

The Iowa Survey of Program Dynamics Feasibility Study

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1 Introduction and Overview

A new era of social welfare policy began in 1996 with passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, a federal entitlement with many national standards for assistance to low-income families, was replaced by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which provides a fixed block grant to state-administered programs. The passage of the federal welfare reform legislation signals a major shift in responsibility for the design, administration and evaluation of support programs for low-income families. As states explore the opportunity for the development of policies and programs that respond to local needs, there is a growing awareness of the lack of appropriate data to evaluate the effectiveness of welfare programs and to monitor the well-being of families as they enter, participate in, and exit the welfare system.

Although several surveys (e.g., the Survey of Program Dynamics, the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and the Current Population Survey) provide useful national indicators, a gap exists in the availability of statistically reliable state-level (and sub-state) data and the associated analyses required to guide policy development. Iowa State University and the Bureau of the Census expressed interest in developing a research and outreach agenda to support the information needs of state and local social welfare policymakers, practitioners, policy analysts, the Congress, and Federal executive branch agencies.

The Statistical Laboratory, the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, and University Extension, all of Iowa State University (ISU), and the Census Bureau collaborated on a demonstration project to address the need for state-level data in Iowa. The overall purpose was to investigate methodologies for conducting state-level surveys that are relevant for local policy evaluation and that can be integrated with data from national surveys. Particular areas of emphasis included examining the feasibility of applying procedures from a national survey at the state level, developing locally relevant questions, and investigating the use of welfare participant lists as sampling frames. Although this joint effort was designed to examine procedures for Iowa, the larger goal is to consider the implications for other states or other policy development units and create procedures that can be used by the local entities.

To accomplish these goals, ISU constructed a series of questions on topics of interest to state policymakers, and integrated the questions with the national 1998 Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) instrument. These questions were also designed to provide the Census Bureau with topics that could be used to augment the Survey of Income and Program Participation. The augmented questionnaire was tested with a small sample of people living in low-income households in Iowa.

In addition to questionnaire development, ISU investigated the feasibility of using administrative databases from welfare programs to augment a traditional area sample. Because the percentage of individuals with incomes below the poverty line in Iowa is less than 10 percent (Dalaker 1999) and poor households are widely dispersed throughout rural Iowa, methods that might be used to reduce the costs of contacting low-income households need to be explored. To accomplish this objective, ISU used welfare program participant data from the Iowa Department of Human Services (IDHS) to draw the sample for the Iowa implementation of the SPD.

This report begins with a description of the methods used to implement the demonstration project. Other documents containing the sample design and weighting procedures (Nusser *et al.*

1999), the Iowa SPD questionnaire (ISU 1998a), and the coding manual (ISU 1998b) provide additional detail on procedures used. The results of the demonstration project are discussed, with emphasis on the operational implications of using the SPD instrument and administrative data from welfare programs to conduct state-based welfare surveys.

2 Sample Design Overview

2.1 Sampling Welfare Cases to Reach Households

The sample design was constructed to yield an approximately self-weighting sample of households. A two-stage sample design was used, with counties as primary sampling units and welfare cases as second-stage sampling units. The full specification of the sampling frame and sample design are described in Nusser *et al.* (1999).

An administrative database provided by IDHS was used to develop the sampling frame. It contained Family Investment Program (FIP) and Food Stamp Program (FSP) participants in Iowa as of March 31, 1998. FIP is Iowa's TANF program. This source of welfare participants was selected because a suitable database was relatively easy to obtain due to cooperative relationships between IDHS and ISU. It was also believed that important variables for sampling were by and large well described and fully populated, and that locating information appeared to be available on nearly all households. Other lists containing low-income households were considered, but deemed too difficult to obtain or work with. For example, obtaining a Supplemental Security Income list for Iowa residents would have involved a lengthy and potentially difficult process.

Ten counties were selected in the first stage of sampling. Four counties with the largest welfare caseloads were selected with certainty. Six additional counties were selected with probability proportional to the number of cases in each county using a stratified sample design to ensure geographic spread.

Roughly equal numbers of cases were selected in each of the sample counties using a systematic sampling procedure. Prior to selecting the case sample, the list of welfare program cases within a county was sorted by type of aid given to the case (FIP only, FSP only, both FIP and FSP). A sample of 125 cases was selected from the set of 10 counties, with the expectation of completing 100 interviews.

2.2 Subsampling Within a Household

During the field period, it became apparent that some interviews were running up to three hours and 40 minutes long, far exceeding the one to one-and-a-half hour interview length to which the respondent had agreed. Thus, a procedure was developed for large households to reduce respondent and interviewer burden. If a household had three or fewer children, information was collected for all children. If there were more than three children, two children were randomly selected from the set of children (under 18). After ordering the children by age, a systematic sampling procedure was implemented to select the two children about whom questions were asked. Four households were subsampled in this manner. No method was implemented to subsample adults, although in some households this may have been desirable.

3 Survey of Program Dynamics Questionnaire

3.1 *The National Survey of Program Dynamics Instrument*

The SPD questionnaire was obtained from Census Bureau staff in two forms. A hard copy of the document submitted to the Office of Management and Budget to obtain approval for the national 1998 Survey of Program Dynamics was provided, as well as a CASES computer-assisted survey instrument for the same survey. Because ISU did not have the version of CASES used by the Census Bureau, a paper-and-pencil survey instrument was developed for the project (ISU, 1998a). The CASES SPD instrument obtained from the Census Bureau was used to test and verify the construction of the ISU version of the SPD questionnaire.

