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Introduction

Since the passage of the welfare reform legislation of 1996, social scientists have studied the impact of reform on poverty, work effort, and well-being among those affected. Most of the research documents the decline in welfare rolls since 1996, the increase in work effort associated with this decline, and the strategies the poor have relied on to make ends meet in the context of a new policy context. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the role of social networks and social support as key factors in the reliance on work or welfare among rural single mothers.

The Barriers to Work Among Single Mothers

Considerable attention has been directed at the economic consequences of divorce and unwed motherhood on women and their children. The strong connection between family structure and poverty has been well established. In the United States, 27 percent of divorced women with children and 45 percent of never-married mothers have incomes below the poverty level (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). While concerns over poverty and the implications of single parenting abound, most research and policy initiatives directed at this issue have focused on single mothers in large urban centers. Although 42 percent of *rural* female-headed families live in poverty (Lichter & Jensen 2000), relatively less is known about the situations of single mothers living in rural areas of the United States.

Since the passage of the welfare reform act of 1996, the pressure on single mothers to find work as an alternative to public assistance has increased substantially. Yet, rural poor

women face the same substantial barriers to work as their urban counterparts, including low education and lack of work experience, transportation problems, and physical and mental health problems. (Danziger 2002). In addition, rural areas pose other, unique challenges to single mothers. The travel distances between home, work, child care, and services are often longer than in urban areas (Shelton et al. 2002). Moreover, the kinds of services that help to facilitate the transition from welfare to work are often lacking in rural areas (Whitener, Weber, and Duncan 2001; Lerman, McKernan, Pindus 2001).

On the other hand, there may well be advantages to living in rural areas for single mothers. These include the more personal relationships between service providers and recipients and smaller scale of service agencies (Shelton et al. 2002), and more extensive and stronger informal support networks among rural residents (Whitener, Weber, Duncan 2001). To the extent that such networks are crucial for negotiating the challenges of single parenthood and the work requirements of welfare reform legislation, rural single mothers may benefit from this characteristic of rural communities. One important question that follows and that we pose in this research is the role of social networks in affecting the work or welfare outcomes for rural single mothers.

Social Networks, Community Attachment, and Social Support

There is considerable overlap between the literatures on social networks, community attachment, social support and the more general concept of social capital. It can be argued that social capital is a more general concept that encompasses these other social resource dimensions. Indeed, the proliferation of research focusing on social capital may be a product of its multidimensional character. A common definition is that posed by Coleman, who maintained that “social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” and is

productive of “certain ends that in its absence would not be possible” (1988, p. S99). Putnam’s influential treatment of social capital elevates the dimensions of the concept referring to “networks, norms, and social trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (1995, p. 67). The concept has been important in stimulating thinking about the role of informal networks, formal organizations, and trust and reciprocity “not just in helping families survive but in advancing public policy that seeks to combat poverty” (Warren, Thompson, and Saegert 2001, p. 1).

Furstenberg and Hughes (1995), for example, examined the role of social capital in affecting the life chances of poor women and families. Their broad take on social capital included measures of both relations within the family (e.g., family cohesion, activities between children and parents, number of child’s friends mother knows, etc.), and family links to the community (religious involvement, network ties, perceptions of the neighborhood). These measures certainly reflect multiple concepts, including community attachment and trust, informal and formal network ties, and social support. Using data from Furstenberg’s Baltimore Study, they found that at least half these measures of social capital were related to outcomes for children, including educational achievement and (somewhat less so) labor force participation. They conclude that the concept of social capital needs much clarification but that it is a useful tool for thinking about how poor families survive and the “importance of examining the ways that social and psychological embeddedness in family and community contexts influence the course of human development” (p. 590).

James, Schulz, and van Olphen (2001) attempted to tackle the links among social capital and the other related concepts of social integration, social support, and community capacity.

They developed a model differentiating among organizations and *organizational networks*, *social capital* (trust, respect), *social support* (instrumental, emotional, informational), and *social networks* (size and density). While, their particular substantive focus was the potential impact of these on health status, their model has general applicability to a range of phenomena, including work and welfare strategies among low-income rural single mothers. In the current study we consider several dimensions of social capital in our analysis of the welfare and work strategies of rural single women. These include community attachment, levels of trust in community groups, formal organizational networks, informal social networks, and social support.

The Significance of Social Networks, Community Attachment, and Social Support for Single Mothers

A substantial body of research documents the important role of social networks among low income women for coping with hardship and improving socioeconomic outcomes and well-being.

