

2020

Exploring a Pathway Out of Poverty Using the Welfare System

Cadarrall A. Eddings
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Walden University

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Exploring a Pathway Out of Poverty Using the Welfare System

by

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MA, Liberty University, 2015

BS, University of West Alabama, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration – Global Leadership

Walden University

November 2020

Abstract

Individuals dependent on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) encounter multiple contributors that impede economic empowerment and a pathway out of poverty that leads to self – sufficiency. Previous research has not been fully clarified as to why TANF has not been successful in moving recipients out of dependency and into lasting economic success. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to conduct a comparative analysis between two administrations, namely the Obama and Trump administrations, concerning welfare policies. The human capital theory provided the theoretical framework for the study. This study explored the lived experiences of TANF recipients related to cognitive preparedness and skill-based training as a pathway out of poverty leading to lasting economic success. A purposive, homogenous sampling method was utilized to select six TANF recipients to participate in this study. Only recipients during the Obama and Trump administrations were considered for participation in this study. A validated, semi structured interview questionnaire was utilized. An inductive, In Vivo coding technique indicated that there are barriers within the TANF program, and the program did not engage in the holistic development involving both skill-based and cognitive training to lead to self – sufficiency and lasting economic change. As a result of research findings, further critical research needs to be done specifically towards the TANF workfare program to assess its effective approach in provoking high – wage employment. Findings may be used to influence individuals receiving welfare assistance to provide a pathway out of poverty through economic empowerment, training, and new policies, leading to positive social change.

Exploring a Pathway Out of Poverty Using the Welfare System

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Dedication

First, I want to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This has been a rigorous process and without Him, I would have given up. This achievement would not have been possible if it had been for His grace. Secondly, I would like to dedicate this lifetime achievement to my mother and father, Dwight and Renee Eddings. Since birth, they have always been there for me. I can honestly say that they raised me and my siblings the right way. Their support and guidance have steered me in the right direction. I am proud to say that what they have invested and instilled in me throughout the years has not been in vain.

I dedicate this achievement to my daughters, Imani Grace Eddings and Abigail Joy Eddings. We did it! This successful achievement is evidence that all things are possible through Christ who strengthens us. You can do anything that you put your mind to do; you can be anything that you desire to be. I pray that this success is a pattern for you to pursue and fulfill your goals and dreams.

To my wife, Karla Eddings, this achievement is a result of your continuous support and sacrifice through my academic journey. You have been there for me to cheer me on the whole way and for that I thank you.

Last but not least, to all the individuals who encouraged me throughout this process, it was not in vain. It was your encouragement that helped me through the tough times.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me the ability and grace to survive and successfully finish my dissertation. This would not have been possible without Him. I want to send a special shout out to my lovely daughters, Imani Grace Eddings and Abigail Joy Eddings as well as my beautiful wife, Karla Eddings for enduring the process with me. The sacrifices that you have endured for me to finish my dissertation are greatly appreciated. Special thanks to my brother, Edwond Eddings and my sister, Amber Eddings, for believing in me and loving me as your big brother. I would like to thank my mother, Renee Eddings, and my father, Dwight Eddings, for being amazing parents throughout my life and setting the example for me to follow. I would also like to thank my in – laws, Bobbie Robinson and Willie Robinson, for their continuous support throughout my dissertation journey. To my auntie, Dr. Karen Brown and uncles, Greg Brown and Crandall Brown, thank you for all of your advice, push, and support to get me through the tough times. I would also like to thank my grandmother, Lorreanner Brown, and the late, Hilmer Brown, for who you both have been to me. I love you dearly grandpa. To my friends, Dr. Donyea Hargrove, Lindsey Hargrove and their lovely family, to Apostle Brandon Cornelius and the Glory Revival Center family; thank you for your consistent friendship. To my leadership covering, Bishop RJ Matthews and Prophetess Cyclopedia Matthews, thank you for your motivation and prayers throughout the process. I really appreciate it! Last but not least, I would like to extend a special thanks to my dissertation committee, Dr. Gregory Campbell (chair), Dr. Victoria

B. Landu-Adams (2nd committee), and Dr. Lydia Forsythe (URR) for walking me through the dissertation process and challenging me to be the best that I could be. We did it!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

For decades, the welfare system has been an established government institution whereby individuals and families rely on its assistance for provisional needs. It has been in times of economic instability and uncertainty, especially in the 21st century era, where the poverty epidemic continues to be a threat to society which causes the welfare system to be under immense pressure and scrutiny to make changes that address ongoing challenges. One of the most significant changes in the welfare system happened when former President Bill Clinton enacted a reformative measure within welfare that marked a radical shift by creating and signing the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) (Hammond, 2017). It was during this shift in welfare reform that the transition was made from dependency on welfare assistance to personal responsibility (Williams, 2017). The implementation of the PRWORA paved the way for a program to be designed named the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) utilized to transform a broken system that confronted dependence and that emphasized work and independence (Greene, 2017). Since the implementation, accountability and responsibility have been a major priority to help eliminate dependency.

The welfare system has been a concern for policymakers and citizenry in general for some time. Thorough examination and analysis on the history of the welfare system have been problematic for our country because of the strain of an already stressed American budget and the facilitation of codependency through the creation of “lazy

Americans” (Fast, O’Brian, & Block, 2017). Additionally, the TANF program, the second largest federal needs-based poverty program, did not address the problem of the poverty epidemic but clearly contributed to the problem by allowing poverty to remain unresolved according to statistics (Crawford & Crawford, 2017). In 1975, 12.3% of the population in the U.S. lived below the poverty line but by 2014, 14.8% of the U.S. population lived below the poverty line (Crawford & Crawford, 2017). The apparent increase of the individuals living under the poverty line amidst welfare reform and modifications speaks to the ineffectiveness of welfare and the need for critical analysis and intense research to help restore a system that is need of it.

The controversy around the topic of welfare dependency in our modern era has raised levels of uncertainty and a lack of confidence in welfare assistance. Moreover, what was established as a strategy for poverty reduction has become a means that cripples the economy and victimizes those individuals that depend on its assistance. With the implementation of the TANF program, strategic efforts have been made to firmly establish a work – based safety net by increasing employment (Berger et al., 2018). Even with those efforts, there were limited improvements made for economic well – being; this may have deepened poverty for those not able to find steady and sufficient work through program initiatives (Berger et al., 2018). Furthermore, the role that welfare assistance including TANF, plays in the financial security and independence of low – income families/individuals are vital and must continuously be investigated for better understanding of long – term benefits and welfare assistance leading to self – sufficiency (Kyoung & Wilmarth, 2017). Ultimately, systematic reform of welfare assistance

programs and policies that lead to self – sufficiency is gradually evolving especially with continued efforts and aggressiveness.

Welfare reform and the programs involved in the process, such as TANF, are instrumental in successfully addressing the ongoing poverty epidemic. Furthermore, although progress continues to be made; more strategic and innovative work needs to be done for recipients of welfare to obtain work whether it be training, more discriminating work requirements, better child care for working mothers, and other forms of employment assistance (Moffitt, 2015). A review of the literature indicated that to help successfully move individuals out of poverty, policymakers believe it is important and useful to make the exploration of strategic alternatives that represent new approaches and significant innovations to welfare existing policies and programs (Berger, Cancian, & Magnuson, 2018). Ultimately, the findings of this study should increase the understanding of policies, trainings, and strategies that help lead to a path out of poverty using the welfare system.

In this chapter, I begin with a brief introduction to the study that provides a description of the research topic of study and why the research study is important to conduct, a brief historical background, and implications for social change. I then transition to the problem statement that describes the reasons behind and the goals of the research study. To collect the data to understand the lived experience of TANF recipients in the welfare system, I used a phenomenological qualitative method was used.

Background to the Study

Today, poverty continues to be a growing epidemic that negatively affect a plethora of individuals around the world, let alone the United States. Moreover, the complexities of the poverty epidemic that has affected so many lives have induced throughout history the creation of policies and programs in welfare assistance that remain to be developed and reformed. Thus, to examine the historical background of the welfare state, the welfare administration began in the early 1930's with the creation of the Social Security Act (SSA) whose responsibility was to transform poverty relief efforts both nationally and locally along with private charity into a centralized system for the rise of a free and independent citizenry (Michelmore, 2017). Unfortunately, the inability of the SSA to uphold its standard to modernize relief of the poor sparked the beginnings of major reforms within the system.

The creation of the PRWORA and the developing of the TANF program as a result initiated a hope in the economic landscape as the motivation that undergirded the act to end welfare dependency. Moreover, breakthrough in welfare reform began with the passing and implementation of the PRWORA in 1996 that represented a significant redirection for anti – poverty policy (Berger et al., 2018). Notably, the PRWORA eliminated cash entitlement to welfare recipients that was provided by the AFDC and transitioned welfare into a time – delimited benefit contingent on meeting work requirements by establishing the TANF program (Berger et al., 2018). It was under the TANF program where welfare reform began to take on a new identity as opposed from the previous program that it replaced known as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). For instance, the AFDC entitled recipients to cash assistance with little

restrictions while TANF imposed strict regulations that put a demand on recipients to work (Greene, 2017). However, though the transition to TANF yielded great expectation to fulfill its responsibility in provoking economic independence and self – sustainability, the TANF program strives to attain program requirements, holistic empowerment, and development amidst diversities and complexities within.

Today, TANF serves as a program that continues to evolve despite the many challenges that it faces to provide as a pathway out of poverty for recipients. It is in the current era where individuals fall into reoccurring cycles of poverty that TANF has the responsibility to meet its standards for implementation by preventing those cycles and moving individuals into self – sufficiency through its policies and programs. TANF policies and programs consist of work requirements that include recipients to be active in job search or enrolled in job training, a time limit on the duration of benefits received, which last up to 5 years, and personal responsibility policies (Groves, 2016). Ultimately, regarding the quality of life and the welfare of humanity, the TANF program plays a pivotal role in providing a pathway out of poverty and into economic independence.

Statement of the Problem

As presidential administrations change, there are generally differences in public policy strategies as it relates to welfare reform and the ongoing efforts to fight against the global issue of poverty. For instance, the Trump administration indicated that success of the welfare system should be measured by how many recipients transition out of poverty into financial independence rather than measures success by program enrollment (Trump, 2018). Alternatively, the Obama administration subverted the 1996 welfare reform law

that allowed states to waive the welfare programs work requirements, which led to increased enrollments (Rector & Menon, 2017). With that, an estimated number of 42 million recipients participated in the welfare program at the end of the Obama administration while making a significant drop to fewer than 40 million as of May 2018 under the Trump administration (Wegmann, 2018). The problem addressed in this study was the possible factors that contributed to recipients remaining on welfare assistance and the lack of policies within the system that helped understand and reduce the poverty epidemic (Abrar – Ul – Haq, Jali, & Islam, 2016). This study will be needed to better understand what welfare reform policies are needed to aid in proper cognitive and skill – based training for recipients that will enhance the chances of a path out of poverty through economic empowerment. This study’s implication for social change was to impact individuals receiving welfare assistance to provide a path out of poverty through economic empowerment, training, and new policies.

The fight to successfully address welfare dependence not just in the United States, but around the world, has experienced epic failures as well as momentous occasions especially as it relates to participant employability. Despite the numerous efforts by the welfare system to help address the poverty epidemic through its policies and programs, the proper skills and specialized training within has not been clarified as to what is needed to move individuals out of poverty by not just employment, but higher paying employment that leads to self – sustainability (Thomhave, 2017). Simply, employment alone is not enough to provide a path out of poverty and training must be strengthened to hone in on skills both cognitively and skill – based that are adequate for better

employment. Moreover, policymakers are encouraged to help welfare recipients out of poverty by building the skill-based training and acquiring the work experience needed for long term success in today's employment (Pavetti, 2016). Furthermore, researchers have not fully studied cognitive preparation as needed to help determine whether it reduces poverty and enhances productivity and sustainability (Dalton, Jimenez, & Noussair, 2017). To that extent, there is little to no existing research that has sought to integrate cognitive practice within Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) efforts for recipients who are required for work participation to receive benefits (Booshehri, Dugan, Patel, Bloom, & Chilton, 2018). Overall, welfare system policies and training programs should be further examined to ensure responsibility of empowering recipients to be self-sufficient.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of two administrations, namely the Obama and Trump administrations, concerning welfare policies. The findings of this study may help inform policy makers on how to strengthen welfare reform in the United States. A comparison of the welfare policies of the two administrations was the intent to help lead to a path out of poverty for welfare recipients through training and economic empowerment policies. A phenomenological, qualitative study was utilized to explore the lived experiences of TANF welfare recipients that assisted to determine policies, strategies, and training that provided the best pathway out of poverty. A thorough analysis of welfare reform policies between the two administrations in conjunction with a modified, validated research interview

questionnaire with recipients further developed an understanding of welfare system policies and programs and its impact on recipients.

Research Questions

The following research question was addressed in the study:

1. RQ1: In what ways, if any, have Obama and Trump administration TANF policies and programs influenced the lived experiences of TANF recipients related to cognitive preparedness and skill-based training as a pathway out of poverty leading to lasting economic success?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was the human capital theory (HCT). The original concept of this theory rests on the idea that education and empowerment increase individual productivity and efficiency by enhancing the cognitive ability to be economically productive, which is a product of the innate abilities and investments made in human beings (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2008). The HCT puts emphasis on education and training as key dynamics in the investment made in humans to become viable resources and commodities that enhance not just the economy, but society. This theory related to the exploration of a pathway out of poverty using the welfare system in that it focused on the intention of the Obama and Trump administrations, though through different methods, to move recipients from a place of dependency to a place where they are self – sustained to help strengthen the economy. The HCT synchronized and aligned with the population, the research design, and the research question in that it acknowledged the responsibility of entities, such as government assistance, to enhance

policies and programs to empower individuals holistically to become self – dependent. Furthermore, the framework approach for this research study utilized the comparative analysis between the Obama and Trump administration policies. The qualitative in - depth interview process of six to 10 TANF adult men and women from a southern state helped determine whether participants strengthen human capital through its policies and programs.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was a general qualitative method, using a phenomenological approach. Specifically, a descriptive phenomenological design approach was utilized to analyze the personal experiences of participants and the interpretation of the meanings of phenomena experienced by participants (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). The qualitative research method helps to bring greater understanding of individuals, people groups, and phenomena that allow for deeper meaning of the lived experiences and the way of life (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The phenomenological design expressed in the depth of the interviewing process is exploratory in nature. Therefore, only a homogenous, purposive sample number of six to 10 participants were interviewed which is the recommended number of participants for phenomenological studies (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). The six to 10 TANF recipients were adult women from a Southern state. A southern city had an above average percentage of residents below the poverty line compared to the state being 27.2% (Welfare Info, 2018). This study's implication for social change was the intention to help bring greater awareness of the affect of welfare system policies and programs needed to help address contributing

factors that facilitate dependency of assistance. Also, secondary data from the government agencies and Public Policy and Administration databases from Walden University was collected and utilized along with other reliable government websites to conduct the research.

Definitions

The following key terms were defined for this study.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). A program popularly referred to as welfare in which states were allowed substantial latitude in settling enrollment qualifications (Lands, 2018).

Cognitive training. The concept of cognitive training denotes the readiness or mental preparedness of individuals in being able to overcome any dynamic or unpredictable challenge that may arise (Hagemann & Schatz, 2019).

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). A major legislative reform measures whose main objective was to get low-income with children 18 and below off welfare and into work (Ho, 2015).

Phenomenological Research. A term defined as the study of lived experience – the world as we immediately experience it (Van-Manen, 2017).

Poverty. Poverty is typically referred to as a lack of economic resources but has been defined more broadly as social exclusion (Berger, 2018).

Skill – Based Training. A measure of preparation used to prepare individuals to acquire the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills to prosper within a dynamic global economy (Weaver & Habibov, 2017).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A welfare reform program funded through block grants utilized to eliminate welfare dependency (Hammond, 2017).

Welfare Recipients. Underprivileged individuals whom live in a culture of poverty that rely on welfare assistance for benefits (Pizzolato & Olson, 2016).

Welfare Reform. Legislative, comprehensive efforts of the welfare system including paradigmatic changes to structural and systematic components designed to eliminate dependency and promote self – sufficiency (Yoshida, 2018).

Assumptions

The research topic was selected to help analyze strategies, programs, and policies that would help lead to a pathway out of poverty through the welfare system. One assumption was that the comparison of welfare policies and programs between the Obama and Trump administrations helped discover strengths and weaknesses and enhanced them to eliminate welfare system dependency. An additional assumption was to explore if the lived experiences of welfare recipients involved in the TANF program were transparent enough to provide truthful and accurate responses to interview questions that would help lead to policies and programs being strengthened. A final assumption was that skill – based, cognitive trainings and policies represented contributors that enhanced the welfare system in eliminating dependency and facilitating economic empowerment. As assumptions are key to research acting as a foundation by which they are built upon, the aforementioned assumptions were important to this research study because they helped to enhance the development of the theory stated as well as the research study overall.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the phenomenological, qualitative study focused on the utilization of a comparative analysis between two Administrations. The scope encompassed the Obama and Trump administrations to examine welfare system policies and programs that would help lead to a pathway out of poverty. Delimitations included six to 10 adult men and women TANF recipients between the ages of 18 – 35 years from a southern state. A second delimitation of the study was that only recipients that received TANF benefits were included in the study. Also, another delimitation of the study was that only two administrations were utilized to examine policies and programs.

