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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AFDC RECIPIENTS:
A COMPARATIVE VIEW

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ABSTRACT

To what extent do the characteristics of Milwaukee and other Wisconsin AFDC recipients confirm or challenge images that welfare clients are recent immigrants to the state, usually of minority background, frequently with no marital experience and little education, and destined to repeat their parents' experience of spending many years on welfare?

Looking at Milwaukee AFDC recipients and contrasting their findings with those of studies of New York City and Chicago, the authors report that only half the women are of minority background that 80% have been in the city ten years or more, that three-quarters of them have had marital experience, usually of several years duration. Inter-generational welfare dependency is exceptional, as is "repeating" on AFDC. From respondents' reports about friends, relatives, and participation in organizations, it seems that AFDC clients do not live in isolation in the urban community.

Outside Milwaukee, Wisconsin AFDC recipients are overwhelmingly white, divorced, long-term state residents. Though the average length of time in the AFDC program varies considerably from county to county, the percentage of women who have been on welfare before, either as adults or children, was small everywhere. Outside Milwaukee, women reported more relatives and friends, though participation rates were approximately the same.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AFDC RECIPIENTS:

A COMPARATIVE VIEW

by Joel F. Handler and Ellen Jane Hollingsworth

In recent years increased attention has been paid to questions concerning the characteristics of welfare recipients, particularly those covered by the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. As slogans such as "breaking the cycle of poverty" have gained currency, it has become important to ascertain both the size and nature of the target population, the characteristics of the welfare agencies which deal with them, and the community and societal resources available to welfare clients. Although we will look with more detail at agency programs, personnel and the community in subsequent papers, this section will concentrate on the clients themselves. They are, after all, the raw material of the program.

The popular conception of the AFDC recipient in the 1930's was that she was a middle-class white widow who accepted welfare assistance in order to prevent the breakup of her family until alternative arrangements could be made. We will never know just how accurate was the popular image in all its details, but during the 1930's, most AFDC recipients were in fact white widows.¹ After the second World War, a new stereotype of the AFDC recipient emerged: black, born in the Southeast, she had "moved north"

¹Gilbert, Steiner, Social Insecurity: The Politics of Welfare (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1966).

with little education or job experience. Usually unmarried or deserted she quickly turned to welfare for support. It was frequently alleged that she had even moved into the state in order to take advantage of better welfare benefits. She and her presumably numerous children would spend many years on the welfare rolls. Allegations were common concerning the promiscuity of recipients, their unwillingness to work or to better themselves, and their unfamiliarity with the institutions of urban life. The recipients were thought to have come from broken homes dependent upon welfare for support and they were believed to head families in which the younger members would very likely become the public charges of the next generation.

This characterization did not carry even face validity for many recipients, but for large urban areas, which made up an ever-greater percentage of welfare dependents in most states, it seemed reasonable. This paper will look first at the AFDC population in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, to see how apt the stereotype is for one of the nation's largest cities, and then will turn to an examination of the characteristics of recipients from other areas in the state of Wisconsin.

The data for this study are survey responses collected in the summer and fall of 1967 from complete AFDC rolls. Every woman included in the target sample had been in the program six months. And since we were primarily interested in female-headed households,

only women were included in the sample.² For Milwaukee and Dane counties, the women were stratified into categories of unwed and wed and proportionately sampled. From Brown County a random sample was drawn, and from Walworth, Sauk and Dodge (the three rural counties), all women who had been in the program at least six months were solicited. In each of the six counties, approximately 80% of the women approached agreed to be interviewed.³ The completed interviews were distributed as follows:

Table 1
AFDC Interviews Completed, by County

Total	Milwaukee	Dane	Brown	Walworth	Sauk	Dodge
766	302	179	86	80	57	62

²The requirement that a woman have had six months of AFDC experience in order to be included in the sample was designed to ensure that respondents would have enough contact with the welfare system to develop knowledge and opinions about it. Despite our efforts to include only female-headed households, we did interview a number of women who had husbands residing in the home. Many of these married women were raising children of relatives or foster children (46 of 148 women who said they were married). In other cases, a married woman was listed by the county welfare agency as the payee because at the time the case was opened her husband had been hospitalized, imprisoned, or otherwise absent. However, all AFDC-U recipients (where the father is unemployed) are excluded from our sample.