Edin and Lein (1997a) analyzed the survival strategies of single mothers in four urban sites. They identified three types of strategies: work (reported, unreported, and underground); networks (family and friends, men/boyfriends); and social service agencies (public and private; food stamps, SSI, EITC). They found that poor single mothers relied on a mix of strategies to meet their economic needs when confronted with the reality that this was not possible with welfare or low-wage work alone. Specifically, friends and relatives provided a personal safety net which was especially important for working mothers, while moms on welfare were more reliant on community groups (Edin and Lein 1977b). While the Edin and Lein work has been very important in increasing our understanding of how these women attempt to “make ends meet,” we know less about the coping strategies of their rural counterparts. Given the potential

social and physical isolation that are more typical of rural areas, rural single mothers may have developed a different mix of strategies to make ends meet.

Newman (1999) describes the importance of social networks for finding jobs among the working poor in Harlem. She shows that “a job-seeker’s greatest asset is the chain of friends and acquaintances who are already working somewhere, people who can provide a personal connection to an employer” (p. 78). Similarly, Rankin (2003) identified strongly tied informal networks as the mechanism by which most low-income urban women find jobs. If such networks are more extensive in rural areas, this would be an advantage in job search strategies for rural women. In general, then, we might expect to find a relationship between rural single mothers’ access to informal networks and their likelihood to be working.

On the other hand, some research also argues that strong ties are more likely than weak ones in rural areas (Wilkinson 1991) and that these “weak ties” are more important in both building community bonds and in seeking and obtaining jobs (Granovetter 1973, Lin 2002, Burt 1997). To the extent that weak ties are relatively fewer in rural areas, rural residents are disadvantaged and less likely to be upwardly mobile. Although we cannot address this comparative prediction directly with a study of rural single mothers, we can examine the important potential connection between social ties and socioeconomic outcomes in this particular population.

While the research cited above focuses largely on the role of informal social networks, formal networks ties and involvement may also be important. In fact, there is reason to believe that participation in formal organizations or associations could facilitate the “weak ties” that are potentially important for obtaining employment. However, opportunities for participating in formal organizations are often limited in rural areas. Reliance on strong family ties for making

ends meet may be accentuated in rural areas, while formal organizational ties are underdeveloped. For example, Hofferth and Iceland (1998), found that families in rural areas were more likely to rely on exchange relations with kin exclusively, which they argued supports the idea that family ties are stronger in rural areas where families are less mobile. They also cite additional research that has shown the relative lack of access to and availability of services in rural areas. Both the apparent greater reliance on kin and the lack of services and formal organizations have implications for coping strategies for rural single mothers.

A very important source of network ties lies in a woman's household structure. In this study we focus on rural single women, but of course there are multiple ways a single mother can structure or rely on household composition. We know that "doubling up" is a common strategy among the poor to make ends meet (e.g., Lichter and Jensen 2001). Single mothers very often live with others; in some cases this is a cohabiting partner, but in other cases it is another adult, either a friend or a parent. This doubling up provides additional network resources for the single mother, with potentially positive consequences for her socioeconomic well-being. Hao and Brinton (1997) argued that kin coresidence encourages work by providing a social context in which expectations to work are greater, a potential source for child care, and exposure to the world of work through the other adults in the household (p. 1310). For a national sample of women, they found that "kin coresidence substantially increases the likelihood that single mothers will move from nonproductive to productive activities" (p. 1332). It might be argued, however, that the net effect of kin coresidence very much depends on the types of jobs the kin hold down. Nelson and Smith (1999) found that the job connections and economic benefits varied substantially between "good job" and "bad job" families in rural Vermont. Good jobs are more secure, year-round, with benefits, while bad jobs are those sometimes referred to as

contingent – insecure, part-time or part-year, and without benefits. The connections and the economic cushion provided by bad jobs are decidedly inferior and lead families in these circumstances to seek alternative strategies to get by. They are much worse off economically and in terms of life chances than “good job” families. The benefits of coresidence, then, are not automatic. While there is a basis for predicting that coresidence might facilitate work among rural single women, the evidence is mixed.

A frequent strategy among the poor or those living in poor rural communities is the decision to migrate; this often is an available option to those with the greatest human capital, leaving behind those who are the least likely to be able to find and keep jobs in a rural economy. (Lichter and Jensen 2002). Those who move into a rural community are often those with lower human capital. But in addition to the human capital deficits migrants to rural communities may bring, there are social network costs as well. A newcomer must establish herself in the community, build a new network of support, and learn about the more formal services available and how to negotiate them. We would expect that a relative newcomer to a rural community would have less developed social networks and, as a result, less community attachment. To the extent that networks are related to finding a job, we would then expect relative newcomers to be disadvantaged in the job market. Migration as a strategy may have long-term benefits, but in the short run, it is costly as a woman enters a new community and needs to identify and build a new social network.

