

WOMEN AT THE NEXUS OF CORRECTIONAL AND SOCIAL POLICIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR RECIDIVISM RISK

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This article addresses criticism by critical and feminist criminologists who fault the Risk/Needs/Responsivity corrections model for ignoring state-created recidivism risks. It examines the connection between women offenders' changes in access to economic safety net benefits and changes in individual recidivism risk. Longitudinal quantitative data were from 345 women interviewed six months apart in a state with extreme benefits cuts. Loss of monetary assistance and new unmet need for housing aid were significantly related to increased economic-related recidivism risk. Women with consistent unmet needs and those who received benefits had high levels of risk over time. Women with persistent unmet economic need had high levels of other risk that included mental illness and substance abuse. Findings reveal inconsistencies between policies that reduce availability of economic benefits to the poor and the correctional goals of reducing recidivism risk.

Key words: welfare cuts, recidivism risk, women offenders

Introduction

This article addresses a criticism of a dominant paradigm in corrections, the Risk/Needs/Responsivity (RNR) approach, which emphasizes the efficacy of addressing individual offender deficits that predict recidivism. Numerous studies have documented specific individual-level recidivism predictors, and many correctional organizations (i.e. prisons, probation departments) use assessment tools to measure risk factors to guide the choice of correctional interventions. For most offenders, these interventions are based on cognitive behavioural methods to promote individual change (e.g. Andrews and Bonta 1998; Cullen and Gendreau 2000; Gendreau *et al.* 2006; Smith *et al.* 2007; Andrews 2011).

Working from a different paradigm, feminist and critical criminologists criticize the RNR model for ignoring structural causes of women offenders' economic distress that puts them at risk for recidivism (Allard 2002; Bloom *et al.* 2004; Haney 2004). They point out that research has often ignored the retraction of the welfare state that decreases offenders' access to economic aid in several countries, including Australia, Canada, Great Britain and the United States (Comack and Balfour 2004; LaVigne *et al.* 2004; Visher *et al.* 2004; Freudenberg *et al.* 2005; Maidment 2006; Hannah-Moffat 2010; Wacquant 2010; Hannah-Moffat and Innocente 2013). Corcoran (2010: 242) wrote that in addition to consideration of individual risks of being unemployed or poor,

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researchers should study the effects of *social lack*, including lack of access to financial support (emphasis added). Consistent with Corcoran's assertion, [Freudenberg et al. \(2005\)](#) concluded from research that both social policy and individual choices contribute to women's reincarceration. Thus, not only do individuals require reform but so do policies and social services. Other critical criminologists (e.g. [Gutierrez 1990](#); [Haney 2004](#); [Hannah-Moffat 2004](#); 2015; [Goodkind 2005](#); 2009) have argued that holding offenders responsible for correcting their personal deficits ignores the constraints imposed by social structure and policies. For instance, labour market conditions for poor single mothers have resulted in greater material hardship for women who return to work than for those who retain welfare benefits ([Edin and Lein 1997](#)). To contribute to knowledge about the connection of the retracting welfare state to recidivism reduction objectives, the present research investigates women's access to economic benefits (e.g. welfare, subsidized housing) as an influence on economically based individual risk for recidivism.

Unemployment and other indicators of economic distress are key individual-level predictors of women's recidivism ([Heilbrun et al. 2008](#); [Van Voorhis et al. 2013](#)). The association of economically based risk with recidivism at the individual level is consistent with findings from aggregate-level analysis showing that in metropolitan areas, the higher the expenditure on welfare assistance, the weaker the association of crime rates to the size of the population living in poverty ([Hannon and Defronzo 1998](#)). Also consistent, studies show that monetary support for substance addicted individuals through Social Security Insurance reduced recipients' odds of criminality ([Swartz et al. 2003](#)). Conversely unemployed women's loss of welfare benefits following federal and state welfare reforms led to increased criminal behaviour ([Monte and Lewis 2011](#)). The few studies specific to women on probation and parole found that net of other risks, women's recidivism was lower if they received monetary and housing assistance ([Holtfreter et al. 2004](#); [Schram et al. 2006](#)). Although these findings support the notion that as the safety net shrinks, women's recidivism risks increase, there is no prior study of the connection between individual women's receipt of needed economic assistance and changes in their economically based recidivism risk.

In the US system, many prisoners are released to be supervised on parole before the completion of their sentences. Other convicted offenders are sentenced to probation rather than prison. Both parole and probation supervision involve reporting to agents who monitor clients for compliance with court and supervision rules (e.g. drug abstinence, paying fines). Agents can initiate proceedings that lead to incarceration and in some jurisdictions, they identify and address risks for recidivism.

Women offenders supervised in the community are less studied than their male counterparts, but in the United States their numbers are substantial. In 2013, an estimated 102,384 US women were on parole and 977,650 were on probation; and women constituted 12 per cent of the parole population and 25 per cent of the probation population ([Herberman and Bonczar 2014](#)). The numbers on parole result from three decades of rapid increase in incarceration, which was greater for women than for men and disproportionately included drug-involved offenders ([Mauer 2001](#); [Mauer and Chesney-Lind 2002](#)). In addition to tougher sanctions meted out by courts, the concentration of strict law enforcement in poor communities and on drug offenders accounted for more women being arrested, convicted and sentenced to probation or incarceration ([Steffensmeier and Streifel 1992](#); [Bush-Baskette 2000](#); [Steffensmeier et al. 2006](#); [Schwartz et al. 2009](#)).

To cut costs, in recent years, several states have shifted away from judicial and correctional policies that emphasized incarceration and punishment (Pew Center on the States 2008; Carson and Sabol 2012; Phelps 2013). In the study site, Michigan's Department of Corrections instituted effective policies and programmes aimed at reducing the number of paroled women who returned to prison (Holtfreter and Wattanaporn 2014). For offenders who posed no risk to the public, efforts included restrictions on returning offenders to prison for violations of supervision conditions and tailoring assessment and treatment to causes of offending. Thus, a study of women offenders supervised in the community is timely and relevant to the dual policy goals of cutting costs of programmes to assist the poor and saving public monies by reducing recidivism. In particular, there is need to understand the effect of reducing assistance to poor people on women offenders' recidivism risks that stem from their financial needs.