³For all counties except Dodge, 90% of the women interviewed were in the AFDC program at the time of the interview. In Dodge county, only 75% of the respondents were still receiving AFDC monies at the time of the interview. Insofar as possible, those who refused to be interviewed will be compared to the respondent population to see whether they differ on variables such as time in program, reason for exit, age, number of children, marital status, etc.

In looking at the respondents in Milwaukee, we are interested not only in their backgrounds and characteristics, but also in the way in which they compare with AFDC recipients in other large cities in the United States.⁴ The welfare populations of both Chicago and New York have been subjects of rather intensive study, and, when possible, it is to those cities that most comparisons will be made.⁵

One of the first questions asked about AFDC recipients for a major urban area concerns race. The racial distribution of our AFDC respondents in Milwaukee is generally reflective of the total caseload for the county, although dissimilar from the distributions for Chicago and New York. See Table 2.

⁴Although the sample was drawn from Milwaukee County, we found that 294 of the women lived in the city proper. Therefore, the findings can be considered applicable for the AFDC recipients of the city.

⁵Greenleigh Associates, Inc., Facts, Fallacies and Future: A Study of the Aid to Dependent Children Program of Cook County, Illinois (New York: Greenleigh Associates, Inc., 1960); Lawrence Podell, "Families on Welfare in New York City," Preliminary Reports I-IV, Center for Social Research: City University of New York, 1967. Throughout the text the Cook County Study is referred to as the Chicago study.

Comparisons with Chicago and New York welfare studies are open to questions, in that the bases for selecting samples differ. The Chicago study was based on a sample of all active cases taken in April 1960. The New York City study lumps together recipients of AFDC, Temporary AFDC, and Home Relief. Home Relief households include husbands. Podell and his associates have weighted their findings so as to give the most representative picture possible of a large segment of the welfare population of New York City, but their intentional inclusion of some intact families may mean that comparisons between Milwaukee and New York should be viewed with caution.

A still more basic objection to comparisons of any two or more welfare systems is that without more study of the processes filtering people into programs, one cannot be confident about the likenesses of sets of dependents, even in terms of their relationship to the total society.

Table 2
Racial Distribution of AFDC Recipients

<u>Race</u>	1965 All AFDC Milwaukee County	1967 Sample AFDC Milwaukee	1967 New York* Sample	1960 Chicago Sample
White	47.7%	41.1%	10.0%	9.0%
Non-white	-	-	-	91.0
Negro	50.3	57.0	40.0	-
Other non- white	2.0	1.9	50.0	-

The Milwaukee caseload for AFDC is clearly "more white" than for the comparison cities.

Women turn to AFDC because of various family crises. The marital status distributions for all of our respondents, as well as for the two largest racial groups, help to indicate some of the reasons for dependence.⁶

Table 3
Marital Status of Milwaukee AFDC
Respondents by Race

<u>Marital Status:</u>	<u>All Respondents</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>
Married	20.9%	27.4%	15.7%
Divorced	25.5	34.7	19.8
Separated	27.5	23.4	30.9
Deserted	3.6	2.4	4.6
Widowed	2.3	3.2	1.7
Unmarried	<u>20.2</u> (302)	<u>8.9</u> (124)	<u>27.3</u> (172)

⁶Hereafter whenever race is discussed, only Negro and white women are considered. The numbers of women were sufficient for comparison with only those two groups.

* See footnote 5.

The Chicago study showed much higher percentages for deserted and unmarried mothers (47.6% and 34.6% respectively). Comparisons among the three population segments in New York City show that separation was the most common explanation for absence of a husband for whites, Negroes, and Puerto Ricans. Of those without husband, however, 34.3% of the Negro women were unmarried, a percentage considerably higher than those for the whites or the Puerto Ricans.

The striking finding from Table 3 is that three-quarters of the Milwaukee recipients were married, divorced, or legally separated. The incidence of desertion is very low.

