

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS AND OPINIONS OF THE  
CURRENT WELFARE SYSTEM AND MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE PROPOSED  
FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN

Attitudes Toward the Current Welfare System

Criticism of the present welfare system is directed towards its implementation, rather than its underlying assumptions, for the basic concept of welfare is generally accepted and endorsed. Although the general attitude toward the present system was found to be largely unfavorable, certain aspects of the present program drew significant approval.

Although 10% more respondents reacted unfavorably rather than favorably to the present system, only 2% rejected the concept of welfare, using a rationale such as "it is bad for society, nothing good about it." On the other hand, a full half of the respondents said it was good in terms of providing "help to the poor, others who really need it...one must help the poor, the needy, the unfortunate. In the context of a "tax -payers revolt", it is significant that only 4% of the respondents specifically phrased their unfavorable comments in terms of the "burden on the taxpayer, increased taxes, waste of taxpayer money."

Many people believe that the present welfare system is like our penal system in that it is merely custodial rather than remedial or therapeutic in its effects. The current welfare system is considered custodial for it "removes the incentive to work and becomes a crutch." The belief in the lack of remedial effects is illustrated in statements such as "women have more children to get welfare" and "no job training is offered." In addition, many respondents felt that the current system produces a tendency toward recidivism because it "makes people dependent on the system and they never get off of it...it encourages second and third generation recipients."

The major points of criticism are directed toward the implementation of the welfare system.

- (1) Eligibility requirements are not strictly enforced, yet coverage is not broad enough.
- (2) Some welfare recipients are thought to cheat to get on the welfare rolls and/or then use the assistance for the wrong purpose, "colored TV's and cleaning ladies rather than clothes for the children."

- (3) The current system is not conducive to or helpful in getting people off the welfare rolls. It is seen as removing the incentive to work, encouraging illegitimacy and producing second and third generation recipients. Public assistance is viewed as a temporary aid, except for the physically handicapped, the very young, and the very old.
- (4) The cumbersome and top-heavy administrative mechanism is too lax in investigating welfare recipients, yet the investigations which are conducted create an unwarranted sense of shame and guilt in those receiving assistance.
- (5) Welfare workers are disinterested, lax, and obtain benefits for themselves unfairly.

#### The Reasons for People Being on Welfare

There is a widespread concensus that physical handicaps, discrimination due to race, religion or sex are not primarily responsible for people being on the welfare rolls. Beyond that, however, there is a substantial variation of opinion, with few of these "reasons" considered as responsible for either a "majority and/or a minority" of welfare recipients being on the rolls.

There are two almost directly opposing perspectives as to the reasons why people are on welfare.

- (1) A majority of welfare recipients are "lazy and won't work."
- (2) The majority of welfare recipients "want to work but cannot find a job."

Those respondents who feel that a majority of the welfare recipients are lazy and won't work are most likely to feel that only a minority of recipients are on the welfare rolls because they lack education, training, or needed child care facilities. They are very likely to feel that the majority of recipients had been brought up in welfare homes and learned to rely on the government for their income. In short, they feel that the majority of welfare recipients are there due to personal faults or character deficiency, perhaps instilled at an early age.

The other distinctive perspective assumes the position that the majority of welfare recipients want to work but cannot find a job. Respondents holding this view are likely to feel that a

majority of recipients lack education or training for the jobs available, need child care facilities to take a job, and are not necessarily the product of a welfare home. In short, this set of respondents feels that the majority of recipients are on the welfare rolls due to deficiencies in the system rather than in individual.

Class divisions tend to correspond to the opposing attitudes. Those holding the "lack of initiative" view are middle-income and middle-education people, while those who blame the tools and services that an individual had been able to obtain in the society, rather than the recipient are in both the low income and high education groups.

This is probably due to the fact that those in the middle-income and -education groups are successfully working hard to "make it" and have difficulty in seeing how others cannot do as they do and have done if these others have the gumption, while those in the lower income brackets have probably had unemployment experiences which make them reject the "lazy" argument, knowing how it is to want to work and not be able to find a job. While the high-income person has not had this latter experience, he and those with three or more years of college are substantially less likely than the middle-income and -education respondents to attribute the problem to being lazy. Perhaps those at the higher ends of these two classes of people also are more aware that many welfare recipients cannot work due to their age or other problems.

