

**UCLA**

## **AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community**

### **Title**

Welfare Reform and the Delivery of Welfare-to-Work Programs to AAPIs: What Works?

### **Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/99d6b4vd>

### **Journal**

AAPI Nexus: Policy, Practice and Community, 5(2)

### **ISSN**

1545-0317

### **Authors**

Chow, Julian Chun-Chung

Yoo, Grace J.

Vu, Catherine

### **Publication Date**

2007

### **DOI**

10.36650/nexus5.2\_77-97\_Chun-ChungChowEtAl

### **Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# Welfare Reform and the Delivery of Welfare-to-Work Programs to AAPIs

## What Works?

Julian Chun-Chung Chow,  
Grace J. Yoo, and Catherine Vu

### Abstract

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA) of 1996 has major implications for low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the research currently examining the impact of welfare reform on AAPI recipients and the welfare-to-work services available to this population. This article highlights AAPI participation and their timing-out rates in California's CalWORKs program and their barriers to transitioning to work. Four welfare-to-work program models and recommendations are presented to illustrate strategies that can be used to address the unique needs of AAPIs in order to alleviate their high risk for timing-out: one-stop-shops, transitional jobs programs, providing comprehensive and family focused services, and additional research and evaluation of programs specific to assisting the AAPI population on CalWORKs.

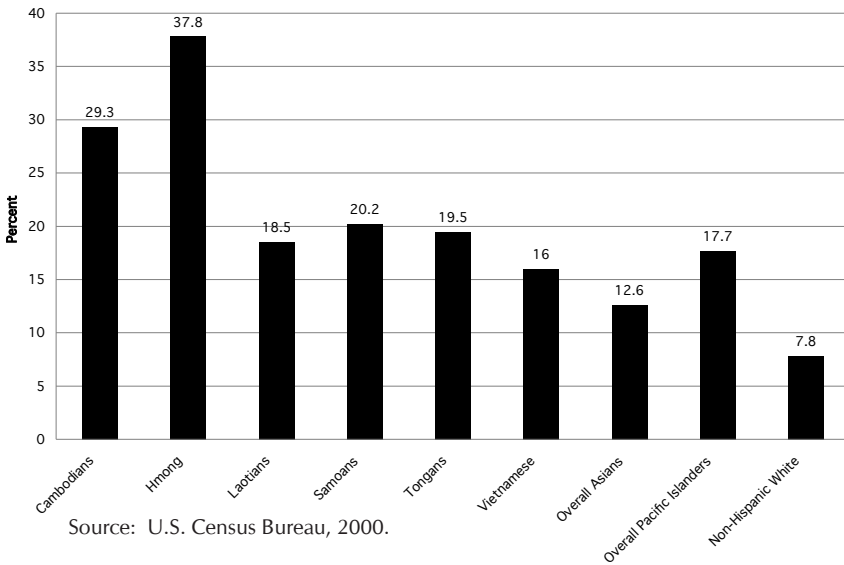
### Introduction

Although federal welfare reform has been framed as a black and white issue (Yoo, 1999), the transformation of AFDC to TANF has major implications for low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations. As an aggregate, the average family income of AAPI is higher than other racial/ethnic groups; but AAPIs have a lower per capita income and higher poverty rates than Whites (Reeves and Bennett, 2003). The 2000 Census reported approximately 1.6 million AAPIs with income below the poverty level in 1999; its poverty rate of 12.89 percent is notably higher when compared to 8.28 percent of non-Hispanic whites

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). At the same time, the AAPI population in the United States is heterogeneous with certain subgroups facing higher poverty rates. Figure 1 below compares the poverty rates between various Southeast Asian and Pacific Islander groups, an average of the Asian only population, an average of the Pacific Islander population and non-Hispanic Whites.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the re-

Figure 1. Poverty Rate of Select Groups in the U.S., 1999



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000.

search currently examining the impact of welfare reform on AAPI recipients and the welfare-to-work services available to this population. We have particularly focused on Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) in the state of California. California’s TANF law, known as California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs), limits aid to five years with specific work requirements. The existing literature on welfare reform and AAPIs has focused on immigrant welfare use overall. The little information that is available on AAPI welfare participation focuses on Southeast Asians, particularly refugees who immigrated to the U.S. after the Vietnam War (Ong and Blumenberg, 1994). While Pacific Islanders also have serious financial needs, very little is written about this group despite the alarming proportion of impoverished Pacific Islanders on welfare. Pacific Islanders include those who

identify as native Hawaiian, Samoan, Guamanian, Tongan, Fijian, Marshellese, or other Pacific Islander. Most Pacific Islanders do not consider themselves to be immigrants but rather indigenous people, native to the region from which they come (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). Unlike Pacific Islanders, Asians are either recent arrivals or whose families have arrived generations ago. The exact distinction between the two groups continues to be an on-going discussion in social welfare research. Whether they are native people or immigrants, however, the modest information that is available for both groups only provides a glimpse of welfare participation among them. Because the available information on AAPI welfare use is sparse, inferences on the effects of welfare on AAPI will be drawn from the literature on general immigrant welfare use.

