

## **Refereed Articles**

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# ***A Study of Employer Attitudes Toward Hiring Individuals Trained Through Welfare Training Programs***

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### Abstract

This study was conducted to determine employer attitudes toward individuals who participate in the state and federally funded welfare-to-work programs. The study's goal was to determine if employers felt a bias toward those who are on welfare and in whom the government is investing large sums of money to train and assist in obtaining employment. This study found that very few of the businesses surveyed have hired or currently employ individuals on welfare-to-work programs. In comparing work traits of welfare trainees to non-welfare trainees, most employers felt that, in comparison, those trained by welfare programs were lacking. The study also found that although a resounding 100% of the employers felt that the welfare recipients should be required to work if physically and mentally able, very few felt any obligation to hire them to assist in the nation's welfare reform. The information gathered from the study will make a significant contribution to this area of adult education in two ways. First, the trainees must be made aware of how they are viewed by employers and what is expected from them when they enter the work force. Training must focus more on employer expectations. Secondly, the employers must become better educated regarding the trainees and the programs available and be given more input into the development of the programs.

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## Introduction

The federal government is currently spending in excess of 225 billion dollars annually in welfare spending (Rector, 1993). This figure does not include the dollar amounts spent by the states on their own individual assistance programs. However, to reduce this enormous cost to the tax payers, the state and federal governments have enacted employment and training programs to reduce the number of welfare dependent individuals within the country. These programs have been in action since the early 1980s, but, unfortunately, there has been no definitive decrease in the number of people being supported by the welfare system. The programs are not working to a degree that is deemed successful.

The only means to successful welfare reform is permanent employment. Therefore, employers hold the key role in the reformation of the welfare system. It is the receptiveness of the employers toward hiring a welfare recipient that determines the outcome of the welfare-to-work programs and welfare reform.

Unfortunately, very few programs are developed with input from the employers. It is obvious that with the minimal success that the current programs are having that the program developers need to determine the opinions, needs, and expectations of the future employers and allow that input to be the central focus of the training.

The purpose of this study was to identify employer attitudes toward hiring welfare recipients who have been trained through welfare-to-work programs. The intent was to determine if any negative attitudes were held toward welfare recipients and if those attitudes decreased their chances of becoming employed.

The information gathered from this study will be valuable in changing employment and training programs to meet the expectations of the employers and stressing the importance of the employers in developing a successful adult welfare-to-work training program.

## Methodology

This study was conducted in both Blair and Cambria Counties of Pennsylvania. The businesses were randomly sampled from the yellow pages of the area telephone books. No specific size, type, or characteristic of business was identified for selection in the study. Once a business was selected, it was contacted via telephone to identify the hiring authority within the company. A three-page questionnaire was then mailed to that

particular individual within the organization. A total of 140 businesses were selected to participate in the study.

## Findings

### *Demographics*

Of the 140 employers that were selected, a total of 80 responded. The initial two parts of the questionnaire were used to obtain demographic information about the businesses responding.

The most frequent type of businesses responding to the survey were retail (grocery, auto, equipment and machine sales) with 40 responding and service (rental, construction, banking, hotels) with 21 responding. The most common positions of the respondents were proprietor with 17 responses, manager with 16 responses, and president with 12 responses.

The employers were also asked the length of time the business has been in operation. Of those businesses who responded to the survey, the most frequent response to length of time in business was 25 years with six businesses giving this response.

Also of interest was the size of business. The sizes ranged from one employee to 1,500. The most representative sizes were four employees (six responses) and five employees (five responses). Of those businesses responding, 64% fell between the one and 20 employee range, meaning that most businesses responding were small businesses (less than 20 employees). Larger businesses (those with more than 20 employees) are not considered in this study due to their limited response rate.

The second section of the questionnaire asked employers to circle "Yes" or "No" in regards to their current employment situations. Of those employers responding to this survey, 84% have never hired an individual participating in a welfare-to-work program, and only seven individuals responded that they currently employ a person trained through a welfare-to-work program. Also of note is the finding that five respondents stated that they would consciously *not* hire an individual if he or she knew that person were participating in a welfare-to-work program.

### *Hiring Practices*

The third section of the survey dealt with the hiring practices of the businesses surveyed. Responses to these questions were measured on a Likert scale with one being little, three being equal, and five being more. The respondents were able to indicate answers of two and four to indicate degree.

The hiring authority was asked what degree of consideration he or she would give to hiring an individual who was trained through a welfare-to-work program. Most (88.8%) responded that they would give only equal consideration to hiring, with only 6.3% indicating that they would give more.

