

2019

Impact of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families on Poverty Rates in Kansas

Carla Green
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Carla Green

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Impact of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families on Poverty Rates in Kansas

by

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MA, Baker University, 2007

BS, Kansas State University, 2006

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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August 2019

Abstract

The impact of the length of time that Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty is not clear. The purpose of this qualitative study with a phenomenological design was to increase understanding of the comparative experiences of TANF recipients who reached their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of the TANF goal and second purpose. Human capital theory provided the framework for the study. Using a purposive, homogenous sampling method, 6 social service professionals were selected to participate in this study. Only social service professionals who began serving in their role prior to November 1, 2011 were considered for participation because that is the date Kansas first reduced maximum TANF eligibility from 60 months. Data were collected from questionnaires and interviews with these 6 social service professionals. Inductive coding and theme analysis indicated that TANF participation did not reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. Although the reduction in the number of lifetime TANF eligibility months resulted in TANF participants being more focused and intentional in following TANF participation guidelines, poverty persisted. Findings may be used to influence Kansas legislators to enact social service policies at the county and local levels to increase financial self-sufficiency for Kansans exiting TANF.

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Dedication

Daddy would be so proud. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Dean and Barbara Whiteside, for their unwavering support and unconditional love. To my children, Victoria (Adrian), Victor (Bianca), and Aaric (India), thank you for your patience and understanding during those many times I wasn't available. And to my amazing grandchildren, Victor, Kayden, Genesis, Maritza, Aaric, and Journee, who didn't complain much when Nani was too busy to host sleepovers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In fiscal year 2017, 16,562 Kansans (5,475 adults and 11,087 children) who had been receiving cash welfare payments through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program stopped receiving those benefits (Office of Family Assistance, 2018). The U.S. Census Bureau (2017) reported that 11.9% (346,662) of Kansans were living in poverty in 2017. The impact of TANF on poverty rates in Kansas was the topic of this study. Kansas's annual TANF block grant is \$101.9 million and is combined with the state's mandatory annual match of \$62 million (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). Kansas is responsible for using these funds to design and implement programs and services to meet the purposes of the TANF program. With this in mind, in September 2011, former Kansas Governor Sam Brownback began enacting a series of TANF eligibility changes intended to better assist TANF families in becoming financially self-sufficient by increasing their employment opportunities. One change reduced the lifetime limit for eligible households to receive TANF to 48 months in 2011, to 36 months in 2015, and to its current limit of 24 months in 2016 (Mitchell, Pavetti, & Huang, 2018). I explored the lived experiences of former TANF recipients who exited the TANF program after 60 and 24 months to determine how the length of time they received benefits impacted their path out of poverty. The results of this study may influence Kansas legislators to enact social service policies at the county and local levels to increase financial self-sufficiency of Kansans exiting TANF.

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to this study and the background of TANF. The problem statement indicates limited knowledge concerning the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty. Chapter 1 also

includes the purpose of this study, research questions, theoretical framework, and the nature of this study. The chapter concludes with definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background of the Study

The TANF cash welfare block grant is one of the major provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). As part of a federal initiative to end impoverished families' dependency on cash assistance, food assistance, and medical coverage, TANF replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which originated as a provision of the 1935 Social Security Act (Kyonne, 2008). The primary goal of TANF is for states to design and implement programs that encourage impoverished families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Supporting this goal, the four purposes of the TANF program are to (a) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; (b) reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (c) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (d) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Office of Family Assistance, 2016).

TANF is public policy developed and articulated at each level of government: federal, state, and local. Congress created the TANF program and authorizes funds to be allocated to states in block grants. The goal and purposes of TANF articulated at the federal level are broad, and states are allowed discretion in developing more specific public policies to achieve TANF's goal and purposes (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). States have flexibility to use their TANF allotment "in any manner reasonably

calculated to accomplish the purposes of TANF” (Office of Family Assistance, 2016, p. 1).

For Kansans, this flexibility has meant more stringent program requirements. For example, federal policy dictates that adult TANF recipients participate in work activities 2 years after they begin receiving monthly cash assistance benefits (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). With a federal TANF lifetime limit of 60 months, this provision allows adult recipients 2 years to participate in education and training activities, and another 3 years to find and maintain employment. In Kansas, state policy requires adult recipients to immediately participate in work activities (Economic & Employment Services, n.d.). With a TANF lifetime limit of 24 months in Kansas, this provision allows adult TANF recipients only 2 years to complete education and training activities and find and maintain employment.

Although the federal government has imposed a 60-month lifetime limit for eligible households to receive assistance, Kansas reduced the time limit to 48 months in 2011, to 36 months in 2015, and to its current limit of 24 months in 2016 (Mitchell et al. 2018). As of July 1 2016, 37 states including the District of Columbia maintain a lifetime limit of 60 months, eight states impose limits between 36 and 45 months, and six states including Kansas impose limits between 12 and 24 months (Giannarelli, Heffernan, Minton, Thompson, & Stevens, 2017). Although not specifically addressing TANF in terms of time limit changes, a 2017 Foundation for Government Accountability study indicated that the income of Kansans exiting TANF rises steadily (Horton & Ingram, 2017). However, the increase in income is not sufficient to prohibit these individuals from meeting eligibility requirements for other federal and state aid programs.

For example, although the number of children in households receiving TANF decreased from 26,633 in fiscal year 2007 to 15,419 in fiscal year 2013, the childhood poverty rate, as evidenced by eligibility for other assistance programs such as food assistance, Medicaid, and free and reduced-price school lunch, increased during this same period (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). In addition, Butler (2015, p. 397) determined that, in Maine, “loss of TANF did not lead to a significant increase in wages or hours of employment”. Mitchell et al. (2018) also found that most parents leaving TANF have no earnings or have earnings below 50% of the poverty threshold. These studies indicated that a disproportionate number of families no longer eligible to receive TANF remain dependent on public assistance.

Although TANF has been widely studied, there was a gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of adult TANF recipients after they exited the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). There was also a gap in literature regarding the reduction in the number of TANF recipients, primarily resulting from the reduction in lifetime TANF eligibility months and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). In addition, although TANF was most recently due for reauthorization in 2010, Congress had not yet passed that legislation, and had instead authorized a series of temporary extensions (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). An increased understanding of the impact of the length of time adults receive TANF on their path out of poverty may assist policymakers in developing evidence-based strategies for decreasing poverty rates.

Problem Statement

Congress created the TANF program, a public policy, as part of a federal initiative to end welfare by assisting impoverished families to become self-sufficient (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). Although the federal government has imposed a 60-month lifetime limit for eligible households to receive assistance, states are free to adjust that limit. The overarching problem was the lack of understanding of how the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits impacts their path out of poverty. Mitchell et al. (2018) reported that Kansas reduced the TANF time limits to 48 months in 2011, 36 months in 2015, and 24 months in 2016. The research problem this study addressed was whether Kansas's policy decreasing the lifetime limit of TANF eligibility to 24 months impacted the poverty rate in Kansas. Although not specifically addressing TANF in terms of time limit changes, a 2017 Foundation for Government Accountability study indicated that the income of Kansans exiting TANF has risen steadily (Horton & Ingram, 2017). However, the increase in income may not be sufficient to prohibit these individuals from meeting eligibility requirements for other federal and state aid programs. This study addressed the gap in literature regarding the limited evidence concerning compared lived experiences of former TANF recipients after exiting the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). Additionally, I examined the gap in literature regarding the reduction in the number of TANF recipients, primarily resulting from the reduction in lifetime TANF eligibility months and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014).

The primary goal of TANF is for states to design and implement programs that encourage impoverished families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Supporting this

goal, the four purposes of the TANF program are to (a) provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes; (b) reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (c) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (d) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). Because Kansas has reduced the number of months that families can be assisted, the intent of this study was to explore the impact of Kansas's TANF time limit policy on poverty rates in the state and the effect the policy has on the fulfillment of the goal and the second purpose of the TANF program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my study was to increase understanding of the comparative experiences of TANF recipients who reached their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of the TANF goal and second purpose. I used The Urban Institute's D.C. TANF "Leavers" Questionnaire (1999) as the instrument to answer the following question: Does Kansas's policy decreasing the lifetime limit of TANF eligibility to 24 months impact the poverty rate in Kansas? Findings may influence social change by assisting policymakers and practitioners in making informed decisions guiding the design and implementation of TANF policies and programs by providing information regarding the impact of TANF time limits on recipients' ability to obtain a path out of poverty through economic self-sufficiency.

Research Questions

RQ1: How did TANF participation reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

RQ2: How would the extension of TANF eligibility to 60 months reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

RQ3: How has limiting TANF eligibility to 24 months reduced the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical basis for my study was human capital theory. Human capital theory asserts that education and training must be provided to impoverished individuals if they are to become financially self-sufficient (Becker, 1993). This approach provided the lens through which study participants' responses to the D.C. TANF "Leavers" Questionnaire (The Urban Institute, 1999) were analyzed. I used a general qualitative design with a phenomenological approach including interview responses and open source data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF), and Office of Family Assistance for data triangulation purposes. A more detailed explanation of human capital theory is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

I used a qualitative approach and phenomenological design to explore participants' lived experiences regarding time limits of TANF eligibility from 60 to 24 months, the reduction in the number of TANF recipients, and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). To increase understanding of this phenomenon, I used a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of former TANF

recipients with 60-month and 24-month eligibility to assess their level of success in achieving TANF's second purpose and to identify common themes, similarities, and differences. A purposive sampling method was used to select two social service professionals from Johnson County Kansas and four social service professionals from Wyandotte County Kansas. Participating social service professionals were asked to share their lived experiences of 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers supported by them in Johnson and Wyandotte counties. A comparative approach allowed the generalization of the study's results. Study participants were recruited through professional contacts in Johnson and Wyandotte counties. During individual interviews, study participants were asked to respond to questions from the D.C. TANF "Leavers" Questionnaire (The Urban Institute, 1999). These questions aligned with my research questions, which were aligned with TANF's goal and second purpose. Once interview data were collected, I triangulated findings with state-collected TANF data reported to the Office of Family Assistance.

Definitions

Definitions of key terms in my study are as follows:

Child: An individual who is unborn, under 18 years of age, or between 18 and 19 years of age and actively pursuing a high school diploma or its equivalent (Kansas Department for Children and Families, 2018).

Family: Parent(s) and child(ren) living in the same household (Kansas Department for Children and Families, 2018).

Poverty: A condition in which a family's total income falls below the poverty threshold as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau considering the family's size and composition (Poverty, 2018).

Self-sufficiency: The ability to sustain a family without regular reliance on governmental assistance; the ability to define needs and determine and implement appropriate actions to meet those needs (Hong, Sherrif, & Naeger, 2009; Kovach, Becker, & Worley, 2004).

Social service professional: The individual responsible for providing professional guidance and support to TANF recipients (Kansas Department for Children and Families, n.d.).

TANF leaver: A former TANF recipient who has not received cash assistance for at least 2 months (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.).

Assumptions

One assumption of my study was that study participants would truthfully respond to the D.C. TANF Leavers Questionnaire. A second assumption was that the sample size was appropriate and adequately represented the population of social service professionals who assist TANF leavers in Kansas. The third assumption was that the D.C. TANF Leavers Questionnaire was adequate to collect data from the sample population.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of my qualitative empirical phenomenological study included TANF recipients who reached their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of the TANF goal and the second purpose. The target population was social service professionals who assist TANF leavers in Johnson and Wyandotte counties. A delimitation was the shared experiences of TANF leavers in Johnson and Wyandotte counties who reached their lifetime limit of 60

or 24 months. The results of this study may be generalized to TANF leavers throughout Kansas.

Limitations

The use of a phenomenological design was a limitation of my study. I applied the bracketing process to mitigate personal bias (*see* Gearing, 2004). A second limitation was the use of the D.C. TANF Leavers Questionnaire (1999). Participants could have failed to answer each question honestly and completely for fear of reprisal. Because study participation was voluntary and responses had no impact on current or future professional standing, the impact of this limitation was limited. The third limitation was the use of the purposive sampling, which limited the ability to generalize research findings. The population consisted of social service professionals who voluntarily participated in my study.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to address the gap in literature regarding the limited evidence concerning the lived experiences of former TANF recipients who exited the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). Additionally, this study addressed the gap in literature regarding the relationship between the reduction in the number of TANF recipients, primarily resulting from the reduction in lifetime TANF eligibility months, and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). This study contributed to the body of knowledge through triangulation of interview data with state-collected TANF data reported to the Office of Family Assistance. This study may help policymakers and practitioners by providing empirical evidence of the impact of TANF time limits on recipients' ability to obtain a path out of poverty through

economic self-sufficiency. The implications for social change include encouraging impoverished families to achieve economic self-sufficiency. In addition, the results of this study have positive social change implications regarding social service policies implemented at the county and local levels to increase financial self-sufficiency among Kansans exiting TANF.

Summary and Transition

In Chapter 1 I discussed the expectation that TANF participation increases TANF leavers' ability to rise above poverty and become financially self-sufficient. Barriers to success experienced by TANF leavers hinder this pathway out of poverty. Chapter 1 indicated that the likelihood of becoming financially self-sufficient could be further limited by the decrease in the time allotted for successful attainment of TANF's primary goal and second purpose. A qualitative empirical phenomenological research design was the most appropriate methodology for exploring the shared lived experiences of TANF leavers in Johnson County Kansas and Wyandotte County Kansas. Chapter 2 contains a review of literature and synthesis of current research concerning the problem statement and research questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

With the 2006 reauthorization of PRWORA, the federal government imposed more stringent restrictions on TANF recipients (Patterson, 2012). In line with these restrictions, Kansas reduced the 60-month lifetime limit for eligible households to receive TANF to 48 months in 2011, to 36 months in 2015, and to its current limit of 24 months in 2016 (Mitchell et al. 2018). The primary problem addressed by this study was the lack of understanding regarding the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty. Although the number of former TANF recipients no longer receiving cash assistance due to having reached their lifetime limit has increased at an unprecedented rate, and although the pervasiveness of poverty in the United States has increased since 1996, scholarly literature articulating the comparative experiences of those former TANF recipients is limited (Shaefer & Edin, 2013). The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of the TANF goal and the second of its four purposes. (AFDC and TANF - overview, 2009)

Chapter 2 includes an examination and synthesis of empirical research on TANF lifetime time limits to assist in gaining insight into the lived experiences of TANF leavers and their path out of poverty. The chapter includes a background of TANF and a description of the literature search strategy employed for this study. The chapter also includes a description and discussion of the use and appropriateness of the theoretical foundation: human capital theory. The chapter further includes an elaboration of TANF and poverty, and concludes with a summary of relevant literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review consisted of scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, public policy websites, books, and federal and state government publications. Articles were identified using Google Scholar and databases accessed through Walden University's library including the following: ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, ProQuest Central, Dissertations & Theses @ Walden University, ERIC and Education Source Combined Search, SAGE Journals, Public Administration Abstracts, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. A comprehensive database search was conducted and included the following key phrases and search terms: *welfare reform*, *TANF*, *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families*, *TANF leaver perceptions*, and *poverty*. Utilizing these search strategies resulted in more than 160 documents, of which 114 were explicitly related to the topic addressed by this study.

Theoretical Foundation

Human capital theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. Scholarly discussions regarding human capital as a theoretical foundation originated with Adam Smith in 1776 (Goldin, 2016). Smith (as cited in Spengler, 1977) contended that human capital is a fixed capital that includes the learned capabilities or skills of all members of a society. These capabilities are secured through formal education, informal study, or apprenticeship; the degree of the investment in honing these skills directly relates to the complexity of obtainable employment and the corresponding wages available as a result of utilizing the skills (Spengler, 1977). Becker, (1964), Mincer (1958), and Schultz (1961) were responsible for developing Smith's assertions into the current theory of human capital.

