

Abstract

This book examines the implementation of the 1996 national welfare reform act and summarizes field-research findings to date. The focus of this research is on what happens to national policies after they are made. The theme is that a lot is happening and that there are surprises in the implementation of the 1996 Personal Responsibility Act and its connections to other social agencies and programs. Bureaucracies typically don't change this much and this fast. Why did it happen this time around? The book highlights three S's to encapsulate the changes that are occurring — Signals, Services, Sanctions. Emphasis is placed on "second-order devolution," the crucial role of front-line workers, the relationship between employment services and cash payment systems, varieties in goal clusters among the states and locally, the new role of "diversion" before welfare reciprocity, and the condition and importance of welfare information systems. Field researchers in 20 states (including 2 local sites in each) are conducting this ongoing study in conjunction with Rockefeller Institute central staff. Major funding has been provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation along with other funders. A component of the research program funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and headed by Irene Lurie is examining the ground-level operation of the welfare programs in 12 local sites. The first round of the state-local field research is completed. The second-round research consists of targeted studies on selected topics.