TRI-COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: A TANF INITIATIVE IN RURAL MARYLAND

CORRENE SAUNDERS, M.P.P.
RESEARCH SPECIALIST

PAMELA CAUDILL OVWIGHO, PH.D.
RESEARCH DIRECTOR

CATHERINE E. BORN, PH.D.
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

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FAMILY WELFARE RESEARCH AND TRAINING GROUP
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
525 WEST REDWOOD STREET
BALTIMORE, MD 21201

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For additional information about the report or the study, please contact Dr. Catherine Born at the School of Social Work (410.706.5134, cborn@ssw.umaryland.edu). Please visit our website, www.familywelfare.umaryland.edu, for additional copies of this and our other reports.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary challenge and goal for caseworkers providing services through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program in Maryland and throughout the country is to support low-income adults in finding and securing gainful employment. Despite monumental caseload decline, this challenge has not become any easier as agencies struggle to move from "check management" to "case management", and to better understand why some adults continue to remain unemployed. In order to meet this challenge, agencies and local offices often rely on shared information and best practices, though they are rarely able to share their limited resources.

On Maryland's Lower Eastern Shore, a primarily rural region, three local departments of social services (LDSSs) found that it was especially difficult to meet the needs of their TANF populations without some of the advantages typically found in urban centers, such as public transportation and an array of public services, as is common for many TANF agencies serving rural communities (Meckstroth, et al., 2006). Although they did not have the financial means to provide those services individually, in November 2003 the three local offices pooled their resources and created economies of scale where none had existed before. Specifically, the three jurisdictions partnered to create the Tri-County Workforce Development Initiative (TWDI) with the hope that the combined effort would improve service delivery and client outcomes in all three counties.

Major components of the collaboration include a coordinated fixed route bus system, improved employment barrier assessment and removal services available in one centralized location (the "One-Stop Job Market"), and a software system designed to provide on-demand outcome data (Terri Jackson, Somerset County DSS Assistant Director, personal communication, August 11, 2005 and September 16, 2005). Specifically, through the One-Stop Job Market, local TANF agencies partner with the Workforce Investment Board (i.e. the Lower Shore Workforce Alliance) and a host of other social service providers to provide a three-week life skills course, focusing on developing "soft skills" for clients, an in-depth educational and employment skills assessment tool to assist in providing appropriate work experiences, built-in monetary incentives for job retention, and a full-time job developer.

While caseworkers are able to receive ongoing feedback in terms of job placements and TANF caseload dynamics on an individual basis, the purpose of today's report is to provide a more comprehensive, longitudinal comparison of TANF cases. Specifically, we compare TANF cases that applied for services before TWDI implementation to TANF cases that applied for services after TWDI implementation in terms of baseline characteristics, historical welfare and employment experiences, and welfare and employment outcomes during a two-year follow-up period. Key findings are summarized in bullets and discussed below.

- **Payees are basically alike in both the pre-TWDI and post-TWDI groups in terms of payee characteristics, though payees applying for TANF after TWDI implementation were slightly older than those applying before TWDI (mean=29.67 years vs. 28.13 years, respectively). There were no differences in case characteristics.**

Assuming there may be differences in employment and welfare outcomes according to certain payee or case characteristics, it is important to note that we found no statistically significant differences in payee race, marital status, or education status between the pre-TWDI and post-TWDI groups. Although there was a statistically significant difference in age, the variation was minimal (1.5 years). Overall, the typical payee was a never-married (75.2%) African-American (62.9%) female (96.2%) in her late twenties (mean=28.89) with a high school level of education (55.3%). Similarly, there were no significant differences in terms of case characteristics. The majority (50.7%) of cases included at least one child under the age of three, and approximately two-fifths (43.8%) of all cases included only one child. Nearly all (93.6%) TANF cases included a single adult.

- **After TWDI implementation, TANF payees were more likely to be exempt from work requirements due to having a child under the age of 1, or having a long-term disability, short-term illness, or a breakdown of child care. Post-TWDI payees were less likely to be exempt due to a lack of support services or other reasons.**

One of the major components of the TWDI effort was an improved and comprehensive assessment tool, intended to identify employment barriers early on and to improve job skill matching for TANF recipients. It is possible that pre-TWDI recipients were less likely to actually have particular barriers to employment. However, it is much more likely that the higher rates of work exemptions overall and in certain categories are a result of the new assessment. We consider this to be a positive trend, as it is likely to result in TANF recipients receiving needed services that they may not have otherwise received if they had been required to work without the thorough up-front assessment. Theoretically at least, the early identification and amelioration of impediments should have a positive effect on client outcomes in the long run. Overall, in the first month after TANF application, eight out of ten (80.8%) payees were considered to be “work mandatory” before TWDI implementation, compared to six out of ten (59.7%) payees after TWDI implementation.

- **There were no significant differences in terms of TANF history, and most applicants had not received cash assistance in the past five years.**

Long-term welfare receipt is considered an indicator of welfare dependence and a red flag for employment barriers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006). At least for the cases in the three counties in our study, however, long-term receipt does not appear to be a common experience. Overall, eight out of ten cases (79.5%) had not received Maryland cash assistance in the past year, and a majority (53.6%) had not received Maryland cash assistance in the past five years. Among those who had been previous recipients, the average number of months of receipt was 4.32 months out of the past 12, or about one-third of the time, and 11.54 months out of the past 60, or about one-fifth of the time.

- **Overall, the only statistically significant difference in recent employment experiences of adults in pre-TWDI TANF cases compared with those in post-TWDI cases is that caseheads in the pre-TWDI group were significantly more likely to have worked at some point in the past two years (89.7% vs. 79.1% for post-TWDI adults).**

In our series of longitudinal *Life After Welfare* studies, we have found that women leaving welfare are more likely to maintain employment if they have worked in the past (Ovwigho, Born, Patterson, & Kolupanowich, 2008). Therefore, if there were substantial differences in the employment histories of TANF recipients before and after TWDI implementation, we would expect differences in employment outcomes over time separate and apart from the impact of the TWDI effort. While we found a statistically significant difference in the percent employed in a Maryland, UI-covered job in the past two years (or eight quarters), there was no difference in the average number of quarters worked or in the amount earned for those who were employed.

Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the percent employed or amount earned in the quarter of the TANF application. Overall, about eight out of ten (84.5%) had worked at some point in the past two years, with a mean quarterly earnings around $2000 (mean=$2,194.66). In the quarter of TANF application, approximately two-fifths (42.4%) of adults were employed at some point, with an average earnings of approximately $1000 (mean=$1,089.24). Findings such as these lend support to the premise underlying TWDI and the emerging Maryland RISE initiative.

- **During the two-year follow-up period, there were no statistically significant differences in the employment rate or average earnings among caseheads who were employed in a Maryland UI-covered job.**

While the data reveal that employment rates and earnings were slightly higher in the post-TWDI group, the difference is not statistically significant. The lack of significance may be the result of a small sample size or skewed earnings. Alternatively, it may reflect the reality that increases in earnings after TWDI were random and could not be specifically attributed to the intervention. Finally, it is important to note that a greater portion of the post-TWDI caseload was exempt from work requirements in the early months of their TANF application, indicating that they may have been more likely to have temporary or permanent employment-related challenges to overcome. At the very least, it is likely that the higher rate of administrative work exemption coding in the latter period resulted in a greater portion of the post-TWDI caseload receiving services targeted towards coping with employment barriers rather than work participation, narrowly defined. This, too, is a fundamental cornerstone of the emerging Maryland RISE effort, a focus on individualized assessment and employment with promise and not just the pursuit of any available job. Overall, across the entire two-year follow-up period, approximately eight out of ten (81.4%) caseheads had UI-reported wages and on average, those who worked earned an average of approximately $2,000 per quarter (mean=$2,378.95).