The evolution of human capital theory began with Mincer's (1958) human capital model indicating that individuals invest in education, including on-the-job training, only up to the level at which the cost of that education equals the resulting financial compensation. Wages must, at minimum, equal the cost of education (Mincer, 1958). Becker (1964) added to Mincer's model by classifying education as an investment, not a consumable good. Modern-day human capital theory is grounded in Becker's assertion. According to Becker, an educational investment is expected to yield a particular rate of return. Becker proposed that increased investments in education and training will yield the return of an individual's increased productivity.

Schultz's (1961) contribution to human capital theory was an examination of the impact of education and training on earnings. In examining 1929 to 1956 cohort data, Schultz (as cited in Constance-Huggins, 2013) determined that additional education was the reason for 36% to 70% of the increase in earned income. Schultz (1961) hypothesized that an increase in an investment in education would result in an increase in an individual's earnings. The major theoretical proposition is that human capital is the sum of all characteristics contributing to an individual's productivity and increased economic value (Flair, 2017).

This proposition is grounded by three fundamental assumptions. First, human capital theory assumes individuals participate in a rational process leading them to choose to invest in education and training (Johnson C. F., 2000). Human capital theorists contend that individuals weigh the economic, physical, emotional, and social cost of education and training against the same cost categories of their perceived benefit of additional education and training. The second assumption is that there is a direct and constant

relationship between an individual's earned income and the amount of human capital owned by that individual (Johnson C. F., 2000). For instance, if an individual has attained a higher level of human capital but does not realize a higher earned income than those with less human capital, the investment in education and training is considered futile. Third, the theory assumes that individuals who have attained a higher level of education will have sufficient opportunities to earn higher wages (Constance-Huggins, 2013).

Although the application of human capital theory is not limited to education, education is routinely the primary human capital investment used in empirical analysis (Sweetland, 1996). Researchers discussing human capital theory have differentiated among a number of education subtypes. These categories include primary, secondary, and higher formal education (Cohn & Geske, 1990), personal and professional informal education (Schultz, 1981), apprenticeships and on-the-job training (Mincer, 1974), and specific vocational education (Corazzini, 1967).

The primary problem addressed in this study was the lack of understanding regarding the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty. As TANF time limits are reduced, the length of time in which TANF recipients can actively engage in and benefit from education and training is subsequently reduced. Considering Becker's (1993) assertion that education and training are critical investments in human capital, limiting opportunities for education and training is a significant hindrance to a person's path out of poverty.

When applying human capital theory to welfare studies, most researchers have focused on level of education, work experience, on-the-job training, and the worker's skill sets (Gezinski, 2011; Heflin, 2003; London, 2006; Nam, 2005; Simmons, Braun,

Wright, & Miller, 2007). Similar to the current study, Constance-Huggins (2013) studied the manners in which human capital and social capital contribute to an increased understanding of the path leading to the need for TANF assistance and the circumstances under which individuals exit TANF. In related research, Gezinski (2011) applied human capital theory to welfare recipients to study their level of education, recent completion of on-the-job training, and community college attendance.

The rationale for selecting human capital as the theoretical foundation for this study was that human capital theory can assist policymakers in evaluating the relationship between education and training and earnings contributing to a person's path out of poverty. According to the theory, an individual with an increased investment in human capital should have a greater level of productivity and an increased likelihood of obtaining and maintaining employment wages sufficient to eliminate the need for welfare. Empirical data indicated that welfare recipients have less education. Nearly half of the 2008 TANF recipients had not earned a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008). Additionally, Danziger et al. (2000) determined that 13% of the general population had not earned a high school diploma compared to 31% of the study's sample population of welfare recipients.

The study's research questions originated from the goal and second purpose of the federally legislated public policy, TANF, and Kansas's public policy regarding lifetime limits for receiving TANF. Human capital theory was appropriate for this study because its application provided insight into TANF recipients who lack the investment required to increase their human capital. This is particularly relevant for Kansas's TANF recipients who have a reduced amount of time to invest in education and training required to

increase their productivity providing a pathway out of poverty. According to human capital theory, the poverty status of individuals exiting TANF after 24 months may be partially attributed to an insufficient amount of human capital. Figure 1 depicts the evolutionary cycle of the application of human capital theory on the pathway out of poverty.

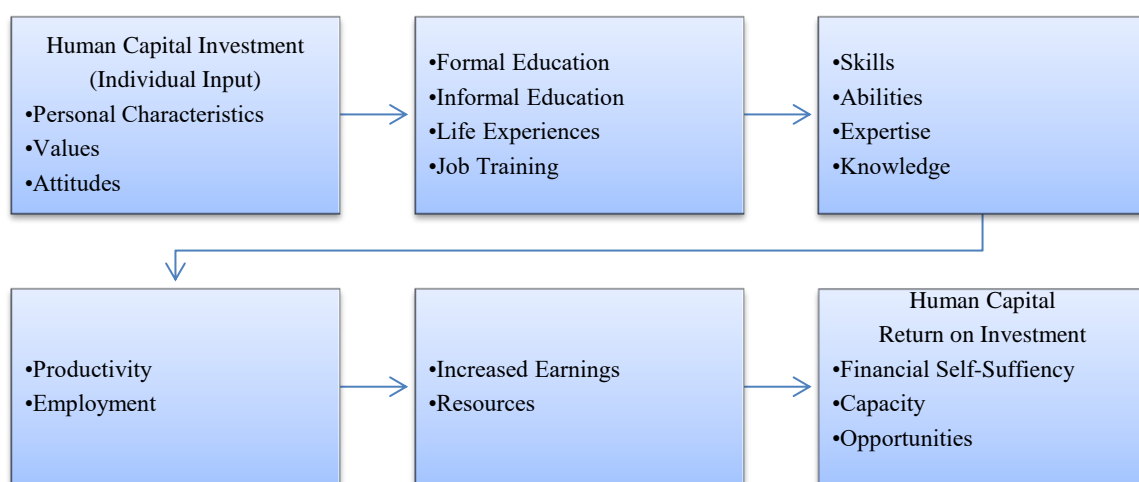


Figure 1. Theoretical evolution of TANF recipients' pathway out of poverty.

Welfare Reform

History of Welfare Reform

Federally funded social welfare programs intended to financially assist low-income families with minor children have existed in the United States for more than 100 years (Abramovitz, 1992). These programs have undergone significant changes from the 1911 Mothers' Pension plans to the current TANF program authorized in 1996 (Patterson, 2012). Although the basic premise of assisting the economically impoverished is consistent, the underlying factors guiding these changes have evolved.

The 1911 Mothers' Pension plan, also known as Mothers' Aid, was intended to provide financial subsidies to families with dependent children and no adult male income (Abramovitz, 1992). First adopted by Missouri, the plan was founded on the supposition that providing a means for children to remain home with their mothers instead of being institutionalized or placed in orphanages was more cost effective for the government (Abramovitz, 1992). Further, the plan's designers alleged that Mothers' Pension would reduce the need for mothers to work in positions yielding wages insufficient to financially support their households (DiNitto, 1995). The onset of the Great Depression led to a reduction in available local revenue to fund the pension plan (Goodwin, 2005). Although the plan was eventually unfunded, it became the model for its replacement, the Social Security Act's (1935) Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program.

The Social Security Act of 1935 created the federal entitlement cash program ADC. The purpose of the program was to provide financial assistance to mothers no longer receiving income from a spouse. Because most of these mothers were widowed, they were considered deserving poor (Grice, 2005). As with the Mothers' Pension, ADC targeted single mothers because they were obligated to remain home and care for their children (Grice, 2005). The ADC program's focus on widows was not arbitrary but reflected the current welfare roll. For instance, in 1939, 61% of welfare recipients were widows, 37% were mothers who were divorced or separated for various reasons, and 2% were mothers who had never married (Abramovitz, 1992).

Changes in societal norms, however, triggered a paradigm shift in the public's perception of mothers. One such change was the rise in the number of out-of-wedlock births. Out-of-wedlock births tripled from 1940 to 1958 (Trattner, 1999). At the same

time, divorce rates significantly increased (Trattner, 1999). The shifting composition of the traditional family was reflected in the welfare rolls. In 1975, approximately 33% of welfare recipients were mothers who had never married; by 1988, never-married mothers composed 58% of the welfare population (O'Neill & Ellenoff O'Neill, 1997). The number of welfare families headed by a single mother nearly doubled, and society perceived these mothers as less than deserving of public assistance.

Other changes also influenced the public's shifting perception of single welfare mothers. As the percentage of never-married mothers (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001) within the poor population increased, the welfare roll burgeoned. For instance, although 1.2 million individuals received welfare in 1940, that number grew to 8.5 million in 1970, and increased to 11.5 million in 1990 (DiNitto, 1995). Compounding the negative perceptions of welfare recipients was the increasing percentage of minority women in this group (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Another noteworthy change was the significant increase in the number of never-married mothers entering the workforce. For example, the percentage of working single mothers caring for at least one minor child rose from 22% in 1950 to 70% in 1995 (Committee on Ways and Means, 2004). Because these women were able to maintain employment while caring for their children, it was widely believed that welfare mothers should be required to do the same. Society's opinion of never-married welfare mothers again shifted, and these women were increasingly perceived as underserving. This shift resulted in the currently widely held belief that cash welfare assistance is the problem, not the solution (Trattner, 1999).

Since that time, several attempts have been made to increase the number of welfare recipients who are married and employed. For example, in 1961, perpetuating the

belief that ADC encourages out-of-wedlock parenting, the Kennedy Administration allowed states the option to offer ADC cash benefits to children living with both parents if both parents were unemployed (Trattner, 1999). Subsequently, in 1962, ADC became Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). By 1967, responding to public perceptions of welfare, Congress began debating legislation that would require welfare recipients to work (Caputo, 1997). Congress authorized the Work Incentive Program (WIN) that required fathers receiving AFDC benefits to register for the program to maintain AFDC eligibility. Mothers receiving AFDC were strongly encouraged but not required to register for WIN. Mothers were enticed by promises of job training, job search assistance, and increased childcare subsidies (Caputo, 2011). The success of WIN was questionable. With a budget of \$150 million to serve 2.5 million eligible AFDC families, fewer than 3% of eligible families secured employment through the program (Caputo, 2011). By the end of the 1960s, constituents urged Congress to end the program (Caputo, 2011).

Legislative attempts were also made to severely limit AFDC expenditures. With the passage of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (OBRA) (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981) legislators reduced welfare costs by restricting the receipt of cash assistance to those deemed truly impoverished. They did so by imposing greater eligibility restrictions and by reducing monthly benefit allotments. The fundamental purpose of OBRA was to begin moving AFDC from a supplemental income program to an employment program (Epstein, 1997). The OBRA became the federal platform that allowed states to develop non-evidence based initiatives to increase employment among welfare recipients (Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, 1981). The Act also

granted each state authority to mandate that both AFDC applicants and recipients participate in job readiness or job search programs (Epstein, 1997). This component of OBRA laid the foundation for the next major welfare reform legislation.

The Family Support Act (FSA) was enacted in 1988 to shift the focus of the AFDC program and place more emphasis on employment, payment and receipt of child support and family medical insurance coverage (Family Support Act of 1988). The Act also amended title IV of the Social Security Act to include provisions for assisting financially impoverished parents of minor children with increasing their level of education and training and with obtaining and maintaining employment allowing them to eliminate reliance on welfare (Family Support Act of 1988). The purpose of FSA was to provide AFDC families a pathway out of poverty by increasing child support enforcement and by requiring welfare recipients to participate in the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) program (Hagen & Lurie, 1993). FSA was enacted to encourage individuals to attend vocational or traditional college while receiving cash assistance. The guiding principles of the JOBS program were consistent with human capital theory. The program's approach highlighted education and training as the critical initial investment in providing a means for cash assistance recipients to become financially self-sufficient (Schneider, 2005). A General Accounting report cited the JOBS program as a response to public consensus that simply meeting the basic financial needs of impoverished families is an ineffective solution to reducing welfare dependency (O'Neill & Ellenoff O'Neill, 1997). The pathway out of poverty is predicated on the parents' ability to become financially self-sufficient.

FSA required states to require cash assistance recipients to work or participate in work related activities. Although acceptable work activities included education and training intended to prepare individuals for employment and assistance with improving job search skills, the expectation was that most recipients of cash assistance would be actively engaged in JOBS related activities (Schneider, 2005). FSA further required states to direct an increased portion of their expenditure to high risk cash assistance recipients; recipients more likely to become or remain dependent on welfare were the priority (Family Support Act of 1988, 1988). To this end, FSA was the first legislation requiring parents of children under six years old to work or participate in a work activity.

Despite the shift in program focus and the addition of more stringent requirements, the shroud of controversy surrounding AFDC increased and political support for the program waned. A major concern was the dramatic increase in welfare caseloads between 1988 and 1995 from 3.8 million to 5 million (O'Neill & Ellenoff O'Neill, 1997). A renewed concern for reducing welfare dependency among these individuals prompted a national outcry for drastic and effective welfare reform (O'Neill & Ellenoff O'Neill, 1997). In response, a key campaign promise of then Democratic Presidential candidate, Bill Clinton, was to ensure passage of innovative welfare reform (O'Neill & Ellenoff O'Neill, 1997). President Bill Clinton enacted the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) on August 22, 1996.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, considered revolutionary public policy, replaced AFDC with the

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The establishment of the TANF program to replace AFDC was the most significant change brought about by PRWORA (Patterson, 2012). Although PRWORA was arguably a response to changing public perceptions of welfare and welfare recipients, understanding the rationale leading to PRWORA required a paradigm shift regarding welfare policies.

Perhaps the first notable change legislated by PRWORA is the manner in which states receive federal welfare funds. As an entitlement program, AFDC permitted families to receive benefits if gross and net income standards were met (AFDC and TANF - overview, 2009). These standards were set by each state within federal guidelines, and federal funds reimbursed states for AFDC related expenditures (AFDC and TANF - overview, 2009). Under TANF, states determine financial need, establish eligibility criteria, and must commit a pre-determined amount of funding each year to TANF related expenditures (AFDC and TANF - overview, 2009).

In addition to the federally funded TANF block grant, states have a TANF spending requirement known as the maintenance of effort (MOE). Annual federal funding for the basic TANF block grant has been set at \$16.5 billion since PRWORA was enacted in 1996 (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). This amount is based on peak federal welfare expenditures from FY1992 to FY1995 as welfare rolls and associated costs were at an unprecedented high during this period of time immediately preceding TANF legislation (Falk, 2017). The required MOE contribution amount represents 80% of a state's 1994 expenditures supporting AFDC-related activities, and the rate is reduced to 75% if the state is meeting its specified work participation rate requirement (Greenberg, 2002).

Touted as groundbreaking welfare reform legislation, PRWORA represents a clear shift in welfare policy. TANF shifts the purpose of welfare from simply providing cash support while assisting individuals with work related education and training to a four-fold purpose. The purposes of TANF are (a) to encourage parents to care for their children in their own home; (b) to facilitate job preparation; (c) to promote work and marriage; (d) and to reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies (Hamil-Luker, 2005).