The overwhelming majority of our Milwaukee respondents had lived in Wisconsin for ten years or more: 80.3 percent, and of that number almost half had spent all their lives in the state. Hardly new to the state, the women reported that they had spent a median of twelve years in Milwaukee County.

The states of birth named by most of those not born in Wisconsin are in the Southeast, where almost half of the women were born (145). The following table presents the two major racial groups distributed by birthplace.

Table 4
Birthplace, by Race

<u>State</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>
Wisconsin	80.7%	13.4%
Southeast	7.5	79.1
Other state	<u>11.8</u> (119)	<u>7.5</u> (172)

In short, about 43% of our sample is made up by Negro women born in the Southeast. Although this may seem a large percentage, it is sufficiently small to refute the idea that welfare recipients are all "outsiders."

Although Negro respondents had been in the community a shorter time than white respondents, they averaged 10.5 years of residence, as opposed to 21 years for whites. Earlier studies of Chicago underwrite the same point: the overwhelming majority of AFDC recipients can legitimately be considered long-term residents of both the community and the state in which they are receiving aid.

Almost half of those who had not spent all their lives in the state said they had come to Wisconsin with their parents, or to be with their parental families. The next group had come with husbands, or to join husbands. Still others mentioned wanting to be with siblings. Family ties seem to be the most important influence on the migration patterns of these respondents. Previous studies, chiefly in the Detroit area, have highlighted the extended family as a major element in migration. From the study of Chicago, we know that of those moving to Illinois as adults, 60% cited reasons of family. Among our respondents, only 14% gave as their reason for moving the seeking of a better job or of a better life.

One third of the respondents had been reared on a farm or in a rural situation, while just over a third said they had been in a city with at least 100,000 residents. But, as Table 5 shows,

there were rather different distributions of the two major racial population groups.

Table 5
Size of Community of Rearing, by Race

<u>Size</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>
Farm or rural	32.5%	15.3%	44.2%
Less than 10,000	15.2	13.8	15.7
10,000 to 49,999	9.9	9.7	10.5
50,000 to 99,999	4.0	3.2	4.6
Larger City	<u>38.4</u> (302)	<u>58.0</u> (124)	<u>25.0</u> (172)

In terms of urban experience, whites have had an advantage over Negroes. Exactly what the implications of this are, we cannot be sure. Given the decade of residence in Milwaukee County reported by Negroes, one must be wary of making too much of the discontinuities in their experience. The significance of the greater urban experience of whites lies chiefly in their background characteristics: more education for themselves and their parents, for example. But regardless of race, the similarities between the adult lives of rural and urban-reared women are more striking than the differences.

Studies of the New York City welfare population have shown that roughly a quarter of the women were reared in each of the following: New York City, other cities, small towns, and farms. Likewise, our data on Milwaukee clients establish that about half of them did not grow up in an urban milieu, that is, in cities of 10,000 or more.

Over three-fifths of the Milwaukee respondents reported that they had been raised by both parents. In contrast, only half of the New York City respondents had been raised by two parents. Among our respondents, there was a difference in the frequency with which the racial groups reported coming from an intact family: four-fifths of the whites were raised by both parents, whereas only half of the Negroes were. Unmarried AFDC recipients were more likely to have been raised by their mothers only or by others, rather than by two parents.

Giving the occupations of their fathers, the largest number of women replied "farmer," with the second largest group indicating semi-skilled or unskilled factory jobs. Just over a sixth indicated that they had no father (or substitute). Almost 90% of the fathers had worked regularly. Sixty per cent of the fathers had no more than a grade school education. Over half of the respondents said that their mothers had worked while they were growing up, usually as semi-skilled or unskilled workers, or as service workers. Their mothers usually had no more than grade school educations.⁷

Concerning conditions in their homes while they were growing up, the AFDC recipients in Milwaukee were most likely to report that their homes were not crowded and that they had enough to eat all or most of the time. Sometimes, or often, there was

⁷Recall about the educational achievements of parents is open to question. A fairly high percentage of respondents said they did not know about the years of schooling completed by their parents. The figures presented in the paper are based on respondents who gave grade or school levels as replies.

money for special treats. Their parents, or other adults in the home, got along very well or fairly well, according to the recollections of our respondents.