Although not always measured directly, it is largely implied that social networks are important to socioeconomic outcomes because of the social support they provide to single mothers. While much of the support benefit is assumed to be instrumental, such as assistance with childcare or transportation needs, it seems likely that *emotional* support represents an

important resource in this population. There is a rich body of research demonstrating the importance of emotional support for in reducing the negative effects of stress, increasing self-esteem, and contributing to positive mental health (Cohen and Syme, 1985; Turner and Turner 1999). Given the stressful circumstances that rural single mothers often confront (Turner, 2003), receiving emotional support from friends and family may be essential to these women's functioning. It seems likely that such support would help to provide the motivation and encouragement to acquire and maintain paid employment and reduce reliance on welfare.

In sum, we make several predictions about the role of networks, community attachment and trust, and social support among rural single mothers:

- Informal networks – relatives and friends – will facilitate single mother's reliance on paid employment.
- Formal networks may also facilitate paid employment by providing a resource for job information and contacts, although the evidence for this link is mixed in the literature.
- The impact of informal networks on increasing the likelihood of work and decreasing the likelihood of TANF use will be stronger than that of formal, organizational networks, given the evidence for the importance of informal networks in rural areas and the relative lack of services and organizations in rural areas.
- Emotional support from family and friends will related to a greater likelihood of employment and a lower likelihood of reliance on welfare.
- There may be differences in these associations for never married and ever-married single mothers.

Method

Sample and Procedure

Data for this study come from telephone interviews with a sample of 504 unmarried women age 18-39 living with dependent children (under age 18). Using random digit dial (RDD), participants were sampled from rural and semi-rural areas of northern New England (New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont). Specifically, we sampled only from areas within these three states that were at least 15 miles away from any town having a population of 15,000 or greater. Interviews averaged 1 hour in length and respondents were sent a payment of \$20 upon completion of the survey.

Data collection was conducted using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) by the Survey Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. All interviewers attended intensive training sessions prior to working on the project. A minimum of 20 callbacks, across different days and times, were made in order to contact and screen selected households. The participation rate among known eligible respondents was 91 percent. The response rate accounting for estimated eligible respondents among unscreened households was 56 percent. However, given the high proportion of vacation homes in rural Northern New England, we believe that this represents a very conservative estimate of the true response rate. Since the large majority of our estimated non-respondents were “lost” due to difficulty in obtaining contact with any household member (e.g. no answer/answering machine), it is likely that a significant portion of those non-contacts represent second home residences that would be ineligible for the study. Nevertheless, to the extent that we were unable to contact eligible respondents, the sample may underestimate employed individuals, more socially active respondents, those with telephone screening technologies, and/or smaller households.

Although single mothers are more likely than other demographic groups to have low income, we did not screen for low income in the sampling process. Given that we are interested here in the strategies these women rely on as they negotiate reliance on work and welfare, we focus in this paper on the women in our sample with low income, defined as less than \$30,000. This selection yields a sample for the current analysis of 440 rural single mothers, approximately 87% of the original sample. Due to incomplete data on some of the variables, the final sample represented in the analyses to follow is 399 women.

Measures

The socioeconomic outcomes considered here are work and public assistance reliance. The survey includes several employment questions, including “Are you currently working for pay outside the home?” Responses to this question are used to measure current employment (*employed*). There are two measures of reliance on public assistance. The first is a measure of whether the single mom is currently receiving TANF (*TANF*). The second is a summary index of whether the single mom received any of several services over the past year: Medicaid, food stamps, SSI, WIC or food pantry, and public housing (*services*).

Several dimensions of social networks are included here: informal networks, formal networks, community trust, and attachment. Informal networks refer to networks provided by relatives and friends, by household structure, and by the involvement of the father with his children. Informal relative and friend networks are measured by three separate variables. The first is an additive index of the number of relatives and friends who live close by (*closeby*); the second is an index of the frequency of seeing and talking to relatives (*relatives*); and the third is an index of the frequency of seeing and talking to friends (*friends*). Household structure is measured by two variables: whether the woman is cohabiting with a partner/boyfriend (*cohabit*),

and whether there are other adults in the household, other than a cohabiting partner (*other adult*). Involvement of the father is measured by responses to a question about how frequently the father sees his children (*seedad*).