A shift in purpose is one of many far-reaching legislative changes associated with TANF. First, although TANF rules prohibit individuals from receiving federally funded support for more than 60 months, states can elect to shorten the federal lifetime limit or extend the limit funding additional support with their own funds (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). Second, working or participating in work activities is required of TANF recipients (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). By 2002, it was expected that at least 50% of each states' TANF recipients would be actively engaged in work programs for at least 30 hours per week (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). The participation requirement is reduced to 20 hours per week for mothers with children less than six years of age (Office of Family Assistance, 2016). TANF also slashed the list of educational and training activities that would satisfy the participation requirement (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2018). In addition to these more rigorous requirements, the TANF program mandates sanctions for non-compliance. TANF recipients failing to comply with work programs or failing to cooperating with child support enforcement agencies by providing requested information regarding the absent parent are assessed a penalty ranging from a reduction in their monthly cash benefit to no longer being eligible to receive any monthly cash benefit (AFDC and TANF - overview, 2009). TANF

regulations also automatically disqualify certain groups of individuals. For example, convicted drug felons and undocumented immigrants are ineligible to receive TANF benefits (Office of Family Assistance, 2016).

In addition to changes in requirements impacting initial and ongoing TANF eligibility, PRWORA changed the basic structure of cash assistance programs. PRWORA delegated greater program authority and responsibility to the states by providing funding to states through TANF block grants (Blank, 2002). The TANF block grant is intended to provide states funds necessary to assist families to discover and follow a clear path out of poverty (Morgen, Acker, & Weigt, 2010). PRWORA essentially shifted power to the states allowing each to choose which of its families to support.

Table 1

Major Welfare Legislation

Date	Title	Main provisions
1911	Mothers' Pension	Provided cash assistance to families with dependent children and no adult male in the household
1935	Social Security Act	Established ADC for impoverished children with only one parent in the household
1962	Amendments to the Social Security Act	Established AFDC to replace ADC allowing both unemployed parents of impoverished children to receive cash assistance
1967	Amendments to the Social Security Act	Established WIN requiring fathers receiving AFDC benefits to participate in work programs
1981	Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act	Imposed greater eligibility restrictions and reduce monthly cash assistance benefits
1988	Family Support Act	Established the JOBS program and required AFDC recipients to participate in work programs
1996	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act	Established TANF to replace AFDC

Note. Adapted from Zeng, 2011.

Kansas's TANF Policy

With this power, less than one year following his 2011 inauguration, Kansas Governor Sam Brownback began making comprehensive welfare policy changes. He first enacted legislation reducing the maximum number of lifetime TANF eligibility months for Kansas residents from the federally allowed 60 months to 48 months (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). Subsequently, Governor Brownback systematically reduced that lifetime eligibility limit to its current level of 24 months effective July 1, 2016 (Mitchell

et al., 2018). These time limit reductions combined with additional sanctions and changes in eligibility requirements are considered by some to be bold, commonsense welfare reform.

Presumably, Kansas plays an inconsequential role in affecting national welfare policy because the TANF caseload in Kansas amounts to approximately 0.4% of the nation's total TANF caseload (Office of Family Assistance, 2018). Despite the seemingly insignificant impact of Kansas's TANF policy, a faction of constituents reasons policymakers in other states, if not at the federal level, should follow Kansas's model of welfare reform (Horton & Ingram, 2017). Kansas has the potential to have a substantial voice in shaping national welfare policy and in influencing the manner in which states allocate TANF funds.

Figure 2 displays the percentages of TANF and MOE funds Kansas spent in FY2017 for each core and noncore work activity.

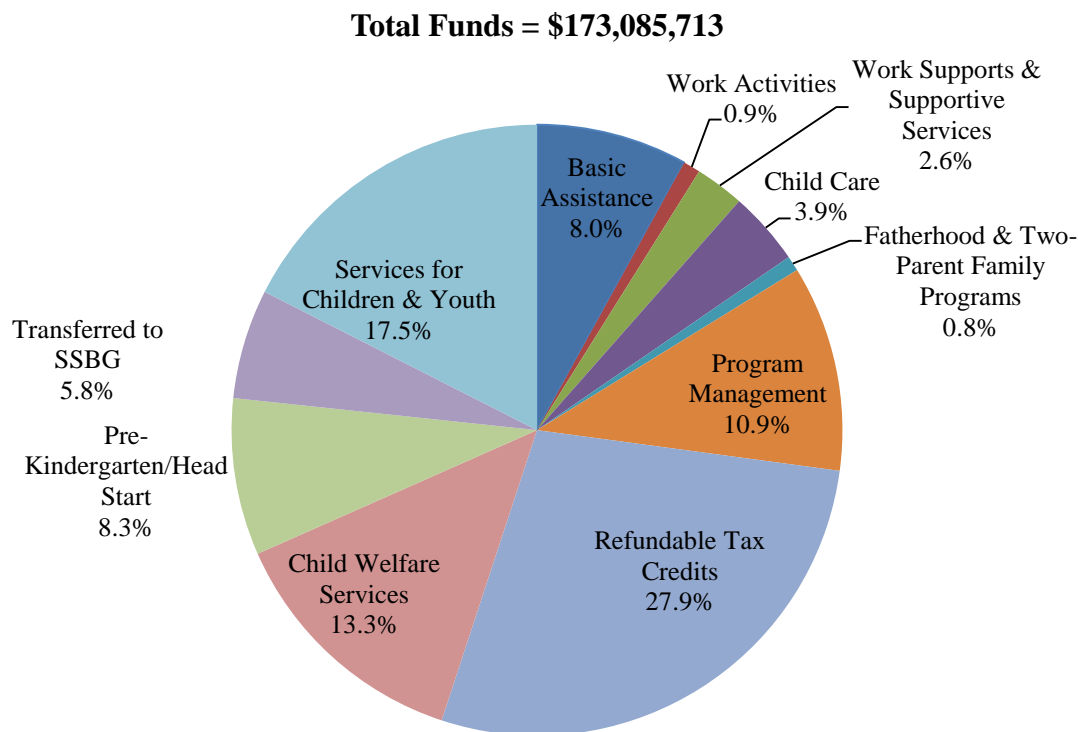


Figure 2. FY2017 Kansas TANF and MOE spending by activity. Adapted from (Office of Family Assistance, 2018).

In general, Kansas's welfare policies are less generous than the national average. Kansas's policymakers have reduced time limits for TANF receipt and limited the percentage of TANF funds allocated for core welfare reform activities. Policy research indicates that Kansas is one of only five states with a lifetime TANF eligibility limit of 24 or fewer months (Urban Institute, 2018). In addition to restricting the amount of time in which TANF recipients must prepare for and obtain employment paying wages sufficient to lift them from poverty, Kansas underfunds activities supporting core welfare reform activities. These core activities, identified within PRWORA as basic assistance, work activities, work supports and supportive services and child care are deemed essential to

providing TANF recipients a path out of poverty (Office of Family Assistance, 2018). In FY2017, Kansas lagged behind average national spending levels for each of the four core activity categories.

Figure 3 displays the percentages of TANF and MOE funds spent nationwide in FY2017 for each core and noncore work activity.

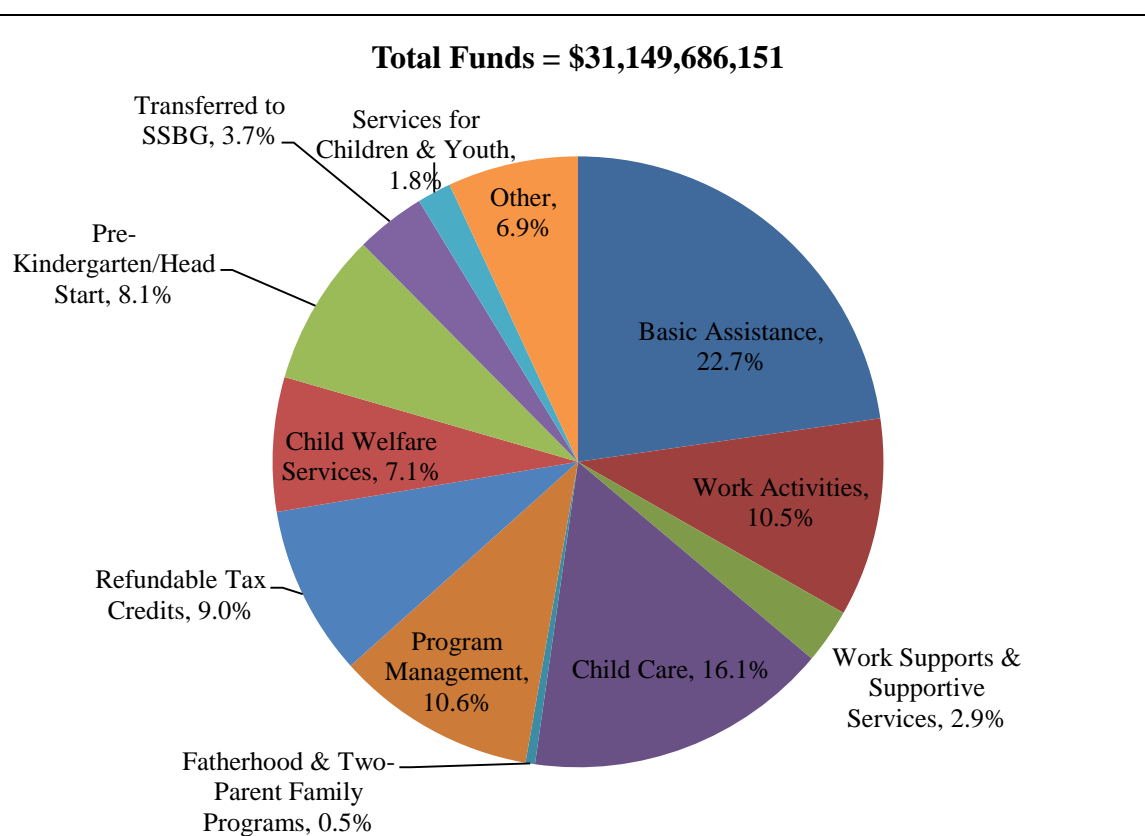


Figure 3. FY2017 United States TANF and MOE spending by activity. Adapted from (Office of Family Assistance, 2018).

Figure 4 highlights and compares Kansas and United States expenditures on the four core TANF activities.

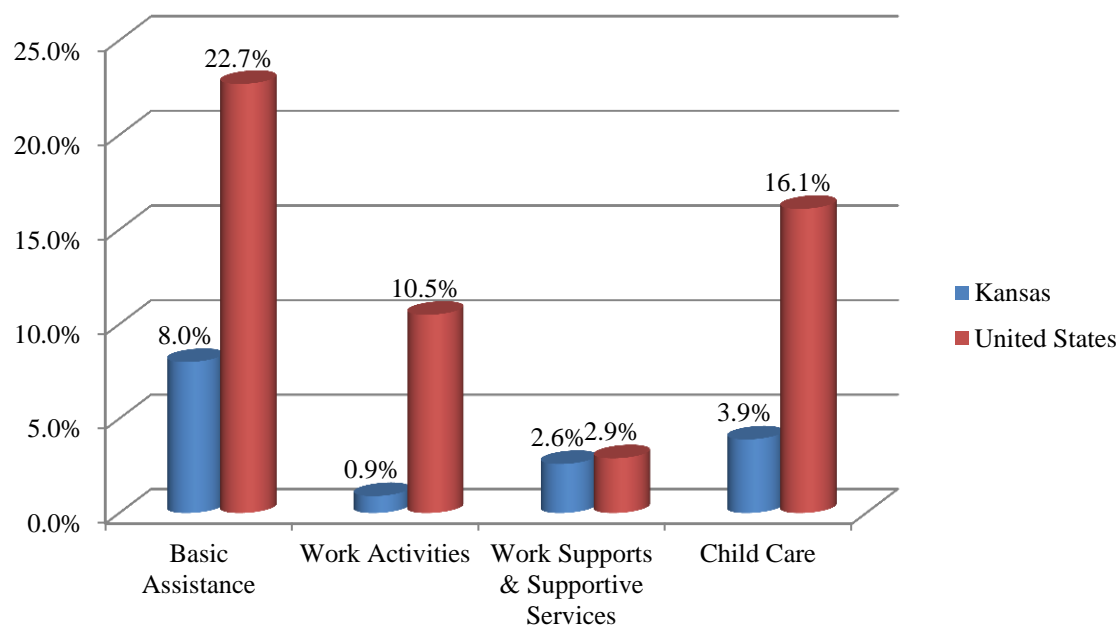


Figure 4. Core activities. Adapted from (Office of Family Assistance, 2018).

Welfare to Work

Welfare Culture

PRWORA is an attempt to legislate a culture shift among welfare recipients. This attempt is predicated on the assumption that welfare recipients embrace a mindset of entitled dependency and must be led to a mindset of personal responsibility and economic self-sufficiency (Alfred, 2005). The emphasis of TANF is on ensuring adult recipients begin working as quickly as possible to facilitate their move from poverty to economic self-sufficiency. Although the work first concept appears sound, state implemented strategies generally do not include approaches able to mitigate barriers to successful welfare-to-work transitions (Alfred, 2005). The most significant identified barrier to TANF leavers' ability to become financially self-sufficient is the lack of human capital required to obtain and maintain employment other than temporary, low skills jobs paying

low wages (Alfred, 2005). Individuals with limited human capital lack economic security and have an increased probability of experiencing long-term welfare dependence. These barriers often exist due to TANF leavers' lack of a high school diploma or GED attainment or their low math and reading skills.

Barriers to Self-Sufficiency

Reviewed literature consistently identified and agreed on the types of barriers to self-sufficiency. These barriers include chronic illness, history of or active physical or sexual abuse, substance abuse, domestic violence, undiagnosed or improperly treated mental health disorders, and neighborhood violence (Blank, 2007). Alfred and Martin (2007) categorize four types of barriers: disabilities, education/learning experiences, personal and situational.

Managing issues related to physical disabilities and mental health disorders increases impoverished single mothers' likelihood of remaining unemployed or underemployed (Alfred & Martin, 2007). Education and learning experience barriers include poor English language skills, low math skills, limited interpersonal skills and low or no motivation to work (Alfred & Martin, 2007; Hogan, Unick, Speiglman, & Norris, 2011; Taylor, Samblanet, & Seale, 2011). Personal barriers include inappropriate interpersonal interactions that hinder the TANF leaver's ability to remain employed (Alfred & Martin, 2007). Situational barriers are those involving lack of adequate housing, transportation, childcare and care of a household member with physical or mental disabilities (Alfred & Martin, 2007). For those with higher levels of human capital, situational barriers are seen as short-term and easily overcome.

Kansas's TANF Work Requirements and Time Limits

Policymakers assess the success of welfare reform in terms of the reduction of statewide TANF caseloads and the level of TANF recidivism. Cheng (2010) found that TANF leavers returned to TANF primarily due to being underemployed or unable to obtain and maintain sufficient employment because of their limited education and inadequate job skills (Cheng, 2010). TANF recidivists lack the level of human capital required to successfully and permanently transition from welfare dependency to financial self-sufficiency. In Kansas, the lifetime maximum number of TANF eligibility months was first reduced in 2011 and the most recently in 2016 (Mitchell et al., 2018). From 2010, one year prior to the initial reduction to 2017, one year after the most recent reduction, the number of TANF caseloads in Kansas decreased from 14,838 to 4,477 (Administration for Children & Families, 2011; Administration for Children & Families, 2018). Since Kansas policymakers began reducing the number of lifetime TANF eligibility months, 69.8% fewer Kansas families are receiving assistance in successfully finding and following a pathway out of poverty.

Those continuing to receive TANF benefits are to receive support services necessary to increase their opportunities to achieve higher levels of human capital and thereby increase their employment potential (Economic & Employment Services, n.d.). In Kansas, those services provided or coordinated by DCF are as follows:

- Help in getting and keeping jobs
- Work experience
- Services for learning disabilities, drug or alcohol problems, or domestic violence

- Services for help with reading and math
- Mental health services
- Physical health care
- Help coping with disabilities
- Parenting help
- Help getting dentures, eyeglasses, hearing aids
- Job training
- Help getting a GED or learning English
- Help getting to job locations
- Clothing
- Help with basic needs
- Moving costs related to a job

Adapted from (Economic & Employment Services, n.d.)