Still, about a third of the women said that their parents had received some type of public or private assistance during the years they were growing up. Such aid was usually of brief duration. As one would expect, women who had grown up in large urban areas were more likely to come from families which had received assistance than women from farms or smaller towns.

Usually from intact families headed by someone regularly employed, the respondents had completed a median of two years of high school. Although in Milwaukee, Chicago, and New York City most respondents had attended high school, a strikingly larger percentage of Milwaukee women had completed their high school education: 29.8% for Milwaukee as contrasted with 17% in both Chicago and New York. The median number of school years completed by all persons in Milwaukee County twenty five and older is eleven suggesting that compared to the general adult population, Milwaukee AFDC recipients are not greatly disadvantaged.

In age, the Milwaukee respondents are very like the general female adult population of the county, as well as like recipients in Chicago and New York. In all three cities, the median age is 32, although distributions vary somewhat.

Table 6
Age Groups of AFDC Recipients:
Three Metropolitan Areas Compared

<u>Age</u>	<u>Milwaukee</u>	<u>Chicago</u>	<u>New York City</u>
under 30	36.3%	38.8%	40.%
30 to 39	39.7	41.7	40.
40 and over	23.4	19.5	20.

Since the Milwaukee women are somewhat older, it might be expected that their average family size figure would be higher. This is not the case: in each city the mean number of children is 3.4. Perhaps it is more useful in describing AFDC families to indicate that in Milwaukee County, 74% of the respondents have three or more children. A fifth of these have seven or more children. The figures correspond roughly to the findings for Chicago and New York City--the percentages of recipients with three or more children are 74 and 66 for those cities.

With the fragmentary knowledge at our command, can we make any statements about the life patterns, of AFDC recipients? So far we have established that most are from intact homes, did not receive welfare aid as children, and have had some marital experience. Since most women enter public dependency as a result of marital crisis, or at least crises stemming from marital complications, we need to look at a few more variables associated with marital experience. Because there has been much interest in both differences and similarities of racial components, perhaps it will be helpful to consider the two major groups comparatively.

Table 7
Aspects of Marriage, by Race*

	<u>White</u>	<u>Negro</u>
Age when first married	19.6 yrs	18.9 yrs
Yrs. with recent husband	10.1	9.4
Per cent married only once	74.3	80.0
Number of children	<u>3.4</u> (113)	<u>3.9</u> (125)

*Table includes only women who have been married.

For women who have been married, the broad outlines of their history are fairly clear. They have married once, at about age nineteen; they have three or four children living with them at present, after many years of marriage.

The husbands of these women completed a median of two years of high school, just as their wives, our respondents, did. Semi-skilled and unskilled workers were the largest occupational group, followed by skilled workers, and clerical and kindred workers in that order. But only 71% worked regularly.

The above facts mean that of the 302 Milwaukee respondents only 56% had experience in a household unit where the husband provided a regular source of income. Moreover, given the occupational figures that are available, we can make no presumption about the adequacy of the income level. Very likely, even for women who have been married, economic insecurity was a constant threat. Forty four per cent of our sample have presumably experienced even less desirable circumstances.

The real difference between the two largest racial groups is not in terms of the experiences of women who have been married, but in terms of the percentage of the dependents who are unmarried. Though only one of every five AFDC recipients in Milwaukee County has not been married, among Negro women the percentage is three times higher than for white women. Correspondingly, Negro women are more likely to have had illegitimate children. Illegitimacy statistics are always open to question, in that their reliability cannot be ascertained without intensive investigation. About 48% of our Milwaukee respondents had borne at least one illegitimate child, though not necessarily while on the AFDC program. This figure is considerably lower than the one for Chicago: 70%.

How long do AFDC recipients stay on the program. Contrary to stereotypes, very few women spend year after year on public welfare rolls. And for most of the women we interviewed, AFDC was a new experience, a finding consistent with studies of most welfare populations regardless of time and place. A third of the Milwaukee respondents had previous experience with AFDC, whereas only a fifth of the Chicago clients had previous case openings. The percentage of white women who were "repeaters" was higher than that of Negro women. White recipients whose parents had received welfare assistance were almost twice as likely to have had previous AFDC experience as those whose parents had not been aided. Among Negroes, the percentage of women with previous AFDC experience was not affected by whether their parents had received assistance.