#### AAPI Welfare Use

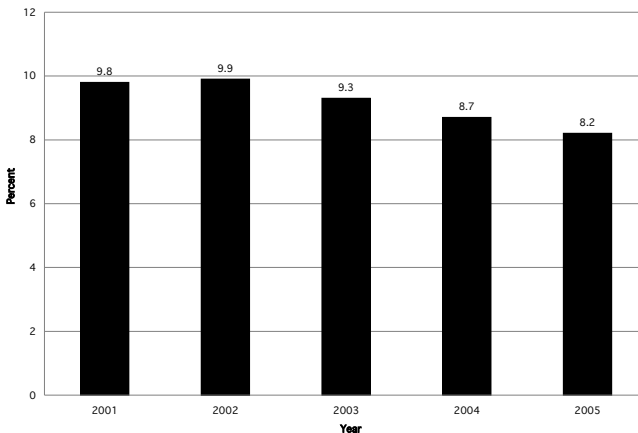
California is home to the largest immigrant population in the country. It was estimated that in the last decade 35 percent of the nation's permanent residents and 40 percent of the nation's undocumented residents live in California (Brady et al., 2002). Poverty impacts a substantial proportion of these immigrant families. The Asian and Pacific Islander Health Forum (2006) reports that 13 percent of Asians and 15 percent of Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders live below poverty level in California. AAPI welfare use steadily increased in the decades prior to welfare reform. Southeast Asians made up the vast majority of welfare recipients, growing more rapidly than any other ethnic group in the 1980s and early 1990s (Ong and Ishikawa, 2006). Although Southeast Asians made up only about one sixth of the total Asian population, they represented over 75 percent of Asian recipients on CalWORKs in 2004 (California Department of Social Services, 2006). Southeast Asian groups on welfare were primarily refugees who came to the U.S. after the Vietnam War. These refugees were likely to have experienced traumatic experiences as a result of the war and separation from their families and native countries, leaving them with emotional and psychological scars that impacted their ability to work (Ong and Blumenberg, 1994). Indeed, foreign-born Southeast Asians have among the highest poverty rates and public assistance use in California (Geronimo, 2001). Among Southeast Asians who arrived in the U.S. in 1991, about 45 percent of

Vietnamese arrivals received welfare, 44 percent Laotians received welfare, and almost 100 percent of Cambodians received welfare (Fujiwara, 2005).

The implementation of CalWORKs changed immigrant participation in welfare dramatically. The CalWORKs program is based on a “work-first” approach that prioritizes placing welfare recipients in any type of employment over assessing what recipients need in order to be self-sufficient. Welfare recipients are required to participate in job-searching and welfare-to-work activities such as basic education, job training, and community service. Participants who do not comply with welfare-to-work requirements risk penalties and/or sanctions. Once recipients reach the sixty-month time limit, cash assistance for adults is significantly decreased or entirely cut off.

Before CalWORKs began, 21.7 percent of low-income legal permanent residents with children received public assistance in California in 1994 (Fix and Passel, 2003). As California began implementing its welfare reform, general immigrant participation in welfare declined steeply. In 1999, welfare use by the same group of low-income legal permanent residents with children declined to 11.7 percent, a 46 percent decrease. This decline is associated with a variety of factors including “chilling effects” where immigrants’ confusion, fear, or stigma of welfare use discouraged them from seeking assistance (Tumlin and Zimmerman, 2003; Fix and Passel, 2003).

Figure 2. Percent of AAPIs in CalWORKs Caseload, 2001-2005



Source: California Department of Social Services, 2006

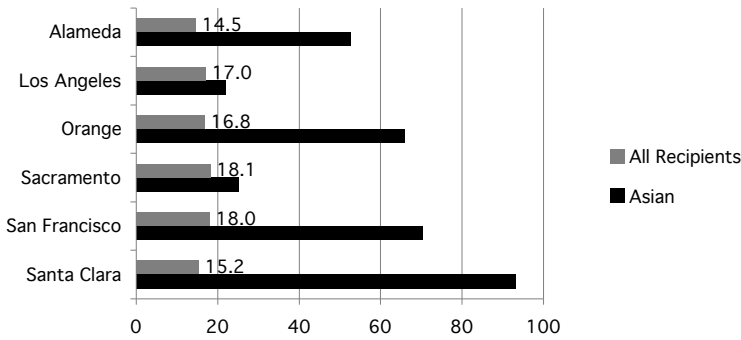
Like the overall trends in the general population, the number of AAPI participants after welfare reform decreased. However, this decrease was not as extreme, suggesting that the proportion of AAPI participation in welfare remains relatively high. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of AAPI welfare recipients in the CalWORKs caseload from 2001 to 2005, indicating the general decline of welfare participation among AAPI in five years.