Limitations

There were several limitations in conducting this study that addressed possible factors that provided the best pathways out of poverty through welfare dependency. The first limitation of this study was the comparative analysis between the Trump and Obama administrations that determined the strength of policies. The second limitation was analyzing TANF policies and programs in this study that only addressed the contributing factors of skill – based and cognitive skills needed for economic empowerment of recipients. The third limitation of this study was only critically analyzing the welfare TANF program amidst the multiple arrays of programs and services within welfare assistance.

Furthermore, the challenges for such a study will be considered. One challenge was difficulty of recruiting recipients that were willing to discuss their lived experiences concerning welfare. Another challenge was the measure of recruiting that was strategic and creative in engaging recipients. The last challenge was that participants were willing

to share their experiences freely and transparently for viable information not to mention issues in preserving the confidentiality of recipients. Researcher personal involvement with the welfare system could influence study outcomes. However, researcher biases and assumptions within the research study were addressed by excluding personal welfare experiences to maximize confirmability. This study did not have any barriers that prohibited the conduct of research.

There were also limitations to the qualitative method and the descriptive, phenomenological research design. As there is no universal acceptance among researchers to utilize the phenomenological design, arguments concerning the design varied. One argument that opposes the design by one researcher views the lived-world as made up of phenomena that are best captured by observation rather than the lived-experiences from participants themselves (Jackson, Vaughan, & Brown, 2018). With that, the main limitations of descriptive phenomenology are the need to thoroughly understand the philosophical nature and the many details related to recognition of being in the world (Jackson, Vaughan, & Brown, 2018). Limitations to qualitative research include the approach leaves out contextual sensitivities by focusing more on meanings and experiences, policy-makers may give low credibility to results from qualitative approach, smaller sample sizes raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research, and data analysis takes a considerable amount of time (Rahman, 2017).

Significance

The significance of this study helped enhance the welfare system by specifically focusing on the welfare system policies, strategies, and training through the Obama and

Trump administrations to develop them to empower welfare recipients both cognitively and skill - based as a strategy to eliminate dependency. In doing so, six to 10 TANF recipients of men and women from a Southern state dependent upon welfare during the Obama and Trump administration eras were interviewed as participants to help understand how to affect welfare system policies. Hagaman and Wutich (2017) mentioned that six to 10 individuals are the recommended number of participants for phenomenological studies. This study was significant because it further addressed an under researched area within the welfare system that analyzes the behavioral or the cognitive side of poverty referring to a breakdown of critical values that lead to healthy families, stability, and sufficiency (Barany, 2016). Not only that, it addressed the proper skills needed for more than minimum wage work that facilitates at or below poverty level living, but employment that leads to better jobs and long – term economic success. To help determine the validity of using a phenomenological design for this study, I utilized a modified, validate interview questionnaire. A validated semi – structured interview questionnaire with participants was framed as such with questions that not only acknowledged welfare preparation for employment as it relates to skill - based, but also policies that help shape perception about wealth and mental preparation for economic success.

The results of this study attempted to provide the necessary insight into the programs, procedures, and policies within the welfare system that lacked the needed empowerment mechanisms to eliminate cycles of poverty amongst recipients by comparing the Obama and Trump administrations. Insights accrued from this study may

aid government assistance in strengthening policies to advance the welfare of the impoverished community by promoting economic empowerment that targets recipients in a southern state. Another implication of social change will be the possible reformation of welfare system policies and programs that will acquire the knowledge needed to not only result in the success of individuals, but also the success of an economy.

Summary

Welfare assistance is a complex yet organized established institution that has historically been through various transitions and reforms to eliminate dependency and explore a pathway out of poverty. The reform of welfare has become a critical component throughout the years to address the poverty epidemic and stands to be further scrutinized and analyzed to strengthen policies and programs that would promote economic empowerment and self – sufficiency. Thus, this study was a phenomenological, qualitative study that explored the lived experiences of individuals dependent on TANF assistance and the role that it has played in their lives in helping to promote self – sufficiency and economic empowerment. Furthermore, the human capital theory (HCT) provided as the theoretical base to understand how the dynamic of training programs and education is key to empower individuals to become viable resources that are useful to the economy and in society. Overall, I articulated the gap in the literature that highlights the lack of TANF efforts, both skill – based and cognitive, needed as a path out of poverty for welfare recipients. In Chapter 2, this study explored the depth of the effectiveness and the ineffectiveness of TANF policies and programs through comparative analysis of

two administrations, namely Obama and Trump administrations, and provided a synthesis of current literature that is related to the research problem and the research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to conduct a comparative analysis of two presidential administrations, namely the Obama and Trump administrations, concerning welfare policies and programs. A comparative study between the two administrations was performed with the intention to help lead a pathway out of poverty for welfare recipients through training and economic empowerment policies. This research may be used by policymakers and those working in health and human services to better understand the welfare system and its effect on recipients.

Welfare reform, especially in the modern-day era, is becoming more aggressive and strategic as an attempt to address cycles of welfare dependency and to pave a pathway out of poverty for individuals and families. In a nation as wealthy as the United States, the overall economic conditions have cycled between growth and recession, but even the most extensive economic expansion efforts, including welfare support, of the past seventy – five years has failed to lift millions of citizens out of poverty (Berger, Cancian, & Magnuson, 2018). It is through these reformative changes that a response is being made to the poverty epidemic and its role in negatively affecting countless of lives in creating a dependency on welfare assistance. With that, the current study involved utilizing a comparative analysis between the Obama and Trump administrations to analyze strengths and weaknesses of welfare policies and programs to enhance measures that lead to empowerment and self – sufficiency.

Modern trends in welfare reform points in the direction of intense scrutiny to examine strategies and trainings in welfare. This study may help to provide welfare policymakers with the understanding to enhance policies and programs with the tools needed to empower individuals to become self – sustainable. With that, the literature review highlighted a substantial theory to help solidify the study as well as welfare effectiveness through administrative analysis and welfare reform changes and outcomes.

In Chapter 2, I present an introduction to the study, a theoretical foundation, and an evolution of welfare assistance. The researcher also provided knowledge of the historical background of welfare in America, reformative measures, and contributors to welfare dependency. Present millennial administrative efforts were also presented to address welfare at the national level. Finally, the researcher discussed strategic welfare approaches to self – sufficiency and concluded the chapter with a summary and an overview of Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

To conduct a relevant and effective research study, the literature review consisted of sources that included peer – reviewed journal articles, dissertations, Federal government agency websites, and other professional websites. Also, the researcher engaged in an iterative process in searching the following databases through Google Scholar and Walden University databases: ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Academic Search Complete, GovInfo, National Bureau of Economic Research, Open Book Publishers, ProQuest Central, SAGE Journals, and US Department of Health and Human Services. Key words were included such as *welfare*, *welfare reform*, *TANF*, *PRWORA*,

welfare legislation, Obama Administration welfare policies, Trump Administration welfare policies, TANF recipients, welfare skills – training, welfare cognitive training, TANF cognitive training, and welfare policies and programs. The search strategies produced a number of about 125 related articles, of which approximately 65 or more were actually used.

Human Capitol Theory Foundation

The theoretical basis for the study was the human capitol theory (HCT). To understand the culture of welfare dependency and the welfare policies and programs implemented to help eliminate dependency, the researcher examined the lived experiences of TANF, welfare recipients grounded in the theory. The theory of human capitol puts emphasis on the investment into individual knowledge and skills to further organizational goals. Furthermore, human capitol is important in that education, proper and effective training, along with human development in adding value to individuals and society (Cooper & Davis, 2017, p. 69). It is the theory of human capitol that supports the idea that empowerment through training and education is essential to lasting economic success.

The idea of investment into human development belongs to an individual named Adam Smith. However, the concept of the theory of human capitol has been utilized and developed since 1961 by T.W. Schulz who believed that all human abilities are either innate or acquired (Lut, 2017). Also, the idea stemmed from the thought that parallels between the entrepreneur's decision to make the investment into physical capital and the individual's decision to make investment in education and other productivity – enhancing

skills (Burns, 2018). Since then, major theological developments around the concept have been continued by G. Becker and J. Mincer with Becker being the principal promoter of the theory. Overall, to achieve longstanding positive results, organizations need to be more dynamic and efficient in resource utilization, especially assets that form the intellectual capital (Juarez Domingos, Helio, Selig, & Rogerio, 2017, p. 316). Human capital is intellectual capital's central element formed by individual competence, including knowledge, skills, experience, expertise, and capabilities (Juarez Domingos, et al., 2017, p. 316). Thus, the theory is essential to the overall development of individual ability in order to become self – sufficient.

HCT Conceptualization

The conceptualization of Human Capital created an understanding in the economic world that dramatically shifted mindsets as it relates to creating and maintaining organizational growth and development. Researchers have discovered the need to assess human capital since in modern conditions such factors as the innovative susceptibility of the economy, intellectual capital, and the quality of human potential vastly impact market growth (Mukhambetova, Turekelova, Iskakova, Nauryzbekov, Kozhakhmetova, 2018). With that, it is imperative to understand the role that the individual plays in society by promoting growth and progressiveness through human resourcefulness. Therefore, the foundation beneath the self – sufficient reality points to the essence of human capital and the efforts to empower ill – equipped individuals.

Perspectives vary concerning human capital in terms of approaches to the development of human social and economic responsibility to advance society. The

education pedagogy continues to be transformative in the reorientation of models and programs towards the integral development of people (Castellano, Garcia – Quero, & Garcia – Carmona, 2018). Two primary approaches that stem out of the HCT that theorists have highlighted are known as ‘marketable human capital (MHC)’ and ‘non – marketable human capital (NMHC).’ These two approaches and the understanding of them help to address those perspectives by describing how human empowerment enhances or not the marketability of individuals in some dynamic way or another.

Marketable Human Capital

Individuals becoming marketable are a critical piece in the fight to end welfare dependency. The MHC approach is linked to a mainstream economic theory that views education as any stock of knowledge that makes the contribution to improve worker productivity and individual well – being (Castellano, et al., 2019). Additionally, NMHC is an approach rooted in the Mediterranean tradition of public thought that highlights the concepts of civic virtues, reciprocity, and public action with the educational process of human development and the influence it has on public happiness (Castellano, et al., 2019). Altogether, both approaches support the thought in one way or another that the state of society is enhanced through human development. However, considering the contributions of the HCT in human empowerment and economic welfare, there are significant and differing viewpoints of the theory that warrants attention. One criticism noted that education is not seen as a site of self – investment in the formation of cognitive ability that delivers economic returns, but as a system that signals a competitive position delivering economic returns (Marginson, 2017). Second, theorists noted that the theory is

weakened because of the synthesizing of education and work that suppresses the distinctiveness of each component instead of acknowledging the heterogeneity of work and education and the value it brings individually apart to its connection to one another (Marginson, 2017). Thus, the dichotomy of the education role in human capital demands more research to help determine effectiveness.

The theoretical foundation of the current study will play a significant role in the relevance of exploring a pathway out of poverty. The intent of HCT used in this study will be to determine how welfare programs, policies, and strategies correlate to empowering individual's skill – based and cognitively to exit welfare assistance and become self – sufficient. Moreover, self – sufficiency has steered away as a goal of welfare as scholars argue that current welfare policy implementation is less about helping clients achieve independence and more about getting individuals off of welfare rolls and into any type of paid employment (Taylor, Gross, & Towne-Roese, 2016). Ultimately, more intensive and extensive work needs to be done in welfare to enhance individuals and families for lasting success.

Historical Background of Welfare in America

The reformative measures of welfare throughout history have been exhaustive in the efforts to effectively address the poverty epidemic in providing a pathway out of poverty. Throughout history, the evolution and the development of welfare policies and programs have been instrumental in making its mark to fight poverty. As welfare has developed even to this day, its developments started off as being deeply rooted into the ideologies of capitalist development that has positioned welfare assistance to achieve

significant accomplishments in the quest for economic freedom (Kirkham, 2017). With that, an analysis of the historical development of welfare in America will be further explained in following sections to help identify its role in the poverty elimination process.

Public Assistance

Welfare assistance has made incredible strides to eliminate dependency. With that, the welfare system is a representation of an important structural transformation of capitalism though imperfect (Fast, O'Brien, & Block, 2017). Unfortunately, the existence of the American welfare system in particular has been set up in such a manner that allows those depending on it to get away with working minimally, if at all, because participants do not want to lose poverty privileges and are incentivized in this direction (Fast, et al., 2017). Therefore, the welfare system promotes a revolving cycle that results in participants needing privileges instead of being holistically empowered to be self reliant.

Public assistance started to provide the needed assistance at the local level through private charitable organizations. During the Great Depression era, Congress passed, and President Theodore Roosevelt signed in 1935 the Social Security Act which in turn created multiple programs (Moffitt, 2015). Additionally, the Social Security Disability Insurance program (SSDI) was established in 1956 and transitioned into other programs being created between the 60' and 70's such as the Head Start program and other progressive programs that are still utilized today (Moffitt, 2015). Transitioning to 1988, President Bush proposed a bill that became the most significant bill in the modern history of welfare reform signed in 1996 (Moffitt, 2015). The bill was called the

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which was renamed the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) (Moffitt, 2015). There have been no further major reforms documented thereafter.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)

One of the most profound and important implementations made within the history of welfare was that of the PRWORA signed into law by President Bill Clinton on August 22, 1996. The PRWORA was a transition in welfare that signaled the importance of personal responsibility as a major theme and an enduring element of American political discourse (Williams, 2017). Since its inception into welfare assistance in 1996, it radically transformed the American poverty policy converting it from a system of dependence to that of independency by strengthening policy and program requirements (Purser & Hennigan, 2017). This approach was a breakthrough approach in the efforts to provide a pathway out of poverty through the welfare system.

The transition into the PRWORA era confronted the welfare dependency model in the most aggressive and unique ways. The PRWORA ended the entitlement program by incorporating numerous changes in existing federal welfare programs (Smith, 2015). The PRWORA mandated that the federal funding for programs of TANF be capped off at an amount of \$16.4 billion annually through the year 2002 and be divided among the 50 states and the District of Columbia (Watts & Astone, 1997). The money allotted to the individual states varied in terms of use; the individual states had the freedom to innovate with the money allotted to them to move recipients into autonomy.

The essence of the PRWORA acknowledged an ethical code within the welfare development process that lifted the focus off a system and to the individual, namely accountability and responsibility. The preamble to the new legislation openly described it as primarily concerned with overcoming the problems that were caused by out – of – wedlock births and welfare dependency (O’Connor, 2001). To that, those acknowledgements have been ideal in the imposing of demands that enhance systemic efforts that benefit welfare recipients by leading to self – sufficiency. The benefits of those demands include saving families by promoting work, discouraging illegitimacy, and strengthening child support enforcement as it transitions welfare into a helping hand rather than a handout, by limiting lifetime benefits (Smith, 2015). Unfortunately, the PRWORA has not held true to its promises as dependency to welfare remains intact and poverty a catalyst for re – occurring generational cycles.

Temporary Assistance of Needy Families (TANF)

TANF is the current welfare program in place designed to address the poverty epidemic by creating a space for individuals and families to become self – sufficient through enhanced policies and programs. The program began as a block grant established by the PRWORA intended to be a short – term economic support system for low income individuals and families until efforts led to self – sustainability (Spencer & Komro, 2017). Over the years since its establishment, welfare efforts have deteriorated even in the midst of reformative efforts as TANF has fared as an experiment that is less effective than AFDC at pulling families out of deep poverty (Hammond, 2017).

However, its pragmatic and grass – roots approach of provoking welfare to work have raised national awareness by sparking questions and ideas that incites reform.

An ideology was formed as a replacement from the AFDC program that sparked an exchange in that welfare recipients had to do something in order to receive something. The creation of TANF challenged the welfare system in enacted policies that set restrictions in place to move dependents out of poverty and into personal responsibility post – welfare. Work participation became a major goal in the efforts to move participants out of dependency and into personal responsibility. Furthermore, new federal rules were initiated and implemented within the TANF program that focused on the progression of making the transition from welfare – to – work (Sandfort, Ong, & McKay, 2018). The TANF program gave states the ability to be involved in the implementation of program restrictive policies which included, recipients showing proof of work within 24 months of receiving assistance, time limits on benefits duration, and punitive sanctions for non – compliance that varies according to state preferences (Bunch, Liebertz, & Milita, 2017). Overall, the TANF program created a drastic change in the welfare scene whereby the strains of dependency on recipients were loosened to the point of potential freedom.

Amidst the transformative process of the TANF program seeking to help eliminate dependency, challenges remain within the program that exacerbates efforts to provoke self – sufficiency. Impacts of TANF have revealed that the program has fallen short of helping people enter and remain in the workforce along with helping participants who have serious behavioral health challenges to become self sustainable (Boosheri,

Dugan, Patel, Bloom, & Chilton, 2018). Additionally, evidence shows that the majority of TANF restrictive programs do not effectively address the overall well – being of families neither do incentives help recipients find employment opportunities that pay well enough to succeed (Boosheri, et al., 2018). Thus, the process to alleviate poverty through the welfare reform of TANF efforts must focus on leveraging opportunities that positions recipients to attain and sustain the type of employment that enhances the type of life for recipients to experience lasting economic success. Further analysis of TANF impact provided clear information to explicate and address the ways in which lack of training and other contributions are serious barriers to self – sufficiency in a work – first approach (Marsh, 2002). The TANF work first strategy may have transitioned participants into jobs, but not necessarily into self – sufficiency.