Forty nine per cent had been in the program two years or less, with an additional twenty five per cent reporting five years or less as AFDC recipients. The mean time on the program for the whole group was 45.8 months, or about three years and nine months. Means are given below for the major racial groups, divided between unmarried and those with some marital experience.

Table 8
Average Time on AFDC, by Race and Marital Status*

White Unmarried	White Married	Negro Unmarried	Negro Married
32.8 mos.	35.6 mos.	56.6 mos.	51.0 mos
(11)	(112)	(47)	(125)

*"Married" means respondent had been married at some time.

The average time on AFDC in Chicago was 2.92 years. Since our respondents had to have six months experience with the program to be eligible for the sample, we would expect to have a mean higher than the real mean for all AFDC recipients in Milwaukee County at any given time. There are, after all, many short term cases, who do not stay in the program six months. Formerly, the state regulations prohibited the opening of the case unless the recipient would be in the program at least three months. This requirement has now been dropped, and it is questionable to what extent it was ever enforced. In any event, it is possible that the mean for Milwaukee County is considerably lower than the mean for our respondents.

Even with the background information presented above and the knowledge that AFDC budgets provide for what, at best, could be called extremely modest living conditions, we know very little

about the lives of our respondents. Many policy questions in welfare require more specific information about the way in which women relate to others outside their households and to the larger society. In subsequent papers we will look at this problem in some detail, particularly at the way in which women resolve a whole set of crises in their lives. Here, we will consider briefly the isolation of these women.

Most Milwaukee AFDC recipients lived in central city census tracts, and of those, 57% lived in tracts specifically designated as poverty tracts. Almost all respondents had television sets and radios, but only 60% had telephones. In Chicago, 77% had television sets and 70% had radios. Seventy per cent of the women lived in units that housed two to nine families, with an additional 20% living in single housing units. Just over 12% lived in public housing, about the same percentage obtained for Chicago.

In a later paper we will examine more carefully the activity patterns of AFDC recipients in relation to the community, their friends, and welfare agency. Here we will touch only briefly on the problem. Asked how often they were able to leave the house for social trips (excluding the doctor, the grocery store, and other errands), over 50% of our respondents said never or once in an average week. And only half of the women not married at present said that they had any social life involving men.

But AFDC recipients are not social isolates. We found that 91% had some friends or relatives. Seemingly, other AFDC clients are not a source of companionship for most women: half said they

knew no one else who was in the program. On the other hand, 77.5% said they had at least one relative in the community or nearby, and many women mentioned several relatives. And half the Milwaukee respondents said that the people they thought of as good friends were their neighbors.

Nor are AFDC recipients withdrawn from the community. Among our respondents, 56% said they were active in a labor union, social club, fraternal organization, or poverty group, attended some church activity other than services, or went to PTA regularly. Many more go to church services with a fair amount of regularity or to PTA for parents' programs.

Given the concern with participation in voluntary groups by different social classes, it is particularly interesting that 23% of the women were active in some group or organization not affiliated with their church.⁸ Since the respondents in this

⁸The question asked was: "Within the last three years, have you participated in, or belonged to, any organization of these types: (a) a labor union (b) a political group--like a political party, or the NAACP or CORE, or any other group concerned with political problems (c) any of the groups connected to the national 'War on Poverty' like a neighborhood task group or a Head Start mothers' group or any other groups or meetings associated with the 'War on Poverty' (d) a fraternal group like the Elks, the Moose, or the Masons (e) a social group or sports group like a card club, a birthday club, a bowling team, or any other informal group that meets fairly regularly (f) a social group like 'Parents Without Partners' that has parties and does other things together (g) as a leader for some young people's group like the Cub Scouts, the Girl Scouts, or the 4-H Club (h) any other groups or organizations?" If the respondent replied in the affirmative, she was asked "Do you still participate?"

survey were primarily females heading families, one might expect they would have less time and fewer prospects for participation than most lower class families. Yet, this participation rate of 23% is roughly the same as the rate for blue-collar workers.⁹

Looking at friendships and participation together, one finds that only 6% of the women have no friends or relatives and no "outside" activity. Although our measures of social isolation are crude, the evidence suggests that the AFDC mother, pictured as alone and inactive, is indeed the exception.

