

Effects of Family Structure on Government Dependency

To assess the role of family structure on [policy outcomes](#), Dr. Henry Potrykus and Dr. Patrick Fagan of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute developed empirical models determining the influence of explanatory variables on various outcomes across the geographic-demographic areas of the U.S. These geographic-demographic areas are the Super Public Use Microdata Areas constructed by the U.S. Census. Potrykus and Fagan conclude that family structure *always* has a beneficial influence on policy outcomes. Family structure is a key factor in the amount of government dependency in a particular area.

1. Food Stamp Recipiency

[Family intactness](#) and the fraction of high school graduates have similar, strong attenuating influences on food stamp reciency in a geographic area.

College graduate percentages only have a precisely determinable¹⁾ influence when income is not controlled for. Otherwise, this influence is indeterminate.

The percent of the population that is black does enhance food stamp reciency, albeit modestly; this enhancement cannot be determined with great precision. The fraction of the population that is Hispanic, in contrast, has no precisely determined influence on food stamp reciency (which is measured to be attenuating).

Income level, of course, has an attenuating influence on food stamp reciency.

Relatively more minors in an area enhances the number of food stamp reciency.²⁾ All the above influences, save the college graduate mention, are determined precisely.

2. TANF and State Welfare Transfers

2.1 Adult Females

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) primarily supports low-income women and their children. Included in the welfare income variable are also state General Assistance programs.

[Family intactness](#) in the geographic area has both the largest and most precise influence on average welfare transfers in that geographic area. This influence is to attenuate those transfers, across all specifications, including when controls for earnings are implemented. The influence of high school graduation is similar in direction and magnitude to that of family intactness.

Interestingly, race and ethnicity are not important for welfare transfer levels in the way the general public thinks, once family intactness and education levels are accounted for: The fraction of Hispanics in the population has no determinable influence on welfare transfers. A larger fraction of blacks in the local population attenuates welfare receipt levels, with certain controls³⁾ active.

However, increasing urbanicity (i.e., population density) enhances welfare payments, presumably because of increased access to welfare programs.

3. Social Security Disability Income

3.1 Adults

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a federal program for once-working individuals who become “permanently disabled” and receive lifetime government support.

Average SSDI transfers among 25- to 54-year-olds was strongly attenuated by the fraction of the population that completed high school, the proportion of the population that was Hispanic, the fraction of the population that completed college, and family intactness (in decreasing magnitude).

SSDI transfers were also attenuated by the proportion of the population that was black, though this influence is less precisely determinable. The influence of the fraction of the population that completed college becomes indeterminable once income is controlled for independently. All the other explanatory variables are precisely determined in their influence on SSDI transfers, and the estimated levels of influence persist even when income controls are applied.

3.2 Adult Males

The fraction of high school graduates in the geographic area has the largest attenuating influence on average SSDI payments among 25- to 54-year-old males. The fraction of Hispanics in the population has the next-largest attenuating influence. This is followed by the fraction of college graduates, though the latter's influence becomes indeterminable after adding controls for earnings.

The fraction of intact families has the fourth-largest attenuating influence on SSDI payments among 25- to 54-year-old males, though, again, the influence becomes less precisely determinable after adding controls for earnings to controls for demographics and education.

The minor dependency ratio has a pronounced attenuating influence on SSDI transfers. The fraction of blacks in the population of a geographic area has the fifth-largest attenuating influence on average SSDI payments for 25- to 54-year-old males, an influence which is not precisely determined.

4. Supplemental Security Income

4.1 Adult Males

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program making income transfers to the permanently disabled. These disabled may have never worked.

The fraction of intact families in a geographic area exhibits the largest attenuating, precisely determined influence level on average SSI transfers to men aged 25 to 54 with controls applied for

demographics, education, and earnings.

The fraction of high school graduates has a similar influence level, with all controls applied. The fraction of college graduates has a smaller attenuating influence; it is precisely determined under controls for demographics and education only but becomes undeterminable when controls for earnings are added.

The fraction of Hispanics in a population has a slightly smaller attenuating, precisely determined influence on average SSI transfers to men aged 25 to 54 with controls applied for demographics, education, and earnings. The fraction of blacks has a still smaller attenuating, but less precisely determined influence. Finally, urbanicity has a small, precisely determined enhancing influence on average SSI transfers to prime-aged men. Presumably this is due to increased access to the program.

4.2 Adult Females

The fraction of intact families in a geographic area has the largest attenuating, precisely determined influence on average SSI transfers to women aged 25 to 54 with controls applied for demographics, education, and earnings.

The fraction of high school graduates, the fraction of Hispanics, the fraction of college graduates, and the fraction of blacks in the geographic area follow intact families (in decreasing magnitude), all of which (save one) have precisely determined attenuating influences under all controls: The influence of college graduates becomes undeterminable when controls for earnings are applied.

Urbanicity has a positive, less precisely determined influence on average SSI transfers to women aged 25 to 54 with controls applied for demographics, education, and earnings.

¹⁾ Precision has no formal meaning. It indicates how clearly determinable (distinguishable from zero) an influence on an outcome is. Precision is comparable to standard deviation. Low no precision indicates a high standard of deviation in which data points spread over a large range of value, signifying that the influence of one variable over another is relatively uncertain. High precision indicates a low standard of deviation in which data points hover around the mean, signifying that the influence of one variable over another is relatively certain. For further elaboration see "[Marriage and Economic Well-Being: The Economy of the Family Rises or Falls with Marriage](#)"

²⁾ However, when we look at the interaction between Belonging and minor dependency levels, more Belonging with more children better than offsets the increase in food stamp use that is seen from more children being in an area. Belonging has an attenuating influence on child food stamp dependency.

³⁾ See U.S. Social Policy Dependence on the Family for the full report, including all methodological considerations.

This entry draws heavily from [U.S. Social Policy Dependence on the Family](#).

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