Formal networks, community trust, and attachment measures are based on items originally developed for the Social Capital Community Benchmark Study by the Saguaro Seminar (Saguaro 2000). For formal networks, we use three separate indices. The first (*orgs*) is the sum of the types of organizations respondents report being involved with in the past 12 months (e.g., sports club, neighborhood organization, parents' association). The second is a measure of the extent of involvement in organizations (*involve*), created by summing responses to items asking about attendance at various community events and organizational meetings. The third formal network measure is specific to religious organizations (*religion*) and taps membership and participation (sum of three separate items).

Community trust taps a conceptually distinct dimension of social networks, the extent of *subjective feelings of trust* in those networks. We measure this by asking respondents the extent to which they feel they can trust various groups of people (people in neighborhood, at work, at church, in stores, the police). The measure averages the trust score over only those groups with which a respondent is involved (*trust*).

Community attachment is measured by length of time in the community (*yrscomm*) and by a question asking respondents to rate their community as a place to live (excellent, good, only fair, or poor, reverse coded so that a high score is a more positive rating -- *ratecomm*).

Social support measures include perceived emotional support from family and perceived emotional support from friends. Perceived family support (*famsupp*) is assessed with a modified version of the Provisions of Social Relations (PSR) Scale (Turner et al., 1983). The scale was

designed to reflect the “provisions” of social relationships conceptualized by Weiss (1974), which includes attachment, social integration, reassurance of worth, reliable alliance, and guidance. Individuals responded to each item on a four-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. A mean score of nine items (e.g., “You feel very close to your family”; “when you are with your family you are completely able to relax and be yourself”) was constructed. The alpha coefficient for this scale is .89. Perceived friend support (*frsupp*) is assessed with a similar modified version of the Provisions of Social Relations (PSR) Scale (Turner et al., 1983) described above, with friends substituted as the referent group. Individuals responded to each item on a four-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. A mean score of eight items was constructed. The alpha coefficient for this scale is .94.

Several additional variables are used for control purposes. The measure of education is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent has low education, defined as less than a high school education (*lowed*). *Age* is measured in years and ranges from 18 to 39. Marital status is a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is never married or divorced/separated (*nev_ever*; 0=never married). *Kids* is the number of children the mother has.

Results

The means and standard deviations for all variables are reported in Table 1. These single mothers have active informal networks, as indicated by the means on the *closeby*, *friend* and *relative* measures. The average number of family members or friends living close by is about 26, the average for both the relative and friend variables is about 9, at the high end of the range for both variables. The formal networks, as measured by involvement in community activities and membership in community organizations, are less active. About 60% of the women report

either 0 or only 1 organizational membership, and a third of the women report attendance at meetings/events 5 or less times per year. The levels of trust and rating of their community are both high. As a whole, these findings support the notion that the social network resources in rural areas are more likely to be based on friends and family rather than the weak ties of formal organizational memberships.

[Table 1 about here]

It is interesting to note, that levels of perceived family and friend social support are also high, indicated by the means of 2.96 and 3.7 for scales that have a maximum value of 4.

Multivariate models predicting the three dependent variables (receipt of TANF, use of other social services, and paid employment) are presented in Tables 2-5. Table 2 presents logistic regression analyses predicting dependence on TANF. Findings show that demographics are important, in predictable ways. Younger women, those with very low education, and those with more children are more likely to be receiving TANF. On the other hand, marital status is not significant – whether a woman has ever married or has never married is not related to her dependence on welfare.

[Tables 2 About Here]

Informal network ties are also important. Specifically and surprisingly, friendship networks are *positively* related to TANF receipt; women who see and talk to their friends more often are more likely to receive TANF. This could reflect friends as an avenue for information about the availability of TANF benefits. Alternatively, the relationship might be in the other direction, indicating those on TANF, who generally are not working, may have the time available to interact more with friends. In contrast, the effects of cohabiting and the frequency of children seeing their biological father are negatively related to the use of TANF. That is, the

odds of receiving TANF are significantly reduced when the father is involved with his children, and marginally reduced (probability .07) when a single mom cohabits with a partner/boyfriend. Community attachment is also related to welfare dependence; as expected, the longer a woman has lived in her community, the less likely she is to receive TANF. It should be noted that the effect of years in the community is independent of the woman's age. Thus, it is experience within a given community rather than social experience more generally that appears to contribute to reduced reliance on TANF. Length of time within a community may contribute to more diverse social networks and more opportunities for finding alternatives to welfare dependence. All of these results suggest the importance of a woman's network ties; these network ties provide potential resources that single mothers can rely on to negotiate their precarious economic situations, and those with fewer ties are more likely to be dependent on welfare. The one exception to this is the effect of the friends network variable, which increases the odds of TANF reliance.