In addition to the SPD questionnaire, ISU reproduced the supporting aids used by Census Bureau to conduct the interview. This included calendars and cards used to present response options to the respondent.

3.2 *State-Level Questions*

ISU researchers developed a series of questions for inclusion in the SPD questionnaire. The full list of topics considered relevant to state-level program and policy issues are presented in Table 1. These topics were identified based on research conducted by ISU Extension in 1997 (Fletcher *et al.* 1999). The study conducted by ISU Extension was patterned after the state and community case study protocols developed by The Urban Institute for their *Assessing the New Federalism* project (The Urban Institute 1999). More than 35 state-level administrators and elected officials and 100 community leaders were interviewed. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a small sample of welfare recipients in each of the seven Iowa communities selected for case study. These findings, supplemented by a meeting with IDHS administrators to gather their specific ideas for a survey instrument, gave researchers a long list of issues that state- and community-level decision makers were concerned about as welfare reform evolves in Iowa.

Many of these topics were not specifically included in the national 1998 SPD instrument. For example, transportation and affordable, quality child care were identified as major barriers to work. These issues were not fully acknowledged in the response sets for current SPD questions regarding reasons for moving on and off welfare and for altering involvement in the labor force. In-depth interviews with welfare families revealed health (mental and physical) and abuse issues that need to be identified and addressed by welfare programs. Although the SPD extensively explored income and employment, the extent to which income would translate into actual economic hardships on adults and children was not fully addressed. Interviews with families detected extensive resource exchange among some families and nearly complete social isolation for others. Informal supports for families and friends may make a major difference in the quality of life for some welfare families. The durability of that support over time needs to be monitored. Welfare officials in Iowa were very interested in the extent to which low-income families were aware of community services and the extent to which they utilized those resources to avoid use of welfare benefits or to augment welfare benefits and improve their quality of life. There was concern about the effects of the lack of many community resources in rural areas. Finally, policy makers were interested in public opinions about the current welfare program and potential public support for policy reforms.

Because of concerns over the length of the SPD portion of the questionnaire, it was necessary to reduce the list of augmented topics to a few questions. The final state-level questions and their locations in the Iowa SPD survey instrument are listed in Appendix A. Many of the questions were inserted in sections of the national SPD instrument that dealt with the same general topic. For example, supplemental questions on transportation followed those in the SPD that requested information on the vehicles owned by household members. Questions about abuse, informal support, and welfare attitudes were added at the end of the survey.

4 Interviewing Procedures

4.1 General Procedures

Standard methodologies were used to contact and interview respondents. Once locating information was obtained, sample case heads were initially sent a letter explaining the study and informing the case head that an interviewer would be contacting her/him in the next few days. An interviewer called the case head and conducted a telephone-screening interview to establish eligibility and identify the appropriate respondent and contact information. The case was then assigned to a field interviewer to make an appointment and conduct the interview. Respondents completing the interview were given a \$20 gift certificate.

The following sections provide additional detail on locating strategies employed, incentives and interviewing outcomes.

4.2 Locating Sample Households

Of the 125 sample cases, 85 (68%) had insufficient or incorrect contact information in the IDHS database (Table 2). Several locating strategies were used to obtain accurate location information, and often multiple strategies were required to find households.

Internet search engines were used as the first method to update location information. These included USWestdex.com (first source), Yahoo People Search, Excite People Finder, Bigfoot White Pages, Who/Where People Finder, Alta Vista People Find, and Switchboard Find a Person. The effectiveness of each source appeared to vary over time. Useful locating information was obtained for 34 of the 85 cases that were tracked.

Cases for which no Internet information was found were sent to IDHS for an updated match with their administrative data bases. Of the 51 cases that were returned to IDHS, 25 new addresses and/or phone numbers were provided. Two of the 25 were determined to be ineligible because they had moved out of Iowa, and 11 cases continued to be difficult to locate. Thus, about 25% of the 51 cases sent to IDHS yielded useful contacting or eligibility information.

A third locating strategy involved mailing a second letter with a postcard asking the household to provide contact information. Of the 42 letters mailed, only three postcards were returned. However, this method yielded 100% accurate locating information.

As a fourth locating strategy, field interviewers were given address information for 31 cases to track sampled case heads. Interviewers were able to find 13 of these households.

Many of these strategies were employed simultaneously. For example, an interviewer was sent to a household a few days after the second letter and postcard were sent requesting tracking information for the former resident.

By the time the interviewing phase of the survey was completed, 31 out of 125 cases were deemed unlocatable. Locating efforts continued after interviewing was completed, yielding five additional households that agreed to be interviewed (but were not interviewed because of cost and time constraints).

4.3 Household and Respondent Definitions

A respondent was identified from the household roster using the following rules. When the welfare “case name” (person to whom assistance is provided) and the “person name” (head of household or oldest person on assistance) provided by IDHS were the same, this individual was identified as the respondent. When the welfare case and person names differed, the person name was identified as the respondent if the person name was at least 18 years of age; otherwise, the welfare case name was identified as the respondent. The telephone-screening questionnaire (Appendix B) was used to gather information to implement these rules.

The current household was defined to be anyone living with the selected respondent at the time of the interview who had no other permanent residence. Demographic data were obtained for the current household. Additional information was gathered for persons who had lived in the respondent’s household during 1997. Several challenges arose in applying household definitions to questions about 1997 and in asking about current conditions because, in contrast to the panel sample used for the national SPD, the respondents had never been interviewed.