- **Recipients appeared to exit TANF more quickly in the post-TWDI period, though the difference was not statistically significant. Overall, though, post-TWDI recipients were significantly more likely to exit welfare within the follow-up period compared with the pre-TWDI group, and accumulated fewer months of assistance during the follow-up period, on average.**

Among the post-TWDI group, nearly all payees (98.1%) had left TANF within a two-year follow-up period, compared with approximately nine out of ten (91.1%) who exited in the pre-TWDI group. Among those who did leave, those in the post-TWDI group exited about one month sooner than those in the pre-TWDI group (mean=6.75 months versus 7.54 months, respectively), though this difference was not statistically significant. Additionally, there were no significant differences in the recidivism rates between the two groups. Overall, approximately one in four (23.9%) leavers returned to TANF within the follow-up period. While this may be considered a less-than-optimal finding, it is notable that the recidivism rate remained stable despite a higher rate of exiting in the post-TWDI group. This resulted in less overall welfare receipt during the follow-up period after TWDI than before TWDI, by about two months (mean=7.56 months vs. 9.18 months, respectively).

- **Over time, sample members in both the pre-TWDI and post-TWDI groups came to rely more on employment and less on TANF. Sample members in the post-TWDI group were significantly more likely to be reliant on employment in the fourth follow-up quarter.**

A brief overview of the combined work and welfare status of individuals during the first two years after beginning a TANF spell reveals that over time employment does replace TANF. For instance, in the pre-TWDI group, less than one in twenty (3.7%) recipients had UI wages without any cash assistance in the first follow-up quarter, compared with nearly one-half (46.3%) of recipients in the eighth follow-up quarter. In the post-TWDI group, the results are similar, with nearly one in ten (6.2%) individuals working without cash assistance in the first follow-up quarter compared with nearly one out of two (47.9%) in the eighth follow-up quarter.

Although the rate of those in the “Employment Only” group appears higher in the post-TWDI group than the pre-TWDI group, the difference is not statistically significant except in the fourth follow-up quarter. In this quarter, which represents the period of January to June of 2006 for the post-TWDI group and January to June of 2004 for the pre-TWDI group, three out of ten (30.4%) individuals in the pre-TWDI group were “Employed Only”, compared with nearly one out of two (44.5%) individuals in the post-TWDI group.

The results presented in this report reveal changes in welfare and employment outcomes after TWDI implementation, though the changes are not all substantial or statistically significant. However, it is important to keep in mind that there were notable shifts in the economic climate between the pre- and post-TWDI periods that we are unable to account for in our analyses. In addition, our lack of ability to discern the true implications of the findings related to higher rates of work exemption coding makes it more difficult to understand the welfare and employment outcomes.

For instance, if the caseload has always had the same rate of work-related challenges but the new assessment system included in the TWDI made it more likely for those challenges to be spotted by caseworkers, then we would assume that more individuals in the latter period were receiving or referred for services they may have previously been lacking. That, in and of itself, would be considered a positive finding. If on the other hand, the post-TWDI caseload was truly more likely to encounter employment barriers, then we would fully expect employment rates to be lower in the latter period. Without a direct measure of what the employment rates would have been in the absence of the coordinated efforts of the TWDI, we are unable to discern whether our findings are better or worse than expected.

Overall, the creative and flexible approach of the TWDI allowed the local offices in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties to manage their limited funds in order to provide efficient but tailored services for families receiving cash assistance in Maryland. As TANF agencies continue to meet the challenge of raising their work participation rate to comply with new federal regulations related to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), the lessons learned via the TWDI collaboration are valuable.

In particular, these lessons provide vital information for local TANF offices in Maryland that are currently pursuing strategic partnerships with local resources and employers through the Maryland Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment (RISE) initiative. The RISE initiative, like the TWDI, is aimed at improving opportunities for and access to employment for TCA recipients in Maryland that will help them achieve self-sufficiency. Particularly in these trying economic times, initiatives like TWDI and RISE will provide essential reinforcements for a sometimes strained safety net.

INTRODUCTION

Welfare reform in Maryland has been characterized by bi-partisan agreement, heavy reliance on empirical data to guide policy and program interventions, and a constant mindfulness of the need to think creatively in order to maximize the utility and effectiveness of program resources. Through this innovative multi-dimensional approach, local offices have successfully streamlined their administrative processes, incorporated lessons learned regarding service delivery and assessment, and have forged partnerships within their communities to best serve TANF customers. The local flexibility jurisdictions have historically enjoyed allows agencies to tailor services to the unique needs of their customers. It has also made Maryland a national leader in welfare reform. In one particular instance, three local departments of social services (LDSSs) forged a dynamic partnership to help meet the challenges found in primarily rural communities. That partnership is the subject of our study.

Understandably, attention is often paid to large and sometimes difficult-to-manage urban caseloads; however, there are also formidable challenges for smaller, more rural communities. In particular, program funds are smaller while geographic areas are larger, there are often fewer non-government service agencies for LDSSs to partner with, and it is often difficult to locate and develop sufficient meaningful work opportunities within commuting distance. The scarcity of public transportation in rural areas compounds these problems, of course.

In 2003, Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Departments of Social Services, on Maryland's Eastern shore, formed the Tri-County Workforce Development Initiative (TWDI) to pool scarce resources and to take advantage of economies of scale to better serve their customers. While the TWDI is truly comprehensive, major components of the initiative include the coordination and improvement of a fixed route public transportation system, improved barrier assessment and removal services available in a centralized location (the "One Stop Job Market"), and a software system designed to provide on-demand outcome data.[1] Specifically, through the One-Stop Job Market, local TANF agencies partner with the Workforce Investment Board and a host of other social service providers to provide a three-week Life Skills course, focusing on developing "soft skills" for clients, an in-depth educational and employment skills assessment tool to assist in providing appropriate work experiences, built-in monetary employer incentives for job retention, and a full-time job developer.

As one of several evaluation processes, the three counties asked the Family Welfare Research and Training Group to conduct a client-level study comparing the welfare and employment outcomes of Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA, Maryland's version of TANF) families served under the TWDI to those achieved by customers before the regional approach was adopted. As such, we compare caseloads before and after TWDI implementation and address three research questions:

[1] Outcome data from the program's proprietary software could not be obtained by the authors and was not used in this study.

1. What are the baseline characteristics of the Tri-County TANF recipients before and after TWDI implementation?

2. What are the historical welfare and employment experiences of Tri-County TANF recipients before and after TWDI implementation?

3. What are the welfare and employment outcomes of Tri-County TANF recipients before and after TWDI implementation?

Today's report provides a summary of our analyses. While it is difficult to provide a distinctly causal story about the effects of the TWDI on welfare recipients, data on their employment and welfare experiences during the first two years after beginning a new TANF spell provide an important point of comparison between recipients before and after TWDI implementation. Furthermore, the descriptive story of the characteristics of the caseloads in the three counties before and after the TWDI was implemented is particularly informative in light of the three counties' efforts to improve client assessment and coding of work eligibility.

This section briefly describes the sample and data sources used to evaluate client-level outcomes for TANF recipients in the Tri-County region before and after TWDI implementation which occurred in the fall of 2003.

Sample.