For Milwaukee County recipients, many of the stereotypes about AFDC clients fade into myths. Inter-generational poverty is the exception, not the rule; AFDC repeaters make up only a small percentage of the caseload. Most women on welfare have many years of state residency and marital experience behind them. Still, as heads of families usually containing several children, they have rather slender resources with which to meet the problems of an urban, industrialized economy.

Outside Milwaukee County, the Wisconsin AFDC population we interviewed assumes a somewhat more homogeneous aspect.

⁹C.R. Wright and H.H. Hyman, "Voluntary Association Membership of American Adults: Evidence from National Sample Surveys," American Sociological Review, XXIII (1958), 284-94. The types of groups in which women are active are discussed in Linda Freeman, "Voluntary Group Participation, Integration, and the Lower Class: A Re-evaluation," Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, 1968.

Moreover, it almost wholly refutes the stereotype outlined earlier. There are variations between the two more urbanized counties containing Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Madison in Dane County and Green Bay in Brown County) and the rural counties, (Walworth, Sauk, and Dodge). And there are variations, in some cases, among the rural counties with Sauk and Dodge assuming a superficial similarity.

In all five counties, 90% of the respondents were white, with a few Negroes participating in Dane and Walworth Counties, and a few American Indians in Sauk and Brown, and a few Mexicans in Walworth. As Table 9 indicates, all of these women have spent many years in Wisconsin.

Table 9
Residency Information: Five Counties

	Dane	Brown	Walworth	Sauk	Dodge
% who have lived all lives in Wisconsin	71.5	72.1	51.3	84.2	77.4
Ave. years in Wisconsin*	16.4	21.7	17.9	25.0	20.3

* of those who have not lived in Wisconsin all their lives.

More than any other explanation, those who had not been born in Wisconsin said they had come to the state in order to be with parents or family.

Half of the women in the three rural counties said they had been raised on farms, and just under a third of those in Dane and Brown Counties so replied. Even now, the typical AFDC recipient in Walworth County lives in a city of fewer than 5,000

inhabitants. Sauk County women are fairly well divided, in that equal numbers live in towns under 2,500 and in towns between five and ten thousand. Over half the Dodge County women live in a city having 10,000 residents, though a large number of them make their homes in towns with fewer than 2,500 residents. One of the many problems of welfare administration in Wisconsin counties is the fact that women are dispersed in small towns throughout the county. To develop services specific to them is all the more difficult because of their decentralized patterns of residence. On the other hand, it may be that as residents of small communities, welfare recipients are so well embedded in networks of relationships that they do not require specially fostered programs or arrangements. At any rate, as Table 10 points out, many women are living in quasi-rural conditions: either they live in quite small towns, or they live in medium to small towns primarily oriented toward an agrarian market and population.

Table 10
Size of Community of Residence
Three Rural Counties

	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
on farms	8.75%	12.2%	
cities under 4999	73.75	47.4	38.7%
5000 to 9999	17.50	40.4	8.1
10,000 and over	<u>80</u>	<u>57</u>	<u>53.2</u> 62

Almost all AFDC recipients in Dane and Brown Counties live in the large cities of the counties, Madison and Green Bay.

As one might expect, the percentages saying that they had been raised by both parents were quite high, ranging from 74% in Dane to 83% in Sauk. In all the counties but Brown, women were most likely to indicate that their fathers had been farmers. Skilled work was the occupational category for fathers mentioned most often by Brown County respondents. Semi-skilled jobs were mentioned by the second largest group in most counties, with very few reporting that their fathers had been in service, professional, or clerical work. Almost every father worked regularly. Usually he had a very modest education; the percentages reporting no more than grade school completed by their fathers were: Dane, 64%; Brown, 79%; Walworth, 71%; Sauk, 90%; and Dodge 82%.