The research described in this article takes advantage of data collected for a longitudinal study of women on probation and parole at a time and place characterized by severe cuts to safety net programmes that disproportionately affect women. The state-wide changes followed previous cuts and disqualifications in Michigan that were considerably larger than in other states (Schott and Pavetti 2011; McNichol *et al.* 2012). The primary focus of the larger research project was probation and parole agent interactions with women offenders. However, changes in state policies provided a unique opportunity to also examine effects of a dramatically shrinking safety net. A month before data collection began, Michigan tightened its already relatively short 48-month Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, often called *welfare*) lifetime limit by eliminating some reasons for exemptions; these restrictions resulted in immediate termination of benefits to over 12,000 families (Schott and Pavetti 2011). The state legislature also reduced the Earned Income Tax Credit by two thirds (Schott and Pavetti 2011); these tax credits benefitted individuals who worked but who lived in poverty. At the time of these cuts, Michigan was among the hardest hit areas in the country by unemployment due to recession, and it had an acute low-income housing shortage (McNichol *et al.* 2012; National Low Income Housing Coalition 2013). The potential for study participants to lack access to benefits, to lose access or to develop new unmet economic needs created an optimal setting for examining the connection between changes in women's receipt of needed benefits and changes in economic-related recidivism risk.

Showing that social welfare benefits are essential sources of support to women offenders, the literature review that follows first summarizes what is known about the extent of poverty among women in the US correctional system. The second section of the literature review briefly documents over two decades of US national, state and local policies that decreased economic assistance for the poor in general and for people with criminal histories more specifically. The final section of the literature review considers prior theoretical and empirical work on women at the nexus of correctional and social welfare policies and explains how the present study contributes to that literature.

Poverty of women on probation and parole

Although no current statistics reveal the extent of poverty and unemployment for a nationally representative sample of US women on probation or parole, studies beginning in the 1980s have consistently established that in various samples, many female offenders are poor and have difficulty finding and maintaining employment

(Chesney-Lind and Rodriguez 1983; Daly 1992; Owen and Bloom 1995; Greenfeld and Snell 1999; Olson *et al.* 2000; Holtfreter *et al.* 2004; Van Voorhis *et al.* 2008; Morash 2010; Belknap 2014). For example, a recent large-sample study ($N = 581$) of Minnesota women in prison, on probation and in a drug court programme revealed that 40–50 per cent were unemployed (depending on the subgroup, and with women in prison reporting employment at time of arrest), and large proportions (50–72 per cent) had incomes of \$10,000 a year or less (Wright *et al.* 2008). Since economic distress is an important risk factor for women's recidivism, research on the effect of a retracted safety net can provide valuable insights into whether policies that decrease assistance to the poor undermine correctional objectives of reducing risk for recidivism and incarceration.

Safety net policies contributing to economic distress

In the United States, reductions in assistance to the poor started with the 1996 federal welfare reform, which primarily impacted female-headed families with dependent children (Bloom *et al.* 2004; Government Accountability Office 2005). It restricted access to economic aid through TANF by setting time limits for receipt of aid and requiring states to involve minimum percentages of welfare caseloads in work preparation and eventual employment. In line with federal policies (Allard 2009; Schott *et al.* 2012), Michigan increased sanctions for non-compliance with reporting, work preparation and employment requirements. Showing a steady progression in punitiveness, in 1996 the most severe sanction for TANF was loss of the entire benefit until compliance was re-established; in 2001, the maximum sanction was loss of the entire benefit for one month; and in 2012, it was permanent termination (Kassabian *et al.* 2013). Research conducted in multiple states revealed that sanctions for non-compliance fell most often on clients with mental illness, limited education and disabilities, and on domestic violence victims and clients who are Black (Kalil *et al.* 2002; Meyers *et al.* 2006; Kauff *et al.* 2007; Schram *et al.* 2008; 2009; Monnat 2010; Alfred and Chlup 2009). Many women offenders have the characteristics of those most negatively affected by sanctions (Greenfeld and Snell 1999; James and Glaze 2006; Steadman *et al.* 2009; Jealous *et al.* 2011; Carson and Sabol 2012), thus they would be likely to experience the increasingly punitive welfare system.

Empirical evidence shows that sanctions for non-compliance with TANF rules contribute to economic distress, at the extreme leading to what researchers describe as a state of being 'disconnected', which means that individuals are out of the labour market, not receiving welfare and have no apparent source of financial support (Reichman *et al.* 2005; Lindhorst and Mancoske 2006; Meyers *et al.* 2006; Moore *et al.* 2012). Disconnection is the opposite of the integration into legitimate economic and social life that prevents recidivism (Travis 2002; Nilsson 2003). Additionally, in 1996 the federal government eliminated alcoholism and addiction as evidence of a disability preventing employment. This change also disproportionately impacts women offenders, who more than male offenders have drug and alcohol problems (Langan and Pelissier 2001; Mumola and Karberg 2006; Guerino *et al.* 2011). The disability eligibility change also left many prior recipients disconnected from all means of financial support (Norris *et al.* 2003; Orwin *et al.* 2004; Hogan *et al.* 2008).

Adding to financial strains, several states have inadequate economic assistance in the form of housing vouchers and public housing. One reason is federal legislators' decisions not to fund a Housing Trust Fund established in 2008 to address an extreme nationwide low-income housing shortage ([National Low Income Housing Coalition \[NLIHC\] 2013](#)). The NLIHC estimated that in Michigan, there were 28 affordable available units for every 100 households with *extremely* low incomes and 63 affordable available units for every 100 households with *very* low incomes. Moreover, offenders face unique barriers to obtaining housing assistance due to federal policy and local practice that deny assistance to people convicted of a drug crime and that allow eviction of family members who house relatives or friends engaged in criminal activity even if the tenant 'did not know of, could not foresee or could not control the behaviour of other occupants or guests' ([Aukerman 2008: 9](#); also see [Colgate-Love et al. 2013](#)). Such collateral consequences of being a suspected or convicted offender intensify the unavailability of economic benefits.