Keeping in line with the employment focus of the TWDI, our study sample consists of TANF adults who would potentially be work-mandatory and excludes adult caseheads on child-only TANF cases. In addition, in order to limit "noise" in the findings which may have been due to previous welfare experiences, etc., the sample was further narrowed to include only those cases which began a new TANF spell in the months before and after TWDI implementation.[2] Therefore, the final sample included the universe of traditional (not child-only) TCA cases beginning a welfare spell in one of the three counties (Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester) in one of two time periods: pre-intervention (January to June 2003); and post-intervention (January to June 2005). The following table, Table 1, describes the groups in more detail.

Table 1. Distribution of Cases in Sample

	Pre-TWDI		Post-TWDI		Total	
Jurisdiction	%	N	%	N	%	N
Somerset	18.7%	40	21.8%	46	20.2%	86
Wicomico	67.3%	144	65.9%	139	66.6%	283
Worcester	14.0%	30	12.3%	26	13.2%	56
Total	**100.0%**	**214**	**100.0%**	**211**	**100.0%**	**425**

Data Sources.

Findings presented in this report are based on data gathered from two administrative data systems maintained by the State of Maryland. Individual and case-level demographic characteristics and program utilization data were obtained from CARES (Client Automated Resources and Eligibility System), and employment and wage data were obtained from MABS (Maryland Automated Benefits System).

CARES.

CARES became the statewide, automated data system for DHR programs as of March, 1998, and provides individual and case level program participation data for cash assistance, Food Stamps, Medical Assistance and Social Services. It also provides information on TANF program requirements (e.g. months used toward the TCA 60-month lifetime limit), and exemptions from various requirements. Data on the education status of payees were obtained through an interface between CARES and the Work Opportunities Management Information System (WOMIS) which is a separate data

[2] A new spell is defined as not receiving TANF for the previous two consecutive months.

system maintained by DHR for the purpose of storing information on the fulfillment of federal and state work requirements, individuals' work history, work activities, and other work-related characteristics. WOMIS was replaced by a new data system in December 2006.

MABS.

In order to investigate the employment patterns of our customer sample, quarterly employment and earnings data were obtained from the Maryland Automated Benefits System (MABS). MABS includes data from all employers covered by the state's Unemployment Insurance (UI) law (approximately 93% of Maryland jobs). Independent contractors, sales people on commission only, some farm workers, federal government employees (civilian and military), some student interns, most religious organization employees, and self-employed persons who do not employ any paid individuals are not covered. "Off the books" or "under the table" employment is not included, nor are jobs located in other states.

In Maryland, which shares borders with Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and the District of Columbia, out-of-state employment is quite common. Most Maryland counties, including the three counties in our study sample, border at least one other state. Moreover, according to the 2000 census, in Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester Counties, the out-of-state employment rates for the general population of workers aged 16 years and older were 4.1%, 7.3%, and 8.7% respectively, all three rates being higher than the national average (3.6%). We are not able to determine whether welfare leavers in these counties have the same likelihood of working in a different state as the general population, so our lack of data on out-of-state employment, as well as federal civilian and military employment, depresses our employment findings to an unknown extent.

Finally, because UI earnings data are reported on an aggregated, quarterly basis, we do not know, for any given quarter, how much of that time period the individual was employed (i.e., how many months, weeks or hours). Thus, it is not possible to compute or infer hourly wages or weekly or monthly salary from these data. It is also important to remember that the earnings figures reported do not necessarily equal total household income; we have no information on earnings of other household members, if any, or data about any other income (e.g. child support, Supplemental Security Income) available to the family.

There are many factors related to one's ability and likelihood to work, including personal and family characteristics, past receipt of welfare benefits, and employment history and previous work experience. In order to understand the context and impact of the TWDI, then, this chapter provides a discussion of the findings related to the characteristics of cases and caseheads receiving TANF before and after the TWDI was implemented. In addition, information regarding welfare utilization and employment history are considered.

Payee Characteristics.

Table 2, following this discussion, presents findings on the characteristics of the payees associated with study cases. Overall, the only statistically significant difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention groups was in age, as post-intervention caseheads were approximately one and one-half years older than pre-intervention caseheads when they started their TANF spell (mean=29.67 vs. 28.13, respectively). Otherwise, the groups are very similar in terms of gender, race, and education status.

In general, the typical casehead in either group was a never-married African-American female in her late twenties, with a high-school graduate level education. Notably one-third (35.5%) in both groups had less than a high school diploma.

Table 2. Payee Characteristics

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
% Female	95.3% (204)	97.2% (205)	96.2% (409)
Race			
African American	61.3% (130)	64.4% (134)	62.9% (264)
Caucasian	37.7% (80)	33.7% (70)	35.7% (150)
Other	0.9% (2)	1.9% (4)	1.4% (6)
Marital Status			
Never Married	72.8% (155)	77.7% (160)	75.2% (315)
Married	13.1% (28)	7.8% (16)	10.5% (44)
Separated	8.9% (19)	9.2% (19)	9.1% (38)
Divorced	5.2% (11)	5.3% (11)	5.3% (22)
Age			
less than 20	6.5% (14)	3.8% (8)	5.2% (22)
21-25	44.4% (95)	35.5% (75)	40.0% (170)
26-30	17.3% (37)	21.8% (46)	19.5% (83)
31-35	12.6% (27)	13.3% (28)	12.9% (55)
36 and older	19.2% (41)	25.6% (54)	22.4% (95)
Mean*	28.13	29.67	28.89
Median	25.40	27.86	26.54
Standard Deviation	7.68	7.93	7.83
Range	18 – 54	18 – 50	18 - 54
Education Status			
Less than HS	35.5% (76)	35.5% (75)	35.5% (151)
Current HS Student	2.3% (5)	0.9% (2)	1.6% (7)
High School or Equivalent	57.9% (124)	52.6% (111)	55.3% (235)
Post HS Attendee	3.7% (8)	9.0% (19)	6.4% (27)
Bachelors Degree	0.5% (1)	1.9% (4)	1.2% (5)

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Case Characteristics.

The two groups were also very similar in terms of case characteristics, presented in Table 3, with no statistically significant differences between them. Approximately two-fifths of the cases (41.2%) had an assistance unit including only two individuals, and about three-tenths had an assistance unit with three individuals (30.4%) or four or more individuals (27.3%). From the information presented on number of adults and number of children, it is clear that variation in the size of assistance units is mainly driven by the number of children, as nearly all are single-adult units (93.6%). Likewise, we find that two-fifths (43.8%) of the cases have only one child included in the assistance unit, three-tenths (29.9%) have two children, and one-fourth (25.2%) have three or more children. Overall, the average age of the youngest child on the case was just over four years old (mean=4.26), and approximately one-half (50.7%) of the cases had at least one child under the age of three.

Table 3. Case Characteristics

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
Assistance Unit Size			
1	0.0% (0)	2.4% (5)	1.2% (5)
2	39.7% (85)	42.7% (90)	41.2% (175)
3	32.2% (69)	28.4% (60)	30.4% (129)
4 or more	28.0% (60)	26.5% (56)	27.3% (116)
Number of Adults in AU			
1	94.9% (203)	92.4% (195)	93.6% (398)
2	5.1% (11)	7.6% (16)	6.4% (27)
Number of Children in AU			
0	.0% (0)	2.4% (5)	1.2% (5)
1	41.6% (89)	46.0% (97)	43.8% (186)
2	32.7% (70)	27.0% (57)	29.9% (127)
3 or more	25.7% (55)	24.6% (52)	25.2% (107)
Mean	1.95	1.88	1.92
Median	2.00	2.00	2.00
Standard Deviation	1.03	1.16	1.10
Range	1 – 6	0 – 6	0 – 6
Age of Youngest Child			
Mean	4.05	4.48	4.26
Median	2.76	3.22	2.90
Standard Deviation	4.16	4.46	4.31
Range	0 – 18	0 – 18	0 – 18
% With Child Under 3	53.6% (112)	47.8% (96)	50.7% (208)

Note: There were no statistically significant differences between the groups.