Most mothers of AFDC recipients did not work, which is not surprising in view of the rural or small town situations for most families. The percentages of mothers completing no more than grade school were: Dane, 49%; Brown, 66%; Walworth, 54%; Sauk, 69%; and Dodge, 66%. It is interesting that mothers seem to have had more formal education than fathers. However, many more respondents did not know about their mother's education than was true for their fathers, so the differences may be smaller than they appear. Still, the pattern is consistent across all counties. Moreover, for both mothers and fathers, the counties rank in the same way: Dane County parents are best educated, Sauk County parents the least educated.

Like the Milwaukee respondents, the women in the other five counties said that their homes had not been crowded while they were growing up, that they had enough to eat all or most of the time.

They recalled that often or sometimes there was money for special treats. Still, between 20 and 30 percent said that their parents had received some kind of welfare aid at the time the respondents were growing up, with the period of assistance usually a year or less.

The median number of school years completed by our respondents varied somewhat from county to county, with women residing in more urbanized counties having some advantage. In Table 11, the median schooling for AFDC recipients is compared with the median schooling for all persons 25 years and over in the five counties. Some of the variation in education may be attributable to the age of the clients; that is, younger women tend to have completed more years of school than the older woman.

Table 11
Education in Five Counties
AFDC Recipients and General Adult Population
and Median Age of AFDC Recipients

Median School years completed	<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
AFDC	11	10	10	10	9
All adults 25 and over ¹⁰	12	11	11	9	9
AFDC median age	31	36	35	39	39

Not only had most women been married, as is shown in Table 12, but they had been married a number of years. They usually married in their late teens and had several children.

¹⁰"General Social and Economic Characteristics," U.S. Census Population, 1960, Wisconsin. Final Report PC (1)-51c, pp. 250-255.

Table 12
Marital Status Information

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>	<u>Total</u>
Married	15.6%	14.0%	20.0%	19.3%	29.0%	18.3%
Divorced	57.0	62.8	46.2	50.9	50.0	54.5
Separated	9.5	18.6	17.5	7.0	1.6	11.2
Deserted	2.8	1.2	5.0	1.8	11.3	3.9
Widowed	4.5	2.3	5.0	10.5	8.1	5.4
Unmarried	10.6	1.2	6.3	10.5	0	6.7
	(179)	(86)	(80)	(57)	(62)	(464)
Age first married (median)*	19	19	18	19	19	19
Years married*	9.5	11.2	11.4	14.2	13.4	11.2
N. of Children*	3.4	3.3	3.6	2.8	3.4	3.4
% married only once	74	84	77	84	82	79

* Applies only to those who have been married.

Not surprisingly, the percentages of those who had borne illegitimate children were lower than the 48% for Milwaukee, but the lack of variation between urban and rural counties is of interest.

Table 13
Percentage Having Illegitimate Child

<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
31%	22%	24%	26%	21%

The husbands of our respondents were usually employed in semi-skilled jobs, or, in two of the rural counties, as farmers. A considerable number of women in Dane, Brown and Walworth counties were married to skilled workers. Apparently, about two-thirds of the husbands had worked regularly.

Their median years of education, shown in Table 14, vary little in response to urban-rural dimensions. As with their parents,

Table 14
Education, Husbands of Respondents

Median school years completed by husbands of respondent	<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
	11	8	9	8	10

wives are better educated (for three counties) than husbands. In Dane County, the years of school completed are the same for women and men; in Dodge County, husbands have received more schooling.

Most women are now on AFDC for the first time, though between 18 and 25 percent have had some previous AFDC history. It is hard to know how to evaluate the fact that a county has women reporting several previous experiences with the program. Does this mean that women have been encouraged to leave the program prematurely, only to return when they were not able to be independent? Or does the agency make it easy for women to have their cases re-opened, so that they move in and out of the program with greater ease? For most cases these questions are probably academic--the women are on AFDC for the first time and will not return to the program when they leave it.