Women at the nexus of correctional and safety net policies

The link between women's involvement in the correctional system and their poverty places them at the nexus of correctional and social welfare programmes and policies. Scholars who have theorized and studied the link between mass incarceration and the shrinking welfare state provide different explanations of how the two institutions operate together. Some argue that both entities have abandoned the ideal of rehabilitation and social reform; others assert that state institutions have either cooperated or taken turns in managing labour, inequality and marginalized populations ([Beckett and Western 2001](#); [Garland 2001](#); [Wacquant 2001; 2010](#)). Few scholars have considered penal and welfare institutions as they specifically pertain to women offenders. In the United States, this relative neglect is surprising given the simultaneous dramatic increase in women's involvement in the correctional system and the decrease in welfare support ([McCorkel 2004](#)). As an exception, [Haney \(2004\)](#) showed in her research that state institutions embody internal inconsistencies, e.g. increasingly punitive practices alongside therapeutic interventions in both penal and welfare institutions. The present study contributes to the limited prior research on the consistency in the practices of multiple state institutions that affect women offenders.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding the study was as follows: Is change in a woman's receipt of needed economic assistance linked to change in her recidivism risk due to economic distress? For example, does economic-related recidivism risk increase for women who initially receive monetary benefits but then lose them? Does it decrease for women who obtain needed benefits?

We also addressed the follow-up question: Are women without access to economic benefits at greater risk for recidivism than others due to non-economic characteristics and circumstances? Answering this follow-up question would reveal whether social welfare policies compound already existing risk for reoffending.

Method

A longitudinal quantitative data set was used to investigate the connection between (1) changes in receipt of needed economic benefits and (2) changes in recidivism risk due to economic distress. Trained interviewers employed for the research asked women whether they needed and received economic aid in the form of cash, housing and food assistance, and they administered a risk assessment instrument that was recently revalidated for women (the Women's Risk/Needs Assessment [WRNA]; (Van Voorhis *et al.* 2012). The instrument included an economic distress measure (the *employment/financial* subscale) that is predictive of arrests, convictions and violations of probation and parole conditions (Van Voorhis *et al.* 2012; 2013). Need for and receipt of economic benefits and economic risk for recidivism were measured during interviews with each woman offender at approximately 2 and 8 months after beginning community supervision. We refer to the first interview as the *initial interview* or *wave* and the interview at 8 months as the *follow-up interview* or *wave*.

Sampling

The sampling aim was to include women under community supervision convicted of a felony and from settings ranging from urban to rural. Moreover, the present study concentrated on the largest group of women on probation and parole—those with drug involvement (Maidment 2006; Morash 2010).

With probation and parole offices in every county, Michigan has a centralized statewide system of supervision for felony offenders and specialized caseloads for women. Most women (89.9 per cent) were supervised by agents with caseloads limited to either probation or parole, who had completed training in working with women offenders (89.8 per cent) and whose caseloads were only women (62.2 per cent).

To create a sampling frame, Morash or Cobbina approached 78 agents whose caseload numbers approximated the proportions of women supervised in each of the 16 counties within a 1½ hour drive from the research office. Seventy-three agents agreed to participate (93.6 per cent participation rate). Similar to the national proportion of 12.7 per cent, parolees (supervised after prison release) constituted just 11.1 per cent of the Michigan women under community supervision (Glaze and Parks 2012). So that we could carry out meaningful analysis to address research questions apart from those addressed through the present analysis, parole agents were oversampled in relation to probation agents.

The counties where the sample lived include 68.5 per cent (6,759,961 of 9,876,187) of the 2011 state population, all major cities, and a mix of rural and suburban areas. An author of this article reviewed the caseload list with each agent and assisted the agent in identifying eligible clients. Of the 846 eligible women identified, some did not take part because they reported to the office when research staff was not on site to explain the project, and some of those neither responded to flyers nor gave agents permission to share contact information with interviewers. Interviewers trained by the research project recruited and obtained consent for 402 participants. A comparison of participants and non-participants revealed no statistically significant differences in official records of drug or alcohol use, violations, arrests, misdemeanour convictions and felony convictions in a 12-month period. Non-participants were slightly but significantly more

likely to be in jail or prison at the end of the period, suggesting a small bias towards including women who were not incarcerated at 12 months. The final sample participating in the initial interview included 305 women on probation (75.9 per cent) and 97 women on parole (24.1 per cent), and the sample retained 379 women (94.3 per cent of the 402; 287 on probation, 92 on parole) to participate in the follow-up interview. The analysis in this article focuses on the 345 women who took part in both interviews and who had complete data concerning their monetary, housing and food benefits (probation $N = 264$, parole $N = 81$). (The 57 women not included in the current sample did not differ from the 345 retained in 12-month official records of drug or alcohol use, violations for reasons other than arrests, arrests, misdemeanour convictions or felony convictions.)

Interviews and measurement

Between November 2011 and November 2013, one of 19 trained interviewers met privately with each woman in a location convenient to her, such as a private office in the probation or parole department or a public place, such as a library. Interviews took from one to three hours, with most lasting about two hours. Participants received a US \$30 gift card for the initial interview and a US \$75 gift card for the follow-up.

Three types of public benefits are most directly relevant to women's economic risk for recidivism: monetary (Supplemental Security Income or SSI, Social Security Disability Insurance [SSDI] and TANF), housing (public housing, vouchers) and food (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP], often called *food stamps*). During the two interviews, with separate questions for each type of benefit, an interviewer asked the study participant whether she currently received cash, housing and food assistance. For each benefit not received, the interviewer then asked, 'Do you need this assistance?' Responses to the questions about need and receipt of assistance were entered into a computer as quantitative data.