#### Response to Components of the Family Assistance Plan

There is extraordinarily strong support for the four components of the proposed Family Assistance Plan.

- (1) Requirement for mothers in families without fathers to register for training or job placement if their children are of school age.
- (2) Provision for day care services for the children of working mothers.
- (3) Income supplementation for low income working families so that working families are at least as well off as welfare families.
- (4) Registration for job training or help in finding a job in order to be eligible to receive welfare benefits.

The percentage of respondents favoring the components ranges from 76% for number 3 to 92% for number 4.

#### Response to Arguments Regarding Income Supplementation

The respondents were presented with both pro and con arguments concerning the most widely-discussed component, supplemental payments to the working poor. They agreed overwhelmingly both with the need for providing incentives and equity. When presented with the argument that income supplements were wrong because they would add to dependency on the government, the public divided into two groups of the same size, one group of 45 percent agreeing with the dependency argument. It was then shown that 48 percent favored or did not oppose this component of the Family Assistance Plan and only 5 percent consistently opposed it, while a group of 28 percent were inconsistent in their response to the argument.

This group agreed with both the importance of incentives and the need for equity, but also agreed that income supplements would increase dependency and is therefore wrong. It is this group which reacts to the component in terms of how it is presented. These people are most likely to be over fifty, have an income between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per year, and have between a junior high school and a high school education. If we put these characteristics together for the purpose of speculation, the picture emerges of someone who knew the struggle of the Great Depression first-hand, who perhaps had to drop out of school to support his family and is still not living at a comfortable level at today's prices in California. He sees--and perhaps has known first-hand--the need for incentives and equity, but in light of his own struggle the specter of dependency is one which repels him. There is little doubt, however, that if the income supplement component is presented in its total contexts he would accept it.

#### The Relationship between Dissatisfaction with The Current Welfare System and Changes Embodied in The Family Assistance Plan

Respondents were grouped into categories according to the extent to which adoption of the Family Assistance Plan would be likely to directly and/or indirectly satisfy their complaints and concerns about the current welfare system --

On the basis of the distribution of respondents among these categories it is clear that the Family Assistance Plan deals with the objections to the current welfare system held by a large majority of people. While comparable data is not available for

other policy areas, it is unlikely that we would find a new domestic policy proposal which removed either directly or indirectly all the objections of close to 60% of the population and leaves only 7% of the population with none of its complaints about current policy undealt with.

The extent to which this potential satisfaction is disproportionately found in any particular segment of the population was determined. In terms of age, once again we find that the younger the respondent, the more likely it is that all objections to the current welfare system will be either directly or indirectly dealt with by the Family Assistance Plan. Yet even in the group with the smallest percentage in the category, those in their fifties, 49% will have all their objections dealt with and only 10% will have none of their objections dealt with at all by the Family Assistance Plan.

Therefore, while there is some variation among age, income, and education groups as to the percentage of objections dealt with by the Family Assistance Plan, more than 49% in these categories have all or some of their complaints relieved. By the same token, variation in the percentage of those who will have none of their objections dealt with by the Family Assistance Plan in these same categories varies, from 11% downwards. In short, none of the above groups is left out in terms of having the majority of its members with their objections to the current system dealt with by the Family Assistance Plan.

The Family Assistance Plan substantially deals with the objections of both groups with differing views as to why people are on welfare. More of those who believe that a majority of recipients want to work but cannot find a job have all of their objections dealt with.

However, this does not mean that those who believe that a majority are lazy and won't work are left with none of their objections dealt with. On the contrary, a large part of this group (48 percent) will be partially satisfied by the Family Assistance Plan. Only a very small group (7 percent) will not have their objections touched by the program.

The Family Assistance Plan consequently can provide even partial satisfaction for those who hold the view that most welfare recipients are lazy and do not want to work. This is a very important indication that it will meet with substantial public acclaim.