



LEFT BEHIND:

Data on Adults and Children with Mental Disorders in Families on TANF

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Three groups of TANF recipients need mental health services and specific amendments to TANF could assist the first two. The third group would benefit from greater liaison between TANF agencies and mental health authorities at the state and local levels:

- Adults suffering from a mental disorder and/or a substance abuse disorder;
- Children in TANF families who have a serious mental disorder which results in significant impairment in the child's ability to function (as defined under the Americans with Disabilities Act).
- All children in TANF families who are growing up with the stress of a poverty environment, and many of whom are also exposed to domestic or community violence.

MENTAL ILLNESS AMONG ADULTS ON TANF

Significant numbers, and perhaps a growing percentage, of individuals still on the welfare rolls are individuals with significant barriers to work. One of these significant barriers is mental illness:

- Around one-fourth and one-third of welfare recipients have a mental illness.
- Nationally, between 70 and 90 percent of adults of working age who have a serious mental illness are unemployed.
- Mental illnesses commonly found among the welfare population are: depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder. The following chart illustrates the over-representation of mental health problems among those on welfare.

	TANF Recipients	General Population
Depression	25-53%	13%
Generalized Anxiety Disorder	7-10%	3.4%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder	15%	3.5%

- Depression is the most common mental illness among welfare recipients, especially among low-

income women; individuals who receive welfare are three times more likely to be depressed between five and seven days a week than those who are not on welfare.

- One-quarter to one-third of TANF recipients have learning disabilities.
- In Utah, a study found the following prevalence rates: clinical depression (42%), generalized anxiety disorder (7%), post-traumatic stress disorder (15%), learning disability (23%), physical health problems (35%), severe child behavior problems (23%).
- Twenty-eight percent of children in low-income families live with a parent with symptoms suggestive of poor mental health, compared with 17 percent of all children.
- Forty-two to 54 percent of domestic violence victims who receive welfare also suffer from depression.
- Up to one-half of parents who have left the welfare rolls due to a sanction indicate that they could not comply with the rules because of a disability, health condition, or illness.

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN TANF FAMILIES

- Eight to 21 percent of families on welfare have at least one child with a disability.
- In 30 to 40 percent of families, the mother, the child, or both have some type of disability.
- Low-income parents have reported 38 percent more behavioral problems among their children than did the parents of children in families with higher incomes.
- Children with depressed mothers show high rates of mental illness and high-risk behaviors.
- Around 42 percent of welfare recipients who care for young children show clinical levels of depression. This is about two to four times as high as depression in the general population.
- The impact of having a depressed mother has a lasting effect on children:
 - ? At age three, they do poorly on school readiness and behavioral indicators.
 - They often display attachment disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder.
 - They also exhibit high rates of mental illness and high-risk behaviors.

Co-OCCURRENCE OF MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- ? Over half of the people diagnosed as having a mental health illness also suffer from problems with substance abuse.
- ? Between 10 and 20 percent of welfare recipients have substance abuse and drug problems.