### AAPI Timing-Out

In January 2003, the first cohort of welfare recipients timed out of welfare in California. Of the 5,573 cases who had reached their time-limit (Graves, 2003), a high proportion of them were AAPI. Previous research suggests that AAPIs are disproportionately more likely and at higher risk of losing their benefits than any other ethnic group in California (Chow, Lemon-Osterling, and Xu, 2005; Nakano, 2006). While AAPI make up about 8 percent of the population on public assistance in California, 37 percent of all individuals who timed out in 2003 were AAPIs (Nakano, 2006). Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of welfare recipients who have reached the five-year time limit in six California counties in early January, 2003. The figure shows that recipients who speak an Asian language have a significantly higher rate of timing out than other recipients. Asian languages included in this survey were Cambodian, Cantonese, Hmong, Laotian, Korean, Mandarin, Mien, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

According to a study by the California Budget Project (Graves, 2002), there are two primary reasons that contribute to the high number of immigrants who timed out in January 2003. First, language deficiencies of welfare recipients prevented many immigrants, including AAPI, from gaining high-wage jobs with opportunities for advancement. These immigrants were forced to participate in CalWORKs in order to supplement their income. Second, because many immigrants belong to large families, they qualify for higher levels of assistance. According to California's earnings disregard policy, a large family will become disqualified for welfare only if the total income for the family increases significantly. Since it is generally difficult to increase earnings dramatically, the disregard policy allowed large families to continue to receive cash aid for a longer period of time than smaller families. Additional reasons for timing out include not having enough

Figure 3. Percent of Adults Reaching Five Year Time Limit in Select California Counties: January, 2003



Source: Graves, 2002.

time to acquire skills and training that would enable them to find a long-term job that made ends meet but also provided healthcare insurance (Ng, 2004).

January 2003 also marked the first month of California’s state funded Safety Net program. In California, only adults are affected by the five-year time limits; children remain eligible for the Safety Net program which provides a reduced cash grant to families once the adults have timed out. As more CalWORKs cases time out, Safety Net cases are expected to rise. By September of 2003, there were already 24,415 cases in the Safety Net program, making up 7.7 percent of the caseload (London and Mauldon, 2006). In March 2006, the number of Safety Net cases reached 41,860, or 13.9 percent of the CalWORKs caseload. As AAPI time out of CalWORKs, the proportion of AAPI in Safety Net cases will rise. One study shows that Vietnamese speakers comprised of 7.7 percent of Safety Net cases compared to 1.7 percent of all CalWORKs cases (Smilanick, 2006). The high proportion of AAPI among those who timed out in CalWORKs and Safety Net cases indicate that the AAPI population face unique barriers and extensive unmet needs that prevent them from successfully transitioning from welfare to work.

### Barriers to Transition to Work

The reasons that AAPIs are at risk of timing out are complex. Asian immigrants and Pacific Islanders face a variety of barriers that prevent them from obtaining job services that could help them

obtain and maintain employment. The literature cites AAPIs as facing many challenges and barriers to self-sufficiency. Some personal obstacles that AAPIs might face include one or more of the following: substance abuse; mental and physical health issues; disability; low educational attainment; limited work experiences; limited English proficiency; and exposure to domestic violence (Nakano, 2006). At the same time, the limited literature that exists on AAPIs also points to structural and institutional barriers that prevent self-sufficiency, such as lack of access to welfare-to work programs, lack of long-term employment opportunities, lack of healthcare benefits, access to childcare, housing costs, transportation assistance, and discrimination (Ng, 2004). Many AAPIs experience at least one or more of these structural and personal challenges, making it difficult to achieve self-sufficiency. These barriers place AAPI welfare recipients at a higher risk for timing out.

### **Institutional/Structural Barriers**

There are many different types of institutional and structural barriers faced by AAPI immigrants. The actual welfare system itself can be an overwhelming barrier as new immigrants attempt to navigate the variety of social services that are available to them. For example, while many employment programs exist to help new immigrants, AAPI immigrants may not know of them or how to access these services. The lack of knowledge in available services prevents many AAPI immigrants from seeking the help they need to obtain suitable employment. In addition, welfare reform created a large number of confusing policies that would be difficult for English speaking recipients to understand, much less AAPI recipients who may have limited English skills. In a report surveying community-based organizations (CBOs) about their services to AAPI welfare recipients, Geronimo (2001) found that most clients of these CBOs did not have a good understanding of the CalWORKs program. The report also noted work first policies were “bureaucratic and difficult to negotiate,” causing clients to feel stressed, confused, and intimidated by the system. At the same time, there are not enough efforts to disseminate information about the services provided by CalWORKs. In a study in Santa Clara county of Vietnamese immigrant women on TANF, only 62 percent had received information on work requirements and five year limits (Ng, 2004).



Education is another institutional barrier that many AAPI immigrants face. A high proportion of AAPI immigrants arrive in the U.S with very low-levels of education attainment and job skills. A report from the Urban Institute (Tumlin and Zimmerman, 2003) reported that 69 percent of non-native TANF adult recipients do not have a high school degree or GED as compared to 37 percent of native adult recipients. In Santa Clara County California, a survey of non-citizen Vietnamese TANF recipients found that 68 percent did not have a high school diploma compared to 53 percent of all women receiving TANF in the county (Huang, 2002). The low levels of education in Southeast Asians make it difficult for them to find adequate-paying jobs, forcing them to take low-paying jobs.