4.4 Incentives

Respondents were offered a \$20 gift certificate in return for a completed interview. Gift certificates were provided to respondents rather than cash to avoid benefit reductions that may occur when cash is received by the respondent. Fifty-four out of 61 cases were given gift certificates to Hy-Vee/Drug Town, a large grocery/drug store chain in Iowa. Seven respondents did not have access to these stores, and alternative certificates were obtained for a business identified by the respondent, primarily WalMart or Fareway, a second Iowa grocery store chain.

4.5 Sample and Interview Dispositions

Interviewing was conducted between July 6, 1998 and September 30, 1999. Table 3 outlines the results of the locating and interviewing phases by county and for the full sample. Of the 123 cases that were not known to have moved out of Iowa, 25% were unlocatable (21% after post-interviewing locating efforts). Of the 92 cases that were located, 63% agreed to be interviewed, 28% refused to be interviewed, and 5% could not be interviewed due to language barriers or because the household was not found to be home (maximum number of call attempts reached). Response rates would have been slightly higher if the five additional cases found would have been interviewed. It is also likely that a few cases that refused would have been converted if additional resources had been devoted to refusal conversion.

5 Data Preparation and Analysis

Questionnaires were edited, coded, and keyentered by two independent keyentry operators using standard methods. In addition, macrodata were examined to further clean the data. Special emphasis was placed on variables that were deemed of interest for examining the results of the feasibility study.

Weights were constructed to adjust for unit nonresponse by stratum and welfare program type see Nusser *et al.* 1999 for a description of weighting procedures.

Although the sample size is quite small and standard errors are expected to be large for this study, weighted estimates were generated for selected questions, including the augmented questions of relevance to Iowa's low-income population and welfare policy makers. When item nonresponse occurred, percentages were adjusted to sum to 100 (as noted in the tables). The half-width of an approximate 95% confidence interval for an estimated population percentage is on the order of 15%.

6 Results

6.1 Demographics

Table 4 describes the estimated demographic characteristics of the welfare participant population sampled. About half of the population was receiving FIP benefits and three-fourths were enrolled in the FSP. Three-fourths were female; nearly 90% were white. Forty percent were employed at the time of the interview, and half indicated they had a health condition that prevented them from working. It appears that those who could work were employed. Personal vehicles and telephone service are important assets in a rural state. About one-fifth (18%) of the population did not own a vehicle, and about one-fifth did not have phone service.

6.2 Local Questions

Tables 5-8 highlight findings from selected state-level questions that were added to the SPD instrument. Table 5 illustrates some of the subtle ways in which an expanded set of questions can illuminate an understanding of economic well-being. For example, the standard SPD question on vehicle ownership indicates that 82% of the respondents own a vehicle. However, a hardship question reveals that an estimated 30% of the participant population lacked transportation to obtain basic needs at some point in the past year. One may speculate about the reasons for this discrepancy. Our in-depth interviews with welfare families would suggest that many of the vehicles owned by low-income families are unreliable. Barriers to obtaining driver's licenses, insurance, and lack of money to buy gasoline may be other factors explaining the lack of transportation reported in the economic hardship series of questions. This series identifies relatively high incidence of economic hardship related to health care affordability with an estimated one-fourth of the population reporting that they could not afford going to a dentist and one in five indicating they could not afford to see a doctor. Phone service had been disconnected for an estimated one-fifth of the population.

Table 6 reports findings from the set of questions that asked respondents whether selected resources and services exist in their community and whether they had used the service.

Relatively small percentages of the population had used community resources. For several resources, an estimated 15-20% of the population did not know whether resources existed in the community. The availability of emergency housing is the lowest among resources, followed by domestic violence services.

Tables 7 and 8 report selected results regarding attitudes toward the welfare system and the concern that state welfare officials have for identifying the appropriate support and services to move Iowa families toward self-sufficiency. Frequencies show a bimodal distribution in the respondents' assessment of Iowa's job training program, PROMISE JOBS. Yet respondents are generally supportive of the welfare system's expectation that they get a job. There appears to be a belief that the five-year limit on cash benefits will be implemented. There is also a modestly positive approval rating of the overall welfare system.

The results reported in Table 8 could provide useful information to shape the direction of Iowa's welfare program. Among those respondents that remained on FIP and/or FSP, about half said that more education and training and more dependable transportation would be needed to make them self-sufficient. Yet, the diversity of the needs of the low-income population is also revealed by the large number of "other" responses we received in response to this question. Those responses ranged from good health, better pay, and more insurance, to needing help with a suicidal teenage child and classes that would address self-esteem.

7 Discussion

7.1 Overview

The Iowa SPD was designed to study the feasibility of implementing a national survey instrument at a local level, with the goal of facilitating links with national information. Of particular interest are the operational considerations in using welfare participant lists as a sampling frame and integrating local questions in the SPD survey instrument. In what follows, we consider each of these objectives and discuss the larger question of whether implementing a national survey at a local level is a feasible method of gathering local information that can be integrated with national data.

7.2 Sampling from Administrative Lists

Administrative databases can provide efficient methods of sampling selected groups, and are frequently used to select state-level samples from specific target populations (e.g., public teachers to assess their use of public television instructional resources, establishments to gather wage rate information for occupations). In some cases, administrative databases may also provide auxiliary information for nonresponse adjustments or contain data that can be combined with survey data to gain further insights into the phenomena observed. However, the cleaning and updating that is necessary to construct sampling frames from administrative databases often require considerable effort because administrative data are developed for management rather than research purposes (Goerge and Lee 1999).