In general, having little variation among demographic and case characteristics between the two groups is beneficial because it provides support for the contention that the groups are comparable. It also gives us confidence that any differences in employment and TANF outcomes are not being driven by fundamental differences in the types of cases that made up the caseload before and after the TWDI. Likewise, we continue this type of comparison of baseline characteristics by looking at past TANF utilization and employment experiences among the two study groups.

Work Exemptions.

In order to identify and address barriers to employment among TANF recipients in the Tri-County region, the TWDI utilized a standardized and comprehensive assessment tool. A thorough assessment of clients' needs and strengths may help the welfare agency create a more appropriate case plan and possibly move the family from welfare-to-work more successfully. Another possible outcome of such an assessment approach, however, is that it may lead to higher rates of work exemptions for individuals who need to address certain barriers before entering employment.

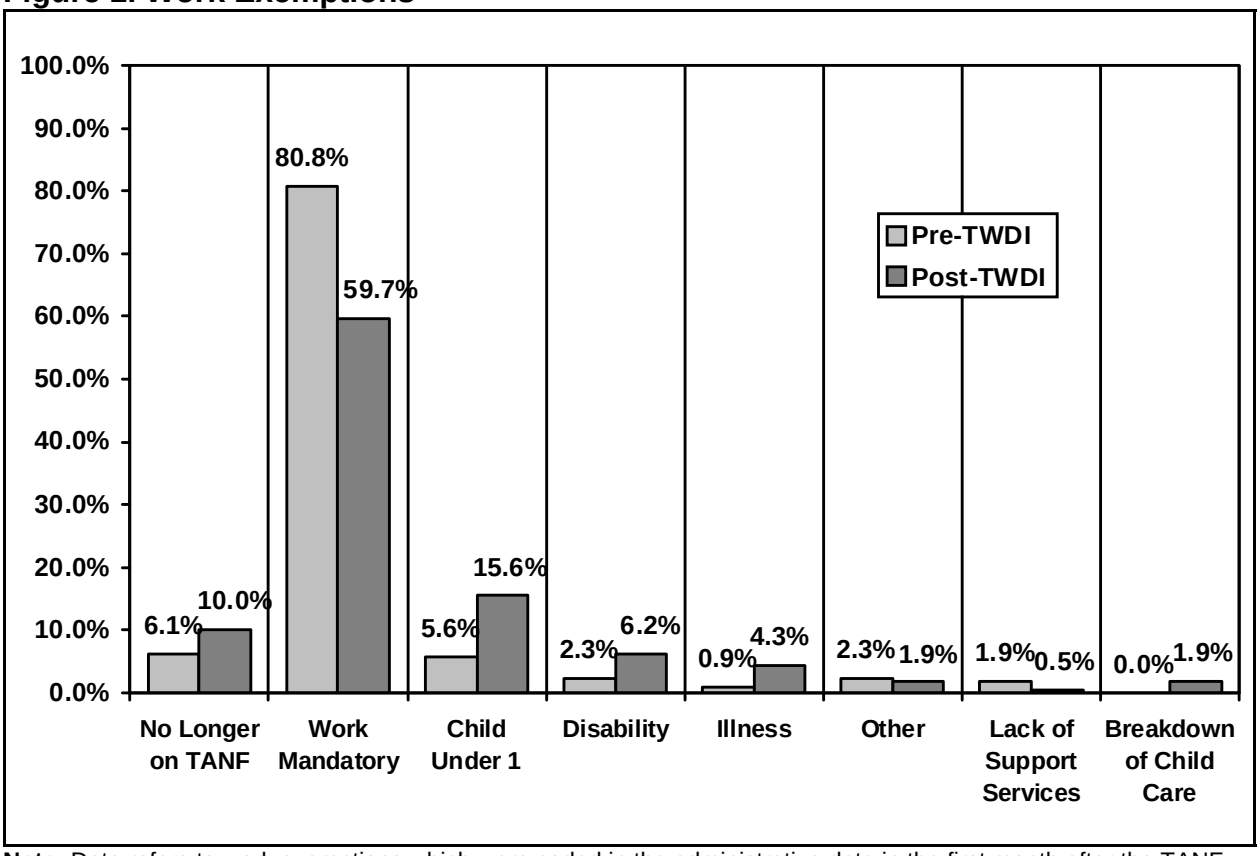
As presented in Figure 1, the TWDI's focus on assessment may have produced such an effect. For instance, in the first month after applying for TANF, eight out of ten (80.8%)

caseheads in the pre-TWDI group were work mandatory, meaning there was no exemption or good cause reason on record for them to be exempt from the TANF work requirements. This compares with just six out of ten (59.7%) adults recorded as work mandatory after TWDI implementation. We find this difference to be statistically significant, as are the differences in the types of exemptions coded in the administrative data.

In particular, post-TWDI caseheads were more likely to be exempted from work participation because they have a child under 1 year of age (15.6% vs. 5.6% before implementation), a long-term disability (6.2% vs. 2.3% before implementation), an illness that does not qualify as long-term disability (4.3% vs. 0.9% before implementation), or a breakdown in child care arrangements (1.9% vs. 0.0% before implementation). Individuals receiving TANF after TWDI implementation were less likely to be exempt from work due to a lack of support services (0.5% vs. 1.9% before implementation), or for other reasons (1.9% vs. 2.3% before implementation). These findings are consistent with the type of wrap-around services provided through the TWDI.

It is impossible to determine, based on the analysis of administrative data, whether barriers to employment were actually more common among the post-TWDI group, or whether the rate of barriers is the same but they are more likely to be known by TANF caseworkers after TWDI implementation. Either way, the next two sections, which highlight TANF and employment outcomes over time, should be understood in context of the assessment piece, since the hope is that more accurate assessment would allow for more targeted service provision and better outcomes overall.

Figure 1. Work Exemptions***



Note: Data refers to work exemptions which were coded in the administrative data in the first month after the TANF spell which brought cases into our sample began. "Other" includes exemptions such as: "In Home to Care for AU Member"; "Transportation Problems"; "Work Assignment"; and "Single Parent With a Child Under 6". These, and the work exemptions presented in the graph, were allowable at the time of the study but may or may not be allowable under new federal regulations.
*****p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

TANF History.

While this study is focused on TANF recipients who began new welfare spells in the Tri-County area, most applicants had received TANF at some point in the past. Specifically, the sample for this study is restricted to adults who had not personally been included in any TANF grant in Maryland for at least two consecutive months. Therefore, adults previously in child-only cases are included, as well as those who may have been long-term recipients but left welfare for at least two months before returning for a new TANF application within the study period. The data presented in Table 4, following this discussion, reflect these different scenarios by highlighting recent TANF receipt, in the year preceding sample selection, and longer-term TANF receipt in the previous five years.

As presented, approximately 8 out of 10 (79.5%) sample caseheads had not received TANF at all in the previous year. Only one in twenty (4.9%) received assistance for 7 months or more in the year before sample selection. Overall, the average number of months of receipt in the past year was 4.32 months, with no statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-intervention groups.