Economic-related risk for recidivism was measured at both interviews using 10 items from the employment/financial risk WRNA subscale (Van Voorhis *et al.* 2012; 2013) (Cronbach's alpha initial interview = 0.59, follow-up = 0.61).¹ Items were summed at each time to create a variable ranging from 0 (no employment/financial need) to 11 (high need). This measure considers more than employment by incorporating information on problems associated with poverty (i.e. inability to pay bills, no bank accounts, problems with eviction and collection agencies, and no household member employed full time year round). In the present research, at the initial interview the employment/financial risk subscale had a mean of $M = 5.92$, $SD = 2.37$, and at follow up the mean dropped significantly, $t(344) = 2.22$, $p = 0.03$, to $M = 5.73$, $SD = 2.51$. Initial and follow-up interview scores were correlated ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.001$).

At the initial interview, *non-economic risks for recidivism* and *strengths that predict low recidivism* were also assessed with the WRNA. A composite of non-economic risks was computed by adding the scores for the following WRNA risk subscales: criminal history (Cronbach's alpha = 0.47), unsafe housing (Cronbach's alpha = 0.54), antisocial

¹The items collect data on employment, previous job difficulties, having a checking and a savings account, being able to pay bills, worrying about making ends meet, being sole provider for children, lacking medical insurance for children, recent severe financial problems like eviction and no member of the household with full-time employment.

friends (Cronbach's alpha = 0.71) anger/hostility (Cronbach's alpha = 0.70), current symptoms of mental illness (Cronbach's alpha = 0.77), substance abuse history (Cronbach's alpha = 0.88), current substance abuse (Cronbach's alpha = 0.61), parental stress (Cronbach's alpha = 0.81), a count of reports of any prior occurrence of two types of child abuse (physical, sexual, range 0–2) and a count of reports of any occurrence of the same two types of abuse as an adult (range 0–2).² All risks were measured through participant responses to questions, but some items in the criminal history subscale (i.e. current offence is violent, time from prior to current offence, number of prior felonies before current offence, number of prior prison terms) were checked against official records and if necessary corrected. Subscales for non-economic predictors of low recidivism included educational strengths (Cronbach's alpha = 0.64), family support (Cronbach's alpha = 0.65) and self-efficacy (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). The means for the two composite variables were $M = 20.62$, $SD = 7.92$, range = 3–42 for composite risks and $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.55$, range = 0–7 for composite strengths. The measures of combined risks and strengths were used to compare women on probation and on parole and to determine whether receipt of economic benefits over time was related to initial non-economic recidivism risks.

Analytic strategy

In the investigation of access to economic benefits over time, at both interviews women could fall into one of three categories reflecting need and access to monetary, housing and food assistance: (1) No need or access, (2) Need and access, (3) Need and no access. To examine the connection between these categories and WRNA-assessed economic risk for recidivism, three mixed-model analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted. For each benefit, based on her placement into the three previous categories over the two waves, women were placed in one of five need/access categories of interest: (1) No need by the follow-up interview, (2) Access to the needed benefit by follow-up, (3) New unmet need by follow-up, (4) Had the benefit initially but lost it by follow-up and (5) Unmet need at both interviews. Women without needs at both interviews were included in category 1 (i.e. no need by the follow-up). In the first ANOVA, the assessment wave (initial or follow-up) was a within-subjects factor, and monetary need/access (the 5 need/access categories) was a between-subjects factor. The other two ANOVAs examined housing and food need/access status. Main effects of need/access status on the WRNA measure of economic recidivism risk were followed by post hoc Tukey tests. Interactions between assessment wave and need/access status were followed by testing the simple main effects of assessment wave separately for each level of need/access status. To determine whether probation versus parole status altered statistical results, we also examined these models treating status as a covariate; since results did not change, they are not presented.

Our discovery of statistically significant relationships between lack of access to benefits and economic recidivism risk (described below) raised questions about whether women lacking economic benefits access shared other recidivism risks. Thus, a final step in the analysis was to compare women in varying economic benefit need/access

²Cronbach's alphas were not calculated for these two count variables of adult and child abuse, because the occurrence of the two types tap different, not necessarily related dimensions.

categories (e.g. no need at either interview, persistent need at both interviews) on *non-economic* recidivism risks and strengths. In addition to comparing women on non-economic composite risks/strengths measures, we also compared them on the specific subscales. For each comparison, we used a single-factor ANOVA to assess differences across the five need/access benefit groups followed by post hoc Tukey tests for significant differences between each pair of groups. Findings of relatively high non-economic risk for groups lacking access to needed economic benefits would suggest a concentration of this lack among women at risk for recidivism for reasons besides their economic distress.

Results

Sample description

The initial interview provided considerable information about the 345 women considered in the analysis. Women ranged from age 18 to 60 ($M = 33.9$, $SD = 10.5$). Based on self-descriptions of race and ethnicity, 50.7 per cent (175) were White and not Hispanic, 36.5 per cent (126) were Black and not Hispanic, 11.6 per cent (40) were Hispanic and either white or black or some other mixture, and 1.2 per cent (4) were Native American. Just over half (52.5 per cent or 181) had children under 18, and of these 74.3 per cent (124) were single parents. Most women (54.8 per cent or 189) reported being unemployed but able to work, 26.7 per cent (92) worked part-time or were unable to work because of childcare responsibilities and 18.6 per cent (64) worked fulltime. Relevant to physical disability status, 36.2 per cent (125) of the women rated their health as fair, poor or very poor. Confirming self reports, case notes indicated that one in four women (83) could not work because of disability or illness.