Under the 1996 passing of the PRWORA, TANF must be reauthorized after five years. On October 10, 2001, Patsy Mink and members of the Progressive Caucus introduced a bill called the Mink Bill to reauthorize TANF (Anonymous, 2003). Furthermore, the TANF reauthorization provided an opportunity to refocus the attention on the well – being of children and families.

The family structure has been a pivotal key to the elimination of dependency. A broad study of organizational culture perspectives and family empowerment implementation approaches are being considered to reorient and reform welfare (Gentles – Gibbs & Kim, 2019). Moreover, building on the successes already achieved through initial TANF implementation, the focus has shifted efforts to strengthen support for families that have left welfare for work to help them climb the economic ladder and on

efforts that provided additional resources and opportunities for families whose well – being has not improved under the first round of welfare reform (Primus, Haskins, Guerra, Anderson, & Blum, 2002). The structure of the family unit is essential to economic success.

Welfare to Work Policies

Welfare to work became a major theme in the efforts to eliminate welfare dependency through the reformatory efforts of the PRWORA. Also, it was ideal in the efforts to address dependency because it did not just challenge the safety net of welfare, but more so, it challenged the victimization of welfare recipients through the introduction of personal responsibility. Welfare to work programs teach and force participants to practice the skills needed to both find and maintain employment in what is an increasingly tumultuous labor market (Purser & Hennigan, 2018). Also, administrations in the debate to challenge the welfare system acknowledged the rhetoric of personal responsibility rather than being dependent upon government subsidies to live and survive (Williams, 2017). Thus, the concept of personal responsibility brought forth a brand - new meaning to the world of welfare by playing a significant role to help in the transition of welfare recipients from dependency to self - sufficiency through work.

The strategy of work became a major asset in the reduction of dependency. Over the past few decades, workfare became a model that emerged out of welfare reformatory efforts in the United States (Greer, 2015). Workfare was an introduction into the requirements of welfare as a concept used to describe any regulation of the labor market through an emphasis on job search and participants are required by policies to undertake

in work requested of them in return for benefit payment (Grady, 2017). However, the transition from welfare to workfare has partially been explained in the increase of severe poverty because of the participation in low paid, insecure, part – time jobs, and when there is less cash availability to the poor (Daguerre, 2017). The essence of the workfare initiative was instrumental in pioneering a way out of poverty, but ultimately fell short in its intentions by not eliminating the safety net of dependency.

Welfare to work was emphasized through the acknowledging of its less than adequate accomplishments in reform and the engaging of stricter requirements of the transition. Its failure to successfully accomplish was due to its ravage of the welfare system as its work requirements in the welfare context constitute a legally cognizable relic of slavery rather than a guide to economic freedom (Banerjee, 2018). With that, the welfare reforms that were made and implemented shifted from a legalistic model of accountability to a privatization and business – like form of welfare governance (Benish & Maron, 2016). Clearly, the welfare – to – work transition, or “workfare,” revealed a system of which work requirements were implemented not to promote economic freedom and self – sufficiency, but to harbor slavery by remaining in control of the dependency safety net by nurturing vulnerability.

Behavioral Health Policies

There are many dynamics relating to behavioral health that contribute to welfare involvement. However, few studies have been conducted to examine how policies effect behavioral health (Spencer & Komro, 2017). Behavioral health alludes to the vast area of mental health and substance abuse conditions, health behaviors, life stressors and crises,

physical symptoms related to stress, and ineffective patterns of health care utilization (Vogel, Kanzler, Aikens, & Goodie, 2017). It involves disorders and behaviors that encourage the need for entities such as welfare to help address vulnerabilities and help provide the support necessary to overcome behavioral obstacles that impede or disrupt everyday life. Unfortunately, the behavioral health epidemic has been a major contributor to the welfare dependency crisis and continues to strengthen the lifeline between assistance and the recipient.

Behavioral health has been an undermined and underestimated contributor to the welfare dependency plight. As decades of behavioral health economic research has increasingly achieved prominence, the advent of policymaking has increased within the last decade creating a unique challenge to welfare analysis that has not been sufficiently addressed in literature (Just, 2017). However, policies that are intended to address behavioral health issues in children and families have improved the likeliness of participants to overcome the obstacles of health detriments. Research has increasingly demonstrated that economic policies within the welfare system impact health behaviors and outcomes via numerous mechanisms such as changing the broad social conditions that ultimately affect individuals and community level susceptibility, responses to poor economic conditions and even experiences (Spencer & Komro, 2017). The economic security policies within welfare designed to do such have been instrumental in influencing the health behaviors and even outcomes of individuals and families.

As the popularity of behavioral health in welfare is on the rise, concurrently there is an increase in behavior policy – making tools among welfare policy – makers. With

that, the intent of behavioral policy – making is to provide correction to decision making that result in sub – optimal outputs and to redirect those decisions that make people self - sufficient (Fabbri & Faure, 2018). This goes to show that decision making is an integral measure of behaviors in an individual and as an offset dictate whether a life is sufficiently sustained or dependent and vulnerable. Policy – making procedures, approaches, and implementation within the welfare capacity include the US Pension Protection Act (PPA) of 2006, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) 2010, and a specific type of behavioral policy called nudging which is an intervention measure that alters people’s behavior in a predictable way through decision making and positively affects welfare participants (Fabbri & Faure, 2018). Additionally, the child welfare field involves a vast array of services and programs that are evidence based practices that move towards the integration of child welfare and behavioral health such as child protection services, home visiting, permanency planning, adoptions, mental health care and substance abuse treatment, and parent training (Thyer, Babcock, & Tutweiler, 2017). The behavioral health field in welfare is progressing in policy development, but still remains limited in literature.

Educational Policies

Making the transition from a lifestyle of welfare dependency into a lifestyle of economic independence where no assistance is needed requires a level of empowerment through knowledge and training that overcomes the poverty epidemic. Empowerment, which involves the tool of education, gives space to opportunity for individuals as a pliable vehicle for productive power that actively disavows domination while quite

effectively accomplishing subjection (Rushing, 2016). It is a powerful wielding tool that offers the liberty needed to translate into autonomy without government sovereignty in a system. With that, educational empowerment has been a key component in economic success and self – sustainability.

The nexus between education attainment and the poverty epidemic and the research conducted reveal the impact that each variable has on the other. Educational attainment determines the occupational and the social success of an individual to a large extent (Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2016). For instance, study results suggest that expenditure on primary and secondary education have a strong long-term effect on reducing the incidence of poverty especially in adults (Hidalgo-Hidalgo & Iturbe-Ormaetxe, 2018). Alternatively, poverty is a detriment to furthering the welfare of society and alleviating the demographic crisis because it decreases the chances of access to education and also generates illiteracy and school dropout (Gabriela, 2018). Nonetheless, education provides a potential pathway out of poverty by removing the barriers of ignorance and illiteracy while empowering individuals through knowledge and skill.

Education and its initiative to promote long – term economic self – sufficiency has been of utmost importance in the United States for a long time. In fact, policymakers have strongly endorsed the education system celebrating universities as “engines of innovation” and promoting education as the “best anti – poverty program” (Schulze – Cleven, 2017, p. 397). However, despite the educational intentions and pursuits, the education system is experiencing turbulence structurally as it may not be enough to position individuals for economic success especially in contemporary society. Private

involvement in education from institutions such as the welfare system over the past several decades have increased as issues in the education sector continue to spark national debate including the role of government in education and the nation's direction of the school system (Fried, 2017). Therefore, with welfare involvement in education, it is incumbent upon the system as a responsibility to create and develop policies and programs that position the participant to succeed economically.

The transition of the PRWORA was critical and eventful as its replacement and implementation of policy programs made it possible for dependency elimination. Upon the establishment of the PRWORA passed by Congress in 1996, President Bill Clinton emphasized the need for both greater individual responsibilities along with government action on jobs and on education (Williams, 2017). Nonetheless, legislation lacked the necessary substance to provoke financial independence as welfare focused attention on welfare – to – workfare rather than the proper education needed to acquire and maintain employment that is sustainable. With the welfare transition of TANF out of the shadow of the PRWORA, the work first approach failed to connect recipients to education and training leaving participants living below the federal poverty line even after leaving TANF (Hall, 2016). Overall, the emphasis on work diluted the need for education as a vital contributor for individual competency and readiness.

Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)

The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) was the primary program that provided cash assistance to dependents before the PRWORA was established as a major reform. It was in that program where participants could receive cash assistance

without any limits or requirements indefinitely (Muennig, Caleyachetty, Rosen, Korotzer, 2015). It was because of this incentive within the AFDC program that initiated a critical transition and replacement of the AFDC to the newly improved TANF program.

Policymakers highly questioned the AFDC program because the logic of paying citizens indefinitely that were able to physically work might serve as a reason for the participant to stay out of the workforce (Muennig, et al., 2015). Thus, the aforementioned dispelled the accountability of welfare to assist participants by casting a life line of dependency.

The AFDC program had been in place since 1935. During its era, very little to nothing was done to move participants into a life of self – sufficiency. It was because of its emphasis on free benefits that the nation’s economy and the welfare of the nation’s citizens became crippled and imbalanced impeding any form of progress. For that matter, the AFDC was responsible for the spike in AFDC rolls especially in the 1980’s and the 1990’s along with the rapid rising of immigrants receiving welfare under its governance (Burkhauser, 2016). With that, 82 out of every 100 families received AFDC benefits in contrast to TANF where only 26 out of every 100 families received of its benefits (Burkhauser, 2016). The distinction between the two programs speaks to the ineffectiveness of the AFDC program and its role in the welfare system.

Contributors to Welfare Dependency

Welfare dependency does not just happen but has been a debilitating concept that has historically crippled recipients from experiencing economic freedom. The idea of ‘welfare dependency’ was first introduced by John Moore between the years of 1987 to 1989 arguing that dependency is a debilitating concept and that the best kind of assistance

is that which gives the individuals the will and the ability to help themselves (Benton, 2018). However, as welfare dependency has played an intergenerational role throughout decades negatively affecting families, there remains to be underlying factors that contribute to the dependency epidemic that facilitates poverty. It is within this section where the researcher will address various contributors.

Causes of Dependency

Welfare dependency to this day remains a problem to society and continues to give rise to the vicious cycle that cost the lives of so many individuals. Several studies reported that 17% to 37% of former welfare participants returned to welfare within 1 year of exiting, while 33% to 60% of former participants returned to welfare within 5 years (Cheng, 2003). This statistic speaks to the multiple lives that welfare negatively affects due to the inability of welfare to produce self – sustainable lives. Furthermore, there are several causes that contribute to the constant dependency that destroys individuals and families.

The overall well – being of individuals must be a concern of government support. Without the well – being of individuals, poverty will continue to be a problem socially and it will be difficult for society to develop and progress as a whole. Biological contributors are widely recognized as determinants of well – being and social discourse (Kathleen & McDade, 2018). In essence, the biosocial factor and the relationship between the two variables should be largely taken into consideration as the discussion remains as to what biological factors contribute to welfare dependency.

Biological deficiencies have been responsible for the vulnerability of participants and demands for assistance to be needed to compensate for what is lacking with the participant. The biological or what some researchers call the individualistic cause or determinant of dependency can be characterized as processes and structures within an individual that contribute to the growth, reproduction, and maintenance of the individual from conception to death (Harris & McDade, 2018). The biological determinant for dependency dated back to the Elizabethan era where the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 was an extraordinary response based on social relations, mutual rights and responsibilities of local communities who were impoverished and in need of public support (Szreter, Kinmonth, Kriznik, & Kelly, 2016). As time evolved from that era where dependency was introduced to the general public to the era of personal responsibility as expressed through the PRWORA, variations in public attitudes became more intolerant of the seeming overgenerous welfare system. Consequently, ongoing debates in government acknowledge the need for establishing programs that demand accountability, despite contributing determinants.

Several biological determinants are underestimated but are very important in the conversation of contributing factors to dependency namely gender and race. Reports suggest that those most likely to be dependent on welfare for extended periods of time are proportionately higher for blacks than non – blacks, whether male or female (Price, 1995). Furthermore, in over a 60-year period, race has indeed been one of the most influential contributors in the development of the programs that undergird the welfare state causing African Americans to become the face of welfare (Callaghan & Olson,

2017). When it came to other biological factors contributing to dependence, there was insufficient amount of information in the literature.

Traditional contributions to welfare dependency were also discovered in literature such as the lack of household families. Single mothers play a dominant role in the acquiring of welfare system benefits. Historically, single motherhood has played a critical role in the contribution of welfare assistance as studies have consistently highlighted a need in the home that promotes and encourages marriage and two – parent families (Freeman, 2017). Statistics record that 26.5% of female householders with no husband or partner present in the home live under the poverty line and need assistance to survive (Yoon, 2008). Traditional families are the pillars of the community, the foundation to a healthy society, and are essential to help decrease welfare dependency (Gash & Yamin, 2016). The structural component of the family unit allows for the economic and the emotional sustainability that is needed for overall success and longevity.

Another unfavorable contribution to welfare dependency is the low educational level of recipients. Changes in the structure of the economy have diminished the importance of the manufacturing sector (Berger, Cancian & Magnuson, 2018). Traditionally, a source of relatively high – wage jobs for individuals with low levels of education have also resulted in stagnant earnings for less – educated workers and have limited the ability to earn a way out of poverty (Berger, Cancian, & Magnuson, 2018). Furthermore, the lack of educational opportunities and achievement among welfare recipients has for a long time curbed the possibility to exit welfare and poverty fostering

individuals that do not have the mental competence and physical skills to achieve lasting economic success. Notwithstanding, welfare reforms, especially the 1996 PRWORA reform, have altered government assistance structurally and organizationally by implementing training and educational opportunities to transition recipients from welfare to work.

Geographical determinants also play a key role in welfare dependency. Key findings from research analysis found that high levels of relative poverty were linked to particular parts of large cities reinforcing constructs of poverty as an urban phenomenon (Milbourne, 2010). Depending on geographic locales within the United States and beyond, poverty is generally found within areas that lack dynamics that are needed to sustain communities and advance the welfare of humanity.

Urbanization over the years has been the direction of the general public; albeit, urban areas have been stigmatized as such where poverty is attached and is thriving. It is predicted that the direction that we are headed in will double with urban dwellers, but it will do so within the context of economic stagnation, underemployment, and limited public investment in resources and infrastructure aggravating rather than alleviating poverty (Lemanski, 2016). With that, it is important to identify poverty-stricken areas because of the cultural attachments to those areas and how they provoke much greater disparity between groups of people. For instance, geographic differences and residential patterns contribute to health and mental disparities along with disproportionate members of minority racial / ethnic populations concentrated in high – poverty stricken geographical areas (Julian Chun-Chung Chow, Jaffe & Snowden, 2003). Analyzing

unique patterns and dynamics embedded in impoverished locales is very important to the creation of self – sustainable models that lead to an exit out of poverty.

One geographic that is to be noted historically for harboring the poverty epidemic leading to welfare dependency is the southern part of the United States. Statistics record that the southern black belt region within the United States is home to 34 percent of the nation's population living in poverty (Harris & Hyden, 2017). Unfortunately, developments within the welfare system in these poverty-stricken areas have not been conducive in creating empowerment mechanisms within to strengthen human capital to be self – reliant and self – sustaining. Studies have shown the insufficiencies of the welfare system in how it has not lived up to its responsibility to effectively transition into the workforce. Research findings reveal that even in the midst of a thriving economy, welfare leavers generally have low earnings, face very high levels of job instability, and have little upward mobility economically which has raised concerns about the work – first approach (Peterson, 2002). The insufficiencies of the work – first approach in welfare have very much contributed to the recycling of recipients back into the welfare system after leaving.

Effects of Welfare Dependency

Welfare dependency impacts society in the most grievous of ways. On the contrary, welfare has also made a positive contribution to society as it positions the disadvantaged for economic success. The welfare system has made its attempts to alleviate the negative consequences of economic shocks through government support (Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017). Nonetheless, welfare has diminished to a perpetual

state of reliance through overuse as its efforts negatively moderates the effect of immaterial resources on well – being among the deprived (Reeskens & Vandecasteele, 2017). Moreover, the exhaustion of welfare dependency does not advance, but hinders the freedom of participants while playing its part in the economic decline of the nation.

There are several notable impacts that have come out of welfare dependency. One effect that welfare dependency has directly influenced is crime. However, literature on the subject matter of welfare dependency and it leading to crime might be considered inconsistent due to crime being vast and comprehensive. There are various measures and degrees of crime that differ depending on differing dynamics such as areas and demographics and so on. One such crime in particular that welfare dependency has influenced is the crime of domestic violence. Due to financial dependencies, women are forced to stay in violent relationships along with the repeated efforts of men to prevent wives or mates from becoming financially or socially independent by beating them before important job interviews or training sessions (Nou & Timmins, 2005). Women living in dependency are more susceptible for men to take advantage of vulnerability through manipulation and control which often and ultimately cause traumatic experiences.

