto Rico to assess TANF participants successful pathway from welfare to workforce.
4. A context, process, and outcome evaluation examining connections between needs assessment and training, work opportunities, and social services support, in order to strengthen participants' capacity to overcome barriers to employment and make a successful transition from dependency to workforce. This system analysis provides a multidimensional view of TANF program.
5. Develop women micro enterprises based on community organization and the specific geographical zone profile.
6. Evaluate existing successful programs and strategies to determine the conditioning factors that contribute for the enhancement of women participation in the workforce for the achievement of a better quality of life.
7. Develop mutual support groups to provide an open space to promote intersubjective experiences that lead to learn each other on how to cope with lack of social services support, child care, transportation and daily life situations to strengthen solidarity linkages between them.
8. Conduct short term (three years) and long term (five years) longitudinal research to determine patterns of employment, earnings, physical and mental health, children

school attendance, childcare and other supportive services to determine program impacts in poor families and children lives.

9. Special attention will be given to fiscal consideration in public administration and their impact in social services for the most vulnerable target population on the Island, particularly health services financed by Medicare, Medicaid and Puerto Rico Health Reform and other essentials services.

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