Women's responses to the interview reflected their considerable poverty. Consistent with limited labour force participations, 85.2 per cent of women had incomes of \$10,000 or less a year. Also, 49.6 per cent reported that they could not pay their bills, 32.5 per cent worried a lot and 33.3 per cent worried some about making ends meet, and 54.2 per cent agreed they had recent severe financial problems. Indicating housing instability, 44.6 per cent had been homeless or lived in a shelter at least once as an adult, and 54.5 per cent had lived in just one place since supervision began, 24.3 per cent lived in two places and 20.3 per cent had lived in three or more places. Also, 16.8 per cent said they could not count on the stability of current housing. In summary, many participants began the study living in extreme poverty. Sizeable proportions fall in the target groups of programmes for people with disabilities preventing employment, parents with limited resources supporting children, individuals unable to afford housing and food, and people who could not count on a place to live.

Comparison of probationers and parolees on benefit access and recidivism risks

The economic risk measured at the initial interview did not differ significantly for women on probation and parole: for probation, $M = 5.87$, $SD = 2.46$; for parole, $M = 6.07$, $SD = 2.23$, $t(343) = 0.68$, $p = 0.500$. Based on the total risk score for the WRNA (omitting the unemployment/ financial subscale) probationers had slightly lower scores for total non-economic risks for recidivism (for probationers, for total non-economic risk,

$M = 20.14$, $SD = 8.09$; for parolees, $M = 22.16$, $SD = 7.18$; $t(343) = -2.01$, $p = .045$). The two groups had a marginally significant difference on total strengths, with parolees having more strengths (probationers $M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.55$; parolees $M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.53$; $t(343) = -1.84$, $p = .066$). However, for total needs scores (risks minus strengths), probationers and parolees did not differ significantly (probationers $M = 16.53$, $SD = 8.43$; parolees $M = 18.19$, $SD = 7.67$; $t(343) = -1.58$, $p = 0.116$).

Table 1 presents the results of chi-square tests of probationer–parolee differences in need for and receipt of economic benefits at both initial and follow-up interviews. At the initial interview, a higher proportion of women on parole than on probation indicated unmet need for monetary assistance, but at follow-up this difference no longer existed. Incarceration interrupts the receipt of social security and welfare benefits, but once women have been out of prison for a few months they may be able to re-establish eligibility. The remaining data in Table 1 suggest that the widespread poverty of both probationers and parolees in Michigan created similar patterns of relationships to economic risks and the safety net benefits designed to provide economic assistance. Women on probation and parole also were similar in non-economic risks for recidivism at the start of the research. Given the focus of the present analysis, we therefore considered individual-level change in economic risk for recidivism for the combined group of probationers and parolees, although we did introduce supervision status (i.e. probation versus parole) as a covariate in the analysis to be sure that findings were not affected by supervision type.

Economic benefit needs and access

Separately for monetary, housing and food assistance, Table 2 presents the proportion of women in each need/benefit access status at the times of the initial and follow-up

TABLE 1 *Receipt of benefits by supervision status*

Benefit type	Initial interview				χ^2	Follow-up interview				χ^2
	Probation		Parole			Probation		Parole		
	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>		%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	
Monetary										
No need	30.3	80	18.5	15		32.6	86	28.4	23	
Receives	34.8	92	32.1	26		31.4	83	33.3	27	
Needs	34.8	92	49.4	40		36.0	95	38.3	31	
Total		264		81	6.68*		264		81	0.50
Housing										
No need	43.6	115	32.1	26		43.9	116	39.5	32	
Receives	9.1	24	8.6	7		7.2	19	9.9	8	
Needs	47.3	125	59.3	48		48.9	129	50.6	41	
Total		264		81	3.76		264		81	0.89
Food										
No need	13.3	35	8.6	7		14.4	38	7.4	6	
Receives	68.9	182	80.2	65		70.1	185	80.2	65	
Need	17.8	47	11.1	9		15.5	41	12.3	10	
Total		264		81	3.90					3.68

df = 2 for all chi-square tests.

* $p < 0.05$.

TABLE 2 *Percentage of women falling into the five categories of self-reported need for, and access to, monetary, housing and food benefits*

Five categories	Type of benefit					
	Monetary		Housing		Food	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
1. Women with persistent unmet needs	22.9	79	36.8	127	7.5	26
2. Women who lost the benefit by follow-up	5.8	20	4.1	14	5.5	19
3. Women with new need unmet by follow-up	7.8	27	8.4	29	1.7	6
4. Women who obtained the benefit by follow-up	31.9	110	7.8	27	72.5	250
5. Women who had no needs by follow-up	31.6	109	42.9	148	12.8	44

interviews. Looking first at monetary benefits, approximately a third of the women reported no monetary needs by the follow-up interview, a third received monetary benefits by follow-up, and the final third (all of whom were not receiving the benefit at follow-up) either had new unmet needs by follow-up (7.8 per cent), had the benefit initially but lost it (5.8 per cent) or had persistent unmet monetary needs at both interviews (22.9 per cent). For housing benefits, women most often reported either never needing aid (42.9 per cent) or persistent unmet need (36.8 per cent). Only 14 women (4.1 per cent) reported losing housing assistance between interviews. Finally, just 12.8 per cent reported no needs for food assistance, and notably almost three-quarters of women said they received food assistance by follow-up. Consistent with the literature review on the political economy of aid to the poor and the poverty of women offenders, the majority of women presented needs for monetary, housing and food assistance. Women had relatively high access to food assistance, moderate access to monetary aid and the least access to housing assistance. Because so few women had difficulty obtaining food assistance, and analysis of access to food assistance provided no information beyond what was learned from focusing on monetary and housing aid, we present the remaining findings only for monetary and housing needs and benefits.

Relationship of obtaining needed benefits to economic recidivism risk

The first ANOVA assessed whether there were mean differences in economic risk for recidivism as a function of assessment wave and self-reported monetary benefits need/access status. The overall ANOVA indicated that although there was no significant change in economic risk on average over the 6-month interval between the initial interview and follow-up, $F(1,340) = 0.93$, $p = .335$, there was a significant main effect of monetary benefit need/access status, $F(4,340) = 20.51$, $p < 0.001$. Table 3 presents the main effect means for the WRNA economic risk measures averaged over time for each type of monetary benefit need/access status. As would be expected, women self-reporting persistent unmet needs ($M = 6.94$) or monetary benefits at the initial interview that were lost by the follow-up interview had the highest average economic risk ($M = 6.72$), and women reporting no monetary needs by follow-up had the lowest WRNA assessed average economic recidivism risk ($M = 4.48$).