In Kansas, TANF recipients have 24 months in which they must avail themselves of offered services, increase their human capital, and overcome barriers to achieve financial self-sufficiency. During the 24-month eligibility period, a household receives TANF cash assistance if eligibility requirements are met. Basic requirements include income lower than the potential monthly cash assistance payment, household resources less than \$2,250, and adult TANF recipients cooperating with Child Support Services and Work Programs (Economic & Employment Services, n.d.). If these requirements are met, households in any of the five counties in the DCF Kansas City Region are eligible to receive cash assistance as follows:

Table 2

Kansas's Maximum Monthly Cash Assistance Payments by County (Kansas City Region)

Persons in plan	Rural county (Atchison County)		High population county (Leavenworth County and Wyandotte County)		High cost high population county (Douglas County and Johnson County)	
	Non-shared	Shared	Non-shared	Shared	Non-shared	Shared
1	\$224	\$168	\$241	\$175	\$267	\$186
2	\$309	\$263	\$326	\$271	\$352	\$284
3	\$386	\$349	\$403	\$359	\$429	\$375
4	\$454	\$421	\$471	\$432	\$497	\$449
5	\$515	\$487	\$532	\$499	\$558	\$517
6+	Add \$61 for each additional person					

Note. Adapted from (Economic & Employment Services, n.d.).

Perception of Welfare Recipients

The public's perception of welfare recipients has changed significantly since Mothers' Pension was legislated in 1911. Welfare and welfare-to-work programs have long been the subjects of debates in the United States (Corcoran, Danziger, Kalil, & Seefeldt, 2000; Gilens, 1995). TANF eligibility and ongoing requirements are considered by some to be too lenient. This leniency is particularly objectionable when considering female TANF recipients who are stigmatized for their alleged flagrant moral deficiencies (Acker, 2006; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). Welfare discussions provide insight into an underlying abhorrence our society expresses toward citizens marginalized based on gender, race, and class (Collins, 2000). Most TANF households are headed by women, specifically single mothers (Acker, 2006; Ridzi, 2009). A consideration of gender in this

study is therefore relevant. Navigating changing welfare requirements, enduring scrutiny of every life aspect and facing stigma are the norm for women receiving welfare (Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001).

White widows, categorically deemed deserving poor, were the population eligible to receive welfare in post Great Depression America (Gordon, 1994; Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). In the 1950s and 1960s post-WWII era, welfare eligibility was expanded to include impoverished women of color, and the resulting dramatic increase in welfare rolls shifted public perception of welfare recipients (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007). Public opinion toward welfare recipients was influenced by underlying racial tensions. The nation's welfare program became commonly known as a "Black program" (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Monnat, 2010; Monnat & Bunyan, 2008; Quadagno, 1996; Schram, 2005).

Labor Market

Human capital must be considered when planning and implementing welfare-to-work programs. Human capital is a significant factor influencing employability (Crittenden, Kim, Watanbe, & Norr, 2008). Making considerable investments in human capital including education and employment-related training positively impacts labor market participation (Crittenden et al., 2008; Kim, 2010; Kim, 2012). Single mothers able to increase their human capital, particularly education, are better able to transfer the skills and knowledge from their coursework to the labor market thus increasing the likelihood of retaining employment (Crittenden et al., 2008). Increased human capital can also assist TANF leavers in adapting to varying work environments increasing their potential for

successful employment experiences. Human capital cannot, however, eliminate racial and gender-based barriers in the labor market.

Race and Labor Market Inequality

Scholars of feminism and scholars of racism strive to better understand the pervasive effect of social constructs on perceptions of welfare recipients. The social norm has become a practice of categorizing impoverished citizens as either deserving (e.g. White widows) or undeserving (e.g. women of color and divorce or never married mothers) (Gordon, 1994; Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). This categorization continues as current and former welfare recipients enter the labor market.

Society assesses a range of values to means of livelihood. Certain occupations customarily held by men and women of color along with women of any race are undervalued (Baron & Newman, 1990; Cohen & Huffman, 2003). Historically in the United States, employment opportunities for women of color have been restricted to low-paying, factory, service oriented or agricultural positions (Hodson & Sullivan, 2002). Despite federal and state legislation, racism in the workplace continues.

The existence of racism and racial discrimination remain persistent in our society and subsequently in our labor market (Hodson & Sullivan, 2002; Ridzi, 2009). Those deemed undeserving of welfare are often also deemed undeserving of equitable hiring practices and employment opportunities (Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Quadagno, 1996). Unemployment and underemployment are disproportionately high among African-Americans. African-American citizens are twice as likely as White citizens to experience persistent unemployment and underemployment, and the wages of Hispanic and African-American workers are disproportionately lower

than their White counterparts (Kirshenman and Neckerman 1991; Pager and Shepherd 2008). African-American mothers find it particularly difficult to obtain employment sufficient to lift their families out of deep poverty as they experience not only racial and gender discrimination, but discrimination due to their parental responsibilities (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Khosrovani & Ward, 2011; Kirshenman & Neckerman, 1991; Neckerman & Kirshenman, 1991; Quadagno, 1996; Seccombe, James, & Battle Walters, 1998). The barriers to their path out of poverty are compounded.

Gender and Labor Market Inequality

Although the number of women employed has increased dramatically and society's perception of working mothers has generally gained favorability since Mothers' Pension in 1911, gender-based inequality persists in the labor market. In some regards, the standing of women in the U.S. labor market has improved (Budig & England, 2001; Hodson & Sullivan, 2002; Staff & Mortimer, 2012; Yu & Kuo, 2018). Contrary to stereotypes of welfare recipients, divorced and never married mothers are more likely to maintain employment than married mothers (Hodson & Sullivan, 2002). Overall, women represent an increased percentage of the working population, and reduced stigma associated with single mothers has led to increased protections for working women regarding sexual harassment, maternity leave, hiring practices and promotion practices (Hodson & Sullivan, 2002). These increased protections have contributed to improvements of women's standing in the workforce (Hodson & Sullivan, 2002; Welsh, Carr, MacQuarrie, & Huntley, 2006). Gender inequities, however, persist.

Despite equity legislation in an arguably progressive society, women experience both successes and failures in terms of gender equity at work. For example, although the

pay gap between men and women has decreased, women's earnings still lag behind those of their male counterparts. In 1980, women were paid 64.2% of wages earned by men; today, that percentage is 81.8 (Hegewisch, Phil, & Williams-Baron, 2018). Women remaining in poverty despite being employed are typically receiving low wages and few benefits for positions requiring limited skills (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Parisi, McLaughlin, Grice, Taquino, & Gill, 2003; Ridzi, 2009). In addition, unchecked prejudices of employers and those in positions of authority in the workforce foster an environment perpetuating the unequal wage gap (Smith, 2002).

Several persistent inequalities contribute to women being paid less than men in general. Disparities in education, parental responsibilities, gender expectations and work experience continue to limit the quality and quantity of women's workforce opportunities. Blau & Kahn (2007) found that although work experience is significant and accounts for 10.5% of the gendered wage differential, industry accounts for 21.9% and occupation is a significant determinant at 27.4%. Consistent with these findings, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) reports that the share of women employed in the occupations of software developers, chief executives and physicians and surgeons ranges from 20% to 38%, whereas 90% of registered nurses and 79% of elementary and middle school teachers are women. As for industry sectors in which women are employed, 75% of education and health services employees are women (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). In general, jobs held primarily by women boast lower pay scales and fewer benefits than positions held primarily by men (Baron & Newman, 1990; Cohen & Huffman, 2003).

Transitioning From Welfare to Work

States and TANF recipients share responsibility for successful transitions from welfare to work. As a requirement of accepting federal TANF funds, states are expected to oversee training and employment programs intended to facilitate successful transitions for TANF recipients from welfare to work. At the same time, parents receiving TANF benefits must actively engage in work activities in a bona fide effort to learn and become proficient in utilizing the skills required to become financially self-sufficient prior to the expiration of their time limited cash assistance. For Kansans, 24 months is the timeframe in which education and training needed for the successful transition from welfare to financial self-sufficiency must be completed. Arguably, Kansas's welfare policy places a higher priority on quickly obtaining employment than on obtaining and maintaining employment paying wages sufficient to eliminate welfare dependency.

Unsubstantiated stereotypes of welfare recipients combined with racial and gender-based inequalities affect employers' willingness to employ current and former welfare recipients. Holzer (1999) found that the perception of the lack of sufficient human capital among welfare recipients was a crucial factor for employers considering employing individuals exiting welfare. Johnson and Corcoran (2003) found that lack of education and occupation-specific training and experience impede TANF leavers' abilities to obtain employment sufficient to lift their families from poverty or to transition from such employment to a position providing an economic pathway out of poverty. Employers want to hire individuals with education and training deemed necessary to fully function in the positions for which they are hired.

Poverty

The issue of poverty is not specific to any geographic location. Poverty spans the globe and the implications of poverty are influenced by a plethora of economic and social factors. Although the government's definition of poverty varies, those definitions are meaningless until applied in the context of actual citizens; poverty must be given a face (Vidyasagar, 2006). The U.S. Census Bureau quantifies poverty thresholds annually and applies those thresholds to the population to measure the level of poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Poverty thresholds do not vary by state and are calculated considering the number and age of each adult and the number of minor children in the household (Lee, 2018). Similarly, poverty guidelines are determined by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), but are calculated considering overall household size, and the guidelines vary by geographic locale (Lee, 2018). Although each formula for poverty measurement has its merits in research, the lack of consistency in defining poverty has long been debated.

The absence of a consistent definition of poverty has not gone unnoticed. In 1963, Mollie Oshansky determined to clearly define poverty (Southwell, 2009; Vidyasagar, 2006). The foundation for any poverty measurement is the minimum cost required to adequately feed a household of four multiplied by 3 (Renwick & Bergmann, 1993). Oshansky's calculation was predicated on the assumption that food costs account for approximately one third of a household's monthly budget (Renwick & Bergmann, 1993; Southwell, 2009). Although Oshansky completed her task of defining poverty, she realized that her defined poverty line was not appropriate for all situations (Pimpare, 2009). The poverty line could not be generalized.

More than 50 years later, and despite considerable criticism, the United States continues to use Oshansky's definition of poverty as the basis for data reporting. Southwell (2009) notes that although the prevailing poverty measure considers variables such as household size, number of minor children and gender of the household head, a more comprehensive measurement is needed to allow a more accurate representation of the prevalence of poverty. Specifically, additional factors to consider include sources of household income, childcare and healthcare costs and transportation costs (Renwick & Bergmann, 1993). Critics of the widely accepted poverty definition have attempted to redefine poverty in a manner allowing for the consideration of common variables (Southwell, 2009).

Researchers advocate for poverty to be redefined so that current and historical poverty data can be more accurately analyzed. One suggestion to compensate for a potentially flawed definition is to define poverty as both absolute and relative (Southwell, 2009). For example, absolute poverty exists when a household does not have the necessary resources (e.g. shelter, food, and utilities) to reach a specific and predetermined standard of living (Southwell, 2009). The determination of relative poverty requires a comparison of family dynamics to other households experiencing the same societal conditions during a specific time frame (Southwell, 2009). The concepts of absolute and relative poverty are grounded in each society's informal definition of poverty and are therefore fluid in nature.

Although adaptations to the definition of poverty have been debated, Oshansky's influence on the widely accepted definition is steadfast. Wheaton & Tashi (2010), however, consider the predominant definition of poverty obsolete. Renwick & Bergmann

(1993) note that Oshansky's poverty measure assumed a four-member household consisting of an employed father, a mother choosing not to work outside the home and two children. Household composition, however, is changing, and single mothers now head a large percentage of households. In 2017, approximately 25.1% of households were headed by single mothers and another 8.0% were headed by single fathers (Kids Count Data Center, 2018). Although it appears the prevailing poverty measure does not apply to at least 33.1% of U.S. households, poverty thresholds are the basis for the Current Population Survey and American Community Survey (Lee, 2018). Poverty thresholds are a widely accepted means to examine poverty fluctuations over a period of time and to compare poverty data considering the environment and demographics of a population (Lee, 2018).

Race, Gender, and Poverty

Race and gender have a significant impact on the likelihood an individual will experience poverty. Studies indicate race, gender and marital status as three of the most influential factors impacting the poverty experience (Hurst, 2001; Rank, 2004; Schiller, 2008). Kwadzo (2010) found race and gender to be significant determinants of a person's risk of poverty. This suggests that female racial minorities are more likely to experience any measure of poverty.

The consideration of marital status along with race and gender highlights another facet of impoverished TANF recipients. A disproportionate percentage of women of color receive TANF. For example, 12.5% of women in the United States are African American; however, African American women represent 36% of TANF recipients and that disparity has remained comparatively consistent over time (Constance-Huggins, 2013). Further,

Constance-Huggins (2013) asserts that households headed by single African American females are most likely to experience poverty as determined by the lack of materials such as money, clothing, food and housing. Thus, the intersection of race, gender and marital status is relevant to poverty discussions.

Poverty in DCF's Kansas City Region

Located in northeastern Kansas, the Kansas City Region is one of four geographic service areas designated by DCF, and is comprised of five of the 105 counties in Kansas. As illustrated in Figure 5, the Kansas City Region is the smallest DCF region geographically.

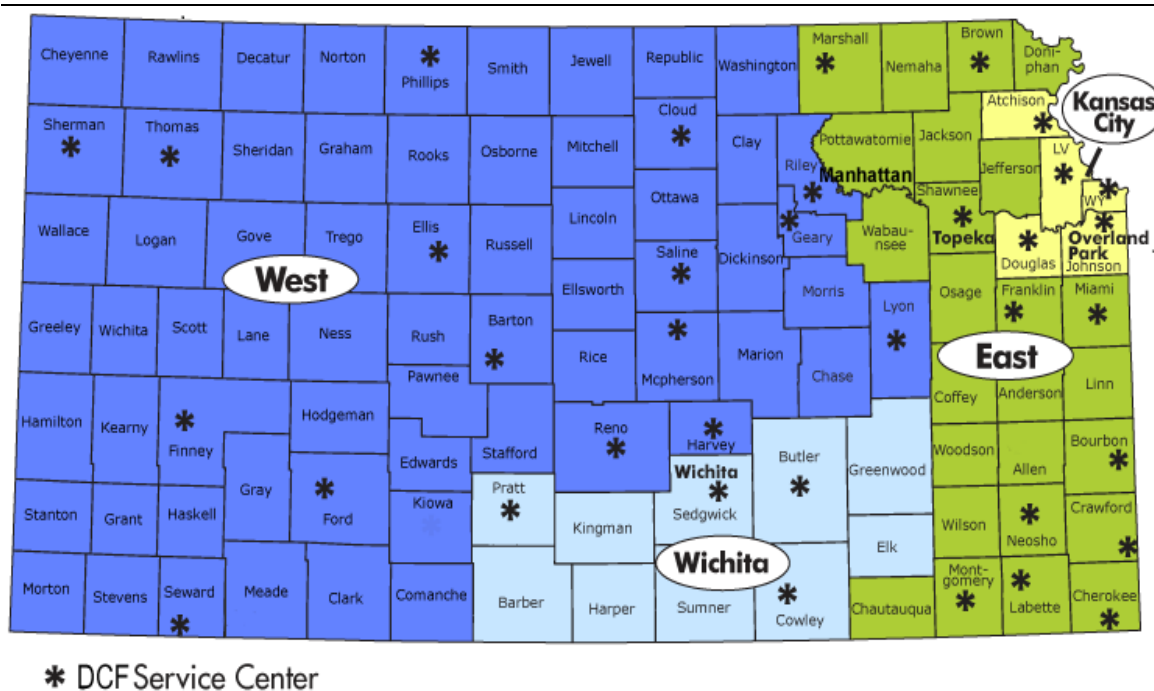


Figure 5. DCF regions and service centers. Source: (Kansas Department for Children and Families, 2015).