Other institutional barriers include poorly run resettlement programs, unsuccessful implementation of welfare reform, and weak community organizations (Ong and Ishikawa, 2006). These barriers may have implications for transportation, housing, and child-care. Ong and Blumenberg (1994) found that many welfare recipients live in “job poor” communities that are far from the jobs for which they are qualified. The authors found that welfare recipients with long commutes to their employment earned less than those who worked closer to their residence. One of the reasons why welfare recipients live so far away from their jobs is because of the high cost of rent that may be associated with living in higher paying areas. Housing represents another barrier to employment. Higher paying jobs are frequently in areas of low poverty concentration, generally outside of the city center where most low-income immigrants live. In order to obtain such jobs, low-income immigrants must either commute to their employment areas, or move to a nearby neighborhood. Often, the transportation and housing barriers prevent immigrants from working at a job that matches their needs, thus forcing them to take low-paying service jobs. In other instances, the lack of transportation and affordable housing discourages immigrants from working at all. Indeed, one study found that transportation and housing, among other obstacles, can contribute to the lack of employment (Perry-Burney and Jennings, 2003).

Access to adequate and quality child care is also an institutional barrier that many AAPIs recipients face. According to a study in Santa Clara County, the provisions of CalWORKs pay for costs associated with childcare, but several respondents encountered both structural and personal difficulties accessing these childcare re-

sources. Some women were working late night shifts and could not find childcare for their late night hours. Others felt uncomfortable with leaving their child with a stranger or could not find a provider that would take a sick child or governmental payment (Ng, 2004).

### **Language Barriers**

Contributing to the barriers of employment are language barriers faced by many AAPI immigrants. Many immigrants from Asia speak little or no English, categorizing them as limited English proficient (LEP). One study of Hmong TANF recipients in Wisconsin found that 90 percent of the study's participants read little or no English (Asian & Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence, 2002). Another study conducted by Wrigley et al., (2003) found that of immigrants who came to the U.S. in the late 1990s, 23 percent were from Asian countries, most of who tend to have limited English fluency which affect their ability to find work and support their families.

Being LEP can also limit the types of jobs available to AAPI welfare recipients. Truong (2007) describes a Cambodian woman's experience as a park sanitation worker, a job that she was assigned because of her inability to speak English and lack of job skills. The author explains that she did not want the job that required her to clean garbage, feces, and other filthy waste, but was forced to because no one else wanted to do it. Because she did not speak English well, she could not advocate for herself.

Language barriers force AAPI to accept lower paying jobs that provide inadequate financial stability to AAPI families. Huang (2002) found that LEP adults have lower income than immigrants who can speak English. She cites a study done by the U.S General Accounting Office which states that LEP adults in Los Angeles and New York had a 34 percent higher poverty rate than immigrant adults who are not LEP in those cities. Geronimo (2001) reports that welfare workers with limited education, work experience, and English skills are concentrated in low-wage industries such as the service, food service, light manufacturing, and low-skilled health-care sectors. They also report that the average earnings per month for an LEP worker are \$355 and for Southeast Asians are \$328. This is considerably less than the \$545 that English speakers make per month. Low-wage work in California for immigrants includes electronic assemblers, housecleaning, and childcare (Ng, 2004).

Being limited English proficient has many implications for AAPI employment. AAPI who are LEP are unable to understand the already complex and confusing system of welfare. The lack of translated resources and interpreter services for AAPIs has left those who do not understand English uninformed of the services available to help them towards obtaining adequate employment. Their inability to gain viable jobs that pay enough prevent them from lifting their families from poverty. AAPI welfare recipients who do not have full access to employment services are unable to meet the welfare-to-work requirements, leading to delays or termination of other supportive services for which they are eligible. The lack of supports that are linguistically appropriate for the AAPI population puts them at a higher risk for timing-out.

### **Personal Barriers**

In addition to institutional and language barriers, many of the AAPI welfare recipients also have personal barriers that prevent them from obtaining secure job placements. Personal barriers may include one or more of the following: depression, anxiety, stressful events, alcohol and drug use, domestic violence, and poor health conditions. These barriers are important predictors of not working (Norris and Spiegelman, 2003). A survey of California welfare recipients found that the majority of respondents reported symptoms of depression, anxiety, or recent stressful event within the past year that interfered with their ability to work, care for children, or attend school (London and Mauldon, 2006). The same survey found that 11 percent of respondents experienced domestic violence while 31 percent had a physical health condition that prevented them from working. Only 4.6 percent of respondents stated that drug and alcohol use impeded their ability to work. While these barriers may not be specific to AAPI welfare recipients, the statistics can be used as a representative example of the types of obstacles welfare recipients face when attempting to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Unique to AAPI welfare recipients is that many come from Southeast Asia, where they escaped their war-torn countries as refugees to come to the United States. These refugees may carry with them the mental and psychological traumas of war and must also cope with family separations as a result of war. Refugees who experienced political oppression, torture, war, and starvation have difficulty accessing employment services, keeping a job, and

advancing in a career due to their emotional disturbances. They may also have difficulty adjusting to a new culture and social environment when they first arrive, particularly older adults who may also experience social isolation and loss of status and independence (Asian Community Mental Health Services and Asian Pacific Psychological Services, 2005). Many may experience debilitating psychosomatic symptoms or frequent periods of depression, which can prevent them from maintaining a significant job.