The ties represent only a potential for receiving resources and support. The social support measures tap actual perceived emotional social support. Women who feel close to and supported by their friends are *less* likely to be receiving TANF, net of the other variables. There is an interesting discrepancy here: those who interact with friends more often are more likely to receive TANF, but those who have high levels of perceived social support from friends have a decreased probability of receiving TANF.

Table 3 presents results of OLS multiple regression analyses predicting use of other public services. These findings show a similar pattern of results to those predicting TANF use. This is not surprising given the strong correlation between the TANF and use of other services ($r = .46$); women who receive TANF are also likely to seek services such as food stamps and

subsidized housing.

[Table 3 about here]

Contrary to the results for TANF, low education is not predictive of reliance on services, but marital status is; women who have never been married are more likely to be receiving services. The impact of the other demographic variables is consistent with the TANF analysis – women who are younger and those with more children use more social services. With regard to informal network ties, the role of friends was not significant. However, cohabiting had the same significant negative effect on services as it did on TANF. With respect to the community variables, reliance on services is negatively related to length of time in the community and more positive community ratings also reduce reliance on these services. This may imply a network effect: women who have lived in their community longer are more likely to have networks to rely on for help in their community, and this is an alternative to public social services. Those that feel more positively about their communities are less likely to rely on public services; although we have conceptualized the feelings about her community as an independent variable, it is very likely that feelings of attachment to her community are at least partially a result of her connections in the community. And, finally, the frequency of the father's involvement is again important; such involvement is associated with less reliance on services. Social support from friends has a negative effect on reliance on services; women who feel supported by their friends are both less likely to receive TANF and less likely to rely on public services. Their feelings of support probably follow from the resources and help that the friends provide.

Table 4 presents findings from a logistic regression analysis predicting whether or not the mom is employed. The majority of the women in our sample are employed (66%), which is noteworthy given the time demands placed on these women by their children and the difficulty

of transportation in these rural areas. Understandably, the factors that predict employment are the other side of the process that is reflected in the receipt of public assistance.

[Table 4 about here]

The single most important predictor is education; the odds of employment are reduced by more than a third for women with less than a high school education. Older women are more likely to be employed, as expected. Personal networks are less important than they are for TANF and services. None of the informal network measures – cohabiting, other adults in the household, involvement of the dad, interaction with friends or relatives – are significant in the prediction of working. The length of time in the community variables is related to employment; the longer a woman has lived in her community, the greater the odds that she is working outside the home. Although formal network variables – organizational memberships and frequency of involvement – are not related to employment, the more general community attachment effect may well reflect the greater potential for important contacts that are helpful in finding a job.

The impact of the social support variables provides an interesting contrast to the previous two outcomes. Here family support is the more important form of social support; the more perceived family support the woman has, the more likely she is to work. Indeed it is likely that many single mothers would not be able to work without the support of family to meet the demands of the job and the needs of their children. The role of friend support is less important than it was for TANF and services, and it is not significant in the prediction of working.

One of the original goals of the research was to examine whether the links between social networks, social support, and socioeconomic outcomes are similar for women who are never married, as compared to those who are single through divorce or separation. This is a crucial issue in the literature and in policy debates. The only significant effect we found for the marital

status variable is the greater reliance on public services by women who have never been married.

One final set of analyses we performed was to test for possible interaction effects between marital status and each of the network, community, and support variables. We did this by constructing a series of interaction terms and adding them one at a time to the regression equations. The only interaction terms that were significant were those for the involvement of the father in the equations for TANF and services. (See Tables 5 and 6).

[Tables 5 and 6 about here]

For TANF receipt, there is a significant interaction between marital status and the involvement of the father of the woman's children. For women who have never been married, the probability of relying on TANF declines with increasing frequency of the father seeing the children. For divorced or separated women, the involvement of the father is not predictive of TANF receipt. The nature of the interaction is graphed in Figure 1, which shows the predicted probability of receiving TANF as a function of the frequency of dad's involvement for the two marital status groups, controlling for all other independent variables by holding them constant at their mean value. It is possible that this effect is a product of the greater likelihood of never married women to be living with their children's father. We examined the interaction separately for women who are cohabiting and those who are not. Among those who are cohabiting, the interaction term is no longer significant, but among those who are not living with a partner, there is a significant interaction effect between never having been married and involvement of the father. Single women who do not live with a partner but who maintain a tie with their children's father are significantly less likely to rely on TANF. This same effect is not found among divorced and separated women. Similarly, there is an interaction between father's involvement and marital status for the dependent variable of service reliance. Never married women whose

children more frequently see their father are less likely to depend on public services, parallel to the TANF effect.