Although these five counties, Atchison, Douglas, Johnson, Leavenworth, and Wyandotte, have a relatively small footprint, their DCF influence is noteworthy. The

combined population of these counties represents 33.45% of Kansas's total population (World Population Review, 2018). Johnson County, home to 20.29% of Kansas residents, is the most densely populated county in the state (World Population Review, 2018). In addition, these five counties are diverse in terms of the TANF benefit eligibility classification determined by Kansas. Specifically, Kansas classifies Atchison as a rural county, Douglas and Johnson as high cost high population counties and Leavenworth and Wyandotte as high population counties.

Diversity among the counties is extended when considering gender, race, marital status and poverty. The population of females ranges from 46.7% to 51.1%, African Americans from 4.6% to 23.2%, singles from 42.6% to 60.7% and impoverished from 5.3% to 18.4% (Atchison County Population, 2018; Douglas County Population, 2018; Johnson County Population, 2018; Leavenworth County Population, 2018; Wyandotte County Population, 2018). This range of diversity among the counties increased the appropriateness of generalizing this study's results.

Gaps in Research

I addressed the gap in literature indicated by the limited evidence regarding the lived experiences of former TANF recipients who exited the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). Further, I addressed the gap in literature concerning the reduction in the number of TANF recipients, primarily a consequence of the reduction in the maximum number of lifetime TANF eligibility months and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). Butler (2015) studied the impact of the 60-month TANF time limit on TANF recipients in Maine. Similarly, Narain and Ettner (2017) examined the effect of TANF time limits on TANF leavers' access to healthcare.

Although TANF time limits have been studied, there is limited research specifically addressing the further reduction of time limits following PRWORA's mandate of a maximum 60 month lifetime limit.

Summary and Conclusions

The concept of welfare has evolved since its roots in 1911, and recipients are no longer encouraged to embrace lifelong, entitled dependence. With the enactment of PRWORA, impoverished citizens are expected to gain education and training necessary to prepare them to successfully transition to employment offering wages and benefits sufficient to lift them from poverty. In the literature review presented in Chapter 2, I analyzed and synthesized relevant research regarding factors that must be considered when placing time restrictions on welfare recipients' transition out of poverty. I reviewed research concerning the theoretical evolution of TANF leavers' pathway out of poverty, and historical and current literature indicating a shift in the purpose, intended recipients and societal perceptions of welfare. I discussed current literature concerning cultural, gender and racial barriers to obtaining and retaining gainful employment, and current literature also indicating inequalities TANF leavers experience in the labor market. I reviewed current literature concerning poverty, and presented demographic data specific to the Kansas counties examined in this study to provide context. Constance-Huggins' (2013) research indicates education and training are a viable means to transition from welfare to financial self-sufficiency. The feasibility of TANF recipients gaining and applying the human capital required for financial self-sufficiency within a 24 month lifetime maximum period was unknown.

This study addressed the gap in literature as indicated by the lack of data supporting a reduction in the number of lifetime TANF months as a means to assist TANF recipients in achieving financial self-sufficiency. The results of this study extended the knowledge in public policy discussions by providing empirical data upon which informed, responsible public policy decisions can be made. In Chapter 3, I provide a comprehensive description of the selected methodology resulting from the qualitative approach by means of a questionnaire and interviews.

Chapter 3: Research Method

A review of the literature revealed a limited number of instances in which social service professionals were encouraged to share personal stories regarding the experiences of TANF leavers impacted by reduced lifetime eligibility time limits. Providing a platform for social service professionals to articulate personal stories concerning the impact limiting the maximum number of TANF eligibility months has had on TANF leavers' ability to become financially self-sufficient can provide insightful data to lawmakers as they assess the effectiveness of Kansas's time limit policy. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the comparative lived experiences of Kansas TANF leavers who received cash assistance until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months. I examined the effect of those time limits on TANF leavers' path out of poverty and the success of these individuals in fulfilling TANF's goal and second purpose.

Chapter 3 includes a description of the qualitative methodology and phenomenological research design framework for this study. This chapter also includes a discussion of the suitability of the instrumentation in addressing the research problem, and a comprehensive description of the theoretical framework for the study. Chapter 3 provides a description of the research processes, data collection, questionnaire, coding and theme analysis used in my study. Additionally, in this chapter, I address the research questions, research method, research design and suitability of the design, population and sample strategy, instrumentation, data collection and analysis and ethical considerations related to the study's participants.

Research Design and Rationale

Research Design

To ensure a thick description, participants were asked to respond to 18 closed-ended questions and six open-ended questions. The study included a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design allowing participants to articulate their lived experiences of no longer being eligible to receive cash assistance due to changing state policy. The premise of phenomenology is that an individual's experience of an event and the event itself are equally important (Mohajan, 2018). The intent of phenomenological research is to gain insight into an event by giving voice to those who experienced that event. My study involved an attempt to increase understanding of the experiences of TANF leavers who became ineligible for cash assistance upon reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of TANF's goal and second purpose. My study addressed the following research questions, which are reflective of TANF's goal and second purpose, and Kansas's changing TANF time limit policy:

RQ1: How did TANF participation reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

RQ2: How would the extension of TANF eligibility to 60 months reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

RQ3: How has limiting TANF eligibility to 24 months reduced the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage?

A qualitative approach with a phenomenological design was most appropriate for this study. A quantitative approach would not have given voice to TANF leavers

impacted by Kansas's changing policy. Quantitative research studies involve numerical data and a narrow scope while qualitative research studies address an expanded understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, grounded theory was not a suitable design for my study because the intent of my research was not to construct a theory using data collected. The grounded theory approach commonly involves the collection of data through documents, iterative participant observations, and interviews (Creswell, 2009). Multistage data collection was not suitable for the population of my study.

Rationale

TANF and poverty research rely on qualitative studies that include questionnaires and interviews rather than state-reported quantitative data alone (Berg, 2004; Dodson, 2006). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) assert that semistructured interviews create an environment in which participants can expound upon their responses. The Urban Institute created the nonstandardized questionnaire (see Appendix A) I used to gather data during semistructured interviews. During interviews, respondents were also asked to provide responses to interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance) and the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). Interviews were conducted face-to-face rather than via electronic communication. As noted by Rubin and Rubin (2012), Internet interviews are appropriate for populations unable or unwilling to participate in in-person interviews. An advantage of face-to-face interviews is the ability of the researcher to make the most of social cues (Barratt, 2012; Opdenakker, 2006). However, disadvantages of in-person interviews include logistics of time and space and potential transcriber bias (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). Disadvantages of Internet interviews include possible delays in

receiving data. Internet interviews can, however, be advantageous as a data collection method because they allow each participant to respond at a time and location most convenient for that individual.

Role of the Researcher

I employed the responsive interviewing technique to eliminate any predisposition that may have impeded the interview process. In-depth qualitative interviewing is a means to create an environment that encourages participants to communicate their shared lived experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The qualitative research strategy for my study included core and probing questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I had no personal or professional relationships that implicitly or explicitly implied the existence of a position of power over participants. Responsive interviewing can elicit emotional responses from interviewers and interviewees. I applied the bracketing technique during the interview process. Tufford and Newman (2012) determined that researchers must bracket, or set apart, any presumptions so as not to taint the interview process. Another consideration of the interview process is reflexivity. Researchers must contain the potential for their influence, such as judgment, opinions, or animosity, while interviewing (Gentles, Jack, Nicholas, & McKibbin, 2014). To this end, I did not place judgement on participants or their experiences, and I acknowledged the potential effect of reflexivity.

Methodology

I used qualitative methodology to explore the phenomenological experiences of individuals whose eligibility for TANF benefits expired after 60 and 24 months, the reduction in the number of TANF caseloads, and the poverty rate in Kansas. Additionally, I used a phenomenological design to assess the target population's

perception of TANF leavers' level of achievement in realizing TANF's goal and second purpose, and to identify common themes, parallels, and contrasts. I interviewed a purposive, homogenous sample to allow an in-depth description of a small subgroup (Suri, 2011). To accomplish this, I used a semistructured questionnaire (see Appendix A), interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance), and the demographic questions (see Appendix B). Interview questions were open-ended questions focusing on the experiences of TANF leavers who became ineligible for further assistance once reaching their lifetime eligibility limit of 60 or 24 months. Participants were asked to respond based on their experiences with individuals no longer receiving TANF due to having reached their lifetime eligibility time limit of 60 or 24 months.

Participant Selection Logic

Qualitative analysis is typically an in-depth concentration on a comparatively small sample (Patton, 2002). Although the sample size for my study was relatively small, Fusch and Ness (2015) noted that data saturation can be reached when each participant is asked the same set of interview questions. I used a purposive, homogenous sampling method to select four social service professionals from urban Wyandotte County Kansas and two social service professionals from suburban Johnson County Kansas. Only social service professionals who began serving in their role prior to November 1, 2011 were considered for participation because that is the date Kansas first reduced maximum TANF eligibility months from 60 months. A sample size of six is considered sufficient when conducting qualitative interviews (Creswell, 2009).

Participating social service professionals are charged with providing guidance and support to TANF recipients to assist them in becoming financially self-sufficient.

Mandatory meetings and routine interactions facilitate professional relationships conducive to learning new employment skills and social skills. These relationships also allow social service professionals insight into the lives of TANF recipients including personal experiences with recipients' successes and failures related to the attempted transition from welfare to work. Social service professionals have firsthand knowledge of TANF leavers' lived experiences.

I contacted the regional director to whom the prospective respondents report (see Appendix E) to request a list of potential participants. I then e-mailed potential participants an invitation to participate (see Appendix C), which included instructions for prospective participants to contact me for additional information or to express intent to participate. Although simplistic, this sampling approach generated a robust population of participants.

Instrumentation

I used administrative data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the U.S. Department of Labor. A publicly published data collection instrument (see Appendix A) from The Urban Institute, interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance) specific to the research questions for my study, and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) were also used to explore the comparative experiences of TANF leavers who reached their lifetime eligibility limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of changing time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of TANF's goal and second purpose. The Urban Institute created the nonstandardized questionnaire (Appendix A) as the data collection instrument for a research project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and conducted by the District of Columbia Department of Human Services and The Urban Institute (Acs & Loprest, 2001). Funding was also provided to 13 other states and counties to conduct similar research (Acs & Loprest, 2001). Because the original questionnaire was finalized in 1999, questions referencing a specific date were not relevant for my study. Therefore, those questions were modified using the month and year of the expiration of TANF eligibility as a point of reference. Also, because the participants for this study were social service professionals, not TANF leavers, questions were modified to reflect that difference. To ensure research credibility, an audio recorder was used to capture and preserve participants' responses. This eliminated bias in the qualitative interview process by not requiring a reliance solely on my memory (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

The Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan collected data for the 1999 study by conducting phone interviews with heads of families from two groups of TANF leavers: those who left TANF during the fourth quarter of 1997 and those who left TANF during the fourth quarter of 1998 (Acs & Loprest, 2001). The representative sample consisted of 277 District of Columbia TANF leavers randomly selected, and the Institute for Social Research encouraged participation by paying each survey respondent 20 dollars (Acs & Loprest, 2001). Acs and Loprest's (2001) research instrument was appropriate for my study because it addressed the overall well-being of TANF leavers. Unlike the 1999 study, participants in my research were social service professionals who supported those who left TANF after reaching their 60 month lifetime limit and those who left TANF after reaching their 24 month lifetime limit. The current study involved face-to-face interviews (see Appendix A Continuance), the same questionnaire (see

Appendix A) with previously noted modifications, and a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

My purposive, homogenous sample included six social service professionals from suburban Johnson County and urban Wyandotte County in DCF's Kansas City Region. The sample comprised four professionals serving Wyandotte County and two professionals serving Johnson County, all of whom began serving in that capacity prior to November 1, 2011. Participants were recruited through the regional director of the social service agency employing the social service professionals (see Appendix E). This simplistic means of random sampling was deemed an appropriate sampling method considering the nature of this study (Creswell, 2009). Potential respondents were then e-mailed an invitation to participate (see Appendix C) including information regarding voluntary participation. Once the six respondents were identified, individual interviews were scheduled and took place in the offices in which the social service professionals generally serve clients (see Appendix E). Each respondent was asked to participate in one 60-minute face-to-face interview. At the onset of each scheduled interview, the respondent was provided an informed consent form including information regarding voluntary participation. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) and demographic questions (see Appendix B) were then distributed. Lastly, participants were asked to respond to interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance).

To mitigate the potential for technical malfunctions interrupting the natural flow of the phenomenological interviews, I used two audio recorders. A notebook and pencils were also used to collect data. I collected all data and placed them in my locked briefcase

along with copies of all e-mail communications with participants. To protect data and ensure respondent privacy, all collected data were stored in an undisclosed location in a locked file safe.

Data Analysis Plan

Accurate data analysis is vital to the validity of research results. Patton (2002) contended that after conducting in-depth interviews with participants, qualitative researchers should analyze collected data to ascertain patterns in the experiences of interviewees. The voices of participants articulated during in-depth qualitative interviews provide a secondary lens by which the researcher's accounts are validated (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Accordingly, my study used an audio recording device to support interview integrity. My phenomenological inquiry used multiple units of analysis providing the scope within which consistent patterns of data were discovered (Patton, 2002). My study explored the perspectives and lived experiences of TANF leavers sharing the common phenomenon of having lost TANF eligibility after reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months. Saldaña (2009) noted that researchers pose epistemological questions to fundamentally and holistically understand human experiences to construct meanings within the context of the phenomenon being studied. Thus, my coded research questions were aligned with the research design. Coding is a foundational component of data analysis without which collected data are meaningless and chaotic (Patton, 2002).

To facilitate content analysis, questions contained in The Urban Institute's 1999 TANF study (see Appendix A), demographic questions I added (see Appendix B), and interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance) were coded. Data saturation, as

indicated by the collection of sufficient data allowing this study to be replicated, was reached through data triangulation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Saturation was facilitated by the nature of the probing questions posed to respondents during interviews. Data from Acs and Loprest (2001) were used to assist in confirming and contradicting qualitative data collected from respondents as a means of triangulation. In qualitative inquiry, triangulation can be attained when the researcher uses more than one data collection method (Patton, 2002). Because my purposive, homogenous sample size was six, responses to questionnaires and demographic questions (see Appendix A and Appendix B) were manually calculated in Microsoft Excel. Ose (2016) reports that Microsoft Excel can be used to efficiently and accurately organize unstructured qualitative data by creating a spreadsheet and entering question numbers from the questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B) in column headings and participants' responses in rows. I transcribed the qualitative interviews (see Appendix A Continuance) verbatim and used NVivo software to categorize data and reveal emerging themes. These data analysis processes also identified anomalies in the data sets.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability

Rudestam and Newton (2007) noted that while the use of the traditional empirical research terms reliability, internal validity, and external validity may be potentially inappropriate in qualitative research, all research findings must be founded on critical examination. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are more appropriate constructs for qualitative research. Rudestam and Newton (2007) also maintained that research findings can be deemed

credible when the researcher has spent adequate time with respondents and has sufficiently explored and detailed respondents' experiences. My study involved qualitative interviews comprised of open-ended questions, and data analysis yielded thick descriptions ensuring the transferability of results.