Personal barriers, particularly mental health, have a significant impact on AAPI welfare recipients. These barriers, along with the institutional and language barriers that many AAPI immigrants face, may prevent welfare recipients from meeting their welfare-to-work requirements. When taking these factors into consideration, it is reasonable to understand why AAPI welfare recipients are at risk for being sanctioned and/or timing out of the welfare system.

#### Welfare-to-Work and Employment Services: Four Program Models

Because of barriers and challenges that the AAPI population may experience from transitioning from welfare to work, alternative models need to be examined that might provide specific supportive services for a limited English-speaking population. A Mathematica Policy Research (MPR) study (Pavetti and Strong, 2001) on strategies for hard-to-employ TANF recipients explored sixty-five welfare-to-work programs that assisted welfare recipients with employment services. Some or all of the following elements were included in the programs evaluated: pre-employment preparation and planning, employment in real jobs that pay, intensive supervision, increasing performance standards, and formal and informal support systems. The analysis of work-based programs identified four program models that are currently being used by agencies: paid work experience programs, transitional jobs programs that use public funding, transitional structured employment programs that include support services, and competitive employment programs that include support services.

The paid work experience programs finds short-term employment for participants at program-operated businesses. With a focus on building job skills, these “social enterprises” are set up specifically to provide jobs for groups and individuals who are not able to find a job on their own and would otherwise be un-

employed due to lack of work experience. The profits acquired through the program are used to pay the participants. The end goal is to transition out of the programs into competitive job placements. While support is given through on-site job supervision, case management, and job coaching are not really provided.

Transitional jobs provide temporary paid work experiences in non-profit organizations, public agencies, or private businesses through individual placements. Wages are subsidized through government funds. Supervision is provided by employees of the job placement with no additional support for program participants. In terms of supervision, participants in the transitional jobs program are treated like other employees within the work place. Upon entering the program, participants receive case management services to assist them over overcome personal and family challenges. Before finishing the program, participants may receive some jobsearch help and post-placement support.

The third type of program includes transitional structured employment programs that include support services. These programs emphasize creating transitional jobs in nurturing work environments before placing them in competitive job placements. The goal of these types of programs is to expose participants to different types of work experiences and to find permanent employment. These programs provide intensive personal and employment assistance for as long as participants need. Placements vary depending on the skills and needs of the individual. Supervision occurs on-site at the job placement. Case management and job coaching are also available. Wages may be subsidized with public funds or can be paid through program revenues.

The last type of program identified in the MPR study is the competitive employment programs that include support services. These types of programs place participants directly into the competitive job market while providing extensive support services to help them maintain their job placements. The goal of these types of programs is to place hard-to-employ TANF recipients into competitive paid employment as soon as possible while providing services to promote job success. Emphasis is placed on creating a good job match between the employer and the program participant. Case management, job coaching, and post-employment services are provided before, during, and after the job placement. Wages in this program are not subsidized.

While these programs may not be specifically geared towards AAPI population, recommendations can be based on these programs as models of support for AAPI welfare recipients who are transitioning from welfare to work. The appeal of these models is that supportive services, such as case management, are linked with employment. These models need to be further explored in terms of effectiveness with AAPI welfare recipients.

#### Recommendations: What Works?

Given the institutional, language, and personal barriers faced by immigrants in general and AAPIs in particular, specialized strategies need to focus on assisting this population in obtaining welfare-to-work services. The literature offers some programs that have been implemented by state and local level agencies. The majority of these programs, however, are aimed towards assisting the general welfare population, not specifically towards AAPI recipients. The strategies and programs described below are based on the components of the four program models identified by the MPR study. While these strategies can be used to help AAPIs overcome some of their barriers, it should be noted that more specific programs need to be developed to address the unique needs of AAPIs in order to alleviate their high risk for timing-out.

*“One-stop shop” intervention can improve access.* The literature on welfare-to-work strategies describes a type of program that incorporates language training and job-skills development. Known as “one-stop shops,” these programs include mixed strategies which combine a work focus with opportunities for job skills training and education (Fremstad, 2003). Several different approaches can be taken when developing these one-stop shops. Programs can combine intensive ESL courses for immigrants with low levels of literacy, ESL and employment services for higher proficient English speakers, job placement services that assist immigrants to find well-paying jobs with advancement opportunities, and job training and career development resources to increase skill levels (Fremstad, 2003). Because English proficiency is essential in most employment opportunities, it is a vital skill for AAPI welfare recipients to have. Wrigley et al. (2003) report that, in the long run, the combination of basic skills education and job training leads to higher earnings for participants than just focusing on basic skills alone.

*Transitional job programs can facilitate employment.* One promising strategy that embodies the spirit of a “one-stop shop” is transitional jobs program. These programs combine time-limited subsidized employment with complete job-training services to overcome barriers and build skills (Baider and Frank, 2006). To be successful, these programs must foster a nurturing work environment where skill development is a vital component to job placement. Transitional jobs programs typically include various components such as intake assessments to identify barriers, develop short-term and long-term goals, and match participants’ work interests to available placements; life skills and job readiness training; work-focused case management; enhanced worksite supervision; connection to other work-related resources, such as child care and transportation; and unsubsidized job search and job placement activities.