Other variables welfare dependency effect is the unemployment rate. Welfare recidivism is a major problem among recipients mainly due to the lack of effective training needed to stabilize good paying jobs that lead to self – sufficiency. Also, a major concern in regard to the effect of welfare dependency and unemployment is the negative view that welfare incentivizes laziness (Eppard, Schubert, & Giroux, 2018). Laziness contributes to the unemployment factor in that overused dependency creates an individual

and a family who makes a career out of dependency rather than accepting responsibility to remain in work (Eppard, et al., 2018). Hence, the success of welfare – to – work transition is gauged by how many recipients remain in stable employment that leads to autonomy, not just finding low income work. Data from an income study concludes that unemployment is the largest penalty of poverty and also found that the United States is less effective at using public policy to reduce poverty and to maintain sustaining employment (Laird, Parolin, Waldfogel, & Wimer, 2018). This data speaks to the revolving door of welfare dependency and the lack of job sustaining skills and programs within the system that need to be addressed and reformed.

The PRWORA was established in 1996 to eradicate dependency by creating austere federal policies that would do as such. As its intent was to replace assistance with employment, unemployment along with high rates of recidivism characterized welfare assistance. Current research concludes that the growing magnitude of caseloads in welfare along with changes in welfare programs and policies are relevant and needed as key determinants to lower unemployment rates (Canon & Cano, 2017).

Education and its contribution to the eradication of welfare assistance are very important. Education plays a key role in human capital and is considered the most imperative element in individual well – being (Kousar, Sadaf, Makhdum, & Ijaz, 2017). With that, welfare assistance has played its part in the lack of education by providing as a barrier to the betterment of society because of impeding educational opportunities.

Before the implementation of the welfare reform act in 1996 and even leading to its passing and establishment, the promotion of education was emphasized, but not

effective enough within the welfare system to move recipients beyond dependency. Education mitigates social and economic inequality. Moreover, there are linkages between education and the welfare system that need to be identified. First, there has been a significant overlap in the politico – economic coalitions promoting institutional and policy change in education along with other social policies. Second, education and training systems in welfare has implications of social inequality ultimately affecting the outcome of policy making. Lastly, education and welfare system institutions shape popular expectations and attitudes towards policy – making (Busemeyer, 2017). Consequently, education is a game – changer in that the introduction of a good education can largely reduce and / or eliminate the poverty crisis (Abrar – Ul – Haq, Jali, & Islam, 2016). However, the welfare system has come short in the responsibility to implement strong and valid educational opportunities to enhance individual cognizance.

The success of the welfare reform transition in 1996 was mistakenly seen in how many recipients are moved into the workplace, rather than how many recipients become sustained through the workplace. Though legislation does vary state by state as it relates to requirements including work and education, there are some positives according to research studies of how welfare reform has affected educational outcomes. More recent research studies show that the implementation of TANF reduced the probability of dropping out of high school by about 3.4 percentage points or by 15 %. In contrast to TANF, state AFDC waivers had no significant effect on high school dropouts (Dave, et al., 2012).

The reduced enrollment of participants to 4 – year and 2 – year colleges can be attributed to time and work constraints imposed by welfare reform requirements. A data statistic from the Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that on average, 27 percent of Americans enrolled in a welfare program had completed less than high school, 33 percent had a high school diploma, 31 percent had some college or associate’s degree and only 9 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher (Lexington Law, 2018). In order for welfare to create greater human capital that addresses dependency, more emphasis needs to be placed on educational reform to challenge participants holistically that correlates to the emphasis placed on the immediate transition to work.

Despite the vast criticisms among researchers on the issue of welfare dependency, there are positives to public support. One, welfare dependency has seen some effectiveness in contributing to the eradication of the poverty epidemic. Researchers suggest that the implementation of welfare reformative programs have historically been instrumental in the reduction of financial hardship of the poor and the middle class, making state policies central to overall efforts to address poverty during decades of increasing wealth inequality (Scruggs & Hayes, 2017). One of the biggest benefits of the welfare system contribution to poverty reduction is the ability to position participants to move into the workforce. Among the social assistance of providing for needy recipients’ resources such as food, money, housing and the like: the most important contribution the welfare system has made that has benefited recipients has been the implementation of restrictions and requirements of time limits and trainings.

Millennial Administrative Efforts to Combat Welfare (National)

Historically, there have been administrative attempts to strategically address welfare dependency at the national level. With the passing of the Social Security Act of 1935 under the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt to the attempts made by President Barack Obama, research analysis has concluded that amidst the attempts, presidential attention to Economic Rights, Social Welfare Rights, and Civil Rights has generally been quite modest while declining substantially over time (Rhodes, 2013). The attempts made by administrations through history saw great defeat as well as victories in its role to address welfare one of which was the passing of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act that shifted the course of welfare history. To date, welfare reform continues to be the topic of discussion of administrations in the fight to bring restoration to the economic landscape.

Obama Administration Efforts

The Obama administration lasted for a period of two terms ranging from January 20, 2009 to January 20, 2017. Upon the election as President of the United States, Barack Obama was perceived by the general public as an agent of positive change for the socioeconomic fortunes and the political power of individuals, in particular the African American Diaspora (Orey, King, Lawrence, & Anderson, 2013). During his tenure as president, arguments continued to build against Obama as to whether or not he was transformative of a president as many as hoped for when he was elected into office in 2008, especially as it relates to welfare (Grossman, 2017). As President Obama's role was examined in the expansion of the welfare state in the United States, it was noted that the administration did relax many of the regulations placed on welfare recipients and the

programs that he expanded contributed to the economic downturn that started in 2008 (Grossman, 2017). Consequently, the Obama administration deviated from the essence of welfare reformative measures to transition from government support to work.

President Barack Obama's election as the first African – American ever to be elected into the US presidency was historic. This historic event played a significant part in the impact on key issues affecting the black community, namely fatherhood and welfare (Amedee, 2013). Obama's election raised the hope of the African – American community in that apparent racial undertones that contributed to the economic disparity would be successfully addressed. Also, Obama's presidential directive was clear: to rebuild the faltering economy and bring prosperity back to the American people (Harrell, 2015). However, upon entering into office and coming upon the heels of the Presidency of George W. Bush, President Obama did not enjoy many of the advantages of previous reforming liberal presidents such as Franklin D. Roosevelt, Lyndon Johnson, or Ronald Reagan, but suffered initial problems that were both political and economic (McKay, 2010). It was the economic pressure that was faced during Obama's presidency that led the administration to rise to the challenge of addressing the crisis of welfare and poverty. Unfortunately, the legislative efforts of President Obama during his tenure did not live up to the expectations that were desired of the administration as Congress looked to repeal the Affordable Care Act soon after implementation (Blackman, 2018). Clearly, the Obama administration welfare attempts did not suffice specifically in the fight to address dependency.

The election of President Barack Obama introduced to society legislation known as the, 'The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act,' or Obamacare signed into law on March 23, 2010. It originally legislated three provisions: to expand Medicaid eligibility and increase health insurance subsidies to individuals living below the poverty line; to institute health insurance enrollment via online marketplace exchanges; and to require those uninsured with an income more than 138% above the poverty line to enroll in health insurance or pay a penalty (Schembri & Ghaddar, 2018). Overall, the purpose of the act was to provide health care coverage for all Americans, and to do so affordably (Lahm, 2014). Though it was an act of legislation that was originally geared towards the reform of health care in the United States, it did affect the welfare system and population to a certain degree.

Obamacare was one of the biggest pieces of legislation ever to be signed and implemented into the public. The Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) did play a part in addressing the welfare dependency epidemic by accounting for nearly one – third of the overall poverty reduction from public benefits and by increasing health insurance coverage for millions of lower – income Americans (Remler, Korenman, & Hyson, 2017). However, it is hard to determine whether the implementation of the Affordable Care Act fully impacted welfare dependency because to date, US poverty measures have not incorporated health needs and benefits (Remler, et al., 2017). Thus, controversial debates about the effectiveness of the act and how it has provoked welfare dependency instead of its positive impact on it has become the topic of discussion.

Obamacare served not just as a means to address welfare and poverty, but as an expansion of the welfare state through the provision of health care. It was a critical component of a variety of emancipatory political projects, including the partial emancipation from the scene of wage labor along with its dominations and exploitations and also the emancipation efforts of material dependency upon the biological family (Jackson, 2016). It was the vision of President Obama to ensure that the future U.S. growth was based on a knowledge economy and on a well – educated work force that contributed value to goods and services sold which required that the United States increased its investment in human capital, in education, and health care (Hartmann, 2009). Medicaid expansion, a key feature of the Affordable Care Act and considered to be one of the most effective antipoverty programs, played a pivotal role in the impact of poverty – based welfare. Research data includes for all people, Medicaid reduced health – inclusive poverty by 3.8 percentage points and also reduced the poverty rates of Hispanics and non – Hispanic blacks by 6.1 percentage points and 4.9 percentage points. Also, Medicaid’s effect on non – Hispanic whites was smaller, though notable, at 1.8 percentage points along with reducing the poverty rate of children under the age of 18 by 5.3 percentage points (Remler, et al., 2017). Despite criticisms, the role of Obamacare was apparently effective to a degree though in a different manner than probably expected of by the administration relating to welfare.

The effort to combat poverty the most during Obama’s tenure was the enactment and implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), or what was often called the federal (or economic) stimulus bill. The economic stimulus bill was

enacted by the 111th U.S. Congress and signed into law by President Obama in February 2009. As being one of the main achievements of the Obama administration, the act proposed the largest fiscal stimulus in American history of approximately \$800 billion (Klein & Staal, 2017). The stimulus package was the first of its kind to inject a significant amount of money and resources into the national economy that targeted job creation, recession relief, social benefits, infrastructure development, and sub national government budget stabilization (Carley, 2016). The passing of the bill produced significant strides in the recovery of an economy that was failing when Obama first came into office.

The stimulus package resulted in ripple effects within the economy that were both positive, but more so negative. On the positive note, the stimulus package in early 2009 did help achieve some economic recovery and the economy did seem to be moving a little faster since the Great Recession (Lindauer, 2017). Also, though the economic recovery lasted longer than expected, data analysis reflects the up side of the stimulus package during the Obama era. Unemployment is below 5 %, just a few tenths of a percent higher than the levels in 2007 before the start of the Recession and the US Census concluded that household incomes were rising again. Specifically, median household income in 2015 was \$56,500, up 5.2 % from 2014 – the largest single – year increase since record – keeping began almost 50 years ago. Furthermore, gains were widespread: the number of households falling below the poverty line shrank by 3.5 million people and the poverty rate, at 13.5 %, was the lowest in 8 years (Lindauer, 2017). Overall, the

stimulus package did accomplish a measure of effectiveness to recover and stabilize a failing economy and restore employment.

Controversial Efforts

Unfortunately, there are an overwhelming number of negative undertones as to whether the enactment of the Recovery act was an overall success. Primarily, the stimulus package did less to alleviate the elimination of welfare dependency efforts. The ARRA increased benefits notably to participants by 15 % and suspended time limits on benefits for the unemployed (Conley, 2017). Furthermore, ARRA deferred the rule that able – bodied adults without dependents either seek or engage in any form of work from April 2009 through September 2010; a total of 40 states extended such waivers to these individuals for the next 3 years (Conley, 2017). One criticism was that the stimulus was too small and that it was oversold, meaning that the stimulus package was not as large as the recession merited (Weatherford, 2012). The missteps of President’s Obama’s proposal mobilized the concerted efforts of powerful interest groups to become more intransigent to reformative efforts (Weatherford, 2012). Other critics of the ARRA asserted that President Obama could have done things differently which would have gained more public approval.

There are other studies that have been conducted to reveal that the stimulus package did not work. The argument around the idea of raising spending and cutting taxes during a recession such as the stimulus bill is centered around the Keynesian model, which is a model that says that the economy is not working either because firms are setting prices too high or because workers are setting wages too high (Anonymous,

2012). The Keynesian model communicates that recessions occur because of lack of aggregate demand, and the government can remedy this shortfall by stimulating demand (Miron, 2010). This theory raises the case against the economic stimulus because even if the Keynesian model is essentially correct, many have failed to recognize that attempts to stimulate the economy utilizing this model could very well exacerbate recessions and even have negative long – term implications (Miron, 2010). With that, the Keynesian model is not a strong enough model to ensure the development of individuals and overly puts reliance on government support apart from empowerment.

During the implementation of the ARRA, there remained an existing dilemma that involved two underprivileged people groups namely the African – American community and the Latino community. Though the economic recession of 2008 was a devastating one that affected the nation as a whole overwhelmingly, it distinctly had a significant impact on these two populations. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that amidst the increase in the national unemployment rate for the years 2008, 2009, and 2010, the differences in the black and Latino statistics compared to the white population is noteworthy (Gray, Johnson, Gibrill, & Boone, 2015). The unemployment rate for the black community rose from 14.8 % to 16 %, 8.5 % for whites in 2009 and 8.7 % in 2010 compared to the unemployment rate of Latino’s that grew from 12 .1 % to 12.5 % in 2010 (Gray, et al., 2015). Overall, Obama spent less of the funds promised to help those in poverty and was the rare Democratic Chief Executive who did not make it a top priority to provoke prosperity and to help those suffering the most economically (Fuchsman, 2017). Literature concerning the proponents of the Obama administration

welfare efforts is limited though such efforts indubitably played at least a marginal role in addressing welfare (Conley, 2017). However, the Obama era left things undone concerning addressing the welfare dilemma leaving important questions unanswered and gaps considerably wider.

Trump Administration Welfare Efforts

In contrast to the Obama administration and efforts to combat poverty and welfare dependency, the Trump administration emerged with a different ambition in the fight against dependency. President Donald Trump was elected as the 45th president of the United States on November 8, 2016. There were many attempts and even changes made as it relates to policies that shifted the social landscape in diverse ways upon his election into the presidential seat and transitioning into the first several months. Specifically, as the narrative was being written into the first several months of the Trump administration era, attention has turned away from expansive proposals for new government programs toward greater reliance on market oriented approaches to poverty (Berger, Cancian, & Magnuson, 2018). Hence, Trump's viewpoints towards poverty reduction and welfare dependency elimination varied extremely.

The Trump administration's efforts to combat poverty embraced an approach created by the Clinton Administration in the 1990's. It was upon the ascendency of his presidency where his motivation behind his mission was heard in his inauguration theme. His sentiments were thus:

We've made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon. One by one, the factories shuttered and

left our shores, with not even a thought about the millions upon millions of American workers left behind. The wealth of our middle class has been ripped from their homes and then redistributed across the entire world, but that is the past. And now we are looking only to the future. We assembled here today are issuing a new decree to be heard in every city, in every foreign capital, and in every hall of power. From this day forward, a new vision will govern our land.

From this moment on, it's going to be America First. (Lucas & Badubi, 2017)

This saying supported the idea of President Trump's motivation to, "Make America Great Again," as the vision was clearly expressed to ignite an era of prioritization where domesticated development superseded international development. The vision of President Trump in just a few short years produced record – breaking numbers in advancing the national economy by creating 5.3 million new jobs, 600,000 new jobs in the manufacturing sector alone along with five million fewer people on food stamps and millions coming out of the poverty epidemic (Hannity, Jones, & Bongino, 2019).

President Trump's efforts were an extreme contrast in anti – poverty ambitions to that of President Obama that has made long strides to not just the recovery of the economy, but the restoration of the economy.

President Trump started the presidency term with an apparent sharp focus to contribute to the decrease in poverty and welfare dependency that included the effort to repeal and replace the economic burden of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Obama care) (Hirsch, Rosenkrantz, Nicola, Harvey, & Duszak, 2017).

Unfortunately, though there have been numerous legislative efforts during the Trump

administration era to modify, repeal, and replace Obamacare, it remains the law of the land and has yet to be replaced (Hirsch, et al., 2017). Moreover, on a positive note, the election of Donald Trump has led to some monumental shifts legislatively as it relates to welfare. One dramatic shift that the election of President Trump has made towards welfare is the disapproval and the overriding of Medicaid waivers. The Section 1115 Medicaid is a section of the Medicaid expansion authority initiated by Obama designed to permit states the opportunity to develop innovative solutions to a variety of health and welfare problems (Holahan, Coughlin, Ku, Lipson, Rajan, 1995). This allowed the federal government to waive a number of standard Medicaid rules and policies.

President Trump has been very intentional since his inauguration to revisit the Clinton model in reintroducing the welfare – to – work pattern aggressively moving participants into the workforce. Hence, as it relates to the welfare population of Medicaid, research findings suggest that the reinforcement of work requirements would likely produce modest impacts on job – searching in this population, inducing participants to at least look for jobs (Sommers, Fry, Blendon, Epstein, 2018). So far, the states of Kentucky, Indiana, and Arkansas are on board with the eligibility work requirements which involve beneficiaries to work at least 80 hours a month or engage in volunteer service, job training, or search for a job (Jaffe, 2018). Studies also suggest that the Medicaid work requirements under the Trump administration not only give people an opportunity to work and give participants the training needed to help transition out of poverty and up the economic ladder, but it is also instrumental in the improvement of

beneficiaries' health (Jaffe, 2018). The Trump administration focused on the reinstatement of work to aggressively confront dependency on another level.