The results of my study provided the foundation on which future replicated studies can be conducted with a different sample. Rudestam and Newton (2007) asserted that the characteristics of the studied sample are a determinant in the reliability of the data collection instrument used with that sample population. For example, the questionnaire (see Appendix A) instrument used by Acs and Loprest (2001) realized high reliability with the sample population of D.C. TANF leavers. Equally high reliability, however, may not necessarily be realized when the same questionnaire instrument is used with a sample population indicating different characteristics. Finally, Rubin and Rubin (2012) contended that confirmability exists when there is no evidence of researcher bias in data collection or data analysis, and research findings are presented in a manner allowing the audience to clearly understand the researcher's process of collecting and analyzing the data.

Ethical Procedures

I continuously monitored the progress of my study to ensure all aspects adhered to the guidelines set forth by Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding ethical standards in research. This included, but was not limited to, securing IRB approval prior to collecting data. IRB assessed the research plans for my study to ensure all human participants were protected. Although TANF leavers are inherently

vulnerable, it is less likely the social service professionals who participated in my study are vulnerable.

Vulnerable population implies disadvantage necessitating greater protections in research (Shivayogi, 2013). It was anticipated that my study's population could include those vulnerable in terms of physical limitations, pregnancy, elderly, economic lack, and ethnic minorities. Procedures were implemented to ensure the sample population was safeguarded. I assured the invitation to participate (see Appendix C) was succinct and unmistakably articulated the recruitment and study details. When contacted by potential participants requesting additional information or wanting to commit to being interviewed, I explained my study, described participation requirements, and detailed the use of data collected. I reviewed the informed consent form with each potential participant emphasizing the individual's right to discontinue participation at any point. These procedures were followed to ensure each participant was treated ethically.

Protections for Confidential Data

To further protect participants and to encourage candid participation, I assigned a descriptive label, the only identifier throughout my study, to each respondent indicating the county served, and the participant number for that category. In doing so, identifiers were assigned in a manner allowing for additional respondents if data saturation had not been reached as planned. For example, the first respondent serving Wyandotte County was coded as W1. The exception to the use of the identifier was the respondent's signature on the informed consent form.

I also established and maintained transparency of the data collection process. I retained a confidential log detailing how data was transcribed, e.g. from the audio

recording, from written notes, or from memory; how transcriptions were verified; and the level of detail maintained when transcribing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All audio recordings of responses to interview questions (see Appendix A Continuance), transcriptions, completed questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B), and logs were stored in a locked box in an undisclosed location for a minimum of ten years post-study.

Summary

In Chapter 3 I provided the rationale for selecting a qualitative phenomenological design to answer the research questions regarding the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of TANF's goal and second purpose. I reiterated the research questions; expounded upon the research method and design; and discussed data collection and analysis, issues with trustworthiness, the plan for purposive homogenous sampling within the target population, instrumentation, and ethical considerations regarding the respondents. A comprehensive presentation of research findings is included in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of TANF's goal and second purpose. The problem addressed was the lack of understanding regarding the impact of the length of time TANF leavers receive benefits on their path out of poverty. My research questions addressed how TANF leavers' pathway out of poverty was impacted by the lifetime eligibility time limit legislated by Kansas at the time of the TANF recipients' participation in TANF. Chapter 4 presents a detailed description of the study's setting, demographics of the population, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, evidences of trustworthiness, and results.

Research Setting

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (approval number 05-16-19-0277570), I e-mailed potential study participants the invitation to participate (See Appendix C). Once the invitations were accepted by e-mailed responses, I reserved one conference room in each of two social services agency sites as authorized by the director of these agencies. I then e-mailed each participant confirmation of the scheduled date, time, and location of the interview. The conference rooms used were private and allowed the interviews to be conducted without interruption. There were no personal or organizational conditions influencing participants or their lived experiences at the time of the study that may have influenced the interpretation of the study's results. All qualitative interviews were conducted at one of two sites within the same calendar week.

Demographics

I distributed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) to participants prior to proceeding with the open-ended questions of the in-depth interview (see Appendix A Continuance). According to the responses provided on the demographic questionnaire, the six participants for this study consisted of five females and one male whose ages ranged from 37 to 60 years; the average age was 49 years. Their races were mixed: two African Americans, one Hispanic, and three Whites. Interviews were scheduled based on the availability of participants considering their work-related obligations. In contrast to the ages of participants, the reported average age of TANF leavers was 27 years. Participants unanimously reported that the typical TANF leaver was female. These females were single parents with 33% having three children and 67% having two children. The races of TANF leavers were also mixed. According to participants, 33% were African American, 50% were either African American or Hispanic, and 17% were White. Table 3 shows demographic factors of study participants and typical TANF leavers.

Table 3

Demographics

Gender	Study participants	Typical TANF leaver (urban)	Typical TANF leaver (suburban)
Female	83%	100%	100%
Male	17%	0%	0%
Average Age (Years)	Study participants	Typical TANF leaver (urban)	Typical TANF leaver (suburban)
	49	26	29
Race	Study participants	Typical TANF leaver (urban)	Typical TANF leaver (suburban)
African American	33%	50%	0%
African American or Hispanic	0%	50%	50%
Hispanic	17%	0%	0%
White	50%	0%	50%

Data Collection

Data collection sites were the social service agency sites to which participants were regularly assigned. Purposive homogenous participant selection entailed my choice of social service professionals based on identified criteria. Only social service professionals who provided expert support in Johnson County Kansas and Wyandotte County Kansas to those who left TANF after reaching their lifetime eligibility limit of 60 months and those who left TANF after reaching their lifetime eligibility of 24 months were invited to participate. I e-mailed the invitation to participate in the study to each potential respondent. At the onset of each confidential interview, I distributed the informed consent form to the participant inviting questions of any unclear information prior to the participant signing the form. Once the participant signed the form, I

distributed the questionnaire and conducted the in-depth interview (see Appendix A, Appendix A Continuance, and Appendix B). I allotted 1 hour for each interview, and all interviews were completed in the same work week.

The interview room at each site contained a table and chairs. This allowed a solid writing surface for participants to complete the questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and for me to take notes during the interviews. I collected questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B) at the conclusion of each interview and placed them, along with my written notes, in a locked briefcase for data integrity and confidentiality. During each interview, the two audio recording devices were placed on the table between the participant and me to ensure all verbal communication was captured. The two audio recording devices allowed me to collect phenomenological data derived from participant clarification requests while completing the questionnaires (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and all oral communication during the in-depth interviews (see Appendix A Continuance). I distributed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B) prior to facilitating the in-depth interviews (see Appendix A Continuance). There were no variations in data collection from my plan presented in Chapter 3, and my participant selection processes using local social service agencies allowed me to achieve research saturation.

Data Analysis

I manually entered all data from completed questionnaires into Microsoft Excel. I used Excel's Function feature to tally responses, calculate percentages of responses, and calculate averages of participants' confidential responses. I transcribed and analyzed approximately four hours of recorded audio interviews verbatim to maintain data

integrity and validity. I then coded the interview data to identify themes and entered data into the NVivo software application for theme validation and the revelation of additional emerging themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Analysis of my study's data yielded thick descriptions ensuring the transferability of results. This study's results supplied the foundation on which future replicated studies can be conducted with a different sample. Uniform reliability, however, may not be realized if the future replicated study targets a population that does not share the identical characteristics of the population targeted for this study. I presented research findings in a manner allowing a clear understanding of my process of collecting and analyzing data, thereby ensuring confirmability. No adjustments were made to strategies regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, or conformability as detailed in Chapter 3.

Study Results

The study's results fulfilled the study's purpose, answered each research question, and addressed the gaps in research. The purpose of my study was to gain insight into the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of TANF's goal and second purpose. Saldaña (2009) noted that epistemological research questions beginning with *how* suggest the exploration of participants' revealed perceptions within the data. Accordingly, the research questions of this study were answered in this study's data results. Most of the social service professionals interviewed agreed that although TANF participation slightly reduced the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation and work, TANF

participation did not promote marriage. Most respondents also agreed that neither extending TANF eligibility to 60 months nor maintaining TANF eligibility at 24 months is ideal for reducing the dependency of needy parents. In-depth conversations revealed how TANF leavers perceive the experience of TANF participation and how TANF leavers navigate the pathway out of poverty.

This study's results addressed each of the two gaps in research described in Chapters 1 and 2. I explored the compared lived experiences of former TANF recipients after exiting the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). According to participants, 50% of 24-month TANF leavers were unemployed or employed less than full time in the first month after leaving TANF. That percentage increased to 67% for 60-month TANF leavers. Additionally, I explored the reduction in the number of TANF recipients resulting from the reduction in lifetime TANF eligibility months and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). Respondents consistently reported a significant reduction in TANF caseloads beginning in 2011 when the TANF lifetime eligibility limit in Kansas was reduced from 60 months to 48 months. Participants also recounted their lived experiences with former TANF recipients whose eligibility ended once they reached their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months.

Result Tables

Taxonomy tables presented in a predetermined order were derived from comprehensive qualitative interview results, tabulated questionnaire responses, and emerged themes. Results were rounded to the nearest 10 to allow an exact 100% total for each data set. Data indicating discrepancies are presented in paragraph form. Following each taxonomy table, I describe, in paragraph form, detailed participant responses I

transcribed from questionnaire results and participants' open-ended comments. Finally, the coding pattern and theme detection displaying emerging themes are presented in a separate table.

Table 4 indicates 60-month TANF leavers were less likely to work either full time or part time during the first month of TANF ineligibility than 24-month TANF leavers. Specifically, 33% of 60-month TANF leavers worked full time, and 17% of 60-month TANF leavers worked part time during the first month of TANF ineligibility. In contrast, 50% of 24-month TANF leavers worked either full time or part time during the first month of TANF ineligibility. Additionally, suburban 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers were more likely to work full time or part time during the first month of TANF ineligibility than urban 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers.

Table 4

Experience With Work

Employed full time in the first month of TANF ineligibility (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	0	0%	2	100%
No	2	100%	0	0%
Employed full time in the first month of TANF ineligibility (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	2	50%	1	25%
No	2	50%	3	75%
Employed part time in the first month of TANF ineligibility (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	0	0%	2	100%
No	2	100%	0	0%
Employed part time in the first month of TANF ineligibility (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	1	25%	0	0%
No	3	75%	4	100%

The following list includes participant comments that revealed additional details during in-depth interviews of the work experiences of 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers during the first month of TANF ineligibility:

- “Again, 60 months is a bad decision. It’s harder to get our clients motivated when they have so much time” (W4, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “They have to get training or education and they have to learn about real life consequences for their actions or they’re never going to be able to hold down

a job. Our typical TANF recipient has not worked prior to TANF participation” (W3, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

- “Sixty months seems to drag on. It’s easy to keep putting things off. It was exhausting trying to figure out how to get to the next step” (W2, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “It depends on the barriers. If they’re coming from generational poverty, started having babies really young, if they don’t have a good family support system, coming from foster care, single parent family, family history of substance abuse, then no, 24 months is not long enough to prepare them for work” (W1, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “With a 24 month limit, we push them more to train and start a career path, not just get a job” (J2, personal communication, May 24, 2019).
- “Twenty-four months is a positive nudge for those more work ready, but an added barrier to those already experiencing barriers to successful employment” (J1, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

Table 5 details results of TANF leavers’ experiences with marriage. The results were consistent in that marriage was not a focus during TANF participation. Results were also consistent when considering the lifetime eligibility time limit and the community demographics: suburban or urban.

Table 5

Experience With Marriage

Married after leaving TANF (suburban and urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
No	7	100%	7	100%
Married prior to TANF (suburban and urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
No	7	100%	7	100%
Married while receiving TANF (suburban and urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
No	7	100%	7	100%

The following list includes participant comments that revealed additional details during in-depth interviews of the marriage experiences of 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers:

- “Marriage is the last thing they need. I think that’s a part we should stay out of. I can’t think of one time where a marriage in this environment was beneficial and most of the time, she needs to leave him” (W4, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “I don’t see that it made a difference. Even if they’re married, they probably have a spouse who doesn’t work and isn’t motivated to participate in the process” (W3, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Marriage has never been a thought in the minds of our clients simply because the man’s income would count and even though it was low, it was higher than

the eligibility limit for assistance. Marriage has no place in this discussion at all” (W2, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

- “Marriage has no impact” (W1, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Our program has not promoted marriage. We make a lot of referrals to Safe Home. We promote safety: protection orders, transitional housing. Only 5% of clients are married. As I said, that’s a boundary we should stay completely out of” (J2, personal communication, May 24, 2019).
- “Marriage increases the pressures on clients by now having to address the barriers to two people” (J1, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Table 6 shows that 67% of both 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers earned at least a high school diploma and that 50% of these individuals obtained that diploma while receiving TANF. As well, 67% of 60-month TANF leavers participated in a non-academic training program and 67% of that group completed the program while receiving TANF. On the other hand, 50% of 24-month TANF leavers participated in a non-academic training program and only 33% of the group completed the program while receiving TANF.

Table 6

Experience With Job Preparation

Highest Academic Degree (suburban)	60-Month Frequency	60-Month Percent	24-Month Frequency	24-Month Percent
High school	2	100%	2	100%
Highest Academic Degree (urban)	60-Month Frequency	60-Month Percent	24-Month Frequency	24-Month Percent
Less than high school diploma or GED	0	0%	2	50%
GED	1	25%	0	0%
High school	2	50%	2	50%
Some trade school	1	25%	0	0%
Received academic degree (suburban)	60-Month Frequency	60-Month Percent	24-Month Frequency	24-Month Percent
Before TANF	1	50%	1	50%
During TANF	1	50%	1	50%
Received academic degree (urban)	60-Month Frequency	60-Month Percent	24-Month Frequency	24-Month Percent
Not Applicable	1	25%	1	25%
Before TANF	1	25%	1	25%
During TANF	2	50%	2	50%
Participated in non-academic training program (suburban)	60-Month Frequency	60-Month Percent	24-Month Frequency	24-Month Percent
Yes	2	100%	0	0%
No	0	0%	2	100%

table continues

Participated in non-academic training program (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	2	50%	3	75%
Not Applicable	2	50%	1	25%
Completed non-academic training (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Not Applicable	0	0%	2	100%
During TANF	2	100%	0	0%
Completed non-academic training (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Not Applicable	2	50%	1	25%
Before TANF	0	0%	1	25%
During TANF	2	50%	2	50%

Open-ended participant discussions that revealed further details during in-depth interviews of the job preparation experiences of 60-month and 24-month TANF leavers are listed below:

- “When it was 60 months, they just rode it out. They weren’t trying to look for work or get a degree. They just let TANF expire. I don’t think 60 months helps; I think it hinders them from being proactive by giving them too much leeway. Sixty months is too much time, 24 months shakes them up a bit and makes them be more proactive. I think extending to 60 months would be a bad decision” (W4, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

- “It helps them get skills to look for work. Most weren’t really prepared because they just spun their wheels; they didn’t really do anything. It just depends on the client whether they’re motivated or not, too. They have so many barriers, they don’t even try. Sixty months gave them much more time to learn the job seeking skills” (W3, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Sixty months didn’t help. They had so much time that the end was too far away for them to take it seriously. Sixty months is too long. 36 months would be best. When they had 60 months, people were just waiting out their months. There was no focus on job preparation. They would go through the motions and do just enough to stay in compliance and not get a penalty. Sixty months seems to drag on. It’s easy to keep putting things off. It was exhausting trying to figure out how to get to the next step. Sixty months is too long. Thirty-six months would be ideal to identify and overcome barriers” (W2, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Some need 60 months. Some may need a full year to address mental health issues, housing, domestic violence, and other trauma. Twenty-four months makes them more proactive. They have more of an urgency to prepare for a job. Twenty-four months is better” (W1, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “They’re not used to working, they didn’t finish school, and they don’t have any organizational skills. Instead of having this long period of time where they can do whatever they want to, we have to constantly keep them going. Giving them specific tasks to complete and giving them deadlines, provides

stability for them and holds them accountable. And that's what they need...that's what most of us need" (J2, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

- "They're never going to be ready. By the time we wade through all their problems, time's up. With only 24 months, they feel the clock ticking immediately. Twenty-four months doesn't give enough time for education, training or deep counseling. Twenty-four months is not enough time. Thirty-six months would be best. They are given choices and opportunities. There's a limited amount of time so clients are more prepped to get everything done. We are more aware of available training programs and work quickly to help clients enroll. There are more training opportunities available. We focus on work, not training" (J1, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

Table 7 details results of TANF leavers' experiences with poverty. In most instances, the results were consistent when considering the lifetime eligibility time limit and the community demographics: suburban or urban. The results varied, however, with 24-month TANF leavers receiving rent subsidy or public housing assistance after reaching their lifetime TANF eligibility limit. Although 100% of urban 24-month TANF leavers received rent subsidy or lived in public housing, only 50% of suburban 24-month TANF leavers shared that experience. Eligibility for income-based public assistance programs such as Food Assistance, Cash Assistance, rent subsidy and public housing indicated TANF leavers remained in poverty.