The bottom half of Table 4 gives a longer term picture of participants' welfare histories. This measure, the number of months of TANF receipt in the five years before sample selection, does not fully capture recipients' lifetime history, but is a fairly good approximation. On this measure, we find that more than half (53.6%) of sample members were entering the welfare rolls for the first time in at least five years and likely for the first time ever. A little less than one-third (30.4%) had received assistance for one to twelve months out of the previous 60. Very few recipients had long welfare histories, with only 4.7% receiving benefits for more than two years. Those with any TANF receipt in the previous five years spent an average of one year (mean = 11.54 months) on the rolls. Again we find no statistically significant difference between the pre-TWDI and post-TWDI cases.

Table 4. Past TANF Utilization

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
Months of TANF in Past Year			
None	81.3% (174)	77.7% (164)	79.5% (338)
1-3 Months	8.4% (18)	10.0% (21)	9.2% (39)
4-6 Months	6.1% (13)	6.6% (14)	6.4% (27)
7-10 Months	4.2% (9)	5.7% (12)	4.9% (21)
Mean	4.20	4.43	4.32
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00
Standard Deviation	2.67	2.79	2.72
Range	1 - 10	1 – 10	1 - 10
Months of TANF in Past 5 Years			
None	53.3% (114)	54.0% (114)	53.6% (228)
1-12 Months	30.8% (66)	29.9% (63)	30.4% (129)
13-24 Months	11.2% (24)	11.4% (24)	11.3% (48)
25-36 Months	4.2% (9)	2.4% (5)	3.3% (14)
More than 36 Months	0.5% (1)	2.4% (5)	1.4% (6)
Mean	11.12	11.97	11.54
Median	9.00	9.00	9.00
Standard Deviation	8.25	10.21	9.25
Range	1 - 41	1 - 52	1 - 52

Notes: The sample for this study included assistance units who applied for TANF in the study period AND had not received assistance for at least the past two months. Therefore, no one in the sample could have received more than 10 months of assistance in the past year, or more than 58 months out of the past five years. Data presented are for caseheads only, and count only months of TANF in which the casehead was a recipient. There were no statistically significant differences between the groups.

Employment History.

As mentioned previously, another possible factor related to the likelihood of working in the future is past work experience. Thus, Table 5, following this discussion, highlights past Maryland-based UI-covered employment for the caseheads in our study.

In the eight quarters before beginning the welfare spell that brought them into our sample, the vast majority of caseheads (84.5%) had worked in a Maryland UI-covered job at some point. However, it is important to note that caseheads in the pre-intervention cases were substantially more likely to have been employed (89.7%) than those in the post-intervention cases (79.1%). This finding should be kept in mind in later discussions about employment outcomes. It may not be a dominant issue in determining employment outcomes however, because among those who worked there was no statistically significant difference in the amount earned per quarter (approximately $2,000 for both groups, mean=$2,095.82 and $2,308.30 for pre- and post-intervention groups, respectively). In addition to the mean, or average, we also present the median, or midpoint, of quarterly earnings for those who worked; the median is less sensitive to extreme outliers. In this case, earnings are skewed more heavily for the pre-intervention group, whose median quarterly earnings ($1,544.38) were nearly $500 less than that of the post-intervention group ($2,060.91).

In Table 5 we also present employment data for the quarter of the TANF application. We find that less than half (42.4%) of the caseheads worked in a Maryland UI-covered job in that quarter. For those who did work in the application quarter, it is impossible to determine whether employment was concurrent with the TANF application, preceded the TANF application, or came after the TANF application. However, in the study quarter, working caseheads earned approximately half of what they had in the past, or $1000 (mean=$1,089.24), which hints that the applicants had indeed fallen on harder times. There was no statistically significant difference in earnings between the pre- and post-intervention groups.

Table 5. Employment History

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
Past 8 Quarters			
% Working**	89.7% (192)	79.1% (167)	84.5% (359)
Quarterly Earnings			
Mean	$2,095.82	$2,308.30	$2,194.66
Median	$1,544.38	$2,060.91	$1,787.77
Standard Deviation	$1,706.86	$1,808.89	$1,755.80
Total Earnings			
Mean	$12,624.68	$13,716.08	$13,132.38
Median	$8,167.91	$9,106.12	$8,795.48
Standard Deviation	$13,189.80	$14,203.20	$13,662.14
Quarter of TANF Application			
% Working	43.5% (93)	41.2% (87)	42.4% (180)
Quarterly Earnings			
Mean	$1,174.54	$999.05	$1,089.24
Median	$924.96	$630.50	$801.39
Standard Deviation	$1,148.88	$1,004.09	$1,081.50

Notes: Caseheads only. Figures related to earnings and the number of quarters worked exclude those with no reported UI wage data in the study period. In addition, earnings are standardized to 2007 dollars.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Overall, the findings in this chapter have revealed that despite virtually no differences in payee or case characteristics or welfare history, recipients in the post-TWDI period were more likely to be administratively coded with a work exemption and they were less likely to have been employed in the previous two years. These two findings together indicate that the latter caseload might indeed have had more employment barriers or challenges, though the extent of this change is unclear. It is possible that pre-TWDI recipients were truly less likely to experience employment challenges, but also possible that the more well-developed assessment component of the TWDI resulted in a higher rate of detecting and coding challenges that had always existed. It is important to keep this distinction, and the possibility of a post-TWDI caseload with more employment barriers, in mind as we move to our discussion of employment and welfare outcomes in the two years following the start of the TANF spell which brought recipients into our sample.

The main goal of the TWDI was to combine the resources of three local departments of social services in order to improve opportunities for and access to employment for TANF cash recipients, ultimately leading to family self-sufficiency apart from welfare. Having considered the baseline characteristics and welfare and employment experiences of TANF recipients in both the pre- and post-intervention periods, we now turn to presenting data related to their work and welfare outcomes. First we consider employment outcomes of our two samples in the two years after applying for TANF, followed by TANF outcomes of the two groups, including information on exits from TCA and total welfare receipt over a two-year follow-up period. In the final section, we present a brief overview of combined work and welfare outcomes over time.

Employment Outcomes.

Though there were certainly other goals related to improving program efficiency and effectiveness, increased employment among TANF recipients was the primary goal of the TWDI initiative. Thus, we begin our discussion of outcomes with a detailed analysis of recipients' employment and earnings in the first two years after beginning the TANF spell which brought them into our sample. As stated previously, our data are constrained by the limitations of using Maryland UI wage data, so we are not able to present information on hourly wages or the number of hours worked in a particular period. Thus, earnings are presented at the quarter and annual levels only, and represent an underestimate of true earnings if recipients work in non-UI jobs, or work in UI jobs outside of Maryland.

Despite these limitations, we find that the data presented in Table 8, following this discussion, hint that individuals in the post-TWDI group may have been more likely to be employed and had higher earnings. However, the differences were not statistically significant. Approximately seven out of ten caseheads were working in a UI-covered job during the first follow-up year (67.3% for pre-TWDI caseheads and 74.4% for post-TWDI caseheads). Among those who worked, average UI earnings were just over $2,000 per quarter for both groups (mean=$2,070.83 pre-TWDI and $2,215.37 post-TWDI), and less than $10,000 for the year (mean=$6,304.94 pre-TWDI and $6,967.38 post-TWDI). Although earnings are slightly higher for the post-TWDI group, the difference is not statistically significant.

Employment rates were about the same in the second follow-up year (69.6% for pre-TWDI caseheads and 71.6% for post-TWDI caseheads). Among those who worked, earnings were slightly higher per quarter than in the first follow-up year, but there were no significant differences between the pre- and post-TWDI groups (mean=$2,625.24 pre-TWDI and $2,870.80 post-TWDI). Yearly earnings were also higher in the second follow-up year, averaging about $9,000 for the pre-TWDI group (mean=$8,933.35) and $10,000 for the post-TWDI group (mean=$10,137.81).