It is likely that fathers who are more involved with their children are also more likely to be providing financial support, thus decreasing the mother's reliance on public welfare. It is also possible that the involvement of the father increases the woman's network potential to include the friends and family of the father, and these additional ties provide resources for the mother and her children. Given the policy significance of child support by the father, and the growing body of research identifying the importance of father's role in the care and well-being of his children, this is an interesting effect that needs to be examined more fully in future research designed to systematically measure the involvement and role of the father.

[Figure 1 About Here]

Discussion

One of the major goals of this research was to examine the role of social networks in affecting how rural single mothers rely on work or welfare to provide for their children. The barriers to work among single mothers can be considerable, but at the same time reform of the nation's welfare system limits reliance on public programs to make ends meet among these women. Indeed, despite the barriers and strains associated with working and raising children, the majority of the rural single mothers we have studied are working. How they negotiate this and how their social networks help or hinder their transition from welfare to work are important conceptual and practical questions.

We expected to find that informal networks – relatives and friends – would facilitate working. The results only partially support this expectation. Informal networks were generally

not important in predicting employment; rather they were important in predicting a *lack of reliance on welfare*. To some extent these are the opposite strategies for getting by, but the lack of a relationship between informal networks and employment was surprising.

The major influences on employment were demographic. Specifically, we found a large negative effect of low education and a positive effect of age. Social support from the mother's family and the length of time the woman had lived in the community were also positively related to employment. With regard to social support, it is clear that single women who are raising children would have a very hard time working outside the home without the support provided by their relatives. And although we attempted to measure various dimensions of a woman's social networks, the strong effect for length of time in the community suggests that there are additional network ties that facilitate working that are not tapped in what we have measured. In her summary of the research on the impact of father absence on children, McLanahan (2002) argues that the longer a family lives in a community, the greater the likelihood of access to "the sustaining web of facilities, programs, people, and care providers that back up parents' efforts," and we believe that this same "sustaining web" facilitates employment by rural single mothers and by extension, less likelihood of reliance on TANF and other public services.

On the other hand, the more formal network ties linked to organizational membership and participation were not important for either the model predicting employment or for the two models predicting reliance on public support. Thus our results are consistent with the literature citing the greater importance of informal networks in rural areas and the relative lack of services and organizations in more rural communities.

Informal network ties were more consistently related to reliance on TANF and services than to employment, generally in the direction of predicting a *lack* of such reliance. Household

structure was especially important in its association with not receiving TANF. Women who cohabit with a partner and whose children are involved with their father were less likely to be dependent on TANF. This suggests that household structure and the involvement of the father can bring additional resources that help a woman provide for her children without relying on public welfare. The interactions of marital status and involvement of the father add to our understanding of the effect of the father involvement variable.

There are only two cases in which there are significant interactions between marital status and other network variables in predicting outcomes. This is an interesting finding both because there is much discussion about the undesirable consequences of out-of-wedlock childbearing, and for what the interactions reveal about the involvement of fathers and the impact this has not only on the children (which we have not attempted to measure here) but also on the mother. Women who have never married derive benefits from the involvement of the father with his children; they are less likely to receive TANF or other services the more the father is involved. There is no parallel effect among divorced and separated women; the involvement of the father is irrelevant for their reliance on public assistance. To the extent that self-sufficiency is valued, this suggests the benefits of father involvement. We need to learn more about the dynamics of this involvement and the mechanisms by which it affects the mother's use of welfare and services. One possibility is that women who are divorced from their children's father have formal arrangements for child support as a result of the legal divorce decree; thus, for them it does not matter so much how involved the father is with the children – they receive child support regardless of day-to-day interaction. For never married women, though, there is no binding legal arrangement, so the chances of receiving material support from the father are enhanced by his on-going involvement with his children, and this material support

helps the mother stay off welfare. Further research would shed light on this important dynamic.