A number of non-experimental studies on transitional jobs programs indicate positive outcomes on employment for participants with barriers. An evaluation of the Community Jobs program in Washington State found that 72 percent of program participants were able to find unsubsidized employment after entering the program, despite the fact that participants had multiple barriers to employment. These participants had an average income increase of 60 percent during the first two years in the workforce compared to pre-program income (Baider and Frank, 2006). An evaluation of the Catholic Charities Community Transitional Jobs program found that participants who received a transitional job earned 32 percent more than participants who only received employment services without a transitional job (Baider and Frank, 2006). After six months of the program, about 65 percent of people who received a transitional job found unsubsidized employment compared to 47 percent of those who only received job services. Qualitative findings have also shown that elements of the transitional jobs programs (i.e. earning a paycheck, enhanced supervision, and goal-setting) have had a positive personal, professional, and financial impact on participants (Baider and Frank, 2006). These positive impacts on average participants suggest that these types of programs can have a significant effect on AAPI participants given that they face multiple barriers.

*Welfare-to-work programs must be comprehensive and family focused in nature.* In addition to employment related programs, other

support services must be used to assist immigrants overcome institutional, language, and personal barriers. Lind (2004) suggests the utilization of community-based organizations to provide culturally competent support services to clients. This partnership is especially essential because clients are likely to feel more comfortable and familiar with local community providers, thus making it easier to engage them. This is especially important to AAPI recipients, particularly refugees, because of their considerable disadvantages as compared to other immigrant groups.

Additionally, practitioners must establish credibility and rapport with clients and in the larger community in order to help AAPI recipients overcome institutional barriers (Chow, Lemon-Osterling, and Xu, 2005). One of the ways to engage participants is to include the participants' families, rather than just the individuals themselves. Most welfare-to-work programs focus on the individual participants' activities, not including the family or community context as most AAPIs are likely to frame issues. In order to incorporate culturally competent services into welfare-to-work programs, services should be family-focused as opposed to individually focused (Chow, Bester, and Shinn, 2001).

Language barriers are significant obstacles that prevent AAPI welfare recipients from obtaining secure job placements. Collaborating with other human services systems such as the Department of Education, public schools, community-based organizations, and private providers to offer English language training will give LEP individuals (Lind, 2004), including AAPI individuals, more opportunities to expand their English skills.

The mental health needs of the AAPI population should also be taken into consideration when developing assistance programs to help AAPI transition from welfare to work. A study done by Chow, Lemon-Osterling, and Xu (2005) found that AAPI welfare recipients reported that culturally competent mental health services would be valuable in conjunction with welfare-to-work services. Mainstream mental health treatment may not be readily accepted by the general AAPI population because mental health services may not have been available in their country of origin. AAPIs may not be familiar with the concept or may even be suspicious of its modalities and methods. Some may not recognize its benefits. Because most Asian cultures consider the family as the basic social unit, treatment is thought of as a family endeavor as opposed to a



personal effort. Including the family may create a more familiar and comforting situation for AAPIs as they seek mental health services (Lin and Cheung, 1999). By incorporating culturally competent practitioners who have an understanding of cultural diversity and bilingual services, AAPIs may be more receptive to mental health assistance.

*Additional research on AAPI-specific participation, needs, and barriers is essential.* Given the sparse information on the AAPI welfare recipient population, it is important to continue to expand the knowledge about this unique population. Research on AAPI participation rates in welfare and welfare-to-work activities is also needed, in addition to information about AAPI timing-out rates. This data can be used to inform the design of services programs for AAPI as well as policies that impact the AAPI welfare population. Program evaluations also need to be conducted on AAPI service agencies to assess whether the programs are effective at assisting the target population. This would help determine the impact of programs on the employment and earnings of AAPI welfare recipients. Knowledge of effective strategies can also be helpful for other agencies that work with the AAPI population. By taking into consideration the unique needs and obstacles of AAPI recipients, culturally competent responses to the AAPI population can be implemented by service providers and policy makers to address their welfare issues.

*Continued outreach: ensure that all materials and outreach are language-specific to immigrant populations in that count.* Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act requires that federal and state welfare office provide access to services not based on national origin, which includes those who do not speak or write English. Moreover, the California Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act passed in 1973 specifies that state agencies that serve a substantial non-English speaking population by at least 5 percent of its welfare participants, must have bilingual/interpretative services available and must have all written materials translated in that language. This means forms, written notices and information regarding CalWORKs services and CalWORKs requirements needs to be translated into languages that CalWORKs participants can access. Moreover, CalWORKs should have bilingual staff available so participants can gain access to services.

## Conclusion

The 1996 PRWORA has impacted immigrant participation in welfare. In California, AAPI immigrants have steadily decreased their enrollment in CalWORKs over the past years due to the regulations on immigrants set forth by welfare reform, as well “chilling effects” whereby immigrants are misinformed and/or discouraged from seeking assistance. In addition to decreasing enrollment, a significant proportion of AAPIs are timing out of welfare due to the unique barriers they face, including institutional, structural, language, and personal obstacles. Because welfare reform’s “work-first” approach does not adequately address these obstacles, many AAPIs are unable to obtain and maintain sufficient jobs to achieve economic independence from government assistance.