Table 7

Experience With Poverty

Received Food Assistance after TANF (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	2	100%	2	100%
Received Food Assistance after TANF (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	4	100%	4	100%
Received Child Care Assistance after TANF (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	0	0%	2	100%
No	2	100%	0	0%
Received Child Care Assistance after TANF (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	0	0%	4	100%
No	4	100%	0	0%
Received rent subsidy or public housing after TANF (suburban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	2	100%	1	50%
No	0	0%	1	50%
Received rent subsidy or public housing after TANF (urban)	60-month frequency	60-month percent	24-month frequency	24-month percent
Yes	4	100%	4	100%

While childhood poverty rates increased in Kansas, the overall poverty rate decreased (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). Table 8 details the number of active TANF caseloads and the poverty rate at the time of each public policy change reducing the maximum number of lifetime TANF eligibility months. As indicated, the rate at which poverty decreased was disproportionate to the rate at which TANF caseloads decreased.

Table 8

TANF Caseloads and Poverty

	60-month limit (2010)	48-month limit (2011)	36-month limit (2015)	24-month limit (2016)	Percent change
Kansas TANF caseloads	15635	12841	5496	5004	(68%)
Kansas poverty rate	13.5%	13.8%	12.9%	12.2%	(10%)
Johnson County TANF caseloads	1120	882	294	277	(75%)
Johnson County poverty rate	6.6%	6.7%	5.5%	5.6%	(15%)
Wyandotte County TANF caseloads	2240	2002	740	519	(77%)
Wyandotte County poverty rates	23.9%	26.0%	21.9%	19.4%	(19%)

Themes

The use of open-ended questions posed during in-depth interviews was critical to this study. Responses to these questions increased insight into the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime eligibility limit of 60 or 24 months allowing a determination of the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and the fulfillment of the TANF goal and second purpose. Although the nature

of open-ended questions implies respondents are free to provide any answer with any level of detail, several themes emerged with the analysis of interview responses for this study.

Respondents were unanimous in asserting that increasing the TANF lifetime eligibility to 60 months does not benefit TANF recipients in terms of work. Participants agreed that 60 months allows too much time for clients to meet their employment goals causing them to lose focus and motivation. Two themes emerged for 24-month TANF leavers: there is an increased sense of urgency to find employment and 24 months is not enough time to find employment paying wages and benefits at a level necessary to lift the household out of poverty.

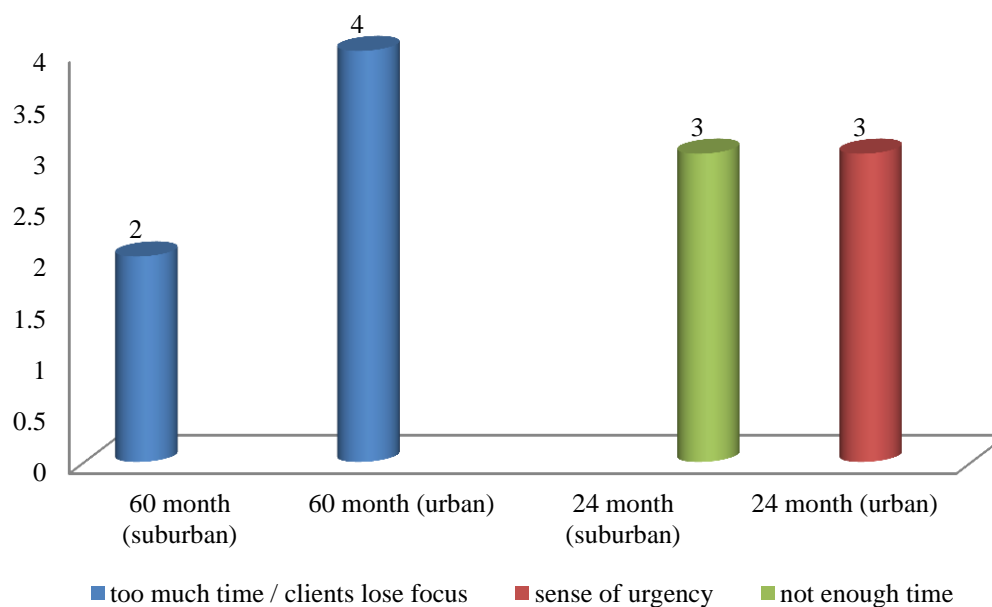


Figure 6. TANF and work.

Again, 60 months of TANF eligibility was excessive and 24 months of TANF eligibility was insufficient. As with work, 60 months of TANF eligibility caused clients

to lose momentum and motivation in preparing for work. There were often long gaps between TANF recipients' successes resulting in the perception that participation in TANF is an ineffective means of job preparation. Conversely, 24 months of TANF eligibility did not allow enough time for clients, particularly those lacking formal and informal education, to gain the education and training required for a successful transition from welfare to work providing a pathway out of poverty.

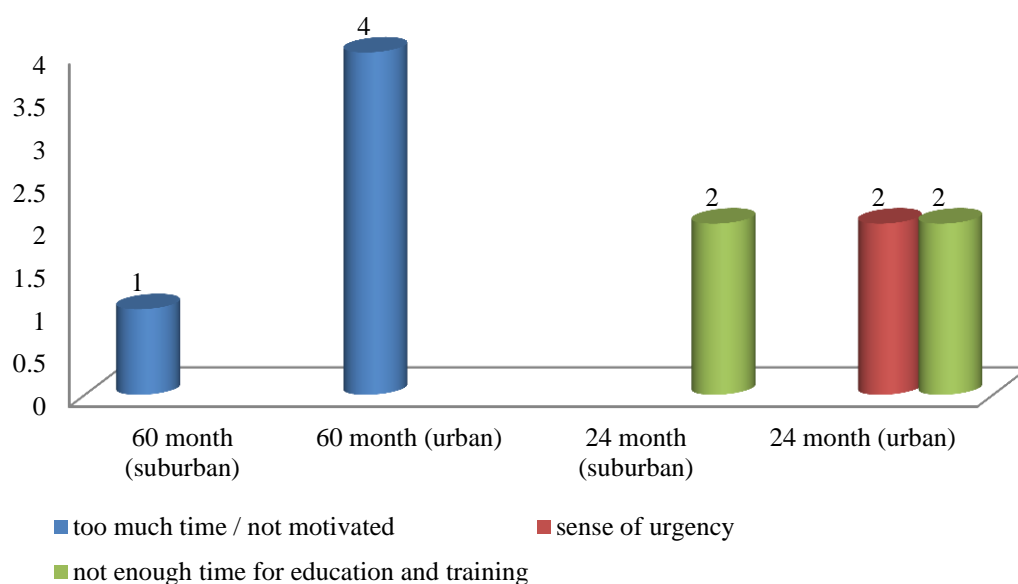


Figure 7. TANF and job preparation.

There was a single, consistent theme that emerged regarding TANF and marriage. Marriage should not be a consideration of TANF. Responses concerning marriage included the following:

- “We should not cross this boundary” (W4, personal communication, May 20, 2019).

- “Marriage doesn’t make a difference” (W3, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Marriage should not be an issue” (W2, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Marriage has no place in this discussion” (W1, personal communication, May 20, 2019).
- “Marriage has no impact” (J2, personal communication, May 24, 2019).
- “Marriage is not an issue” (J1, personal communication, May 24, 2019).

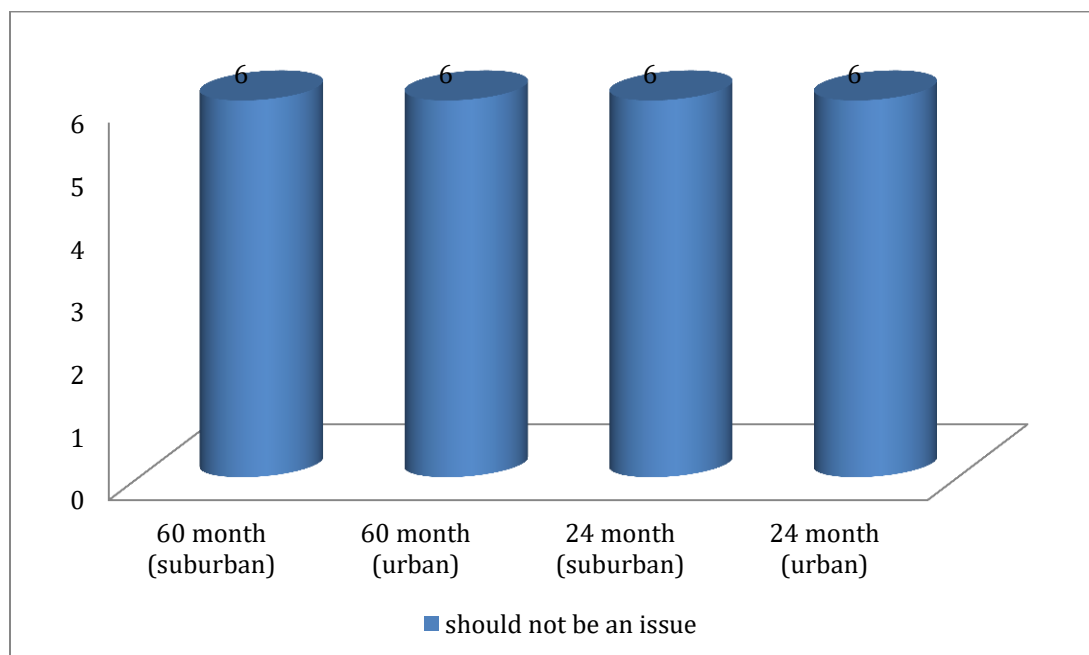


Figure 8. TANF and marriage.

Summary

Chapter 4 contained a detailed account of the setting in which the study was conducted, population’s demographics, data collection process followed, data analysis

technique used, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results. The results indicated an increased knowledge of the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their pay out of poverty, and confirmed the need to further consider the current 24-month lifetime eligibility limit. I discussed how my verbatim transcription of in-depth interviews and use of NVivo software validated themes revealed during data analysis. Chapter 5 continues with an interpretation of the research findings, suggestions for future research, recommendations for social service professionals, and the limitations of the research study. Additionally, Chapter 5 includes a discussion of how this current study's findings affirmed or contradicted findings of research studies described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the comparative experiences of Kansans who received TANF until reaching their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months to determine the impact of time limits on their path out of poverty and fulfillment of the TANF goal and second purpose. I addressed the lack of knowledge regarding the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty. Further, I addressed the gap in literature regarding the limited evidence concerning compared lived experiences of former TANF recipients after exiting the TANF program after 60 and 24 months (Hildebrandt, 2016). Additionally, I examined the gap in literature regarding the reduction in the number of TANF recipients primarily resulting from the reduction in lifetime TANF eligibility months and the poverty rate in Kansas (Kansas Action for Children, 2014). In Chapter 5 I present a summary of my study, recommendations for further research, implications for policy recommendations and social change, and conclusions.

Interpretation of Findings

The study's results demonstrated increased understanding of the impact of the length of time TANF recipients receive benefits on their path out of poverty. The results revealed that overall experiences with work, job preparation, and marriage are consistent among suburban and urban TANF leavers. Results also revealed the need for additional research exploring contributing factors to the ineffectiveness of TANF participation in providing a path out of poverty.

Experiences With Work

Welfare legislation is predicated on the assumption that welfare recipients hold to a sense of entitled dependency and must be trained and educated to become personally responsible for their economic station (Alfred, 2005). I found the experiences of 60-month TANF leavers were consistent with this assumption. Those allowed the extended period to receive benefits were more likely to remain unemployed following the loss of TANF benefits. Finding employment providing a path out of poverty was not a priority. TANF leavers' focus was on receiving welfare for the duration of their entitled 60 months, not on becoming financially self-sufficient. Conversely, the experiences of 24-month TANF leavers were divided in terms of suburban or urban residency. Suburban 24-month TANF leavers found employment while urban 24-month TANF leavers did not. The 42% employment rate for 24-month TANF leavers was inconsistent with the 2017 24% employment rate self-reported by Kansas to Administration for Children and Families (Office of Family Assistance, 2018) and the 60% employment rate determined by Acs and Loprest (2001). Although I anticipated greater success with 60-month TANF leavers and the recommendation by social service professionals that the lifetime eligibility limit be returned to 60 months, the results of my study did not support this expectation. The unexpected results were that the 60-month eligibility limit encouraged welfare dependency, and that my study's participants unanimously denounced returning the lifetime eligibility limit to 60 months. Additional research is needed to explore the reasons for these high levels of unemployment.

Experiences With Job Preparation

Among a population unaccustomed to the structure and self-motivation required to actively participate in the workforce, 60 months allowed excessive, unstructured, unfocused experiences. The inability to focus and self-motivate did not create an environment conducive to overcoming barriers. The concept of addressing one or more of the four types of barriers (disabilities, education/learning experiences, personal, and situational) identified by Alfred and Martin (2007) was overwhelming. The results of my study were also consistent with previous research indicating single African-American mothers face significant, often insurmountable, barriers to obtaining employment sufficient to lift their families from absolute poverty (Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Khosrovani & Ward, 2011; Kirschenman & Neckerman, 1991; Neckerman & Kirschenman, 1991; Quadagno, 1996; Seccombe, James, & Battle Walters, 1998). Lacking skills or experience in employing practices to overcome their barriers, 60-month TANF leavers defaulted to doing nothing.

With only 24 months in which to prepare for and obtain employment, TANF leavers were more focused on the process and more actively engaged in job preparation activities. Suburban and urban 24-month TANF leavers were likely to have received at least a high school diploma before or while receiving TANF. The increased experiences with barriers among urban TANF leavers were not a significant factor among this population. This could, however, be a result of TANF participants voluntarily requesting closure of their cash assistance case prior to reaching the lifetime eligibility limit when participation requirements and associate penalties for failure to cooperate are clearly explained to them. Although job preparation opportunities were readily available,

participation by urban TANF leavers did not increase incidents of employment after leaving TANF. Similar to data reported by Kansas to Administration for Children and Families (Office of Family Assistance, 2018), my study's results indicated approximately 60% of TANF leavers had earned a high school diploma or GED. Also, consistent with the findings of Acs and Loprest (2001), my study did not indicate education and training as significant factors in TANF leavers' ability to obtain and maintain employment sufficient to lift their families from poverty. Inability to focus on the process, lack of experience with the structure of employment, and inability to overcome barriers outweighed the benefits of education and training intended to lead to sustainable employment. TANF leavers did not possess the human capital investment required for education and training to garner skills leading to employment, increased earnings, and the pathway from absolute poverty to economic self-sufficiency (Becker, 1993). Additional research is needed to explore the appropriateness of the education and training programs provided in response to the educational and work-related barriers experienced by TANF recipients.