To assess the impact of welfare reform, it is of interest to consider the entire population of the relevant welfare policy and administration unit (e.g., state, county) as the target population, with a special emphasis on low-income populations. Welfare participant lists represent one method of

reaching the low-income population, particularly in a state such as Iowa where low-income households are distributed widely throughout the state. Ideally, the welfare participant roll is combined with a general population frame to create a dual frame sampling design that covers the entire population in the administrative unit. The Iowa SPD Feasibility Study was designed to investigate the use of administrative participant lists as a sampling frame, but did not consider the dual frame aspects of this issue.

Several problems arose in using IDHS FIP and FSP participant data for sampling. First and foremost was the relatively poor quality and incompleteness of information available for locating and contacting respondents. Even though the snapshot from the full administrative database was only a few months old, considerable effort was required to locate respondents when conducting the Iowa SPD. While at least some contact information was available on a large portion of the case records, there were numerous instances where locating information was inaccurate, incomplete, and/or inappropriate for establishing a personal or telephone contact (e.g., post office box).

Problems with administrative data quality will vary from state to state. However, it is expected to be substantial in general, as evidenced by experiences in welfare leavers studies funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Economic Research Service (ERS). The source of these difficulties is multi-dimensional, and includes inaccurate database information provided by welfare applicants, imprecise definitions for database fields, errors generated by welfare agency staff in recording or failing to update information, or welfare recipient mobility. In Iowa, the case representatives, "case name" and "person name," may have more than one definition (e.g., the head of household, a contact person, the oldest person under 18 on welfare), which complicates processes for locating households and identifying the appropriate respondent. The extent to which other factors contribute to the poor quality of contact information is not clear.

In this study, as is in TANF and Food Stamp leaver surveys currently being conducted via DHHS and ERS grants, the percentage of unlocatable case heads is at least as large as the percentage of refusals for case heads that were contacted. Thus, in addition to needing a strong refusal conversion strategy, it is extremely important to develop effective tracking methods. Multiple methods are necessary to a successful locating strategy when using contact information from administrative files. In addition to methods used in the Iowa SPD survey (e.g., Internet search, matching with unemployment insurance files, postcard, in-person tracking), other states have found reviewing the individual case history files and U.S. Post Office forwarding databases to be fruitful in some cases (Cantor and Cunningham 1999, Weiss and Bailar 1999).

Some of the most effective locating methods for hard-to-locate households involve in-person tracking. This requires qualified tracking staff who have gained the trust of the local community residents. In-person tracking is expensive, although cluster sampling can mitigate costs. Even if the welfare survey is based on telephone interviews, it is worth considering whether a portion of the sample should involve cluster sampling so that in-person tracking can be used in a cost-effective manner. For example, Iowa welfare programs are administered via a state agency in cooperation with counties. In this case, counties provide a method of geographic clustering that balance travel costs and statistical efficiency considerations.

When using administrative databases for sampling, another issue that arises is the confidentiality and privacy concerns of the welfare recipients. In a small number of cases, case heads were

surprised that they had been selected for the survey and wanted additional information on how they had been selected. Dealing with the respondent privacy when administrative databases are used to select a sample for a survey is simpler than maintaining confidentiality when releasing administrative data for analysis purposes. In the survey setting, survey staff steeped in the culture of maintaining confidentiality can deal effectively with individual respondent concerns on a case by case basis. This underscores the importance of training interviewers to respond respectfully and truthfully to respondents regarding how they became involved in the study.

In summary, results indicate that there is considerable cost to using welfare participant lists to select and locate welfare recipients. Whether the problems associated with this approach are large enough to avoid using this type of sampling approach is undetermined. Additional research is needed to further explore appropriate methods and the trade-offs involved in applying them. For example, it is possible that unconventional, but cost-effective strategies can be developed for improving location rates that combine sampling design as well as locating methods. It may also be useful to investigate the extent to which recipient mobility and database errors create problems in locating program participants. If the latter is the larger problem, then perhaps methods can be created for improving the quality of locating information gathered by an agency. Finally, the impact of using administrative data on statistical efficiency in a dual frame setting need to be explored.

7.3 Developing and Integrating Locally Relevant Questions

The successful devolution of social welfare policy requires that state and local decision makers have relevant data to inform policy development. Results of the Iowa SPD Feasibility Study suggest that existing national survey instruments fail to track key information desired by local policy makers. It is essential to involve these stakeholders in a process to identify key policy issues and to translate issues into locally relevant survey questions. Qualitative methods (e.g., case studies involving interviews with state and local policy makers, ethnographic studies of welfare families) prove to be valuable strategies for identifying issues, legitimizing studies, and giving meaning to subsequent findings (Newman 1999). The qualitative methods used in the 1997 *Family Well-Being and Welfare Reform in Iowa* project, coupled with focused discussions with IDHS administrators, yielded a broad range of policy issues surrounding three subpopulations. Stakeholders wanted to understand what precipitates entry into the welfare system, barriers to self-sufficiency among those currently on welfare, and predictors of exit from the welfare rolls. An over-riding concern was understanding and monitoring the well-being of children and families. Welfare administrators were also interested in monitoring public opinions about current and proposed welfare policies. None of the major national surveys of household socio-economic indicators gather data on public opinions on social welfare issues. Notably, a recent foundation-supported poll provides some measures of public knowledge of current policies (Wiseman 1999).