The role of the friends network was important only for TANF, and in a somewhat paradoxical pattern. Frequency of interaction with friends was associated with *greater* reliance on TANF, while at the same time social support from the friends network was associated with *less* reliance on TANF. It is certainly plausible that the causal direction of the interaction with friends relationship is the reverse of that implied by our analysis; women who receive TANF are less likely to be working ($r = -.35$) and more in need of interaction with others in a similar situation, so they spend more time talking to and visiting with friends. Furthermore, it is likely that emotional social support from friends provides a woman with the resolve and encouragement to try to avoid reliance of welfare, a stigmatized dependence in American culture, and probably even more so in rural areas. Those who perceive greater social support from their friends are more likely to be embedded in social relationships characterized by both giving and receiving support, and some research suggests this is more likely to be the case in rural communities (Hofferth and Iceland 1998).

There are significant policy implications of this work. The data were collected after the welfare changes of 1996 (PRWORA), but before many of these women have had to deal with the time deadlines imposed by that legislation. We know that reliance on welfare has declined nationwide since PRWORA, and that employment among single mothers has increased (Ku and Plotnick 2003). We have far less understanding about what happens to women when they are no longer able to receive TANF, particularly when they have low education and reside in communities with a weak job market. Our data suggest that there is reliance on their social networks as an alternative to TANF, although we can't be certain if this reliance leads to less TANF dependence or if it results from being ineligible for TANF. Additional research is needed

to understand more about the informal personal networks and how these help single mothers cope with their circumstances.

The robust finding for length of time in the community suggests that newcomers to a community are particularly vulnerable; community strategies to link these newcomers to employment opportunities and to resources to facilitate work would help ease their transition and their likelihood of relying on employment. Finally, the role of human capital is crucial; rural single mothers with low levels of education are most likely to depend on public welfare, so efforts to provide education and training for both newcomers to a community and long-term residents are essential for successful employment, the resulting lack of reliance on TANF, and eventual economic well-being. Further, linkages among relevant organizations in a community – schools, employment offices, welfare offices, adult education providers, day-care providers – hold promise for creating a public safety network where personal networks and associated resources are missing.

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Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations for All Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
tanf	.198	.399
employed	.662	.474
services	1.891	1.335
lowed	.125	.331
age	29.486	5.729
kids	1.917	.988
nev_ever	.476	.500
other_adult	.110	.314
cohabit	.424	.495
seedad	4.76	2.89
closeby	25.6	25.18
friend	8.92	2.16
relative	9.18	2.27
involve	3.98	1.78
orgs	1.55	1.85
trust	3.17	.585
religion	3.21	2.07
yrscomm	3.6	1.63
ratecomm	3.07	.791
famsupp	2.96	.621
frsupp	3.68	.482

Table 2
Logistic Regression Predicting TANF Reliance

Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Error z	prob
lowed	2.316767	.9002157	2.16 0.031
age	.9197698	.0299501	-2.57 0.010
kids	1.340058	.2074438	1.89 0.059
nev_ever	.7805438	.26885	-0.72 0.472
other_adult	.6167588	.2940196	-1.01 0.311
cohabit	.5565542	.1797011	-1.81 0.070
seedad	.8360979	.0435307	-3.44 0.001
closeby	1.0009	.0058578	0.15 0.878
friend	1.164519	.0777831	2.28 0.023
relative	1.034459	.0718872	0.49 0.626
involve	.9494227	.0907462	-0.54 0.587
orgs	.9317748	.0874252	-0.75 0.451
trust	.8527036	.2258891	-0.60 0.548
religion	1.105004	.0807935	1.37 0.172
yrscomm	.7701193	.0727205	-2.77 0.006
ratecomm	.8454897	.1585396	-0.90 0.371
famsupp	.8548653	.1969359	-0.68 0.496
frsupp	.3885188	.1170754	-3.14 0.002
<hr/>			
Number of obs	=	399	
LR chi2(18)	=	61.69	
Prob > chi2	=	0.0000	
Pseudo R2	=	0.1554	

Table 3
OLS Regression Predicting Use of Services

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	prob
lowed	.2059468	.1910811	1.08	0.282
age	-.0574156	.0135947	-4.22	0.000
kids	.39471	.0691303	5.71	0.000
nev_ever	-.4775972	.1509468	-3.16	0.002
other_adult	-.0991634	.2100966	-0.47	0.637
cohabit	-.4220435	.1381641	-3.05	0.002
seedad	-.0514554	.0227249	-2.26	0.024
closeby	-.0006698	.0025878	-0.26	0.796
friend	.0506914	.0300248	1.69	0.092
relative	.0513711	.030196	1.70	0.090
involve	-.0610982	.0410696	-1.49	0.138
orgs	.0034844	.0397632	0.09	0.930
trust	-.0641466	.1211824	-0.53	0.597
religion	.0278442	.0318109	0.88	0.382
yrscomm	-.0835206	.0394321	-2.12	0.035
ratecomm	-.1920116	.0850936	-2.26	0.025
famsupp	-.1821644	.1103716	-1.65	0.100
frsupp	-.2605777	.138832	-1.88	0.061
_cons	5.303164	.7427306	7.14	0.000