The literature identifies several program models that can be used to assist immigrant populations overcome their barriers. These include: paid work experience programs, transitional jobs programs, transitional structured employment programs that include support services, and competitive employment programs that include support services. Non-experimental evaluations of programs that embody some or all of these components have found them to be effective in assisting the AAPI welfare population. “One-stop shops” that combine job-training, professional development, education and English language courses can provide the necessary resources for AAPI to gain necessary skills for employment. Transitional jobs programs provide subsidized employment with support services (childcare, transportation, etc.) and goal planning to help participants obtain meaningful job-related experiences. Cultural understanding and responsiveness can facilitate “buy-in” of AAPI communities in welfare-to-work programs. Engaging the communities and families in which AAPI welfare recipients belong is an effective way to encourage participation and on-going communication. Finally, additional research and evaluation are needed to continue identifying participation patterns, needs, and obstacles, as well as effective programs that assist AAPI recipients to transition from welfare to work.

## References

- Asian Community Mental Health Services and Asian Pacific Psychological Services. 2005. “Asian Americans and the Alameda County Mental Health System: Recommendations on Implementation of the Mental Health Ser-

- vices Act." Culture to Culture Foundation <<http://www.acmhs.org/documents/MHSAFinalRecsSummary.pdf>> as of March 10, 2007.
- Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence. 2002. "TANF Reauthorization and its Effects on Asian and Pacific Islander Families." Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence <<http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/ResearchAndPolicy/Policypaper.htm>> as of February 11, 2007.
- Asian and Pacific Islander Health Forum. 2006. "Health Insurance Coverage: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Fact Sheet." The Asian and Pacific Islander Health Forum <[http://www.apiahf.org/resources/pdf/AAPI\\_Insurance\\_coverage\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.apiahf.org/resources/pdf/AAPI_Insurance_coverage_Fact_Sheet.pdf)> as of June 19, 2007.
- Baider, Allegra and Abbey Frank. 2006. "Transitional Jobs: Helping TANF Recipients with Barriers to Employment Succeed in the Labor Market." Center for Law and Social Policy <[http://www.clasp.org/publications/transitional\\_jobs\\_06.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/transitional_jobs_06.pdf)> as of January 10, 2007.
- Brady, Henry E., Michael S. Clune, Laurel Elms, Anita K. Mathur, Kamran Nayeri, Jon Stiles, and Jeffrey W. Weinstein. 2002. "California's Immigrant Households and Public-Assistance in the 1990s." Welfare Policy Research Project <<http://www.ucop.edu/cprc/jan-feb02.pdf>> as of January 31, 2007.
- California Department of Social Services. 2006. "CalWORKs Program: Ethnicity of California's CalWORKs Caseload by Percent." California Department of Social Services <[http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/CalWORKsDa\\_399.htm](http://www.dss.cahwnet.gov/research/CalWORKsDa_399.htm)> as of February 27, 2007.
- Chow, Julian, Nancy Bester, and Alan Shinn. 2001. "AsianWORKs: A TANF Program for Southeast Asian Americans in Oakland California." *Journal of Community Practice* 9(3): 111-124.
- Chow, Julian, Kathy Lemon-Osterling, and Qingwen Xu. 2005. "The Risk of Timing Out: Welfare-to-Work Services to Asian American Immigrants and Refugees." *AAPI Nexus* 3(2): 85-104.
- Fix, Michael and Jeffrey Passel. 2003. "The Scope and Impact of Welfare Reform's Immigrant Provisions." The Urban Institute <[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410412\\_discussion02-03.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410412_discussion02-03.pdf)> as of January 23, 2007.
- Fremstad, Shawn. 2003. "Immigrants, Persons with Limited Proficiency in English, and the TANF Program: What Do We Know?" Center on Budget and Policy Priorities <<http://www.cbpp.org/3-18-03tanf.htm>> as of January 19, 2007.
- Fujiwara, Lynn. 2005. "Mothers without Citizenship: Asian Immigrant and Refugees Negotiating Poverty and Hunger in Post-Welfare Reform." *Race, Gender, and Class* 12(2): 121-142.
- Geronimo, Veronica. 2001. "The Impact of Welfare Reform on Asians and Pacific Islanders." Asian Pacific American Legal Center <[http://www.apalc.org/Welfare\\_Reform\\_Impact.pdf](http://www.apalc.org/Welfare_Reform_Impact.pdf)> as of February 12, 2007.
- Graves, Scott. 2002. "Timing Out: CalWORKs Recipients Face the State's Five-Year Time Limit." California Budget Project <<http://www.cbpp.org/pdfs/2002/bb021231timingout.pdf>> as of March 13, 2007.