Without the initial step of involving local stakeholders, it is highly likely that survey designers will miss the mark in designing instruments that produce locally relevant information. It became clear that there was a relatively large mismatch between the suite of questions in the SPD and the data needs in the State of Iowa. Further, if sub-state or cross-state comparisons are desired, standardization of survey questions will be essential. The role of a “third party” in helping policy-making groups identify and prioritize issues, translating those issues into a common core of survey questions, and then disseminating findings to stakeholders is critical. For example, the

role played by Child Trends, Inc. (1999) in the child outcomes studies underway in five states illustrate the value of a deliberate methodological development process for framing and operationalizing such studies. A similar role was played by ISU Extension in trying to investigate multiple perspectives on welfare reform in Iowa (Fletcher *et al.* 1999)

In sum, developing and integrating local questions into a national survey became a challenge because of the overwhelming number of critical policy issues that were identified by local stakeholders and that were not adequately addressed in the SPD instrument. Acknowledging budget constraints and respondent burdens, priorities were set and a relatively small sub-set of local questions were integrated in the augmented SPD instrument. Based on the data needs identified in the state, it is worth considering an approach in which of a core set of questions is selected from a national survey instrument that will allow for national comparisons, developing a standard set of items that allow for inter-state comparisons, and creation of unique modules that respond to local information needs that may be used in states with similar cultural and economic conditions (e.g., a rural transportation module for less densely populated states).

7.4 *Adapting a National Survey at the Local Level*

With the devolution of welfare policy development to the states, no unified framework exists to monitor the impact of welfare reform within policy-relevant units. The larger question addressed in this research is whether a national survey such as the SPD could be adapted to monitor the effects of welfare policy within administrative units (e.g., state or county) while facilitating linkages with national statistical data.

Our findings indicate that many problems arise when pursuing this approach. While the use of administrative data in sampling is still an open question worth investigating, we believe that implementing a national survey at a local level is prohibitive in cost and does not adequately address the needs of the local jurisdiction.

The SPD survey instrument was adapted from the Survey of Income Program Participation (SIPP) and sought to capitalize on historical data available from the 1992-1994 and 1993-1995 SIPP panels (Weinberg *et al.* 1997). Thus, by necessity it is lengthy and relies on a repetitive and time-consuming rostering approach that involves requesting detailed information on assets, income and other characteristics for each member of the household. While it is a great advantage to obtain such information to link with historical data in a consistent manner across states, it comes at a high cost. In particular, household interviews for low-income households, the main subpopulation of interest, can be extremely long and burdensome for respondents and interviewers.

The time required to gather this data could be reduced by subsampling the household members or by inserting screening questions (e.g., Do any household members receive Medicaid?) in rosters requesting information from each household member. However, it is unlikely that these strategies will be sufficient to overcome the problems associated with interview length.

The chief problem with adopting a lengthy national survey instrument for local assessments is that little room is left for questions critical for local welfare policy evaluation and development. Better balance is needed between national and local objectives than was achieved in the Iowa implementation of the SPD.

Finally, there is an issue of capacity and ability for a state to conduct complex sample surveys. As is suggested in the NRC (1999) report, many states are ill equipped to pursue rigorous scientific surveys. There is a need for an integrated resource or system that states can rely on to develop and conduct welfare assessment surveys that provide information for local policy development using sound survey methods.

7.5 Implications for State Surveys of Welfare Reform

PRWORA was a sea change in social welfare policy in the United States. The Survey of Program Dynamics represents a national effort by the Census Bureau to monitor the effects of new policies and programs. Numerous state and local evaluations are also underway to evaluate the effectiveness of post-reform efforts. Devolution has offered tremendous opportunities for creative policy advancement, but has introduced much greater complexity for generating statistically valid and reliable information for policy analysis and program evaluation. The challenge is to create an infrastructure for data generation and analysis that is accessible to both local and federal policy makers.

Results of the Iowa SPD Feasibility Study suggest a vision for developing methods for state (or alternative welfare administrative unit) surveys that facilitate linkage with other sources of information. We offer the following recommendations:

- Create a new paradigm for welfare reform research that balances the need for a core set of common indicators to generate meaningful state, cross-state and national estimates with the growing desire to produce locally relevant policy information. The Iowa SPD Feasibility Study suggests that rather than augmenting a national survey with local questions, much greater emphasis should be given to creating adequate state-based instruments that include core sections of a national survey and modules relevant to the state and others with similar conditions. Building linkages between those who generate information and those who use it should be a key feature of this new paradigm.
- Select a core set of questions from an on-going national survey for use in state-based surveys. Core questions should reflect key policy issues of national interest and facilitate state-national and comparisons on priority welfare indicators.
- Generate a core set of state-based questions that allow for cross-state comparisons. Development of common state questions will require consensus on a conceptual framework that can be operationalized using cost-effective methodologies.
- Develop and test modules of survey questions based on identified local information needs. These modules should be developed such that they can be shared across states with similar interests. Methodology development should be based on a rigorous framework, such as that used by Child Trends, Inc. (1999).
- Involve stakeholders in a collaborative process with researchers to identify locally relevant issues, to legitimize and facilitate data collection strategies, to identify and provide access to existing contextual data, and, subsequently, to utilize research findings in on-going policy evaluation and development.

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Table 1. List of topics considered for state-level questions.