The last question in this section asked what degree of obligation the employers felt to hire welfare trainees to assist in the nation's welfare reform. In response, 33.8% stated that they felt little obligation to hiring a welfare recipient.

### *Employer Attitudes*

The fourth section of the survey was included to indicate how employers felt the work traits of welfare trainees compared to those of non-welfare trainees. This section was also designed in the form of the Likert scale with one being poorer in comparison, three being equal, and five being better. Within this section of six questions, 28 individuals did not respond. Many stated that they could not complete this section due to the fact that they had not knowingly employed anyone on a welfare program and felt that they could not make an adequate comparison. Table 1 indicates the mean responses to the questions in this section.

TABLE 1  
Ranking of Employer Attitudes

Work Trait	N	Rank	X	SD
Dependability	61	2	2.67	0.61
Appearance	61	1	2.70	0.53
Attitudes	61	5	2.57	0.84
Willingness to learn	61	4	2.79	0.79
Motivation to work	61	5	2.47	0.84
Skill Level	61	3	2.45	0.66

As indicated in the table, all mean responses fell *below* the equal indication (score of 3). Those traits that were rated the lowest were attitude

with 32.8% responding it was poorer), motivation to work (37.7% responding poorer), and skill level (39.3% responding poorer).

### *Continuance Of Programs*

In section five of the questionnaire, employers were asked to respond to questions concerning the value of the welfare- to-work programs. The respondents were asked to represent their opinions on a Likert scale. Responses were indicated as one meaning strongly disagree, three meaning agree, and five meaning strongly agree.

Employers were asked if they felt that those being supported by the welfare system should be required to work if physically and mentally able; 100% of the respondents stated that they should be made work. However, 33.6% responded that the government should not provide incentives to encourage employers to hire the trainees. The data also showed that 51.3% responded that they did not believe that the government should supplement the wages and benefits to encourage the trainees to abandon the welfare system.

Contradictory data was gathered regarding attitudes about welfare programs. Forty-nine point three percent felt that the welfare-to-work programs were not successful in developing adequate skills for the recipients to obtain entry level employment. However, 78% felt that the government should continue to fund the welfare-to-work programs.

In the last section of the survey, the employers were asked to respond to two short answer questions. Not every respondent answered these questions. Table 2 provides examples and number of responses given to the question asking what incentives would encourage them to hire participants on welfare-to-work program. Table 3 indicates the most popular responses to the question regarding what changes the government needs to make in the current welfare-to-work programs.

## **Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for this area of adult education in two ways: first, in the type of training the welfare recipients receive and, secondly, concerning the input and knowledge that is given to employers concerning the trainees, benefits, and programs available.

This study indicated that 49.3% (nearly half) of the employers responding did not feel that the current welfare-to-work programs were successful in preparing the trainees for work. Also, in comparing the characteristics of welfare trainees to non-welfare trainees, the employers

TABLE 2  
Summary Of Responses To Hiring Incentives

Response	Number of Responses Given
Greater tax credits	19
Salary Reimbursement	12
No Incentives - up to individual's qualifications	6
Better and/or more qualifications and training	3
Probationary or try-out period with no obligations if trainee does not perform to specifications	3
Assistance in providing medical benefits	2

TABLE 3  
Summary Of Responses To Program Improvements

Response	Number of Responses Given
Unable to comment; not knowledgeable about current programs available	15
Require individuals to work for their welfare benefits	8
Create more programs	7
Reduce attractiveness of current welfare benefits	6

rated the welfare trainees poorer in motivation to work, skill levels, and attitudes.

Because employers are the means to a successful welfare reform, their opinions must be given great consideration when developing and implementing the welfare-to-work programs. Many are developed by the governments with little input from the employers.

Data from this study indicates that only seven of the eighty respondents currently employ an individual trained through a welfare-to-work program. Although 100% of the respondents felt that welfare recipients should be required to work if able, they indicated that they felt little obligation to hire in order to assist in the nation's welfare reform. Employers must become better educated as to the types of individuals, incentives, and programs available. Awareness fosters acceptability.

Within this arena of adult education, the two sides must work together if a successful welfare reform is to take place. Contrary to popular belief, most welfare recipients do want to work, support their families, and provide their families with a middle-class lifestyle (Sklar, 1987). Biases held on the part of employers will not cease unless greater awareness is developed. The welfare recipients must also develop greater awareness as to the expectations they must face in overcoming their barriers. A successful reform can be constituted with a joint effort.

### References

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