Overall, approximately eight out of ten (81.4%) caseheads worked in a UI-covered Maryland job at some point in the two-year follow-up period, and those who worked did so for an average of five out of eight quarters (mean=5.03). Total earnings for the two-

year period were approximately $14,000 (mean=$14,056.85), yielding average quarterly earnings of approximately $2,400 (mean=$2,378.95). This average reflects a mix of low earnings and high earnings, but overall it seems relatively low in the context of families becoming self-sufficient. The next section highlights our sample members' use of TANF as a safety net during the follow-up period.

Table 6. Employment Experiences in Follow-up Period

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
1st Follow-Up Year			
% Working	67.3% (144)	74.4% (157)	70.8% (301)
Quarterly Earnings			
Mean	$2,070.83	$2,215.37	$2,146.22
Median	$1,609.13	$1,789.25	$1,756.95
Standard Deviation	$2,092.97	$1,722.93	$1,907.06
Number of Qtrs Worked			
Mean	2.61	2.78	2.70
Median	3.00	3.00	3.00
Standard Deviation	1.23	1.17	1.20
Total Earnings			
Mean	$6,304.94	$6,967.38	$6,650.46
Median	$3,937.49	$5,105.44	$4,830.63
Standard Deviation	$6,710.61	$7,005.74	$6,862.73
2nd Follow-up Year			
% Working	69.6% (149)	71.6% (151)	70.6% (300)
Quarterly Earnings			
Mean	$2,625.24	$2,870.80	$2,748.84
Median	$2,330.56	$2,339.67	$2,335.11
Standard Deviation	$1,863.23	$2,496.86	$2,204.79
Number of Qtrs Worked			
Mean	3.04	3.15	3.09
Median	3.00	4.00	3.50
Standard Deviation	1.09	1.08	1.08
Total Earnings			
Mean	$8,933.35	$10,137.81	$9,539.60
Median	$6,991.23	$7,744.96	$7,508.99
Standard Deviation	$7,618.54	$9,562.39	$8,658.31
Total Follow-up Period			
% Working	80.8% (173)	82.0% (173)	81.4% (346)
Quarterly Earnings			
Mean	$2,297.35	$2,460.55	$2,378.95
Median	$1,975.35	$2,047.11	$2,038.34
Standard Deviation	$1,957.93	$1,897.21	$1,926.75
Number of Qtrs Worked			
Mean	4.79	5.27	5.03
Median	5.00	6.00	5.00
Standard Deviation	2.41	2.27	2.35
Total Earnings			
Mean	$12,942.09	$15,171.60	$14,056.85
Median	$7,854.67	$10,818.92	$9,061.41
Standard Deviation	$12,911.26	$14,685.71	$13,851.98

Notes: Caseheads only. Figures related to earnings and the number of quarters worked excludes those with no reported UI wage data in the study period. In addition, earnings are standardized to 2007 dollars. There were no statistically significant differences between the groups.

TANF Outcomes.

One of the most radical elements of the TANF program compared to its predecessor, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), is a lifetime limit of five years on adults' receipt of federally funded cash assistance. In today's time-limited world, agencies must quickly and hopefully accurately assess each client's needs and strengths and engage them in activities that will meet the federal work participation requirement AND move them off the welfare rolls as quickly possible. In this section, we explore the extent to which TANF customers who received services under the TWDI model were able to exit the welfare rolls faster than their pre-TWDI counterparts.

Table 7, following this discussion provides data on the time to first TANF exit, reasons for exit, and returns to the welfare rolls. Consistent with the goals of TWDI, we find that TCA customers in the post-implementation period exit welfare at significantly higher rates than those in the pre-implementation period. Specifically, nearly all (98.1%) post-TWDI recipients exited TANF within two years, compared with nine out of ten (91.1%) post-TWDI recipients. And, although this difference is not statistically significant, slightly more post-TWDI recipients exited within three months of beginning their welfare spell compared with pre-TWDI recipients (24.6% vs. 24.1%, respectively). In the first six months, six out of ten (59.9%) of post-TWDI recipients had exited, compared with about one-half (53.3%) of pre-TWDI recipients. Among those who did exit, there was no statistically significant difference in how quickly they left (mean=7.13 months overall).

Also, for those who exited, we are able to examine administrative closing codes that indicate the primary reason for the case closure. It is important to point out that these codes are chosen from a list of pre-determined options which may not necessarily capture the sometimes complex situations that bring about a case closure. For instance, a payee may not notify the agency when she becomes employed resulting in a case closure code that reflects that lack of contact rather than the employment. Despite these limitations, however, case closure codes do provide some important programmatic information including the rate of sanctioning. Moreover, previous analyses have shown that there is in fact a correlation between these codes and important post-exit outcomes such as employment and welfare recidivism (Ovwigho, Tracy, & Born, 2004).

Overall, the most common reason for closure was that income was above the eligibility limit, accounting for approximately two out of five closures (42.5%). Post-TWDI leavers were more likely than pre-TWDI leavers to exit because of a work sanction (25.5% vs. 17.7%) and less likely to exit because their income exceeded the eligibility limit (41.3% vs. 34.9%), but these differences were not statistically significant.

The bottom portion of Table 7 shows the percent of caseheads who returned to cash assistance after having their first exit within the follow-up period. Recidivism rates within the follow-up period were about equal between the pre- and post-TWDI groups, with approximately one quarter of who those who exited TANF having returned by the end of the two-year follow-up period (24.6% and 23.2%, respectively).

Table 7. TANF Exits in Follow-up Period

	Pre-TWDI (N=214)	Post-TWDI (N=211)	Total (N=425)
Exited Within 24 Months?**	91.1% (195)	98.1% (207)	94.6% (402)
Time to First Break			
3 Months or less	24.1% (47)	24.6% (51)	24.4% (98)
4-6 Months	29.2% (57)	35.3% (73)	32.3% (130)
7-12 Months	28.7% (56)	27.5% (57)	28.1% (113)
13-18 Months	13.8% (27)	10.6% (22)	12.2% (49)
19-24 Months	4.1% (8)	1.9% (4)	3.0% (12)
Mean	7.54	6.75	7.13
Median	6.00	5.00	6.00
Standard Deviation	5.31	4.57	4.95
Range	1 – 23	1 – 22	1 - 23
Administrative Closing Code for 1st Exit			
Income Above Limit	43.9% (72)	41.3% (76)	42.5% (148)
Work Sanction	17.7% (29)	25.5% (47)	21.8% (76)
Eligibility/Verification Information Not Provided	10.4% (17)	12.5% (23)	11.5% (40)
Requested Closure	5.5% (9)	6.5% (12)	6.0% (21)
Not Eligible	3.7% (6)	4.9% (9)	4.3% (15)
No Recertification/No Redetermination	7.3% (12)	1.6% (3)	4.3% (15)
Residency	5.5% (9)	2.2% (4)	3.7% (13)
Whereabouts Unknown	3.0% (5)	3.3% (6)	3.2% (11)
Child Support Sanction	1.8% (3)	1.6% (3)	1.7% (6)
Other	1.2% (2)	0.5% (1)	0.9% (3)
If Exited, % Returned Again Within the 2 Year Follow-up Period	24.6% (48)	23.2% (48)	23.9% (96)