President Trump's anti-poverty approach to eliminate welfare dependency via the work-first approach has offered the strength of employment, but yet in still, has offered the weakness of low-wage employment. The first months to the introduction of the Trump presidency has turned the attention and emphasis away from the expansive proposals for reformed welfare government programs and towards a greater reliance on market-oriented approaches to poverty (Berger, Cancian, & Magnuson, 2018). Even in the requirement to work, there is no assurance that participants will remain in work or even become employable at high-wage jobs because of the ineffectiveness and the inefficiency of implemented welfare programs in the welfare system (Caha, 2019). Critics view the requirement to work questionable because of low-end jobs and requiring recipients to get a job, particularly low-end jobs, is not a humane way to go about addressing welfare dependency (Ryan, 2019). There are limited research studies as it relates to the types of welfare training that has been implemented under the Trump administration.

Optimal Welfare – Based Policy / Administration

Amidst the global crisis of poverty and the welfare system dependency phenomena, there are regions around the world that have experienced some measure of success in building an autonomous people. According to country case studies as it pertains to the effectiveness of welfare systems, the European nations have been one of the most successful in addressing the welfare dependency issue. All European welfare

states have a significant capacity and impact for reducing poverty and inequality (Ferragina, Seeleib – Kaiser, & Spreckelsen, 2015). Furthermore, European Union (EU) countries have come together to strive in excellence for the promotion of a high – level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training, and the protection of human health (Ferragina, et al., 2015). The EU welfare model has been one looked upon to assist in the elimination of welfare dependency across the world.

The successful journey of the European Union welfare system dates back to the late 19th century contributing to the social development of Europe. With further development within the welfare system in Europe even until most recent, Europe’s welfare system reputation was often regarded as the jewel in the crown, a feature that gave the European societies a special quality (Muchaleszko & Kakol, 2014). Successful European states that have been integral in the elimination of dependency and a pathway out of poverty through public support are Sweden, France, Denmark, and Germany.

Comparative analysis between the European Union welfare system and the US social welfare programs and policies conclude that EU policies are more advanced in that they lead to social stability, economic independency, a cleaner environment and a generally better livelihood; US policies or the lack thereof led to the exact opposite results (Hama, 2011). Furthermore, European welfare programs and policies better known as the European Way, impacted general welfare including lengthy maternity leave, affordable health, affordable childcare, unemployment benefits and job training

(Hama, 2011). One country within the EU that has affected the welfare system in a positive way that needs to be highlighted is the country of Sweden.

Sweden has developed a welfare system through intense and effective reformative measures that has grasped the attention of the world which has earned them to be a model of self – sustainability patterns. Sweden has been so innovative, reformative, and comprehensive in its method to create a system that provides a pathway out of poverty, that it is regarded as a symbol of advancement, efficiency, and even equality. In addition, the country had been able to maintain the most complex social welfare system, which was viewed as extraordinarily successful in eliminating poverty by focusing on the main aspect of the model being its social welfare policy (Yang & Ortmann, 2018). Though the economy in Sweden has encountered much economic turbulence from 1970 and onward like rising income disparity, unemployment, and economic insecurity, effective reforms made within the welfare system made it strong enough to resist the challenges and to become a model of adjustment and development (Yang & Ortmann, 2018). The resilience of the nation of Sweden to overcome obstacles such as the ones mentioned above has been instrumental not only in its progression, but its longevity.

In the case of Sweden and its optimal welfare – based policy efforts, Sweden has been a force in establishing viable human resources that successfully effect society. One way that the welfare system has been effective in creating independence is the establishment of an explicit welfare family policy which dates back to 1970 intended to seek horizontal equity (Ozawa, 2004). That is, the Swedish government aspired to have a greater equality between genders and greater equality among children (Ozawa, 2004).

Aimed around concepts such as economic security and physical well – being, the Swedish family policy has since 1970 expanded and improved focusing on the family unit as a whole which is a precursor to economic independency.

In more recent literature on successful welfare measures in Europe and specifically Sweden, a new concept was introduced that differentiated the welfare system in Sweden than other nations of the world. The term, “New Welfare,” is a priority within the EU that focuses on more than just transitioning welfare participants from welfare to work. Though employment is a viable poverty reduction strategy, employment alone is not the best strategy to reduce poverty and eliminate dependency because of recidivism. Thus, the new welfare concept emphasizes social investment, activation, and fairer access to employment with the intention that social welfare policies should prioritize helping participants become more employable with better jobs and better income (Taylor – Gooby, Gummy, & Otto, 2015). In acknowledging the transitional shift out of the new welfare system concept from the sole protection of participants from market risks to their empowerment within the market, the welfare system put emphasis on intense job training and education (Ronchi, 2018). The European Social Model (ESM), a special socio – economic welfare model adopted by the EU, is a social policy model within the welfare system where EU member states, such as Sweden, have adopted many of the different variants of the model within their national policy frameworks aimed at reducing poverty and eliminating dependency (Tendera-Wlaszczuk & Szymanski, 2017). Though not specified within the model, one of the features within the policy that has contributed to the effectiveness of the welfare system in defining and implementing its policies and

activities requested that the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, a high level of education, training and protection of human health (Tendera-Wlaszczuk & Szymanski, 2017). These strategic features separated Sweden from the rest of the world in effectively combating dependency.

Mississippi Welfare/TANF Laws and Policies

Strategic Approaches to Self – Sufficiency

The passing of the PRWORA of 1996 gave states the discretionary power to legislate within their own states as it relates to welfare. With that, many states did not take the discretionary power as serious as others as legislative efforts relating to welfare dependency have varied from state to state. Unfortunately, the state of Mississippi for a long time has been a state notorious for its poor economy which came in next to last for the state with the slowest growing GDP along with one of the highest unemployment rates in the country and has the lowest median annual income in the country (Poole & Kim, 2017). Moreover, Mississippi has yet to find a fix for the poverty epidemic that has been a problem for the state for such a long period of time (Poole & Kim, 2017). As a state with one of the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, and the lowest median income in the country; the pressure of turning the economic tide and strengthening welfare system policies is immense.

Mississippi was one of the states who developed and implemented initiatives within welfare upon the passing of the new legislation in 1996. In 1994, two years prior to the passing of the PRWORA, Mississippi began its Welfare Reform Demonstration

Project and its work program component (Work First) in December of that year (Breux, Duncan, Keller, & Morris, 2002). It was under Work First that benefits were made available to participants' contingent upon the fulfillment of a work requirement and introduced a three component system that Mississippi would implement to transition welfare recipients into the workforce (Breux, et al., 2002). However, amidst the reformative attempts to address the welfare system in Mississippi, there continues to be an unresolvable way that the system has failed to successfully transition participants into economic success.

One of the strategic approaches to self – sufficiency in the state of Mississippi and in the South in general is the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 was a declaration of war on poverty that authorized the creation of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and its programs ultimately creating a liberal belief that opening opportunities within a fair economic system would let individuals work their way out of poverty, reducing the need for welfare programs (Aksamit, 2017). Though there were vast criticisms about the effectiveness of Johnson's war on poverty, the lives of millions of poor people improved substantially (Glen, 2017). Notwithstanding, because the passing of this legislation was in the midst of strong racial/civil conflict and political upheaval; southern segregationists correlated the War on Poverty with the civil rights movement (Glen, 2017). Southern segregationists were determined to maintain their power, engage in widespread intimidation, bureaucratic manipulation, economic reprisals, and repeated investigations to block the potential of poor people's coalitions and limit programs (Glen,

2017). Not only does it take a reform in the welfare system, but clearly it takes a reform in other systematic capacities that has harbored the poverty epidemic.

Another strategic approach was the passing and implementation of Enterprise Zone (EZ) legislation in Mississippi beginning in July 1983. Though no longer a policy innovation, enterprise zones were designated by the government, usually for a period of about ten years which comprised a number of sites with individual planning regimes (Duckett, 1996). Mississippi passed the legislation of EZ particularly in the most distressed counties of the state for the intent of creating and directing new jobs towards those areas (Couch, Atkinson, & Smith, 2005). Research study results suggest that in Mississippi, the designation of enterprise zones did contribute to an increase in the number of jobs created (Couch, et al, 2005). Literature was scarce on information regarding EZ.

Mississippi Welfare Approaches - TANF

The state welfare system in distributing benefits to recipients does just enough to contribute to the cycles of dependency while at the same time being negligent in empowerment policies unto autonomy. However, Mississippi has shown its presence in being active in welfare programs such as TANF to help move recipients out of dependency and poverty ultimately. Most of the contribution to the lowest benefits and the distribution inefficiency of Mississippi is that it is the only state that has a majority of TANF funds appropriated to private entities, and therefore works to skew the privatization distribution rightward (Butz, 2014). This speaks to the manipulative control and the misappropriation of benefits and funds at the state level.

Mississippi has experience severe systemic poverty for a long time leading up to reforms. The TANF program was implemented in the state of Mississippi in October of 1996, with a minor adjustment in requirements occurring in March of 1997 (Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, Taquino, Gill, 2003). According to the Mississippi Department of Human Services, the TANF program is the monthly cash assistance program for poor families with children under the age of 18 and a goal to end dependence through job readiness training, jobs skills training, vocational training, and educational training. In Mississippi, there is a three – step process that welfare recipients participate in under the TANF program. The first step is that an eligibility worker at the local human services office determines eligibility. Secondly, once the eligibility is determined, the eligibility worker then determines whether the client is exempt from the work requirement. If the clients are not exempt, they are referred to the next component, which is case management that determines barriers to work. It is at this point where the client has to sign a personal responsibility contract explaining his or her individual responsibilities under the program. Finally, the client is referred to the third component of the program called the job – placement contractor (JPC). It is the role of the JPC to place clients into jobs and to determine if the client needs job – readiness training, which if necessary, the JPC also provides for the client (Breux, et al, 2002).

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Another welfare approach in Mississippi is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamp program. Existing anti – poverty policies, such as SNAP, play an undeniable role in improving the fortunes of low –

income Americans and reduces poverty rates significantly (Kimberlin, Tach, & Wimer, 2018). Furthermore, according to the Mississippi Department of Human Services and the Division of Economic Assistance, the state of Mississippi has the highest number of households suffering from food insecurity in the U.S. (Lokken, 2000). Approximately, 17.2 % and 14.4 % of all food stamp recipients in Mississippi are 55 years of age or older (Lokken, 2000). Unfortunately, in response to the hunger crisis in Mississippi, many state and federal officials have deemed the food stamp program (SNAP) as unsuccessful and a complete failure (de Jong, 2005). Many state and federal officials have determined that there is ample evidence that the welfare program in Mississippi is discriminatory, punitive, dishonest, and endowed with a feudalistic authority over human life and dignity (de Jong, 2005). The deep poverty in the state of Mississippi grabbed the attention of the nation drawing numerous federal officials and even other observers to the state to investigate the atrocious conditions for themselves.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) played its role as a safety net in Mississippi. WIC is a food and nutrition education program for pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum women, infants and children who are under the age of five and women who are low income and at nutritional risk (Kim & Mallo, 2019). The implementation of the WIC program was considered a significant contribution to the reduction of food insecurity among first – time program participants. Also, to be more specific, the program was not designed to be a safety net in guarding against food insecurity or hunger, but the purpose of WIC requirements is to

ensure that authorized retailers have enough consistency, variety, and depth of stock to accommodate the needs of program beneficiaries (Pelletier, Schreiber, & Laska, 2017). The WIC program was created to play more of a dietary role to help ensure the sustainable health of qualified mothers.

There are benefits of the WIC program. The WIC program has been beneficial in that it has advocated the nutritional needs of the welfare participants along with lowering infant mortality, reduced prematurity, and reduced low birth weight deliveries (Schwartz, Just, Chriqui, & Ammerman, 2017). In Mississippi, a research study was conducted where data indicated that slightly more than half (52.2%) of white women participated in WIC during pregnancy while the majority (82.1%) of black women participated in WIC during pregnancy (Marshall, Gavin, Bish, Winter, Williams, 2013). Ultimately, the WIC program does not do much to move recipients out of poverty, but more so provides as an encouragement to get mothers to breastfeed for child nutritional needs.

Skill – based Training

The TANF program of Mississippi is the monthly cash assistance program that aids and supports families that are impoverished and have children under the age of 18. The design of the TANF program is to eliminate the dependency cycle by assisting needy families to achieve self – sufficiency through making participants employable and training programs provided by the TANF Work Program (TWP). The TWP helps participants with job readiness training, job skills training, vocational training, and other educational training programs to become marketable in today’s job market (MDHS,

2019). However, Mississippi has a long way to go with moving recipients into marketability despite its efforts.

The SNAP program was established to provide monthly food benefits to participants. The residents in Mississippi overcome by food insecurity are encouraged to join the program that is designed to help ensure that participant nutritional needs are met. As a part of the SNAP program, the Skills2Work initiative was established to help participants prepare for in – demand jobs and become employed (MDHS, 2019). Literature is extremely limited concerning the specific skills offered through the initiative.

Cognitive Training

The cognitive training component is an important aspect of the research and the development of welfare recipients. There is evidence that cognitive training does have a positive effect on the cognitive development and the preservation and enhancement of the cognitive function is correlated with a healthier lifestyle and greater well – being (Bures, Cech, Mikulecka, Ponce, Kuca, 2016). The poverty epidemic can be linked to the mental and physical well – being of families based on observable disadvantage (Esposito, Delaye, Chabot, Trocme, & Rothwell, 2017). With that being stated, there is no existing literature on cognitive training models in the state of Mississippi welfare system.

Gaps in Research

There is a need in the welfare community to research, analyze, and thoroughly collect data information of welfare models and systems throughout history to aid welfare policymakers in creating, establishing, and implementing policies and programs to

address the dependency cycle. The lack of welfare policies and programs in the United States that translate to producing sustainable lives economically and holistically has caused the nation to become anomalous even within the context of the liberal welfare regime (Beland & Waddan, 2017). The thorough analysis of policies and programs within the welfare system might allow policymakers to consider more carefully the welfare approaches that ineffectively empower recipients with enough advantage holistically to be self – sufficient.

Universally, to transition participants, welfare systems have solely focused on moving recipients from welfare to work. Therefore, literature reviews and studies have only been able to highlight skills implemented within systems that only partially equip participants with skills for some type of employment even if employment opportunities are low wage opportunities. The gap within the welfare system structure of being ill – equipped to handle the capacity of holistic economic empowerment has left the dilemma of perpetual cycles of dependency where welfare has been a revolving door (Williams, 2017). Consequently, the research findings on welfare dependency negatively impacts policymakers from making the necessary reforms to remove the barriers that hinder self – sufficiency.

The gaps identified from this study insinuated that there is still overwhelming work that needs to be done to implement empowerment models into welfare reform system processes. The review of literature has summarized the intent of this research study to help discover and implement models within welfare that will improve the system to help eliminate dependency and move participants into autonomy.

Within the literature review, significant gaps were identified that hindered economic success and autonomy such as the lack of skill – based, cognitive training and policies that facilitate poverty and encourage disparity. Welfare recipients’ dependency barriers were also identified in the literature review. The barriers to live autonomous lives from government support have aided the welfare recidivism epidemic where recipients remain at or below the poverty line after the departure of welfare assistance. The literature review will show that reform is needed with welfare policies and programs that empower recipients holistically that will enhance recipients lived experiences and encourage self – sufficiency that will promote positive social change.

Summary

There has been a challenge within the welfare system nationally and internationally to transition welfare recipients from dependency to autonomy. Policies and programs implemented within the welfare system have not sufficed in creating autonomy but have furthered the poverty epidemic by becoming a revolving door for recipients to return to dependency even after leaving. Thus, policies and programs that only make recipients employable have not been enough to eliminate dependency and needs to be further examined. New categories within the welfare to work model have been suggested to better understand and diagnose the variations that have been made and to help identify the characteristics that are most beneficial for welfare recipient’s long term success (Purser & Hennigan, 2018). Thus, the social democratic welfare model needs to be altered; this must be manifested in the increased implementation of reformed welfare to work policies (Boulus – Rodje, 2019). Policymakers and economists have

validated concerns that current welfare to work policies and programs hinder the long-term economic success of recipients.

Lack of policies and programs within the welfare system that empower recipients holistically have contributed to the dependency problem. With that, a thorough review not only skill – based policies, but cognitive policies within welfare needs to be scrutinized in order to provide policymakers the information in order to create the models that lead to a pathway out of poverty. The success of addressing the gaps within research to create and implement skill – based and cognitive models that lead to a pathway out of poverty lies with the reform and redesign of policies and programs that empower recipients holistically. Unfortunately, information especially dealing with cognitive practices with TANF is limited.