Experiences With Marriage

Although TANF is intended to promote marriage, TANF recipients were primarily single mothers of color. This was consistent with Acs and Loprest's (2001) findings that most TANF leavers were single, Black, never-married mothers. Additionally, although Kansas reported 20% of TANF leavers were married (Office of Family Assistance, 2018), this percentage may have included TANF leavers who were separated physically but not legally. In addition to personal barriers experienced, these individuals are normally categorized by society as underserving citizens (Gordon, 1994;

Handler & Hasenfeld, 2007; Neubeck & Cazenave, 2001). As with the lack of job-related skills, these women lack the skills necessary to enter and maintain healthy relationships. Marriage did not increase instances of successful transitions from welfare to economic self-sufficiency. In fact, I found marriage to a spouse also experiencing barriers or unwilling to engage in the TANF process decreased the likelihood that TANF participation assisted the family in becoming financially self-sufficient. Marriage is not an appropriate path out of poverty for TANF leavers. Additional research is needed to address the impact of marriage on the path out of poverty with consideration for the health of the marriage.

Experiences With Poverty

I found that TANF participation did not lead to economic self-sufficiency as evidenced by TANF leavers' continued eligibility for income-based public assistance programs. My finding was consistent with Acs and Loprest (2001) who reported more than 80% of TANF leavers remained eligible for income-based public assistance programs. Likewise, self-reported data indicated 99% of Kansas's TANF leavers maintained eligibility for income-based public assistance programs (Office of Family Assistance, 2018).

Further research is needed to gain insight into the impact of current policies, specific programs and practices on TANF recipients' ability to become financially self-sufficient. My study added to the definition of poverty by giving face to actual citizens (Vidyasagar, 2006). Absolute poverty, which exists when a household does not have the necessary resources (e.g., shelter, food, and utilities) to reach a specific and

predetermined standard of living, is pervasive among TANF leavers (Southwell, 2009). Regardless of the time limit or the geographic area, poverty is persistent.

Limitations of the Study

The study's three identified limitations were also strengths as indicated by the research design. Although the use of a phenomenological design was a limitation of my study, my application of the bracketing process reduced the likelihood of presuppositions influencing my findings (Gearing, 2004). The use of the D.C. TANF Leavers Questionnaire (1999), which could have increased the probability of participants failing to answer each question honestly and completely for fear of reprisal, provided a semistructured means for participants to articulate their experiences. Because study participation was voluntary and responses had no impact on current or future professional standing, respondents were free to share their perceptions of their lived experiences. The third limitation was the use of the purposive sampling method, which could have limited the ability to generalize research findings. The population consisted of social service professionals who voluntarily participated in my study. These professionals serve different geographic locations and had varying years of experience providing services to TANF participants and TANF leavers.

Recommendations

Future Studies

Implementation of current TANF legislation in Kansas is inadequate to successfully transition TANF leavers from welfare to economic self-sufficiency. An in-depth analysis of the barriers experienced by TANF participants is needed so that appropriate processes and programs can be developed and implemented. A consideration

of barriers ignored, inappropriately addressed, or exacerbated by social service professionals is also warranted.

The role and impact of social service professionals on the likelihood of successful TANF experiences should be explored. Unmotivated professionals cannot appropriately serve TANF recipients and TANF leavers. Even a well-meaning social service professional can provide inappropriate or detrimental assistance to TANF participants if that professional's level of understanding regarding poverty and evidenced-based practices to successfully address poverty is limited.

Ensuring social service professionals are adequately trained, providing them with opportunities to demonstrate learned skills, and consistently holding them accountable for their encounters with TANF participants and TANF leavers is crucial to TANF leavers' ability to become financially self-sufficient. Another recommendation regarding social service professionals involves collaboration. Results of my in-depth interviews indicated a lack of consistency in terms of the utilization of community programs and services available to TANF participants. The reasons for not referring TANF participants to these programs and services were unclear. Again, as with TANF participants and TANF leavers, social service professionals may grow weary of the TANF process and consequently limit the level of assistance they provide. An exploration of the referral process and utilization is warranted.

Finally, there is no evidence that supports the success of reducing the number of eligible TANF months as a means of increasing financial self-sufficiency. Researchers may explore the possibility of legislating a range in Kansas's TANF time limits allowing TANF participation to be better tailored to recipients' barriers rather than imposing a

rigid limit without intentional consideration of individual circumstances and experiences. This study may include posing questions from the D.C. TANF Leavers Questionnaire to TANF leavers themselves. The results may be used to create a well-rounded, in-depth, robust depiction of the status of TANF in Kansas.

Policy

TANF affords states substantial latitude in determining how to allocate funds. In FY2017, Kansas allocated 2.6% of its TANF block grant to work supports and 0.9% to work activities (Office of Family Assistance, 2018). Considering the inability of Kansas's current TANF policy to consistently provide a pathway out of poverty for recipients, Kansas's policymakers should strengthen TANF by increasing funding allocations to programs proven to assist impoverished families in becoming economically stable. In addition, expenditures resulting from the duplication of services offered to TANF recipients can be eliminated by collaborating with community and government partners providing services supporting the goal and purposes of TANF.

TANF also lacks provisions requiring accountability. Although the federal government should continue to allow states the flexibility to determine which programs and services to implement to meet TANF's goal and purposes, federal legislation is needed to establish minimum funding levels for key TANF components such as work supports and work activities. Federal policy should also hold states accountable for TANF leavers meeting specified employment and income outcomes. At the state level, Kansas should hold social service agencies accountable for not only implementing evidence-based programs, but also for the level of service provided by social service professionals.

Lastly, Kansas should legislate a graduated phase out for TANF leavers remaining eligible for income-based assistance programs. Currently, the earned income of TANF leavers will likely cause the family to become ineligible for Medicaid, to receive a reduced monthly food assistance benefit, and to be assessed a higher public housing monthly obligation. A gradual, incremental reduction in public assistance would allow TANF leavers time to adjust financially to the transition from welfare to work.

Implications

The results of my empirical study provided original contributions to collaborative efforts of social service agencies and state policymakers. The findings of my study may influence Kansas legislators as they enact social service policies to be implemented at the county and local levels intended to increase financial self-sufficiency among Kansans exiting TANF. In addition, findings may influence social change by assisting policymakers and practitioners in making informed decisions guiding the design and implementation of TANF policies and programs by providing empirical data regarding the impact of TANF time limits on recipients' ability to obtain a path out of poverty through economic self-sufficiency. To this end, I provided the results of my study to county and local level practitioners who have regular access to state policymakers.

Conclusions

The status of TANF leavers in Kansas merits concern from policymakers. In general, TANF participation did not reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage. Returning lifetime eligibility to 60 months would not be beneficial to TANF recipients who tend to require targeted assistance providing regular acknowledgements of intermediary successes leading to

economic self-sufficiency. Although the reduction in the number of lifetime TANF eligibility months resulted in TANF participants being more focused and intentional in following TANF participation guidelines, poverty persists.

TANF participants and TANF leavers represent a vulnerable population. These Kansans experience deep, absolute, persistent poverty. Not only do TANF participants and TANF leavers lack education and training needed to obtain and maintain employment, they lack the ability to advocate for themselves. My study provided a rich and detailed view of their human experience. My study brought meaning to the lived experiences of TANF leavers beyond numerical data. The results of my study indicated that, for TANF leavers, poverty remains persistent and pervasive.

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[Black_Feminist_Thought__Knowledge__Consciousness__and_the_Politics_of_Empowerment__Perspectives_on_Gender.pdf](http://www.feministes-radicales.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Patricia-Hill-Collins-Black_Feminist_Thought__Knowledge__Consciousness__and_the_Politics_of_Empowerment__Perspectives_on_Gender.pdf)

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Appendix A: Questionnaire

In this section, I would like to learn about your professional experience with TANF leavers who lost benefits after reaching their lifetime eligibility limit of 60 or 24 months. When responding to these items, please refer to your individual experiences as a social service professional. Please select only one response for each question.

1. Is the typical TANF leaver employed full time in the first month of TANF ineligibility?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

2. Is the typical TANF leaver employed part time in the first month of TANF ineligibility?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

3. Does the typical TANF leaver marry after leaving TANF?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

4. If ever married, is the typical TANF leaver married prior to the first month of TANF eligibility?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

5. If ever married, does the typical TANF leaver marry while receiving TANF?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

6. What is the highest academic degree the typical TANF leaver has completed?

Check only one option.

60 month TANF leaver

- _____ Not Applicable
- _____ Less than high school diploma or GED
- _____ GED
- _____ High school
- _____ Some trade school, but did not complete degree / certificate
- _____ Trade school degree / certificate
- _____ Some college, but did not complete degree
- _____ Two – year college degree (AA / AS)
- _____ Four – year college degree (BA / BS)
- _____ Some graduate school, but did not complete degree
- _____ Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, DVM)
- _____ No high school / GED, but some college
- _____ Other (specify): _____
- _____ Don't Know
- _____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

- _____ Not Applicable
- _____ Less than high school diploma or GED
- _____ GED

- _____ High school
- _____ Some trade school, but did not complete degree / certificate
- _____ Trade school degree / certificate
- _____ Some college, but did not complete degree
- _____ Two – year college degree (AA / AS)
- _____ Four – year college degree (BA / BS)
- _____ Some graduate school, but did not complete degree
- _____ Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD, DVM)
- _____ No high school / GED, but some college
- _____ Other (specify): _____
- _____ Don't Know
- _____ Refuse to Answer

7. For those who have completed an academic degree, when did the typical TANF leaver receive this degree?

60 month TANF leaver		24 month TANF leaver	
_____	Not applicable	_____	Not applicable
_____	Before TANF	_____	Before TANF
_____	During TANF	_____	During TANF
_____	After TANF	_____	After TANF
_____	Don't Know	_____	Don't Know
_____	Refuse to Answer	_____	Refuse to Answer

8. Has the typical TANF leaver ever been in a non-academic training program, including on the job training?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

9. For those who have completed a non-academic training program, when did the typical TANF leaver complete this training?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not applicable

_____ Before TANF

_____ During TANF

_____ After TANF

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not applicable

_____ Before TANF

_____ During TANF

_____ After TANF

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

10. At any time since leaving TANF has the typical TANF leaver or has someone else in that home received Food Assistance from DCF?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

11. At any time since leaving TANF has the typical TANF leaver or has someone else in that home received Child Care Assistance from DCF?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

12. At any time since leaving TANF has the typical TANF leaver or has someone else in that home received rent subsidy or public housing?

60 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

24 month TANF leaver

_____ Not Applicable

_____ Yes

_____ No

_____ Don't Know

_____ Refuse to Answer

Section 2: Interview Questions

13. Please describe how participation in TANF reduced the typical TANF leaver's dependency on public assistance by promoting job preparation?
 - a. 60 month TANF leaver
 - b. 24 month TANF leaver
14. Please describe how participation in TANF reduced the typical TANF leaver's dependency on public assistance by promoting work?
 - a. 60 month TANF leaver
 - b. 24 month TANF leaver
15. Please describe how participation in TANF reduced the typical TANF leaver's dependency on public assistance by promoting marriage?
 - a. 60 month TANF leaver
 - b. 24 month TANF leaver
16. Regarding 24 month TANF leavers –
 - a. Please describe how you think extending TANF eligibility to 60 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting job preparation.
 - b. Please describe how you think extending TANF eligibility to 60 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting work.
 - c. Please describe how you think extending TANF eligibility to 60 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting marriage.

17. Regarding 60 month TANF leavers –
- a. Please describe how you think limiting TANF eligibility to 24 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting job preparation.
 - b. Please describe how you think limiting TANF eligibility to 24 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting work.
 - c. Please describe how you think limiting TANF eligibility to 24 months would reduce TANF leavers' dependency on public assistance by promoting marriage.

Appendix B: Demographic Questions

The demographic information provided by research participants is an important part of the questionnaire. Demographic data can help to illuminate study findings. Please remember your answers to the questions below are strictly voluntary and your responses will be kept confidential. Questions 18 through 20 refer to you. Questions 21 through ... refer to typical TANF leavers.

18. What is your gender? Male ___ Female _____
19. What is your current age? _____
20. To what racial or ethnic group do you belong?
- _____ African American
- _____ American Indian
- _____ Asian American
- _____ Hispanic, non-white
- _____ White, non-Hispanic
- _____ Other (specify): _____
21. What is the gender of the typical TANF leaver? Male _____ Female _____
22. What is the age of the typical TANF leaver? _____
23. What is the household composition of the typical TANF leaver?
- Adults: _____ Children: _____
24. To what racial or ethnic group does the typical TANF leaver belong?
- _____ African American
- _____ American Indian
- _____ Asian American

_____ Hispanic, non-white

_____ White, non-Hispanic

_____ Other (specify): _____

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix C: Invitation to Study Participation

Dear social service professional,

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase my understanding of how TANF time limits impact former TANF recipients whose eligibility expired after they reached their lifetime limit of 60 or 24 months in terms of their path out of poverty. I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University in the Public Policy and Administration Program specializing in Public Management and Leadership. As a social service professional who assisted former TANF recipients who reached their lifetime limit, you are in an ideal position to give me valuable first-hand information from your own perspective. The interview takes around 60 minutes. I am simply trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives about TANF time limits. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings. There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research, and findings could lead to greater public understanding of former TANF recipients' experiences in the TANF program. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Carla Green, B.S., M.A., Doctoral Student, Walden University

Public Policy and Administration: Public Management and Leadership

Carla.Green@WaldenU.edu

913-620-7435

Appendix E: Letter of Cooperation

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

April 24, 2019,

Dear Researcher,

Based on my review of your research, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled “The Impact of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families on Poverty Rates in Kansas” within [REDACTED] sites in Atchison County, Douglas County, Johnson County, Leavenworth County, and Wyandotte County. As a part of this study, I authorize you to use purposive homogenous sampling for specific recruitment, data collection with paper questionnaires and interviews. Individuals’ participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

I understand that our organization’s responsibilities include: providing a list of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] who have served in that role since prior to November 1, 2011, providing the participant availability, and providing a private room to conduct the interviews. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report that is published in Proquest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization’s policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

A solid black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.

Appendix F: Attempts to Contact Questionnaire Creator

The interview instrument for the study was sourced from information available online through the public domain; and while no permission was required for access, the researcher made three attempts to make contact with the creator of the questionnaire.

First Attempt: Email dated March 20, 2019 with a subject line, “use of D.C. TANF “Leavers” Questionnaire”, sent to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary at osaspeinfo@hhs.gov. Good evening, Do I need permission to use or modify the D.C. TANF “Leavers” Questionnaire (<https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdfdocument/dc-tanf-leavers-questionnaire>) for a research project? If so, how do I formally request permission? Carla Green

Second Attempt: Email dated April 3, 2019 with a subject line, “Second Attempt”, sent to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary at osaspeinfo@hhs.gov. My name is Carla Green and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am hereby seeking permission to modify and use the D.C. TANF “Leavers” Questionnaire found at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdfdocument/dc-tanf-leavers-questionnaire> for a research project.

Third Attempt: Email dated April 17, 2019 with a subject line, “Third Attempt”, sent to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of the Assistant Secretary at osaspeinfo@hhs.gov. My name is Carla Green and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am hereby seeking permission to modify and use the D.C. TANF “Leavers”

Questionnaire found at <https://aspe.hhs.gov/pdffdocument/dc-tanf-leavers-questionnaire>
for a research project.