

Welfare Myths: Fact or Fiction? Exploring the Truth About Welfare (May 1996)

By the Welfare Law Center
<http://www.welfarelaw.org/pubs.html>

Although AFDC is gone, welfare myths flourish.

Myth Families stay on welfare for a long time and don't make any effort to get off.
Fact Less than half of AFDC families receive it for more than 36 months overall and most receive it for no more than 2 years at a time.

Myth People become dependent on welfare because it's available to them.
Fact Leading researchers agree that no evidence substantiates the "welfare trap" theory.

Myth Welfare benefits for families provide them with enough to meet all their basic needs. **Fact** AFDC and Food Stamps combined provide less than a poverty level income in all states and their value has been going steadily downward for many years.

Myth Even if AFDC and Food Stamps don't provide enough to meet daily living needs, the shortfall is made up for by all the other benefits these families receive. **Fact** Most of the other major benefits available to poor families are available to only limited numbers of families and they do not add enough to family income to enable families to meet all the basic non-medical needs.

Myth The differences in AFDC benefit levels around the country are due to cost of living differences and/or differences in wage rates. **Fact** Numerous studies have concluded that the range in benefit levels around the country is far greater than any differences in cost of living and wage variation is less than half as much as the benefit variation.

Myth Women AFDC recipients have lost of kids and go on having kids after they begin receiving benefits. **Fact** The most typical family size in a mother and one child. The birthrate among women receiving AFDC is lower than that in the rest of the population.

Myth People need welfare because they won't work. **Fact** The adults receiving AFDC are those who are caring for children and over two-thirds of them have recent work experience from employment while receiving aid or before they applied for aid.

Myth Families wouldn't need assistance if they would just go to work. **Fact** Many families who are in the workplace cannot make it on their earnings alone and need assistance in order to have decent standard of living.

Myth Poor people move from one state to another to get higher benefits. **Fact** The evidence largely contradicts this theory and shows that poor people move less often than others and, when they do, move in the same direction as the rest of the population.

Myth Almost all families receiving AFDC are Black or Hispanic. **Fact** Many more White families than Black or Hispanic families are helped by the AFDC program.

Myth Non-marital births have exploded and welfare is the reason. **Fact** The non-marital birth rate is less than 5% and no reliable evidence exists that welfare is a primary reason for the growth in non-marital birth rates.

Myth Child support reform can eliminate most child poverty and most of the need for AFDC. **Fact** Even if no deadbeat parents existed, most poor kids would be poor and most children who need AFDC would still need it.

Myth Large numbers are receiving AFDC to which they aren't entitled and the government isn't doing anything about it. **Fact** The evidence shows that only a small percentage of recipients are overpaid. Most of these errors are due to honest mistakes. Rigorous programs are in place to limit all overpayments and weed out fraud.

Myth Spending on welfare to aid needy families is a major part of the federal budget. **Fact** Spending for poor families with children under all public assistance programs that provide for basic needs including medical care amounts to about 6% of the budget