Topic	Specific Concerns
Food	Expenditures at home and away Lowest possible amount to meet needs
Transportation	Help from food pantry, check, friends/relatives Miles to work Mode of transportation to work
Housing	Number of rooms (crowding) Relationship to owner, if renting
Reason did not work in 1997	Expanded response set to include other barriers to work, i.e., disabled child, loss of Medicaid, lack of transportation, etc.
Reason worked < 52 weeks	Expanded response set
Reason left job	Expanded response set
Health insurance	Employer coverage for family members Reason does not participate in employer plan
Reasons applied for welfare	Expanded response set to include other problems, i.e., loss of transportation, loss of health insurance, loss of child care
Reasons left welfare	Expanded response set
Domestic abuse	Experience by respondent, children Fear of partner
Physical, learning or mental health	Physical condition, learning disability, mental health condition questions asked separately
Alcohol, substance abuse & gambling	Alcohol use in household Alcohol/substance abuse by respondent Excessive gambling by respondent
Economic hardship	Series of questions that explore housing, utility, medical, clothing hardships in past 12 months
Poverty	Minimum income to make ends meet
Informal support	Help with/provision of child care; source or recipient of help Help/provision of transportation, source or recipient of help Help with/provision of home or car repairs; source or recipient of help Help in emergency; source of help Source of an emergency loan Source of emotional support
Support needed to leave welfare	Ranking (very unimportant to very important) list of services, i.e., child care, education, job skills, transportation, substance free, health care, etc.

Table 1 (continued). List of topics considered for state-level questions.

Topic	Specific Concerns
Welfare experience attitudes	Series of attitudinal statements about the welfare system, workers, 5-yr. limit, job expectations, barriers to self-sufficiency
Public opinions about welfare	Series of attitudinal statements about the welfare policy and options
Community services	Awareness of and use of community services, i.e., food pantries, youth services, drug treatment, crisis counseling Identification of need for local services

Table 2. Summary of the success of locating strategies for sample cases.

Process of Finding Location Information	Number of Cases	
	Submitted To Process	Successfully Located
Original IDHS contact information	125	40
Internet directory search ^(a)	85	34
Additional database matching by IDHS	51	14 ^(b)
Second letter with postcard requesting contact information	42	3
Field tracking	31	13
Final number of unlocatable	31	

(a) Internet search engine procedures were used prior to other strategies for obtaining correct contact information. Combinations of strategies varied thereafter.

(b) Updated contact information was provided for 25 cases. Two of the 14 successful cases were determined to have moved out of the state and thus ineligible for the feasibility study. Contact information for the remaining 11 cases was found to be problematic.

Table 3. Number of samples selected and disposition of sample households, for the entire sample and by county.

County	Initial Sample Size	Completed Interviews	Unlocated ^(a)	Located, Not Interviewed			
				Refused	Language Barrier ^(b)	Maximum Call Attempts	Ineligible ^(c)
Black Hawk	9	6	3 (1)				
Cerro Gordo	14	4	4 (0)	4		2	
Clayton	13	7	3 (0)	3			
Crawford	14	8	3 (0)	3			
Des Moines	14	8	4 (1)	1			1
Linn	8	7	1 (0)				
Pocahontas	13	7	1 (1)	4			1
Polk	16	2	6 (1)	5	2	1	
Scott	10	7	1 (0)	2			
Warren	14	5	5 (1)	4			
Total	125	61	31 (5)	26	2	3	2
Percent of potentially eligible sample		50%	25% (4%)	21%	2%	2%	

(a) Numbers in parentheses indicate number of cases located after interviewing was completed. All five cases that were located agreed to be interviewed.

(b) Language barriers included two households speaking an unidentifiable language (not Spanish or Asian language).

(c) Ineligible households had moved out of Iowa.

Table 4. Estimated demographic characteristics of March 1998 FIP and FSP participants and their households.

Demographics Variable	Estimated Percentage
Households with at least one person on Family Investment Program in 1997 or first half of 1998 ^(a)	48.1
Households with at least one person on Food Stamp Program	
1997 or first half of 1998	94.7
Currently	76.4
Current household size	
1 person	25.9
2 people	18.0
3 people	25.1
4 people	13.2
5 or more people	17.8
Respondent's current age	
Under 30	24.9
30 – 39	27.6
40 – 49	18.1
50 – 59	10.4
60 or older	18.9
Respondent's gender	
Female	75.1
Male	24.9
Respondent's current marital status	
Married	22.1
Widowed	12.1
Divorced	30.3
Separated	11.6
Never married	23.9
Respondent's educational attainment ^(a)	
Did not complete high school	34.6
High school, GED	40.7
Beyond high school	24.7
Respondent's race	
White	87.8
Black	10.4
Asian, Pacific Islander	1.8

Table 4 (continued). Estimated demographics of March 1998 FIP and food stamp participants and their households.

Demographics Variable	Estimated Percentage
Respondent's 1997 employment status	
Employed	51.1
Not employed	45.4
Retired	3.5
Respondent's current employment status ^(a)	
Employed	39.0
Not employed	50.4
Retired	10.6
Health condition prevents respondent from working ^(a)	50.8
Respondent owns a vehicle	82.3
Respondent has phone service	81.5
1997 household income ^(a)	
Less than \$10,000	67.8
\$10,000 to \$14,999	16.8
\$15,000 to \$39,999	13.6
\$50,000 or more	1.9

(a) Results adjusted for item nonresponse. Item nonresponse rates were 1.7% of the respondents for FIP participation, education, current employment status, and health condition questions; 3.2% for household income.

Table 5. Estimated prevalence for indicators of economic hardship for respondent households.