Chapter 3 involves the focus and approach to the study and the research methodology of the study. Not only is the method of the study acknowledged, the explanation of the research design was also described. Also, the role of the researcher and the relevance or justification of the research was provided along with the instrumentation, recruitment procedures, how the researcher selected participants, and data analysis plan. The conclusion of Chapter 3 ended with the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter 3

Introduction

A review of the literature indicated the importance of exploring and implementing new approaches to existing welfare policies and programs that help to eliminate dependency and successfully move individuals out of poverty. Policymakers can enhance the empowerment of recipients economically by implementing platforms based on the experience of TANF participants. The purpose of this study was to conduct a comparative analysis of two administrations, namely the Obama and Trump administrations, concerning welfare policies. The findings of this study may help inform policymakers on how to strengthen welfare reform in the United States. With that, my intention for the study was to explore the lived experiences of TANF welfare recipients in a Southern state during the Obama and Trump administrations and to examine how TANF welfare policies and training programs contribute to the empowerment of recipients cognitively and skill-based.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. I also discussed issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures. The chapter concluded with a synopsis.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Design

This study employed an exploratory descriptive phenomenological research design that allowed participants to express lived experiences of the affects of TANF

welfare policies and programs in leading to a pathway out of poverty. The descriptive phenomenological design seeks to describe a phenomenon by focusing on what is present in the data and ultimately provides a rich, detailed account of the findings (Soule & Freeman, 2019). Additionally, accurate phenomenological analyses of the descriptions provided by the subjects of experienced situations enhance the essence of the study (Soule & Freeman, 2019). Therefore, the study focused on participant's welfare lived experiences as I sought to explore the current welfare phenomenon.

A probing and comprehensive list of 19 open-ended questions (see Appendix B) were asked to participants to assist in developing and completing the qualitative study. The phenomenological research design is important to help understand human factors and human perceptions involved in an experience, whereas other methods only present a partial view of human experience (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). Therefore, this study attempted to enhance the understanding of TANF welfare participants who are dependent upon programs and policies to live and how welfare support has impacted the lives of participant's skill-based and cognitively leading to autonomy. An ethnographic research design was also considered to utilize in the study but was not selected due to the amount of time it takes to effectively implement. This study addressed the following research question that reflected the affects of TANF programs and policies on participant holistic development and the welfare reform efforts between the Obama and Trump administration eras.

Research Questions

The intent of this study was to explore the lived experiences of TANF welfare recipients in a Southern state during the Obama and Trump administrations and to examine how the Southern state TANF welfare policies and training programs contribute to the empowerment of recipients cognitively and skill-based.

The following question framed the research study:

1. RQ1: In what ways, if any, have the Obama and Trump administration TANF policies and programs influenced the lived experiences of TANF recipients related to cognitive preparedness and skill-based training as a pathway out of poverty leading to lasting economic success?

As opposed to the qualitative research design that was used for my study, a quantitative research design method was not feasible for this study. A quantitative research design method does not allow the experiences of participants to be acknowledged. Quantitative research studies utilize standardized questionnaires or even experiments to collect numeric data, whereas qualitative studies address the social aspect of research (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). Due to the intent of the study, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was the ideal approach to capture the true impact of welfare capacities and the genuine experiences of welfare participants.

Research Tradition

The qualitative research design involves integrity and a depth as it relates to its exploratory nature in the research process. Thus, qualitative research is an appropriate method in research as researchers' study the lived experiences of individuals while attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, events or situations relating to the in – depth

meanings people bring to them (Fan – Ko, Long, Chun – Ying, Hui – Man, & Yu – Chieh, 2018). The qualitative research method is significant in that one of the unique features is it locates the observer in the world and acknowledges that there is a relationship between the researcher and the researched (Roger, Bone, Heinonen, Schwartz, & Slater, 2018). It is the qualitative research method that unlocks a deeper understanding of situations, circumstances, and experiences through complex and detailed examination.

Real life experiences are an essential component to a research study as participant transparency contributes to the validity and the reliability of the study. The qualitative research method recognizes the natural contexts in which individuals or groups function with an aim to provide a comprehensive view of real – word situations (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). With that, there are several qualitative designs that ground the qualitative method, namely: ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, case studies, and narrative research (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). The phenomenological research design, in specific, is a well – known and well – used tradition designed to understand to holistic (wholesome) usefulness of a phenomenological research study in order to make a strong and informed determination of what is called the ‘meaning unit’ (Alase, 2017). The ‘meaning unit’ helps transform and transfer the lived experiences of the research participants into a sensitive psychological expression, so that these experiences can be written in a more reflective and descriptive manner (Alase, 2017). In my study, I used the descriptive phenomenological research design approach to gather data that examined

the lived experiences of adult men and women welfare recipient's dependent upon the welfare TANF program during the Obama and Trump administration eras.

Rationale

There is a growing concern for studying the poverty phenomenon and welfare support; thus, the proposed qualitative study is warranted. One important asset of the qualitative research method is, the involvement of interviews and questionnaires that enhance the study by revealing deeper qualities of each participant's experiences that are exploratory and evolutionary; thus, a quantitative methodology is not applicable in this case (Cruz & Tantia, 2017).

The phenomenological qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gain healthy insights into how recipients experienced policies and programs and how strong the system is in transitioning recipients from welfare to work. Also, this phenomenological approach assisted in analyzing the effects of current TANF welfare programs and policies on men and women recipients as it relates to long – term success. Overall, the approach allowed the researcher to delve into the holistic experience of how welfare policies and programs empower recipients with the skills and the cognitive ability to be self – sustained.

Role of the researcher

My role in this study was to evaluate the welfare training and policy process and to explore the lived experiences of welfare participants to understand systematic welfare processes. In qualitative studies, the role of the researcher is to conduct a thorough and effective research study by critically examining his or her role in the research process and

to consider how biases and decisions may negatively affect the overall research study (Orange, 2016). Through observation and reflection of the welfare system and participant stories, I was able to considerably interpret research findings that lead to a more effective welfare approach in terms of policies and programs.

My role was to gain the necessary insight into the system and the lives of participants. I had no prior personal or professional relationships with any participants that were involved in this research study. Also, I did not mislead any participant in order to gain information but used an open-ended, validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) to collect data.

My role as a researcher to conduct interviews with participants was a very important aspect of the study, being that the research study was qualitative. The essence of open-ended interview questions is to be sure that the range of salient items and themes are covered until saturation is reached (Weller et al., 2018). I framed and modified the validated research questionnaire (see Appendix B) in such a way that primarily focused on the direct impact of TANF welfare policies and programs on recipients from their experiences, which eliminated any biases while engaging in the interview process with participants. Also, I was prepared to interview with an audio device while providing a conducive, comfortable atmosphere that incited participant transparency.

Ethical issues were considered within the research process that had the potential to be a conflict of interest concern. I had lived experiences with the welfare program in a Southern state for an extended period of time by being a part of the WIC program. With that, I have gained some insight into welfare system processes and how it affects welfare

recipients. However, the insight gained from my experience with welfare was not implemented within the research study to help eliminate bias, and there was no prior relationship between research participants. It is the responsibility of qualitative researchers to make deliberate methodological choices to acknowledge, account for, and approach researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I followed the proper protocol and the ethical standards that were established by the committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Methodology

I used qualitative method and a descriptive phenomenological research design for the study. The qualitative method was utilized in this study to examine the impact of TANF welfare policies and programs to help eliminate dependency and provide a pathway out of poverty. Additionally, I utilized the phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of TANF recipients and how policies and programs affected participants holistically.

Participation Selection Logic

The population for the proposed study was pooled from participants located in a southern state. A purposive, homogenous sampling method was used to select six to 10 men and women TANF welfare participants from a southern state. Sampling in qualitative research is key to addressing generalizability and is a technique that is appropriate to ensure the collection of rich data to understand the phenomenon that is being studied (Astroth & Chung, 2018). A purposive, homogenous sampling technique was used to handpick the sample for interviewing as it is a method that utilizes the

researcher's judgment to intentionally select participants that are considered to be experienced with the subject matter (What's in a Sample, 2019). The purposive sampling technique allowed freedom to select participants at his or her discretion based on participants' TANF welfare experience.

The criteria for participant selection included six to 10 men and women welfare recipients who were currently receiving TANF benefits, who have been receiving benefits within the Obama or Trump administration eras, and who resided in a southern state. In the selection process upon IRB approval, I utilized social media platforms to post invitation letters for the identification and selection of participants who were willing to participate in the study. Then, I commenced in conducting the semi-structured interview process exploring the lived experiences of the desired population.

Statistics state that a southern city has an above average of residents that are below the poverty line compared to the state is 27.2% (Welfare Info, 2018). The number of participants involved in the study was six adult women TANF recipients. The recommended number of six to 10 participants mentioned for a phenomenological study assisted in reaching saturation in the study.

The study involved using social media platforms such as Facebook to help identify TANF welfare participants that qualified for the research study. Once approved by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I inserted the IRB number. I also set up interview dates and times to interview willing participants. The purposive, homogenous sampling approach was ideal in the selection of participants.

The information collected from the participants through the interview process helped to reach data saturation. Due to the vast array of welfare services provided, only recipients who were dependent on the TANF welfare program during the Obama and Trump administration eras was considered to participate in the research study. The selection of the recommended number of participants helped to generate saturation to produce a robust and quality study.

Instrumentation

Interviews are one of the most used instruments for collecting data to gain depth into the phenomenon and to help avoid gathering shallow amounts of data from larger numbers of people (Burkholder, Cox, & Crawford, 2016). This study included a modified, validated interview questionnaire based on author approval (see Appendix B) that was composed of open-ended questions. During the interview process, participants were asked to respond to the prequalifying questions (see Appendix D) before being able to participate in the semi-formal interview. The primary data collection technique was face-to-face interviews, however, as a secondary data collection plan the researcher replaced face-to-face contact with email and telephone interviews. Face – to –face interviewing is advantageous in that an interviewer can create comfortable environments that build rapport and motivate respondents to answer conscientiously and disclose sensitive information that might not be shared in any other environment (Schober, 2018). However, a disadvantage of face – to – face interviewing is that interviewers must navigate respondents' (and their own) concerns about physical safety and potentially, the social awkwardness of probing about embarrassing opinions and behaviors (Schober,

2018). Furthermore, employing online research interviewing has been found to be useful for encouraging the participation of groups that are hidden, hard to reach and /or vulnerable (Neville, Adams, & Cook, 2016). A disadvantage of Internet interviewing can be the possibility of discomfort and the lack of genuine social connection between the interviewer and participant.

An approved, modified, validated interview questionnaire was utilized (see Appendix B) from a published, Walden University research study. The validated interview questionnaire was a researcher developed questionnaire and was used on the author's study. The research study questionnaire was developed by Dr. Valenta Nichols and was published in November 2018. The instrument was used on existing welfare recipients in Shelby County, Tennessee. The researcher study involved an exploratory, phenomenological qualitative method that was intended to understand welfare recipients' viewpoints on socioeconomic barriers to living self-sufficiently instead of being dependent on government assistance. The instrument used for the study was appropriate for my study in that the natures of both studies were similar in the context of exploring a pathway out of poverty through welfare. Also, the instrument was modeled in such a way that assisted me to thoroughly explore the impact of TANF welfare policies and programs on welfare recipients. However, the instrument was modified to help address specific areas of welfare impact on recipients such as cognitive development.

The modified, validated interview questionnaire consisted of a total of 19 open-ended interview questions (see Appendix B). The interview process was framed with questions that acknowledged welfare preparation for lasting economic success both skill-

based and cognitively. Also, secondary data from government agencies and Public Policy and Administration databases from Walden University, including the National Bureau of Economic Research, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the US Department of Health and Human Services databases, were collected and utilized along with other reliable government websites to conduct the research. A modified, validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) with recipients further developed an understanding of welfare system policies and programs and their impact on recipients. This approach was strategic in helping to address the lack in literature as it relates to the role of cognitive preparation as needed to help determine whether it reduces poverty and enhances productivity and sustainability (Dalton, Jimenez, & Noussair, 2017). Furthermore, the validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) confirmed construct validity and reliability.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The targeted population sample for the research study was six to 10 adult men and women TANF recipients between the ages of 18 - 35 years of age located in a southern state dependent upon welfare during the Obama and Trump administration eras. In a phenomenological research tradition, researchers suggest that qualitative interviewers should conduct a minimum of ten interviews and then check for data saturation (Francis, Johnson, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles, & Grimshaw, 2010). However, six to 10 individuals are the recommended number of participants for phenomenological studies (Hagaman & Wutich, 2017). Data was collected through a validated, semi-formal interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) that explored the experiences of TANF's

impact on participants. Also, secondary data was utilized as a data collection strategy from government resources and databases that aided in the retrieval of pertinent information. The researcher engaged in the data collection process by creating an IRB approved invitation letter utilizing the social media marketing platform to attract participants that were willing to be interviewed for the research study. Researcher contact information was provided for any willing participants that were interested in taking part. Also, the criteria for research participants was included in the advertising material to clarify participant interest.

Participants with low income and middle – class backgrounds were selected from a southern city, an above-average impoverished city as compared to the rest of the cities in the southern state. TANF welfare recipients were verified using a prequalified questionnaire (see Appendix D) that helped determine whether participants were TANF program participants and were currently involved in the TANF welfare program. Also, the pre-qualifying questionnaire (see Appendix D) helped determine if the participants were involved in the TANF welfare program during the Obama or Trump administrative eras or both. This assisted in maximizing the intent of the study to conduct a comparative analysis between the two administration eras about effective programs, policies, and strategies.

For recruitment purposes, the researcher utilized the homogenous, purposive sampling method towards participants who were willing to be interviewed and who met the specified criteria (see Appendix D). Furthermore, the researcher dates and times of interview options was communicated to willing and eligible participants via email, social

media platforms, such as messenger, or telephone at their convenience. Interviews consisted of 45 minutes to one-hour meetings at the agreed-upon date and time. The data collection technique was a secondary data collection plan involving email and telephone. Participants were sent via email consent forms (see Appendix A) on the specific date of the agreed-upon interview meeting. Data from the interview process was recorded using a digital audio recording device with notes being translated onto a personal computer after the interview session for those who interviewed over the phone. If too few participants responded, strategic efforts were made to intensify efforts of recruitment through other social media or online platform options.

The researcher thoroughly explained the confidentiality of the interview process and how data was exclusively used for research purposes, to debrief participants. Names and personal information were confidential for participant privacy and safety.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was an essential component, especially to this study, as data collected revealed the lived experiences of welfare participants and how they are affected by the system. Thus, the researcher utilized a modified validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) to capture the essence of current TANF welfare participants' lived experiences and to help establish research validity. The validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) was modified in such a way that utilized an epistemological approach to analyze how TANF welfare programs and policies have impacted participant's skill-based and cognitively leading to lasting economic success. Thus, participant experiences through the qualitative interview process provided a secondary lens that ultimately

maintains the validity of the researcher's accounts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Also, for purposes of interview integrity, an audio recording device was used to collect data for those who interviewed via phone. Furthermore, multiple units of analysis were used for my phenomenological study to help develop consistent patterns of data in the research (Patton, 2002).

Coding was necessary and vital component of the qualitative research study. Coding is an interpretive, heuristic, and exploratory process where a problem – solving process is required, and a synthesis of the data (Rogers, 2018). In the coding process, epistemological questions were used by the researcher to develop an enhanced understanding and meaning of the phenomenon of interest (Saldana, 2016). Thus, the research question aligned with the research design.

Content analysis was facilitated through coded interview questions used in a Welfare self – sufficiency study, and a modified, interview questionnaire (see Appendix B). Furthermore, modified, validated questions (see Appendix B) addressed to the participants in the interview process contributed to reaching data saturation. The concept of data saturation involves reaching a point in the research at which no new information or themes are observed in the data from the completion of additional interviews or cases (Boddy, 2016). With that, data used from Nichols (2019) assisted in helping to confirm or contradict qualitative data collected from participants as a means of data triangulation.

Transcripts were manually coded to organize the data collected utilizing Microsoft Word. The researcher also identified any recurring and significant data

collected from interviews and placed them in specific categories to help determine similarities among data and any irrelevance. Furthermore, qualitative interviews were transcribed (see Appendix B) verbatim and used the NVivo software also for data transcription. The NVivo software made the coding process less strenuous and effective as it automatically pulled together all the data that was coded and also made the use of codes to identify data that was relevant to any given question in the study (Elliot, 2018). The software provided the assistance needed to enhance the coding process by helping to categorize, organize, and interpret data into themes and patterns.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness enhances the understanding of research findings as well as the interpretation and enables others to establish a level of confidence in research quality (Daniel, 2018). Furthermore, it is imperative for the researcher to acknowledge personal biases and that qualitative research outcomes are subject to multiple realities in order to achieve trustworthiness (Daniel, 2018). The trustworthiness of a research study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Connelly, 2016). Moreover, debates have been waged in the literature as to what constitutes trustworthiness as researcher criteria include credibility, dependability, confirmability, transferability, and authenticity (Connelly, 2016).

Dependability refers to the stability or the consistency of the research process, while confirmability verifies that the findings stand impervious to the researcher's characteristics, biases or assumptions (Langtree, Birks, & Biedermann, 2019).

Credibility is the confidence that the research findings are a truthful representation, while transferability determines whether the findings are potentially applicable to another individual, group, time, context, or setting (Langtree et al., 2019). Authenticity refers to the qualities of genuineness, sincerity, truth, and reality (Tran & Keng, 2018).