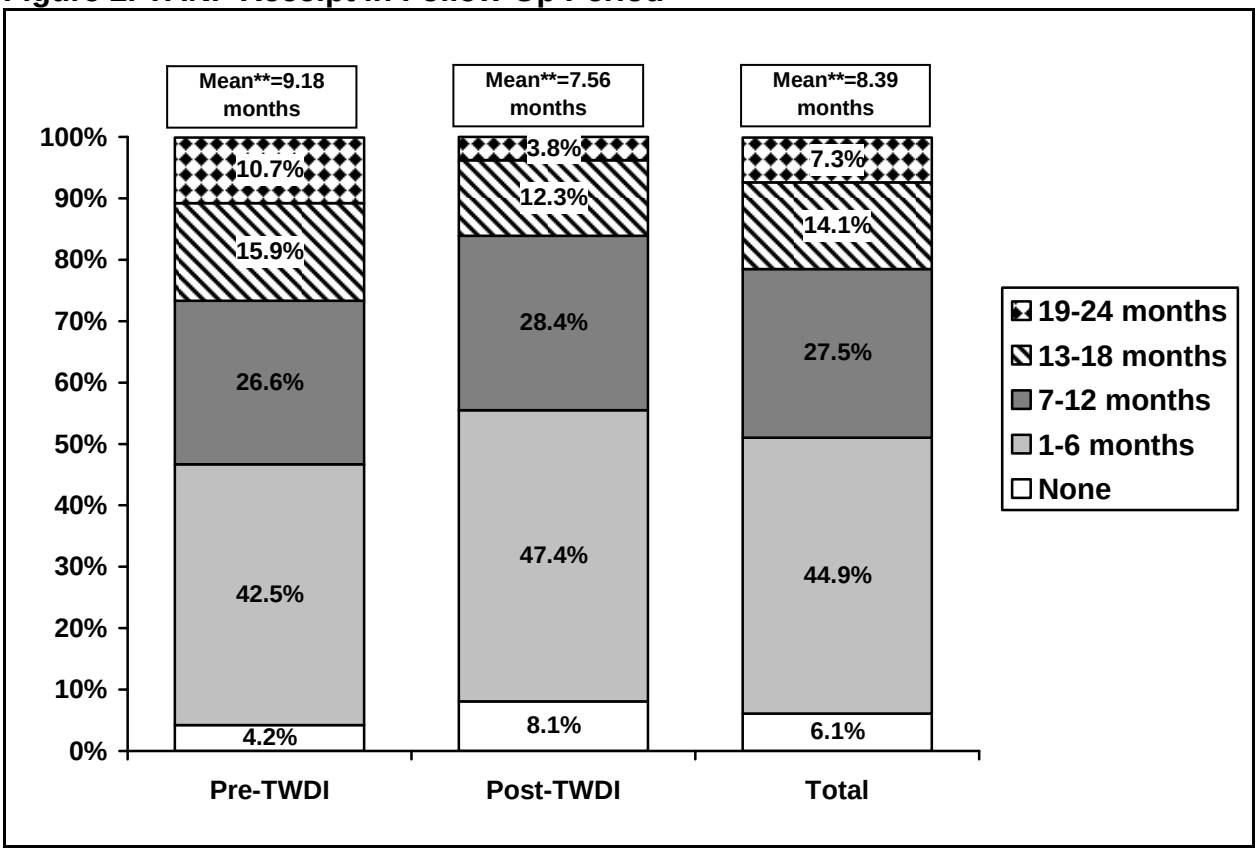
Note: "Exit" is defined as a break of at least two consecutive months in assistance. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

One of the upshots of a high exit rate and relatively low recidivism rate is a reduction in total welfare receipt over the follow-up period. In fact, as presented in Figure 2, more than half (51.0%) of caseheads received TCA for six months or less during the two-year follow-up period, including those who received no assistance beyond the study month (6.1%). An additional one in four (27.5%) caseheads received between seven and twelve months of assistance, summing to nearly eight out of ten (78.5%) caseheads who received assistance for twelve months or less, or less than half the total time of the follow-up period. A little more than one in ten (14.1%) caseheads received assistance for 13 to 18 months, and a little less than one in ten (7.3%) received assistance for 19 to 24 months.

In terms of pre- and post-TWDI welfare outcomes, Figure 2 reveals that in the first two years after the study month, caseheads under the TWDI received less cash assistance than their pre-TWDI counterparts. On average, post-TWDI caseheads received nearly two fewer months of assistance across the entire two-year follow-up period compared with pre-TWDI caseheads (mean=7.56 months versus 9.18 months, respectively). This is likely related to the fact that post-TWDI caseheads were twice as likely (8.1% vs. 4.2%) to have received no assistance in the follow-up period, a difference that we find to

be statistically significant. It should also be noted that a lack of assistance could be related to the higher sanctioning rate in the post-TWDI group discussed previously.

Figure 2. TANF Receipt in Follow-Up Period*



Note: Includes caseheads only, and counts only months of TANF in which the casehead was a recipient.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Combined Work and Welfare Status

Having reviewed employment and welfare outcomes separately, this final section combines the two types of data in an effort to tell a more complete story about the experiences of welfare recipients before and after the TWDI was implemented. Because employment data are only available quarterly, the combined outcomes presented in Figure 3, following this discussion, are also presented by quarter. Thus, while we can obtain a glimpse of individuals' combined work and welfare status over time, we cannot be sure whether work and welfare were combined simultaneously within a particular month, or serially among months within a single quarter.

There are four possible subgroups of combined work and welfare status presented in Figure 3. They are: 1) "Employed Only", which includes those with UI wages and no cash assistance in Maryland; 2) "Employed & TCA", including those with UI wages and at least one month of cash assistance in Maryland within the specified quarter; 3) "TCA Only", including those with at least one month of cash assistance in the specified quarter and no UI reported earnings in Maryland for the entire quarter; and 4) "No TCA