TABLE 3 Main effect means and standard deviations for economic recidivism risk as measured by the WRNA financial risk scores averaged over the initial and follow-up interviews

Five categories	Type of benefit			
	Monetary		Housing	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. Women with persistent unmet needs	6.94	1.80	6.75	2.03
2. Women who lost the benefit by follow-up	6.72	2.32	6.18	1.38
3. Women with new need unmet by follow-up	5.52	1.93	5.72	1.78
4. Women who obtained the benefit by follow-up	6.15	1.97	6.80	1.94
5. Women who had no needs by follow-up	4.48	2.09	4.75	2.09

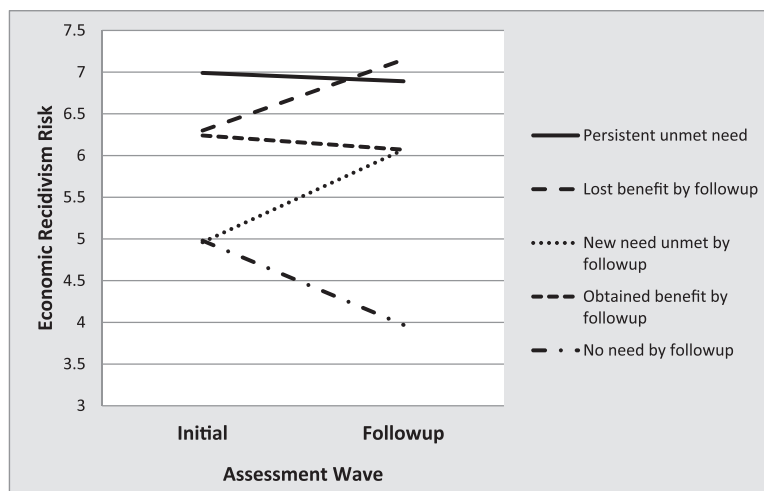


FIG. 1 Economic risk for women varying in their need and receipt of monetary benefits

Of particular interest is that there was also a significant interaction between time and monetary benefit need/access status, $F(4,340) = 8.14$, $p < .001$. The interaction is depicted in Figure 1. Paired t -tests were used to compare initial economic risk to follow-up economic risk separately for each group of women in different categories of monetary benefit need/access status. Women reporting persistent unmet needs maintained relatively high scores on economic recidivism risk at both time points, $t(78) = 0.52$, $p = 0.601$. Women who lost monetary benefits they had been receiving initially showed a marginally significant increase in economic risk, $t(19) = 1.82$, $p = 0.084$. Women who reported new unmet monetary needs by follow-up also showed a marginally significant increase in needs over time, $t(26) = 2.00$, $p = 0.056$. Women who obtained the benefit by follow-up did not change in their economic risk, $t(109) = 0.85$, $p = 0.399$. Finally, women who reported having no needs for monetary benefits by follow-up showed a significant decline in assessed economic risk over time, $t(108) = 4.98$, $p < 0.001$.

The next ANOVA assessed differences in economic risk for recidivism as a function of assessment wave and women's reports of their housing benefit need/access status. As was the case for monetary needs, the main effect of time was not statistically significant, $F(1,340) = 0.23$, $p = 0.64$, but both the main effect of housing benefit need/

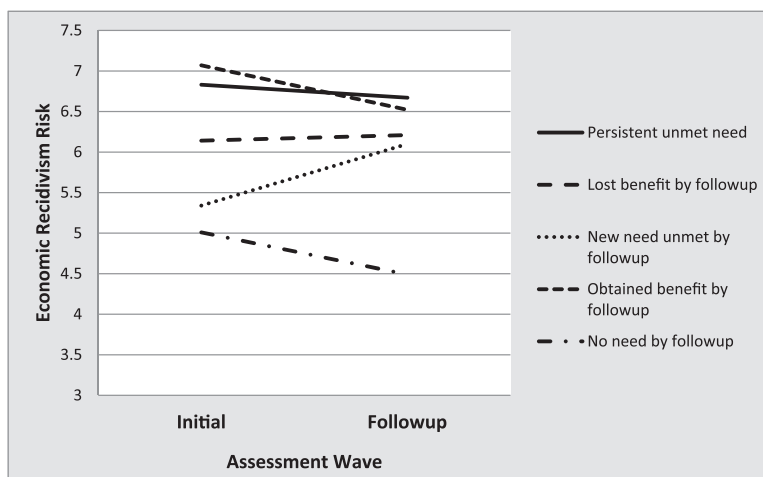


FIG. 2 Economic risk for women varying in their need and receipt of housing benefits

access status, $F(4,340) = 18.92$, $p < 0.001$, and the time by need/access status interaction, $F(4,340) = 2.48$, $p = 0.044$, were statistically significant. The main effect means in Table 3 show that like the results for monetary benefits, women who identified no housing needs by follow-up showed the lowest average economic risk for recidivism ($M = 4.75$). Women with persistent unmet needs for housing were very high in economic risk ($M = 6.75$). Women who obtained the benefit by follow-up had the highest average economic risk ($M = 6.80$), suggesting that their high need may have led to their obtaining aid.

The interaction between assessment wave and housing need/access status is depicted in Figure 2. Simple main effects analyses showed that women without housing needs by follow-up declined significantly in their economic recidivism risk score over time, $t(147) = 2.81$, $p = 0.006$. Women who obtained the housing benefits by follow-up did not change in their economic risk in the six months between interviews, $t(26) = 1.22$, $p = 0.235$, but women who had a new unmet housing need increased in their economic risk over time, $t(28) = 2.43$, $p = 0.022$. Finally, women who had housing benefits initially but lost them did not change in their economic recidivism risk scores over time, $t(13) = 0.17$, $p = 0.869$, and similarly, women with persistent needs did not differ over time, $t(126) = 0.85$, $p = 0.397$.