To accommodate the qualitative researcher criteria as it relates to trustworthiness, a qualitative data software program was utilized to help organize the data for dependability. Also, an audio recording device was used for interviews to record and store data. For research credibility, the researcher utilized interview transcriptions to confirm with the interviewee that the data was correct and aligned with participant lived experiences. Thus, the researcher conducted a 10 – 15-minute phone call with participants for summary of study results. Researcher biases and assumptions within the research study were addressed by excluding personal welfare experiences to maximize confirmability. Focusing on the impact of TANF welfare on recipients and experiences as a result of the impact through the qualitative interview process addressed transferability. Furthermore, the data analysis process yielded the appropriate amount of descriptions that ensured transferability along with study results that provided a basis for future studies to be conducted.

Ethical Procedures

In order to move forward with research data collection, the study was approved by the committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is an administrative body that is comprised of diverse members established to protect human subjects' rights and interests through three written procedural requirements before research can

commence (Azim, 2018). With that, informed consent of human subjects is a very important piece of document that requires that researchers provide sufficient opportunity for participants to decide without coercion or undue influence whether to participate in a research study (Azim, 2018).

After the approval of the committee and IRB, the researcher engaged in the recruitment of participants through advertisement measures such as invitation letters on social media platforms to identify potential subjects willing and qualified for participation in the research study. For safety purposes, each participant was given a false name to protect identity through confidentiality. Being that the research is voluntary – based, the researcher ensured that each participant had the choice to complete the research interview process or discontinue if they did not feel comfortable without condemnation of any sort.

The researcher utilized a modified, validated interview questionnaire (see Appendix B) consisting of open-ended questions to explore the lived experiences of research participants. The researcher also engaged in follow-ups via a telephone call to help ensure clarity and direction moving forward as it relates to the study. Each willing participant who met the criteria for the study had the opportunity to call, message, or email the researcher to express interest in the interview process. Once the willing participant responded, the researcher sent out dates and times to the participants that were convenient for them with a confirmation upon agreement. The researcher interviewed participants via phone for less than 45 minutes on the agreed-upon date and transcribed interviews within 48 – 72 hours. Consent forms (see Appendix A) were given to

participants on the day of agreed-upon meeting. Follow – up meetings transpired via telephone. Finally, the researcher manually coded data collected from the interviews utilizing the Microsoft Word platform and, when necessary, uploaded all data on the computer to the NVivo software for transcription and organization.

Summary

The researcher used a phenomenological, qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of men and women TANF recipients during the Obama and Trump administration eras. For a sample population, six to 10 TANF recipients from a southern state were selected for the research study. The researcher engaged in the recruitment of participants through an approved invitation letter by utilizing social media platforms, specifically Facebook. For research participation, participant complied with criteria: must be TANF welfare recipients, reside in a southern state, must be recipients during the Obama or Trump administration eras. Also, prior to the interview on the day of the meeting, research participants signed a consent form of which participants were informed concerning the study. Upon consent, six to 10 participants were interviewed via phone and email, along with a follow – up of the progress of the study that lasted 10 - 15 minutes via telephone.

The researcher used NVivo to transcribe and organize data when necessary. Also, to help ensure trustworthiness in the study, the researcher maximized all criteria for the qualitative study, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. The researcher also complied with all ethical procedures as required by the IRB to ensure the safety and confidentiality of participants. To do this, the researcher utilized consent

forms for voluntary participation and initiated false names to participants to secure identity and confidentiality.

Chapter 3 presented the reasoning of using a phenomenological, qualitative study. Also, data information about the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, research methodology, research participants, instrumentation, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures were presented. In Chapter 4, the researcher presents research findings. The researcher concludes with a synopsis.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Government welfare has created and utilized a system to aid individuals and families with the objective of successfully addressing dependency and successfully transitioning recipients into the workforce. Previous research has identified that welfare assistance does not successfully attain its objective of leading families out of dependency and needs a more comprehensive analysis and study to examine its processes. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of TANF welfare recipients that would assist in determining policies, strategies, and trainings that will provide the best pathways out of poverty. This chapter contains the results of the phenomenological qualitative study conducted to answer the research question: In what ways, if any, have the Obama and Trump administration TANF policies and programs influenced the lived experiences of TANF recipients related to cognitive preparedness and skill based training as a pathway out of poverty leading to lasting economic success?

In this chapter, the results of this phenomenological qualitative study will be presented. The human capital theory was utilized as the theoretical framework. This chapter discusses the research setting, participant demographics, data collection and analysis procedures. Included is evidence of trustworthiness and the results that reflect the interpretation stages of this study.

Research Setting

The primary data collection technique for this study utilized face-to-face interviewing, however, as a secondary data collection plan telephonic interviews and email correspondence replaced face – to – face contact due to the advent of the COVID - 19 pandemic. It was determined that conducting telephonic interviews or corresponding via email was the safest and most convenient option for both participant and the researcher. Interviews were conducted telephonically with two of the research participants. The phone used in the interview included an audio recording software that provided safety and security to protect participant confidentiality. The last of the four research participants opted to do interviews through email. Participants agreeing to conduct interviews through email were sent a prequalifying questionnaire and consent form via email along with the interview questions. Participants were encouraged to completely answer all questions as honestly and as transparent as possible. A 10-minute follow – up was conducted telephonically with each interview participant for any questions and concerns that they might have had. Conducting interviews via email versus telephonically was more challenging because visual and social cues were not available and participants' tone and voice could not be determined. Finally, the COVID - 19 pandemic may have played a significant role in the data collection process and results as participants may have directly or indirectly suffered from this universal traumatic experience.

Demographics

Six participants were interviewed for this study. Female TANF recipients between the ages of 18 – 35 dependent upon welfare during the Obama and Trump administration eras represented the study. Table 1 provides a breakdown of demographic data for each of the participants that were involved in the study. It reveals the (a) alias of population involved; (b) gender; (c) age. 18 – 35; (d) highest level of education; (e) ethnicity; (f) approximate income level. The following demographic questions were presented to research participants during the interview process:

- What is your gender?
- What is your current age?
- What racial or ethnic group do you belong to?
- What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- What is your approximate current income level? (yearly)

The demographic information was necessary to help determine whether participants represented the chosen sample for my study. Furthermore, the information allowed the proper analysis of how the welfare system affects or not the participants that are within the scope of the demographic preference. Aliases were given to participants to protect confidentiality.

Table 1

Breakdown of Participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Highest level of Education	Ethnicity	Approximate income level
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Suzy	Female	31	High School	White, non - Hispanic	\$21,000 - \$30,000
Betsy	Female	29	High School	African American	Less than \$20,000
Lula	Female	25	High School	African American	Less than \$20,000
Lucy	Female	35	High School	African American	Unemployed
Rita	Female	34	High School	African American	Less than \$20,000
Lala	Female	32	B.S. Degree	African American	Unemployed

Data Collection

The data collection process included a modified, validated interview questionnaire based on author approval that was composed of 19 open – ended questions. The interviews were presented in two forms: telephonic interviews and email. Telephonic interviews lasted between 18 – 22 minutes per participant and was recorded using voice recorder. Four participants were interviewed via email correspondence. A prequalifying questionnaire, consent form, and the interview questions were sent to participants. The data collection process took six (6) weeks to complete.

Unusual and unpredictable circumstances were encountered during the data collection process that provided challenges during the process. Due to the COVID – 19 pandemic, variations within the data collection process were inevitable. Data collection techniques were altered from face – to – face interviews to conducting interviews through techniques such as telephone and email to protect researcher and participant safety.

Data Analysis

NVivo 12 was utilized to transcribe audio files from telephone interviews. Email interviews were also transcribed manually. After transcribing interview documents line by line and reading transcriptions multiple times, the coding process began to determine unique patterns and consistencies within the data. The coding process in qualitative inquiry often involves a word or a short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence – capturing and / or evocative attribute for a portion of language – based or visual data (Saldana, 2016). The coding process allowed me to develop categories and themes within the data that helped to answer the research question.

For the data analysis process, the traditional technique of manual coding to analyze the data was utilized. Saldana (2016) recommended that for researchers who are analyzing for the first – time or conducting small – scale studies, it is ideal to code on hard – copy printouts first, not via a computer monitor. This technique allowed me to engage in critical analysis with the data and gain a level of control. The In Vivo coding technique was applied which allowed me to prioritize and honor the voice of the participant. The In Vivo coding technique allows the researcher to draw from the words of the participants themselves allowing the researcher to capture the true meanings inherent in participant experiences (Saldana, 2016). By using the In Vivo technique to collate data, the researcher was able to identify words, statements, and sentences that were closely related and developed them into categories and themes. The researcher grouped words, statements, and sentences from each interview that were related to the same concept or idea into categories to identify any patterns. The categories were then

translated into themes that were relevant to addressing the research question. For example, the researcher developed a list of codes from a participant who is a current TANF recipient such as, “more personal interaction,” “I had no one to help support me,” “very little personal involvement,” “personal interaction is non – existent,” “they can be more personal.” The researcher categorized these group of codes as “relational concerns,” which was then translated into the theme, “Lack of Personal Involvement.” This was a common theme found among participants throughout the analysis process.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To ensure credibility, the researcher was able to debrief with research participants for 10 – 15 minutes for a summary of study results. Also, with the changes of interview techniques due to COVID – 19 to email and phone interview, participants were able to retrieve a copy of the interview questions and answers for their own personal records.

Transferability

To ensure transferability, the data analysis process yielded the exact amount of descriptions that ensured transferability along with study results that provided a basis for future studies to be conducted. Each step in the data collection process was detailed and clarity was ensured to confirm data reliability as a reference for future researchers.

Dependability

To ensure dependability, the researcher ensured thorough and critical review of the data collected from the participants through the interview process. The critical

analysis of the data through manually coding line by line revealed the true intention for exploring the data to come up with dependable results.

Confirmability

To guarantee confirmability, researcher biases and assumptions within the research study were addressed by excluding personal welfare experiences to maximize confirmability. Ensuring the objectivity of the research questions was a focus so that responses obtained from participant lived experiences did not have a perceived outcome of the researcher. The researcher ensured that the data collection process was clear and detailed and ensured the organization of all documents related to the interview process.

Results

This section included a phenomenological qualitative study to examine the impact of TANF welfare policies and programs to help eliminate dependency and provide a pathway out of poverty. Six TANF recipients responded to the request to participate. The participants were interviewed as outlined in Chapter 3 and the responses generated codes and themes that translated into determining results. All participant interview responses, whether through telephone recordings or email, were transcribed and the data presented evidence for the identifying of codes and themes.

The research question that drove the study are as follows: In what ways, if any, have Obama and Trump administration TANF policies and programs influenced the lived experiences of TANF recipients related to cognitive preparedness and skill based training as a pathway out of poverty leading to lasting economic success? A modified, validated interview questionnaire composed of 19 open – ended questions were used to collect data

to address the research question. Below are the emergent themes that were discovered through the data from participant interviews:

Theme 1: Lack of Personal Involvement

The first theme that emerged from interview questions that focused on participants experiences with the TANF program and barriers that prevent TANF recipients from obtaining high – wage employment and lasting economic success. The data that this theme emerged from were discovered from interview questions such as:

- Explain your personal experience with the TANF program?
- Are there any barriers within the TANF program, either skill – based or cognitively, preventing you from seeking high – wage employment?

Such interview questions focus on the effectiveness of the TANF program and how it may lead to a pathway out of poverty towards autonomy. Interviewee 1 emphasized that “personal interaction with welfare employees were pretty much non – existent.” There were two interviewees that expressed the TANF program does not do much to prepare you to go further. Interviewee 6 stated that TANF welfare workers “do not empathize with recipients and treat us as if we just want a handout or portray us as lazy.” Table 2 illustrates the quotes from participants that support the theme “Lack of Personal Involvement.”

Table 2

Theme 1: Lack of Personal Involvement

Codes	Number of Frequent Occurrences
“They are not really personal”	6
“The welfare process is very systematic”	4

“The system is overloaded”	1
“There is not really anything to help”	3
“A blessing in disguise and helpful”	3
“TANF program is not a good experience”	3
“They do not give much”	2
“The TANF program has a lot of control through rules and restrictions”	1
“Case workers treat us as if we just want a handout and portray us as lazy. They are very insensitive”	1

Theme 2: Lack of Effective System Processes

The second theme emerged as a response to interview questions that focused on factors that hinder the potentials to overcome welfare dependency and that keep TANF recipients subject to poverty. According to the data collected from participant interviews, barriers to overcome welfare dependency emerged as a major theme and as a byproduct of why TANF recipients seldom reach the end goal of lasting economic success. The responses of participants centered around questions that highlighted welfare dependency barriers provided information concerning the ineptitude and the incompetence’s of the welfare system. Interview responses covered a range of factors such as “the system is not designed to further you” and “the system is just to sustain you.” This was data collected from interviewee 1. Interviewee 1 also stated that “the system is not adaptive to single mothers” and there is not a whole lot in reference to childcare.” Other responses from interviewees ranged from “the TANF system keeps you needing to be dependent on them” to “there is not enough personal one on one help.” Also, the demographic data revealed that 83.3% of the study participants only obtained a high school diploma revealing the limited education as a barrier to exiting welfare long term. Table 3

describes the participant responses that hinder participants from overcoming welfare dependency and becoming economically independent.

Table 3

Theme 2: Lack of Effective System Processes

Codes	Number of Frequent Occurrences
“TANF welfare employees are not hands on “	5
“There is no process that helps me to find something better or to work at getting me out of this”	5
“The TANF system does not have a lot in reference to childcare”	3
“There are no barriers that I know of”	3
“The TANF program is lacking in resources that allow me to further myself”	2

Theme 3: Lack of Holistic, Skill-Based and Cognitive, Empowerment

The final theme that emerged from participant data is holistic welfare transformation / empowerment. A thorough analysis of data collected highlighted how TANF policies and programs empowered, or not, TANF recipients as a pathway out of poverty. Participant responses to questions that were centered around TANF empowerment, both skill – based and cognitive, demonstrated how the program prepares TANF recipients to achieve independency and lasting economic success. Interview questions that alluded to the skill – based and cognitive empowerment revealed such responses as “I don’t think that TANF welfare is accomplishing skill – based and

cognitive empowerment.” Interviewees also stated, “that the TANF program should have different programs with companies to help train and bring in employees.” Also, “the TANF program needs to take more responsibility to employ welfare recipients and to train skills instead of just making us apply for jobs a couple times a week.” Another significant response from an interviewee stated that “TANF needs to help more with colleges courses.” Table 4 reveals responses from interview participants that helped to address the research question in reference to the holistic empowerment of the TANF welfare system.

Table 4

Theme 3: Lack of Holistic, Skill-Based and Cognitive, Empowerment

Codes	Number of Frequent Occurrences
“I don’t thing that TANF welfare is accomplishing skill – based and mental empowerment”	5
“TANF welfare needs to have different programs with companies to help train and bring in employees”	4
“The TANF program should do a better job of training skills instead of just making us apply for jobs a couple times a week”	4
“The TANF program does not empower me with the skills that I need”	5
“The program does not prepare you skill wise for higher wage employment”	3
“The job placement program is not good at all” “They do not really help with job placement”	3
“The TANF program needs to improve the job training program, job placement, skills program, and adult education”	2

Summary

Research findings indicated that welfare empowerment is needed within welfare reform practices to enhance individuals and families towards lasting economic success and self – sufficiency. TANF recipient responses revealed the disempowerment of the TANF welfare program and how it has lacked in sufficiency to provide a pathway out of poverty. As a response, the MDHS must ensure its programs, policies, and operations provide an effective and efficient means to empower its recipients to meet skill – based and cognitive needs that leads to a self – sufficient lifestyle. Empowerment programs and policies within the Department of Human Services is essential to ensure the holistic stability of welfare recipients that result in positive social change and improved human welfare and wellbeing. Overall, the research revealed that the TANF welfare program does not engage in the holistic transformation / empowerment of its recipients and aids in the fostering of the poverty epidemic while disrupting a pathway out of poverty.

Chapter 5 encompasses discussions, interpretations of the findings, and limitations of the study. Also, recommendations for further research are explained along with implications addressed in Chapter 5 leading to the conclusions of the research findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to conduct a comparative analysis of two administrations, namely the Obama and Trump administrations, concerning welfare policies. Data was obtained through in – depth, semi – structured interviews. Semi – structured interviews were conducted with participants to explore the lived experiences of TANF welfare recipients that assisted to determine policies, strategies, and training that provided the best pathway out of poverty.

Results of the data from TANF participants varied about TANF welfare dependency. The qualitative study did indicate factors such as lower levels of education, lack of quality resources, lack of employment, and lack of support that led to welfare dependence and that prevented recipients from exploring a pathway out of poverty and into economic success. Furthermore, the research found that the traditional job search for employment does not suffice as an effective pathway out of poverty, but welfare assistance needed more holistic programs and trainings that lead to high – wage employment and lasting economic success. Through critical analysis of the data, a total of three themes were identified that contributed to addressing the research question namely: (a) lack of personal involvement, (b) lack of effective system processes, and (c) lack of holistic, skill-based and cognitive, empowerment. Overall, findings from this study may provide opportunities for the welfare system to reform and implement policies, programs, and trainings that target the holistic empowerment of individuals and families leading to lasting economic success.