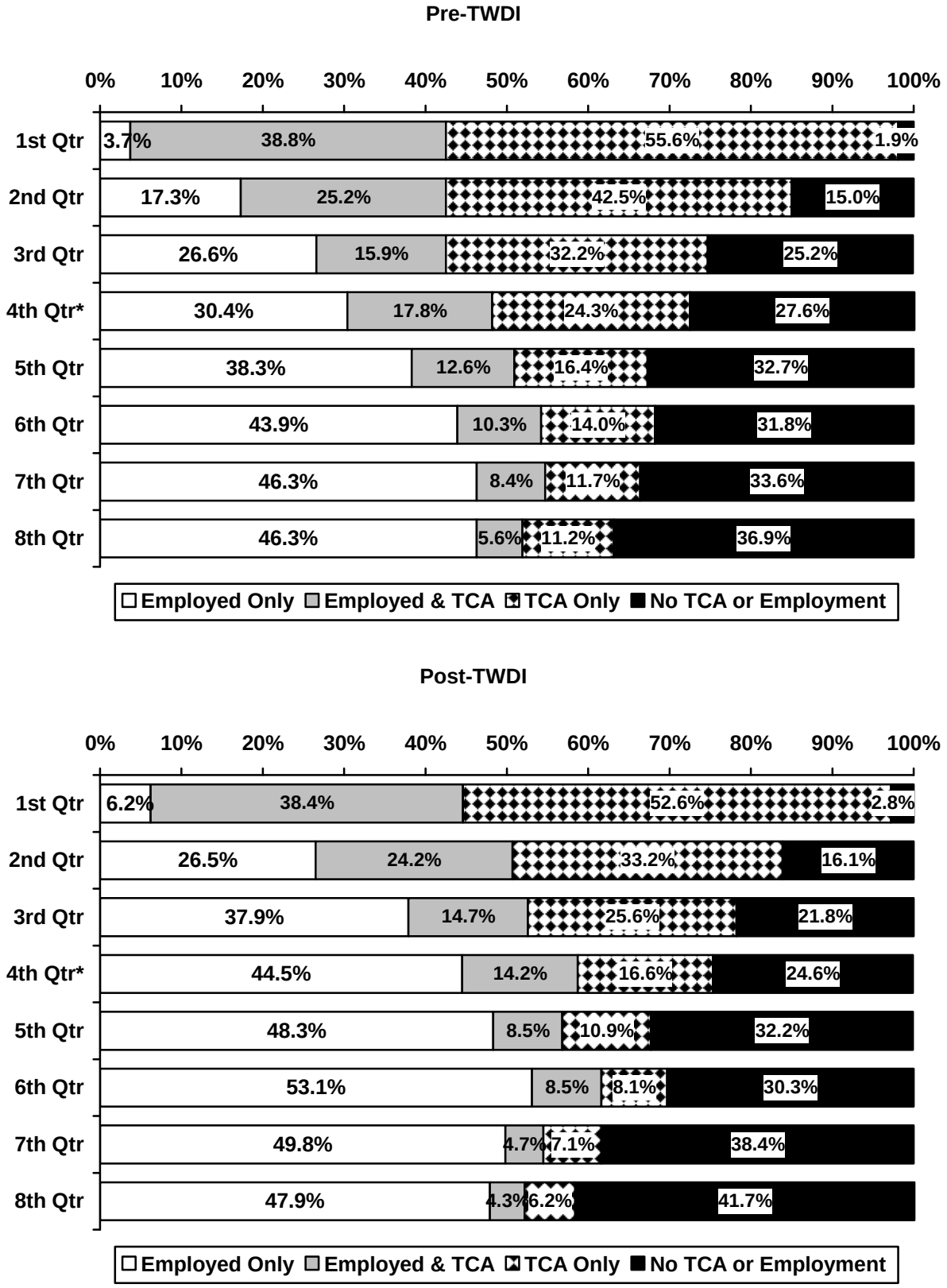
or Employment", which includes those without any cash assistance or UI wages reported in Maryland for the entire quarter. It is important to note that these data are constrained by the previously mentioned limitations of UI wage data, and also do not include non-TCA benefit programs such as Social Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps), Medical Assistance, child support, other forms of assistance, or benefits received outside of Maryland.

In the first quarter after sample selection during the pre-TWDI period, the majority of sample members received TANF, with nearly two out of five (38.8%) combining work and TCA ("Employed & TCA") and more than one-half (55.6%) relying on cash assistance only ("TCA Only"). Fewer than one in twenty (3.7%) caseheads were employed in the quarter without any record of TCA ("Employment Only") and even fewer (1.9%) had no record of either UI wages in Maryland or TCA. Over time, these last two groups, presented on the tail ends of the bars, grew as a proportion of the total sample. Thus, by the eighth quarter after coming onto TANF, nearly one-half (46.3%) were employed without TCA ("Employed Only") and nearly two out of five (36.9%) were without records of employment or TCA in Maryland. The middle two groups, which represent TANF receipt, shrunk in proportion to the overall sample. By the eighth quarter after starting the TANF spell which brought them into our sample, approximately one in twenty (5.6%) caseheads combined work and welfare ("Employed & TCA") and a little more than one in ten (11.2%) received TANF without any reported UI wages for the quarter.

In the post-TWDI period the results are similar, with the proportion of the overall sample receiving TANF shrinking over time and the relative proportions of caseheads who were employed without TCA, or without either employment or cash assistance, growing over time. While the percent of those who were employed without any TCA ("Employed Only") was consistently higher in the post-TWDI period than in the pre-TWDI period, this difference was only statistically significant in the fourth follow-up quarter. This quarter represents the period of January to June of 2004 for the pre-TWDI group versus January to June of 2006 for the post-TWDI group.

Overall, these findings are consistent with the trends seen in other of our studies, including a review of active Maryland TANF recipients in October 2006 and a review of Maryland TANF leavers who exited in the early years of welfare reform (Ovwigho, Born, Patterson, & Kolupanowich, 2008; Saunders, Kolupanowich, & Born, 2009). That is, over time, a higher percent of individuals come to rely on Employment alone and a substantial portion of individuals are without TANF or employment. Based on additional data in our previous studies, we can infer that many of the families in this last subgroup are receiving non-TANF benefits such as Food Stamps, Medical Assistance, or SSI, or they may have moved out of state or have died (Ovwigho, Kolupanowich, & Born, forthcoming; Ovwigho, Saunders, Patterson, Kolupanowich, & Born, 2007).

Figure 3. Work and Welfare Status



*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

CONCLUSIONS

This longitudinal evaluation of client-level outcomes related to the Tri-County Workforce Development Initiative (TWDI) indicates that there were some potential improvements in families' experiences after implementation. It is impossible to provide a definitely causal story about the effects of the TWDI on welfare recipients. However, data on the employment and welfare experiences during the first two years after starting a new TANF spell reveal that post-TWDI caseheads had fewer months of welfare receipt and are more likely to have at least one TANF exit. Furthermore, the descriptive story of the characteristics of the caseloads in the three counties before and after TWDI implementation reveals that, despite almost no differences in observed payee and case characteristics between the caseloads, work exemptions were significantly more likely to be administratively coded in the post-implementation period.

The lack of significant results related to employment outcomes is perhaps disappointing, but it is important to keep in mind that there were notable shifts in the economic climate between the pre- and post-TWDI periods that we are unable to account for in our analyses. In addition, our lack of ability to discern the true implications of the findings related to higher rates of work exemption coding makes it more difficult to understand the welfare and employment outcomes. For instance, the caseload may have always had the same rate of work-related challenges but the new assessment system included in the TWDI made it more likely for those challenges to be spotted by caseworkers. If this is so, then we would assume that more individuals in the latter period were receiving or referred for services they may have previously been lacking, and consider that a positive finding in and of itself.

If, on the other hand, individuals in the post-TWDI caseload were truly more likely to encounter employment barriers, then we would fully expect employment rates to be lower in the latter period. Without a direct measure of what the employment rates would have been in the absence of the coordinated efforts of the TWDI, we are unable to discern whether our findings are better or worse than expected. The analyses related to combined work and welfare outcomes hint that post-TWDI recipients may in fact be more likely to transition from welfare to work, at least when we examine the cases one year after beginning their TANF spell.

Overall, the creative and flexible approach of the TWDI allowed the local offices in Somerset, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties to manage their limited funds in order to provide efficient but tailored services for families receiving cash assistance in Maryland. By being willing to share and pool resources, these three jurisdictions were able to create economies of scale where none existed previously. And as evidenced by the national awards and recognition received, they were able to convincingly demonstrate that this type of inter-county collaboration and service delivery can be done and be successful. As TANF agencies continue to meet the challenge of raising their work participation rate to comply with new federal regulations related to the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA), the lessons learned via the TWDI collaboration are valuable.

In particular, these lessons provide vital information for local TANF offices in Maryland that are currently pursuing strategic partnerships with local resources and employers through the Maryland Reaching Independence and Stability through Employment (RISE) initiative. The RISE initiative, like the TWDI, is aimed at improving opportunities for and access to employment for TCA recipients in Maryland that will help them achieve self-sufficiency. Particularly in these trying economic times, initiatives like TWDI and RISE will provide essential reinforcements for a sometimes strained safety net.

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