Relationship of need and receipt of benefits to initial non-economic recidivism risk

In our final analyses, we used a set of single-factor ANOVAs to test whether the women falling into the five need/access statuses for monetary and housing benefits differed in their initial non-economic recidivism risk and protective strengths. Table 4 presents the means and standard deviations of the WRNA non-economic risks and strength measures as a function of the five need/access groups. Analyses indicated significant differences across the five monetary benefit groups on the composite measure of initial non-economic recidivism risk, $F(4,340) = 6.02$, $p < 0.001$. Post hoc Tukey tests indicated that women with persistent unmet monetary needs had considerably higher

TABLE 4 Means and standard deviations for selected initial non-economic recidivism risk and protective strengths for women differing in need for and access to monetary and housing benefits over time

	Type of benefit					
	Monetary			Housing		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Composite non-economic risk						
1. Persistent unmet needs	23.81	8.02	79	22.05	8.55	127
2. Lost the benefit by follow-up	22.73	7.11	20	20.26	8.87	14
3. New need unmet by follow-up	17.88	6.60	27	19.87	7.23	29
4. Obtained benefit by follow-up	20.71	8.42	110	23.95	7.22	27
5. No needs by follow-up	18.85	7.05	109	19.21	7.26	148
Protective strengths						
1. Persistent unmet needs	3.38	1.58	79	3.50	1.52	127
2. Lost the benefit by follow-up	3.40	1.39	20	3.14	1.61	14
3. New need unmet by follow-up	4.22	1.60	27	3.69	1.71	29
4. Obtained benefit by follow-up	3.47	1.53	110	3.63	1.71	27
5. No needs by follow-up	4.08	1.48	109	3.94	1.49	148
Depression/anxiety						
1. Persistent unmet needs	2.58	2.09	79	2.43	1.95	127
2. Lost the benefit by follow-up	2.50	1.79	20	2.00	2.04	14
3. New need unmet by follow-up	1.41	1.76	27	2.28	2.22	29
4. Obtained benefit by follow-up	2.37	1.98	110	2.70	1.92	27
5. No needs by follow-up	1.71	1.79	109	1.77	1.86	148
Current substance abuse						
1. Persistent unmet needs	1.69	1.70	79	1.53	1.58	127
2. Lost the benefit by follow-up	1.45	1.23	20	1.07	1.21	14
3. New need unmet by follow-up	.74	1.32	27	.48	.78	29
4. Obtained benefit by follow-up	1.17	1.33	110	1.81	1.47	27
5. No needs by follow-up	1.02	1.21	109	1.02	1.25	148

non-economic recidivism risk than women who either had a new unmet need at follow-up or who had no needs at follow-up. Comparison of protective strengths for women at different levels of need/access for monetary benefits also resulted in a statistically significant difference, $F(4,340) = 4.19$, $p = 0.003$. In this case, the Tukey test indicated that women with persistent unmet needs were significantly lower in protective strengths than those with no needs at both interviews.

Table 4 also shows the means as a function of need/access status for housing benefits. The ANOVA indicated significant mean differences for non-economic recidivism risk, $F(4,340) = 3.28$, $p = .012$ and the post hoc Tukey test indicated that women with persistent unmet housing needs and those who obtained housing benefits by follow-up had significantly higher non-economic recidivism risk compared with those with no housing needs throughout the study. Finally, there were no significant mean differences in protective strengths as a function of need/access status for housing benefits, $F(4,340) = 1.91$, $p = 0.108$.

In addition to examining the composite non-economic risk and strength measures, we also conducted ANOVAs to test for mean differences on each of the indicators included in the composites. For both monetary and housing benefits, there were significant mean differences in current depression and anxiety as a function of receipt and need of benefits [for monetary benefits, $F(4,340) = 3.99$, $p = 0.004$; for housing benefits, $F(4,340) = 2.65$, $p = 0.033$]. Women with persistent unmet needs for both

monetary and housing assistance reported significantly higher levels of depression and anxiety than women who consistently indicated no need. In a similar pattern, groups differed in mean levels of current substance abuse for both monetary and housing benefit categories [for monetary benefits, $F(4,340) = 3.90$, $p = 0.004$; for housing benefits, $F(4,340) = 5.81$, $p < 0.001$]. Women with persistent unmet need for monetary benefits reported significantly higher substance abuse than women with no need by follow-up. Women with persistent unmet need for housing benefits also had higher substance abuse scores than women with no need and those with a new unmet need. The overall pattern is that persistent unmet financial need is associated with higher levels of current depression, anxiety and current drug use.

Analyses also revealed some findings about non-economic risks unique to either monetary or housing benefits. We briefly summarize these results here. Only for monetary benefits [$F(4,340) = 3.47$, $p = 0.008$], women with persistent unmet need had friends who were more antisocial ($M = 4.00$, $SD = 2.05$) than either women never reporting monetary need ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.75$) or those who obtained monetary benefits ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.82$). Also only for monetary benefits [$F(4,340) = 7.43$, $p < 0.001$], women with persistent unmet need had lower self-efficacy ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.43$) than women who had new unmet needs by follow-up or who never had this need (obtained $M = 1.63$, $SD = 0.36$; no needs $M = 1.57$, $SD = 0.29$). As might be expected, just for housing benefits women with persistent unmet need reported less safe residences than those with a new unmet need or no need [$F(4,340) = 4.13$, $p = 0.003$; persistent need $M = 0.93$, $SD = 1.26$; new need $M = 0.34$, $SD = 0.97$; no need $M = 0.49$, $SD = 0.81$]. Women with persistent unmet housing need also more often reported abuse as an adult than did those with no needs [$F(4,240) = 2.93$, $p = 0.021$; persistent unmet need $M = 0.90$, $SD = 0.81$; no need $M = 0.63$, $p = 0.78$]. Finally, women in varying need/benefit categories for monetary and housing assistance did not differ on a number of dimensions, including anger and hostility, child abuse, substance abuse history, educational strengths and family support.