N = 396
F(18,377) =6.38
Prob > F = 0.0000
R-squared = 0.2334
Adj R-squared = 0.1968

Table 4
Logistic Regression Predicting Employment

Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Error z	prob
lowed	.3312988	.1156318	-3.17 0.002
age	1.072699	.0287632	2.62 0.009
kids	.9797396	.1381507	-0.15 0.885
nev_ever	1.03151	.3057392	0.10 0.917
other_adult	.7052404	.2768499	-0.89 0.374
cohabit	.9565699	.259382	-0.16 0.870
seedad	.9328267	.0415362	-1.56 0.118
closeby	1.002859	.0052153	0.55 0.583
friend	.9265396	.0531418	-1.33 0.183
relative	.9216069	.0540694	-1.39 0.164
involve	1.001323	.0788818	0.02 0.987
orgs	1.102877	.0904071	1.19 0.232
trust	1.35009	.3075424	1.32 0.188
religion	.988412	.0605778	-0.19 0.849
yrscomm	1.226784	.0959186	2.61 0.009
ratecomm	1.167832	.1885367	0.96 0.337
famsupp	1.533198	.3182624	2.06 0.040
frsupp	1.185832	.3204742	0.63 0.528
<hr/>			
Number of obs	=	396	
LR chi2(18)	=	66.62	
Prob > chi2	=	0.0000	
Pseudo R2	=	0.1314	

Table 5:
Logistic Regression Predicting TANF With Interaction of Marital Status and Involvement of
Father

	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	z	P> z
lowed	2.45819	.9710434	2.28	0.023
age	.9082705	.0305129	-2.86	0.004
kids	1.36589	.2122182	2.01	0.045
nev_ever	.3039736	.1625306	-2.23	0.026
other_adult	.6107906	.2929842	-1.03	0.304
cohabit	.6096287	.1989307	-1.52	0.129
seedad	.7608102	.0506709	-4.10	0.000
closeby	1.000434	.0059008	0.07	0.941
friend	1.174996	.0795885	2.38	0.017
relative	1.032274	.0721634	0.45	0.650
involve	.9530548	.0918745	-0.50	0.618
orgs	.9269746	.0875779	-0.80	0.422
trust	.8347601	.2228713	-0.68	0.499
religion	1.08031	.080764	1.03	0.301
yrscomm	.7811134	.0744254	-2.59	0.010
ratecomm	.8180067	.1548837	-1.06	0.289
famsupp	.8815261	.2056465	-0.54	0.589
frsupp	.3689491	.1140189	-3.23	0.001
interaction	1.285966	.1359648	2.38	0.017

Number of obs	=	399
LR chi2(19)	=	67.42
Prob > chi2	=	0.0000
Pseudo R2	=	0.1698

Table 6:
OLS Regression Predicting Use of Services With Interaction of Marital Status and Involvement
of Father

	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t
lowed	.2236129	.1895804	1.18	0.239
age	-.062427	.0136047	-4.59	0.000
kids	.398208	.0685593	5.81	0.000
nev_ever	-1.010687	.2461707	-4.11	0.000
other_adult	-.0947688	.2083311	-0.45	0.649
cohabit	-.355576	.1391494	-2.56	0.011
seedad	-.1030961	.0294311	-3.50	0.001
closeby	-.0007791	.0025663	-0.30	0.762
friend	.0485652	.0297818	1.63	0.104
relative	.0505756	.0299428	1.69	0.092
involve	-.0618758	.0407243	-1.52	0.130
orgs	.0031951	.039428	0.08	0.935
trust	-.0493648	.1202827	-0.41	0.682
religion	.0164715	.031817	0.52	0.605
yrscomm	-.0728189	.0392959	-1.85	0.065
ratecomm	-.2029195	.0844707	-2.40	0.017
famsupp	-.1701594	.1095293	-1.55	0.121
frsupp	-.2700796	.1377053	-1.96	0.051
interaction	.1236268	.0453243	2.73	0.007
_cons	5.675566	.7490156	7.58	0.000

N=396

F(19,376) = 6.54

Prob > F = 0.0000

R-squared = 0.2483

Adj R-squared = 0.2103

Figure 1