Most recipients in these five counties have had several years of married life and have held jobs. But their possibilities and plans for moving out of a condition of dependency vary greatly. Thus, the length of time they have spent on the program varies. For Sauk and Dodge recipients, experiences have been considerably longer. One would expect that as time in the program increases, women become less likely to foresee an end to need for aid (except in those cases where child maturation or departure is involved)

because options of employment and marriage decrease as women grow older. But expectations do not seem to be related to time in the program. See Table 15. About half the women in each county

Table 15
Months on AFDC and Expectations of No
Longer Needing Aid

"How many months have you been in the AFDC program this time?"

"Do you see sometime in the future when you think assistance from AFDC or other welfare programs will no longer be necessary for you?"

	<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
Months	41.5	38.5	36.1	62.2	51.4
Yes on no aid in future	63%	41%	58%	56%	50%

expect to be independent one day. Very likely they are making their assessment of the possibility of independence in terms of a complex of variables: their own skills and opportunities, aid or pressure from the county welfare agency, or the opportunities of the environment for employment. Or perhaps, on a more direct basis, they are assessing their own prospects for marriage or reconciliation.

In the two more urbanized counties, under half the women live in single family dwellings, whereas two-thirds or more of the women in Sauk, Walworth, and Dodge Counties live in single houses. About 90% have radios, and still more have television sets. Telephones, which may be paid for by the AFDC grants, are in 70-87% of the homes and thus are more widespread than in Milwaukee County. Women in the rural counties are more likely to

have cars than those in Brown or Milwaukee counties.

How often do welfare clients get out of the house for social purposes? Regardless of county, about 60% say once a week or less often. Half of the women without husbands say they date, with slightly lower percentages in rural areas. But then, rural women are older.

Most women have among their friends only one other AFDC family. Many say they know of no one else on AFDC. In Dane County, however, 18% said they knew eight or more AFDC families, which is suggestive of the potential for, or existence of, organization.

Relatives are near at hand for over 80%, and visiting or telephoning them is a daily business for about one-third of the women. The women in these counties also tend to say they know many other people in their communities. Partly, this may be a product of years of continuous residence. No doubt it is also due to the size of the community. In small towns, after all, there are numerous face-to-face contacts with others, and there is little change in the cast of characters. Of the 464 women in the five counties, only seven said they had neither friends nor relatives--less than 2%.

About a quarter of the women in each county spoke of participation in some organization or group, with Dane County women reporting the highest percentage (27%).¹¹ Only about half the women with children in school have been to a PTA meeting in three years, but over 70% did go to a program at the school in order to

¹¹See footnote 8.

meet teachers during the same time span. Approximately a quarter of the women reported taking part in some church activity other than services.

It is difficult to appraise the impact of frequent church attendance, but it does seem to be a feature in the lives of many women. The percentages reporting church attendance weekly or a few times a month are: Dane 46%, Brown 58%, Walworth 40%, Sauk 47%, and Dodge 55%. Very likely denominational preferences are important in shaping attendance. The major groups in each county are shown below.

Table 16
Major Religious Groups and Percentages
Identifying with Each

	<u>Dane</u>	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Walworth</u>	<u>Sauk</u>	<u>Dodge</u>
Lutheran	28%	22%	30%	44%	40%
Roman Catholic	26	54	28	23	32
Methodist	17	-	15	-	-
Baptist	-	-	15	-	-

In trying to piece together a picture of the social lives of women in the five counties, we found that women in Walworth County were somewhat less likely to participate in activities and less likely to go regularly to church services than women in other counties. For the others, it is correct to say that most women were involved either in an organization or a church. Depending upon the implications attached to membership, it seems that most of our respondents were somewhat active in their communities. Since we earlier found that they tended to have -

friends and relatives in their communities, the overall picture that emerges is one of involvement with society, not isolation.

Above, we have looked briefly at the characteristics of AFDC recipients in six counties. It should be fairly clear that stereotypes of black AFDC mothers, recently immigrated to Wisconsin, representing a second generation of public welfare dependents, and having little or no normal family experience are quite inaccurate. Perhaps it is more accurate to consider the typical AFDC respondent as a woman much like the other mothers in her community, save for her lack of a husband and her low level of income.