Conclusion and Discussion

In the Michigan context, the only women who had declining economic risk for recidivism in the study period were those unaffected by the policies and practices of the welfare state. They consistently reported no need for economic aid, and they had the lowest non-economic recidivism risk and the highest strength scores. Future research could usefully explain why this group had some success participating in the mainstream economy and how they improved their economic standing.

In contrast, all groups affected by the welfare state due to their needs and access fared poorly in terms of economic distress and the related risk for recidivism. As expected, women who lost monetary and housing benefits had increased economic risk, and those reporting persistent unmet need remained high in economic recidivism risk. The low levels of economic aid, the permanent disability status of many recipients and the outcomes of studies of TANF payment levels and programmes to attach people to the workforce provide further evidence that the current system leaves women who have multiple non-economic challenges at high risk for recidivism (Handler and Babcock

2006; Edin and Kissane 2010; Ben-Shalom *et al.* 2012). This literature and the current study findings raise questions about the wisdom of repeatedly decreasing economic assistance to individuals with persistent need and setting benefit levels that maintain women in extreme poverty.

Critical researchers who study populations entangled in the welfare and/or justice systems have documented associations of economic and mental health and substance abuse problems similar to those that we found (Kalil *et al.* 2002; Handler and Babcock 2006; Meyers *et al.* 2006; Kauff *et al.* 2007; Schram *et al.* 2008; 2009; Alfred and Chlup 2009; Edin and Kissane 2010; Monnat 2010). The present research confirms that women with mental health and substance abuse difficulties are most likely to have persistent unmet needs for economic aid. Thus, multiple governmental systems and programmes are relevant to their capacity to desist from offending.

Next, we turn to the theoretical issue of whether there is a universal and coordinated shift towards punitiveness across social welfare, correctional and other governmental agencies. A primary motivation for reducing safety net programmes is to lessen public expenditures. Ironically, at least in the short run as they affect women on probation and parole, the unintended consequences of cutting these programmes may be to increase expenditures by increasing the odds of recidivism and the subsequent high costs of criminal justice system processing, control and future rehabilitation efforts. Based on a review of research, Tyagi (2006) similarly concluded that for correctional efforts to succeed, broader social policies must consider income security, affordable housing, welfare reform, living wage employment, child care availability and more generally, women's participation in the economic mainstream of society. As others have noted, it is ineffective to limit programming to simply pressuring or encouraging women to reduce their economic recidivism risks where social forces and policies maintain these risks (Fitzpatrick and Gomez 1997; Haney 2004; Goodkind 2005; Hannah-Moffat 2015).

There are existing examples of state and agency efforts to increase offender access to needed benefits and to avoid cut-offs. Ware and Dennis (2013) describe best practices through the SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery Program for increasing access to social security benefits for people leaving prison. The initiative trains local corrections and community transition staff to guide women through the complex, lengthy application process. In another example, some states avoid suspending recipients who violate TANF rules by ensuring that social service staff members fully understand policies and communicate this information to clients, routinely monitor clients, and re-engage non-compliant clients before or soon after sanctions (Kauff *et al.* 2007). Another way to reduce economic risk would be to grant disability assistance for people addicted to substances. Different from the United States, none of the eight countries with disability systems similar to the United States (e.g. Canada, Australia) disallows disability benefits when the primary disorder is substance abuse, and most provide treatment resources along with monetary support (Brucker 2009). The US approach may work at cross purposes with goals of reducing drug use through treatment, and thereby reducing recidivism.

Although the research results are unique, and the design took advantage of an unusual dramatic drop in benefits at the beginning of data collection, several caveats must be considered. The present analysis did not link change in assessed risk for recidivism due to financial distress with measures of recidivism. However, other studies have shown that changes in financial distress are predictive of various indicators

of continued criminality (Raynor 2007; Schlager and Pacheco 2011; Vose *et al.* 2013; Labrecque *et al.* 2014). Regarding the generalizability of findings, there is evidence of the shrinking of welfare benefits in many different settings both within and outside the United States, but given national and within-nation variation (e.g. Abrahamson 2012, Fenna and Tapper 2012; Starke *et al.* 2013), replication of our study in other settings is warranted. For the United States, it would be especially useful to locate state and local policies and practices that have less negative effects on economic recidivism risk than we found, as these could serve as models for improvement. Finally, a few of the singular findings suggest how risks are interrelated. For example, it is logical that women with persistent unmet housing assistance need reported the highest levels of unsafe housing, as reflected by their responses to questions about housing stability and exposure to drugs and violence in the home. However, the study design prevents us from untangling the causal ordering of economic needs, substance abuse, mental illness and other risk factors. Such research would be very helpful in designing interventions to both prevent and correct women's economic marginalization and potentially related risk for recidivism. Important questions are whether mental illness and substance abuse or self-efficacy contribute to difficulties accessing benefits, and whether economic hardship contributes to depression, anxiety and efforts to self-medicate by using drugs.

Despite the current study limitations and a related need for additional research, a consideration of access to economic social service benefits provided new insight into the interplay between the political economy of aid to the poor and women's economically driven and other risks for recidivism. While Michigan sought to limit recidivism through its correctional policies, changes in its anti-poverty system appeared to simultaneously increase recidivism risk. This finding illustrates the need to focus on the effects of social policy, rather than solely focusing on individual-level risks. Also relevant to theory, the current research did not confirm conceptualizations that view the correctional and social welfare systems as coordinated systems (e.g. Brown and Bloom 2009) or as taking turns to manage economically marginalized populations (e.g. Beckett and Western 2001; McCorkel 2004). Instead, similar to Haney's (2004) conclusion from a study of penal and welfare settings, social welfare policies seemed to contradict and undermine the intent of programming intended to reduce incarceration in the state correctional department.

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