Interpretation of the Findings

The goal of this phenomenological qualitative study was to increase the understanding of the welfare system policies, strategies, and training through the Obama and Trump administration eras to empower welfare recipients both cognitively and skill – based as a strategy to eliminate dependency. Exploring the lived experiences of welfare recipients in the TANF welfare program brought significant insight into understanding the barriers of the program. Furthermore, results of the study revealed what is further needed to strengthen the TANF program to enhance holistic individual success and productivity in society.

The demographic data of the six TANF recipients revealed that five out of the six participants obtained a high – school diploma as their highest level of academic achievement. All six of the research participants were female with five being African – American. One of the participants had an income level of approximately \$24,000/yr. and the rest of the five participants were either unemployed or had an approximate income level of \$20,000 or less a year.

In the review of literature from Chapter 2, the researcher discovered that TANF has deviated from its goal of self – sufficiency as scholars argue that current welfare policy implementation is less about helping individuals and families achieve independence and more about getting them off of welfare rolls and into any type of paid employment (Taylor, Gross, & Towne-Roese, 2016). The results of this study support those findings as welfare – to – work programs do not lead to high – wage

employment, but to minimum and low wage employment that incites welfare recidivism and poverty. Research findings are discussed below.

Research Finding # 1

Lack of personal involvement was a major theme of the study. Participant experiences were similar as it relates to how they perceived TANF policies and programs in that they were ineffective measures to a pathway out of poverty. This particular result confirmed what was revealed in the literature review in that the TANF program has fallen short of helping people enter and remain in the workforce (Boosheri, Dugan, Patel, Bloom, & Chilton, 2018). All six of the participants specifically stated that, “they are not really personal.” The responses were interesting in that they revealed the lack of the social dynamic needed to empower and develop TANF recipients into viable human resources. Thus, according to responses, it is vital for TANF workers to be involved with its clients relationally as it motivates trust and empowerment.

Research Finding # 2

Lack of TANF welfare system processes was one of the themes that emerged in relation to the research question. This particular result indicated factors that contributed to participants being stuck in a cycle of dependency that failed to transition into economic independence. The responses from the participants were clear of the lack of processes within TANF that failed to progress and enhance. Responses to questions that revealed the barriers to overcoming welfare dependency included five of the six participants alluding to the lack in TANF processes.

Specifically, one participant stated, “There is no process that helps me to find something better or to work at getting me out of this.” Another significant response stated that, “The TANF program is lacking in resources that allow me to further myself.” This finding supported the literature in chapter 2, which stated “the existence of the American welfare system in particular has been set up in such a manner that allows those depending on it to get away with working minimally, if at all, because participants do not want to lose poverty privileges and are incentivized in this direction” (Fast, et al., 2017). For participants to successfully leave the welfare system, programs and policies must be strengthened to accommodate the needed development for high – wage sustainable employment.

Research Finding # 3

The final theme that emerged within the study indicated the need for holistic empowerment within the TANF welfare program that is essential for individual economic success. Responses revealed the lack of holistic, skill – based and cognitive, empowerment within the TANF program that contributed to dependency. One participant stated that, “The TANF program should do a better job of training skills instead of just making us apply for jobs a couple times of week.” This statement clearly confirmed research found in Chapter 2 that “workfare has partially been explained in the increase of severe poverty because of the transition and participation in low paid, insecure and part – time jobs, and when there is much less cash available to the poor (Daguerre, 2017). Also, “the work requirements of the welfare system constitute a legally cognizable relic of slavery rather than a guide to

economic freedom” (Banerjee, 2018). According to responses, TANF is insufficient in preparing recipient’s skill – based and cognitively for the marketplace. The current TANF program is broken and incapable of addressing the poverty epidemic and needs the proper reparations to successfully transition its recipients into a successful economic lifestyle.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study revealed how economic empowerment is instrumental in addressing welfare dependency. The study results were aligned with the research purpose that addressed the need for the reform of policies, strategies, and training to provide the best pathway out of poverty. Also, in the context of the theoretical framework for this study which involved the human capital theory, lack of educational resources and the proper training necessary for holistic empowerment were revealed from participants ultimately stunting recipient growth and development, progress, and overall economic success.

Limitations of the Study

As stated in Chapter 1, this study had an array of limitations that addressed possible factors that provided the best pathways out of poverty through welfare dependency. One limitation referenced the comparative analysis of the Obama and Trump administrations to help determine strength of policies. Also, only the TANF welfare program was analyzed amidst the multiple welfare programs and services within government assistance. With that, the results from this study may not be generalizable to welfare recipients participating in other forms of welfare programs

or even in other locales. The participants of this study were recipients that obtain TANF assistance during the Obama and Trump administration eras and that reside in a Southern city and state.

The study was also limited to participant gender and sex. Six TANF recipients participated in the study who were all female participants. The lack of lived experiences from male participants contributed to the limitations of the study. Also, five of the participants were African – American and one of the participants was white. The lack of ethnic persuasions that participated in the study with the African – American population dominating the study provided a major limitation that influenced the results of this study.

Another major limitation that contributed to the study was the trauma of the COVID – 19 pandemic. COVID – 19 potentially affected recipient participation in the research study. The experience of the pandemic may have altered participant responses by provoking fear, trauma, panic, and safety measures that were implemented to protect themselves. As a researcher, the difficulties of the data collection process through this traumatic experience were excessive and daunting making responses limited and lacking.

Lastly, as stated in Chapter 1, limitations were also revealed to the qualitative method and the descriptive phenomenological research design through COVID – 19. Interview techniques were altered due to the pandemic. The researcher went from an original interview technique of face – to – face interviews to interviews through telephone and email. The technique alteration limited personal involvement between

the researcher and participants and participant transparency that ultimately provoked vague and limited answers preventing clarity and depth of information. Thus, the reality of participant lived experiences were impeded.

Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, there are a few recommendations for further research. The TANF welfare program puts a lot of emphasis on the welfare – to – work (workfare) program to transition recipients out of welfare as an effective means. However, research has shown that welfare recidivism remains an issue that generates the cycle of co – dependency. Therefore, critical research needs to be done specifically towards the TANF workfare program to assess its effective approach in provoking high – wage employment, not just any employment.

Also, due to the participants’ value of more personal interaction between caseworkers and recipients, it is recommended research is completed that will study the effectiveness of TANF human resources to examine the social or relational dynamic of the program in how welfare employees build relationships, interact with recipients and how recipients respond.

To further determine effectiveness of the welfare program, it is recommended that broadening the scope of research from just a single program to initiating a comparative analysis between at least two or more welfare programs to assist in determining program, policy, and training initiatives. This recommendation will potentially help determine strengths and weaknesses of programs as compared to the others and how improvements can be made through comparative analysis.

Implications

The results from this study offered us a working knowledge concerning the barriers to a pathway out of poverty and attaining self – sufficiency. Based on the results of this study, the lack of personal interaction / involvement between TANF workers and recipients were deemed as being one of the primary barriers to self – sufficiency. This reveals the program as being systematic without the empowerment dynamic that properly prepares TANF recipients with the proper skill – based and cognitive skills for personal development and lasting economic success. With that, the results of this study did implicate the importance of the reformation of TANF welfare programs and policies that strengthens empowerment mechanisms as a holistic approach to individual and economic success. Furthermore, this study did confirm that the presence of holistic empowerment (both skill – based and cognitively) as playing a vital role in an individual’s ability to transition off welfare, out of poverty into being autonomous.

Positive social change can take place when government assistance policy makers begin to recognize the importance of lasting economic success and begin to provide a more strategic and comprehensive TANF welfare program model that assists in high – wage employment and a prosperous lifestyle. This study, along with other studies, have proven the ineffectiveness and insufficiency of the “work – first” model as it only promotes the recycling of individual back into the welfare system due to low minimal wage employment. According to the results of this study, positive social change will begin with a TANF program holistic approach that

enhances individuals not just to become employable, but viable human resources in society.

Conclusion

Welfare dependency has been a cycle that has fostered as a system that has held individuals and family's victims of poverty for a long period of time. To address the issue of dependency, the government at the federal level enacted legislation in 1996 called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) as a major welfare reform to help transition families and individuals into self – sufficiency. To move individuals from welfare to work, the TANF programs was established which was purposed to be a systematic approach to make recipients employable. However, the “work – first” initiative was found to be an ineffective approach to the elimination of welfare dependency because several factors aided in the lack of preparation and empowerment to lift individuals out of poverty even while becoming employable. With that, welfare to work programs for a long time have failed to create and develop successful approaches that would enhance individuals to obtain sustainable, high – wage employment above the poverty line.

The results of this research study reveal responses that highlight the lack of a holistic approach, both skill – based and cognitive, within the program that prepared recipients for long term economic success. The participants in this study acknowledged that though the TANF program may have been helpful or beneficial, it was incompetent in the proper training of job skills and cognitive development in

order for long term success and high – wage employment. Clearly, the TANF recipients that participated in the study are looking for a more relational approach from welfare that would provide them with the commitment, empowerment, resources and confidence needed to move from being welfare statistics to productive citizens of society that are viable human resources. It was clear from participant responses that personal relationship between TANF employees and recipients mattered and was sought after. Therefore, based on study results, positive social change would first start with policymakers acknowledging that recipients are not victims, but are resources that need the proper training and empowerment to enhance their skill and cognitive ability as a pathway out of poverty and into economic success.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

“Exploring the Pathway Out of Poverty Using the Welfare System”

Dear Respondent,

You are being invited to participate in a research study about how to lead a pathway out of poverty through strengthening welfare in the United States. You were selected as a potential participant because you are a TANF welfare recipient that depends on the TANF welfare program for living assistance. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

Cadarrall A. Eddings, doctoral candidate at Walden University, will be conducting this study.

Background information:

The general problem is the lack of knowledge about how TANF welfare policies and programs impacts welfare recipients. The study will take a closer look at TANF welfare from the views of recipients.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire and to participate in a research study interview. The questionnaire will take approximately 5 minutes or less to complete. The interview will take approximately 45 – 60 minutes, which will be audio – recorded.

The interviews will be done via phone, email, videoconferencing, or other online platforms or at a local library if local regulations related to COVID 19 indicate it is safe to meet in person.

Examples of interview questions include:

- Explain your personal experience with the TANF program?
- What are your experiences regarding the Work – First Program?
- How long have you lived in this Southern state? Tell me a little about your background.

A follow – up call will be made to the participant to go over study results. The call will last 10-15 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one involved in the research process will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Also, I have an obligation to report to the proper authorities any criminal behavior or abuse that is revealed in the interview.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

There are no physical harmful risks to you but may involve minimal risks such as mental discomfort and stress. However, in case there are any mental effects, a community

counseling service will be available with a 24-hour crisis hotline. The hotline information and number is as follows:

Community Counseling Services

24-hour crisis hotline number: 888-943-3022

Community benefits may include the strengthening of TANF policies and programs that would help successfully address poverty and eliminate dependency. The researcher has no prior interactions or relationships with TANF department.

Compensation:

No payment will be provided.

Confidentiality:

Any information you provide will be kept private. Research records will be kept in a locked box; only the researcher will have access to the records. All files will be destroyed after ten years from the completion of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at Walden University at 612 – 312 – 1210. The email address is irb@mail.waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-17-20-0664100, and it expires on April 16, 2021.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below.

Printed name of Participant _____

Date of Consent _____

Participant's Signature _____

Researcher's Signature _____

Appendix B: Modified Validated Research Questionnaire

TANF Welfare Recipients Interview Questionnaire

The below questions will be used as interview questions in the research study.

The questions listed will be the bases for the study in helping to capture the lived experiences of welfare participants and the effectiveness of the TANF welfare program on participants. The questions are a modified, validated questionnaire that will explore the holistic experience of participants.

Demographic Questions

Research participant demographic information is an important part of the questionnaire.

The demographic information can assist in illuminating study findings. Your answers to the questions below are strictly voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential

1. What is your gender? Male _____ Female _____
2. What is your current age? _____
3. What racial or ethnic group do you belong to?
____ African American
____ White, non – Hispanic
____ Hispanic, non – white
____ American Indian
____ Asian American
____ Other (please specify)
4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
____ High School or GED

____ Associates Degree

____ Bachelors (4-year) degree

____ Graduate

5. What is your approximate current income level? (yearly)

____ Unemployed

____ less than \$20,000

____ \$21,000 - \$30,000

____ \$31,000 - \$40,000

____ \$40,000 +

____ I choose not to answer

Interview Questions for Existing Welfare Recipients

1. How long have you lived in this Southern state? Tell me a little about your background.
2. Do you have prior work experience? If so, what is your work experience history?
3. Are you currently employed or unemployed? Explain your current employment condition.
4. Are you currently in school or studying trade? If so, what school/trade are you enrolled in?
5. What circumstances caused you to be dependent on welfare? Explain how long you have been dependent on welfare, and when you started the welfare program.
6. What has your lived – experience been like about becoming self – sufficient?

7. Explain your personal experience with the TANF program?
8. Are there any barriers within the TANF program, either skill-based or cognitively, preventing you from leaving welfare? If so what are they?
9. Are there any barriers within the TANF program, either skill-based or cognitively, preventing you from seeking high – wage employment? If so what are they?
10. What are your thoughts about living self – sufficiently (on your own without government assistance)?
11. How has or does the TANF welfare process help you become self – sufficient?
12. What types of TANF welfare programs and / or policies are there in place that you know of through your experience?
13. How important to you as a welfare recipient, is it to have skill-based and cognitive (mental) empowerment within the welfare system? Do you think that welfare is accomplishing what you just mentioned?
14. What kind of assistance do you feel is needed in the welfare system that will help you overcome any barriers that may be preventing you from taking care of your family at home?
15. What are your experiences regarding the Work – First Program?
16. Are there any changes in the welfare processes or programs that you think would enhance welfare to prepare and position you to live on your own?
17. Does the TANF welfare program have any educational opportunities for you to further your education if you would like to? If so, explain.

18. What can the welfare program do in general that will help you and your immediate family achieves long-lasting economic success?
19. Has the welfare program influenced you in any way through your experience to someday want to live self – sufficiently?

Appendix C: Approved letter of Validated Interview Questionnaire

Permission letter written by Cadarrall Eddings on validated interview questionnaire approval on 9/2/2019

Dear Dr. Nichols,

I hope this email finds you well. Foremost, my name is Cadarrall Eddings, and I am currently a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University. My program of study is Public Policy and Administration with a specialization in Global Leadership. I am working on the proposal phase of my Dissertation study and expect my proposal to be approved within a few weeks so that I can move on to the actual research study.

My reason for writing you is to get permission from you, Dr. Valenta Nichols, in regards to utilizing your interview questionnaire for my research study. I am conducting a qualitative research study to explore a pathway out of poverty using the welfare system. I believe that your interview questionnaire, when modified, will enhance my research study. The questions will help examine the lived experiences of participants currently in welfare. With your permission to utilize and modify your questionnaire, you will help me to maximize my study through exploring experiences that will hopefully reveal the effectiveness of welfare programs and policies.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your consideration of my proposal and for your time in reading this email. Your approval will allow me to move further in my research study. Thank you and blessings Dr. Nichols.

Sincerely,

Mr. Cadarrall Eddings

PhD Candidate - Walden University

Reply by Dr. Valenta Nichols on 9/3/2019 at 10:22 AM

Approval is granted.

Dr. Valenta E. Nichols

Appendix D: Welfare Recipients Prequalifying Questions

There are certain requirements that recipients will have to meet in order to participate in the research study. They are listed below:

1. Are you currently in the TANF welfare program?
2. Were you a TANF participant during the Obama administration era (Jan. 2009 – Jan. 2017)? Yes_____ No_____
3. What is your age?
4. How long have you been on TANF welfare assistance?
5. What years specifically have you been in the TANF welfare program?
6. Are you employed?
7. Do you have Internet access?
8. Do you have an active email account?
9. Do you have any social media active accounts?
10. Face-to-face will be the preferred method for conducting the research interview.

Will you be able to meet face-to-face? Will you be willing to be transparent as possible in the interview process contingent upon interview confidentiality?

Appendix E: Invitation to Study Participation

Dear Prospective TANF welfare research participant,

My name is Cadarrall Eddings and I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase my understanding of TANF welfare policies, programs, and strategies in terms of a pathway out of poverty. I am currently a doctoral candidate at Walden University in the Public Policy and Administration Program specializing in Global Leadership. Being a TANF welfare recipient, your participation in the research study will be vital in assisting me with valuable information that will reveal the effectiveness of TANF welfare system policies and programs.

To participate in the research study, you must be:

- TANF welfare recipient between the ages of 18 – 35
- Received TANF benefits within the Obama and Trump administration eras
- Reside in a Southern state

If you qualify for and are interested in participating in the study, please contact Cadarrall Eddings. The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes of your time. Simply, I want to capture your lived experience and perspective about the TANF welfare program. Your interview will be confidential, and you will be given a false name to preserve confidentiality. There will be no compensation or incentives to participate in the research study. However, your

responses will be valuable to our research by potentially leading to a better understanding of TANF welfare system processes along with the reform of policies and programs that would help to eliminate dependency. Please do not hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cadarrall Eddings, Doctoral Candidate, Walden University

Public Policy and Administration: Global Leadership