Question	Estimated Percentage of Households
In the past 12 months, has there been a time when...	
Could not afford a place to live	7.9
Evicted for not paying rent	9.4
Electricity or heat was turned off	7.9
Phone was disconnected	20.9
Could not afford doctor	20.0
Could not afford dentist	25.9
Children lacked clothing	16.5
Lacked transportation to obtain basic needs	30.6
Do any of these problems apply to your current housing?	
Leaky roof or ceiling	12.9
Toilet or plumbing does not work	13.3
Rats, mice, roaches	21.0
Broken windows	24.4
Heating does not work	10.1
Exposed wires or other electrical problems	13.1
Stove or refrigerator does not work	16.5

Table 6. Estimated percentage of respondents that were aware of the existence of community resources and whether their household used them in the past year.

Community Resource	Estimated Percentage			
	Have Used	Exists?		
		Yes	No	Don't Know
Emergency food assistance	36.3	91.7	5.2	3.2
Emergency shelter	1.7	51.8	30.4	17.8
General Assistance	7.9	84.7	0.0	15.3
Free clothing	31.1	93.3	1.7	4.9
Public health services	23.0	86.2	3.5	10.4
Substance abuse treatment	1.8	85.0	3.2	11.8
Mental health care	16.6	78.1	1.7	20.2
Domestic violence services	0.0	74.6	8.6	16.8

Table 7. Estimated percentages for attitudes toward the welfare system. Opinion ratings are cited for those who were able to answer the question (e.g., participated in the program, have children, should get child support).

Attitude Statement	Estimated Percentage			
	Able to Rate	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The PROMISE JOBS program has been helpful in preparing me to get a good job	55.2	42.4	11.6	46.0
Requiring me to get a job sets a good example for my children ^(a)	54.6	76.2	14.7	9.1
The welfare system is not helpful to me in collecting child support	50.1	50.3	19.8	29.9
Medicaid, not cash benefits, is the main reason I am on public assistance ^(a)	85.9	52.7	8.2	39.1
If my family really needs FIP benefits, we won't be cut off after five years	62.0	25.5	13.2	61.3
Overall, the Iowa welfare system does a good job of providing useful services to help me and my family get off welfare and make it on our own ^(a)	87.7	51.0	16.6	32.4

(a) Adjusted for item nonresponse (1.7% of respondents did not respond to these questions).

Table 8. Estimated percentage of households currently on FIP and/or Food Stamps citing resources needed to move off public assistance.^(a)

	Estimated Percentage
What would it take for you to be able to support yourself without any public assistance?	
More education or job training	55.4
Affordable child care	35.1
Dependable transportation	56.9
Other ^(b)	63.9

(a) An estimated 5.2% were no longer on public assistance, and an estimated 7.0% were considered not applicable (primarily because they felt they would not leave assistance).

(b) Most frequently mentioned “other” responses were better pay, insurance benefits, and good health.

Appendix A

Iowa Questions Added to the National 1998 Survey of Program Dynamics Instrument

<i>Module Placement</i>	<i>Question</i>
Question Number	Question
<i>Current Employment (p .62)</i>	
68a	How many miles is it from your home to work?
68b	How do you usually get to work?
<i>Health Conditions (p. 78)</i>	
236B1	Describe the physical, mental, or other health condition that prevents (you/him/her) from working.
<i>Food Stamps (p. 107)</i>	
339-1 (added 1998)	During which months in 1997 and 1998 did (you/your husband) receive food stamps?
339-2	Are you currently receiving food stamps?
339D (if Food Stamps cut off due to non-cooperation with work requirements)	What have you done to make up for the loss of food stamps?
<i>Family Investment Program (p. 109-110)</i>	
352 (added 1998)	During which months in 1997 and 1998 did (name/you) receive assistance from the Family Investment Program (FIP)?
352-1	Is/Are (name/you) currently receiving FIP benefits?
352-2 (if no, go to 352-1)	After leaving FIP, did you receive transitional child care assistance?
353-3 (if no, go to 352-2)	Why not?
352-4 (if no, go to 352-1)	After leaving FIP, did you receive transitional Medicaid?
352-5 (if no, go to 352-4)	Why not?

Module Placement

Question Number	Question
<i>Eligibility & Assets (following vehicle questions, p.171)</i>	
638a (if no vehicle owned by respondent or household)	When you need to go somewhere, how do you usually get around?
638b (if borrow a vehicle to get around in 638a)	From whom (relationship)?
639a (if ride with a relative, friend or neighbor in 638a)	Do you pay for this?
639b (if yes to 639a)	How much do you pay?
<i>Food Security (p. 203-5)</i>	
1006a	Think of all the different places where (you/members of household) buy food, how much (do you/does your household) usually spend on food per week (including any purchases made with food stamps)?
1006b	What do you think would be the lowest possible amount that you could spend for food per week and still provide a healthy, acceptable diet for your household (including any purchases made with food stamps)?
1017a	In the past 12 months, did you (or anyone else in your household) ever get meals or food at a shelter, food kitchen, or food pantry?
1017b	In the past 12 months, did you (or anyone else in your household) ever get meals or food from a church?
1017c	In the past 12 months, did you (or anyone else in your household) ever get meals or food from friends or relatives?
<i>Economic Hardship (p. 205-206)</i>	
1023	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you could not afford a place to stay or when you could not pay your rent?
1024	In the last 12 months, have you been evicted from your home for not being able to pay your rent?
1025	In the last 12 months, has your electricity or heat been turned off because you could not afford to pay the bill?
1026	In the last 12 months, has your phone been disconnected, or have you gone without a phone?
1027	Do you currently have phone service?