- . 2003. "Welfare Reform: Early Impact of CalWORKs 60-month Time Limit." California Budget Project <<http://www.cbp.org/pdfs/2003/030627FactSheet.pdf>> as of December 29, 2006.
- Huang, Grace S. 2002. "TANF Reauthorization and its Effects on Asian and Pacific Islander Families." Asian and Pacific Islander Institute on Domestic Violence <<http://www.apiahf.org/apidvinstitute/Research-AndPolicy/Policypaper.htm>> as of February 12, 2007.
- Lin, Keh-Ming and Freda Cheung. 1999. "Mental Health Issues for Asian Americans." *Psychiatric Services* 50(6): 774-780.
- Lind, Christianne. 2004. "Addressing Linguistic and Cultural Barriers to Access for Welfare Services." Welfare Information Network <<http://www.financeproject.org/Publications/addressinglinguisticRN.pdf>> as of January 3, 2007.
- London, Rebecca A. and Jane G. Mauldon. 2006. "Time Running Out: A Portrait of California Families Reaching the CalWORKs 60-month Time Limit in 2004." Welfare Policy Research Project <<http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1012&context=wprp>> as of December 19, 2007.
- Nakano, Dana. 2006. "Out of Time: Asian Americans, Time Limits, and Welfare Reform in California." *Asian American Policy Review* 15 (2006), <<http://www.aaprjournal.com/article/view/417/355>> as of December 12, 2006.
- Ng, Doris. 2004. "Welfare Reform in Santa Clara County: The Experiences of Mexican and Vietnamese Immigrant Women." Pp. 159-183 in *Immigrants, Welfare Reform, and the Poverty of Policy*, eds. Philip Kretsedemas and Ana Aparicio. Westport: Greenwood Publishing.
- Norris, Jean C. and Richard Spiegelman. 2003. "Welfare and Work Status under TANF: Effect of Barriers to Employment and Implications for Program Planning." Public Health Institute <<http://www.phi.org/pdflibrary/CalWORKsResearch.pdf>> as of March 1, 2007.
- Ong, Paul and Evelyn Blumenberg. 1994. "Welfare and Work among Southeast Asians." Pp. 113-139 in *The State of Asian Pacific America*, ed. Paul Ong. Los Angeles: LEAP Asian Pacific American Public Policy Institute.
- Ong, Paul and Hiroshi Ishikawa. 2006. "A Research Agenda: Impacts of Welfare Reform on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs)." Paper presented at Research Symposium: Impacts of Welfare Reform on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. UCLA. Los Angeles, CA. June 30, 2006.
- Pavetti, LaDonna and Debra Strong. 2001. "Work-Based Strategies for Hard-to-Employ TANF Recipients: A Preliminary Assessment of Program Models and Dimensions." Mathematica Policy Research <[http://www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/pavetti\\_strong\\_SRI2001.pdf?CFID=7795201an&CFTOKEN=38274476](http://www.jcpr.org/wpfiles/pavetti_strong_SRI2001.pdf?CFID=7795201an&CFTOKEN=38274476)> as of February 18, 2007.
- Perry-Burney, Gwendolyn and Alyce Jennings. 2003. "Welfare to What? A Policy Agenda." *Journal of Health and Social Policy* 16(4): 85-99.
- Reeves, Terrance and Claudette Bennett. 2003. "The Asian and Pacific Islander Population in the United States: March 2002." Washington

- D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Smilanick, Paul. 2006. "After Time Limits." Paper presented at the National Association of Welfare Research and Statistics Annual Workshop, Jackson Hole, Wyoming.
- Truong, Michael H. 2007. "Welfare Reform and Liberal Governance: Disciplining Cambodian-American Bodies." *International Journal of Social Welfare* 16(3), 258-268.
- Tumlin, Karen C. and Wendy Zimmerman. 2003. "Immigrants and TANF: A Look at Immigrant Welfare Recipients in Three Cities." The Urban Institute <<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310874>> as of January 12, 2007.
- U.S. Census Bureau. 2000. "Summary File 4 [Data file]." <<http://factfinder.census.gov>> as of April 21, 2007.
- . 2003. "Poverty 1999." Census 2000 Brief <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-19.pdf>> as of July 20, 2007.
- . 2004. "We the People: Asians." U.S. Department of Commerce <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/censr-17.pdf>> as of June 14, 2007.
- . 2005. "We the People: Pacific Islanders." U.S. Department of Commerce <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-26.pdf>> as of June 14, 2007.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. nd. "Surgeon General's Report: Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders Fact Sheet." Office of the Surgeon General <<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cre/fact2.asp>> as of August 17, 2007.
- Wrigley, Heide, Elise Richer, Karin Martinson, Hitomi Kubo, and Julie Strawn. 2003. "The Language of Opportunity: Expanding Employment Prospects for Adults with Limited English Skills." Center for Law and Social Policy <[http://www.ecs.org/html/offsite.asp?document=http percent3A percent2F percent2Fwww percent2Eclasp percent2Eorg percent2Fpublications percent2FLEP percent5Freport percent2Epdf](http://www.ecs.org/html/offsite.asp?document=http%20percent3A%20percent2Fwww%20percent2Eclasp%20percent2Eorg%20percent2Fpublications%20percent2FLEP%20percent5Freport%20percent2Epdf)> as of February 2, 2007.
- Yoo, Grace J. 1999. "Racial Inequality, Welfare Reform and Black Families: The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Reconciliation Act." Pp. 357-366 in *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*, ed. R. Staples. Belmont: Wadsworth.

## Acknowledgment

Support for this study was provided by a Small Grant from the UC AAPI Policy Multi-Campus Research Program.

---

JULIAN CHUN-CHUNG CHOW is Associate Professor of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley.

CATHERINE VU is a graduate student researcher of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley.

GRACE J. YOO is Associate Professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University.