Module Placement

Question Number	Question
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Economic Hardship (continued)

1028	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you or anyone else in your family needed to see a doctor or go to the hospital, but could not afford to go?
1030	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you or your children went without proper clothing because you could not afford it?
1031	In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you needed to go somewhere for basic family needs, such as food, medicine, or appointments, and could not because of a lack of transportation?
1032	I am going to name some problems with housing that sometimes cause people difficulty. Do any of these things apply to your current housing situation?
1032b	a toilet, hot-water, or other plumbing that does not work right
1032c	rats, mice, roaches, or other insects
1032d	broken windows
1032e	heating system that does not work properly
1032f	exposed wires or other electrical problems
1032g	a stove or refrigerator that does not work properly
1032h	lead paint problems

End of questionnaire (p. 262-265)

1610	In the last year, because of drinking alcohol, have you failed to do what is normally expected of you?
1611	In the last year, because of substance or drug use, have you failed to do what is normally expected of you?
1612	In the last year, because of gambling activities, have you failed to do what is normally expected of you?
1613	In the last year, because of domestic abuse problems in your household, have you failed to do what is normally expected of you?
1614	We are interested in the help or support that you receive from or give to people who are not living in this household. This would be help that is not paid for. In the past month have you received any help with child care, transportation, home or car repairs, or other kinds of work around the house?
1615	Who gave you this help?
1616	In the past month have you helped anyone else with child care, transportation, home or car repairs, or other kinds of work around the house?
1617	Who did you help?

Module Placement

Question Number	Question
<i>End of questionnaire (continued)</i>	
1618	If you had a family emergency in the middle of the night and needed help, who would you call?
1619	If you had to borrow some money for a few weeks because of an emergency, who would you ask?
1620	If you had a problem, and you were feeling depressed or confused about what to do, who would you ask for help or advice?
1621	Next I am going to read several statements about the welfare system in Iowa. For each statement, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree. Here is the first one: The Promise Jobs program has been helpful in preparing me to get a good job.
1623	The welfare system is not helpful to me in collecting child support.
1624	Medicaid, not cash benefits, is the main reason I am on public assistance.
1625	If my family really needs FIP benefits, we won't be cut off after five years.
1626	Overall, the Iowa welfare system does a good job of providing useful services to help me and my family get off welfare and make it on our own.
1635	I would like you to think about your current situation and what it would take for you to be able to support yourself (and your family) without any public assistance. Would you need . . .
1635a	more education or job training?
1635b	affordable child care
1635c	dependable transportation?
1635d	anything else? (SPECIFY)
<i>Additional probes when response was "taking care of home and family" or "other"</i>	
18 (p.15)	What was the main reason you did not work in 1997?
28 (p.18)	What was the main reason you worked fewer than 52 weeks during 1997?
39 (1997 Employer #1, p.24)	What was the main reason you left this job?
352A (p.110)	What set of circumstances led (name/you) to apply for assistance from FIP during (month, year)?
352B (p.111)	Why did (name/you) stop receiving public assistance from FIP in (month/year)?
352C (p.111)	What reasons were given for (name's/your) FIP benefits being cut off?

Appendix B

Telephone Screening Instrument

Iowa State University Statistical Laboratory
The Iowa Study of Family Well-Being

ID # ___ - ___ - ___

Hello, this (YOUR NAME) calling for Iowa State University Extension. Recently, we sent you a letter about a research study we are conducting with Iowa Families.

1. Did you receive our letter?

1 = Yes

2 = No [READ LETTER/ DESCRIBE THE STUDY]

As the letter stated, the purpose of the study is to see how new welfare reform laws are affecting Iowa families. The researchers are interested in your experiences with and your opinions about various state and federal programs, about education, housing, transportation, and health issues.

All of the information provided by study participants is kept strictly confidential and names are not connected in any way with the information reported. The interviews take approximately 1½-2 hours to complete. For their time and efforts, participants will be given a \$20 gift certificate to a Hy-Vee or Drugtown Store in their area.

2. Do you have any questions about the study that I have not already answered?

1 = Yes [ANSWER Q]

2 = No

3. Are you willing to participate in the study?

1 = Yes

2 = No → [EXPLAIN IMPORTANCE OF PROJECT. TERMINATE IF UNWILLING TO PARTICIPATE.]

4. I need a little information about your household. First, let me be sure we have your correct name and address. (VERIFY NAME & ADDRESS)

Name

Address

City,

State

Zip Code

5. How many people are currently living in your household?

— —

6a. Beginning with the oldest, what is the first name of each household member? (LIST NAME IN TABLE BELOW)

6b. How old is (name)? (LIST AGE IN TABLE BELOW)

6c. What is (his/her) relationship to you?

a) Name	b) Age	c) Relationship
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

7. In whose name is your home/apartment rented or owned?

(Name): _____ (Line #) _____

8. When are the best times for our interviewer to reach you by phone to set up an appointment for an in-home interview?

1 = days }
 2 = evenings } _____
 3 = either } Specify day(s) of the week

9. When are the best times for our interviewer to schedule an interview with you in your home?

1 = days }
 2 = evenings } _____
 3 = either } Specify day(s) of the week

You'll be hearing from an interviewer within the next two weeks to set up an appointment. Once again, Iowa State University thanks you for your help. It was nice talking with you.

COMMENTS/PROBLEMS:

Appendix C

List of Abbreviations

PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act
AFDC	Aid to Families with Dependent Children
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
ISU	Iowa State University
SPD	Survey of Program Dynamics
IDHS	Iowa Department of Human Services
FIP	Family Investment Program (Iowa's TANF program)
FSP	Food Stamp Program