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The Consequences of Welfare Bans of Drug Felony Convictions on Crime

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Introduction

• The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted in August of 1996, causing a major transformation in the US welfare system (1).
• This study focused on one of the provisions, Section 115, which places a lifetime ban on receiving welfare through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) for those who are convicted of a drug felony in the states that adopted the provision.
• About half of the states opted out of the ban.
• The intention of the provision was to cut down on drug use and drug related crimes (1).
• However, critics argued that the provision unfairly penalizes ex-drug felons and is a misguided effort for cutting down drug crimes (1).
• The goal of this research project is to determine the impact of the welfare bans, from Section 115 of PRWORA, on crime rates.
• The research is significant because it has important implications for US welfare policy in order to improve it.

Methods

• Quantitative data was collected at the state level in a longitudinal format for years 1989 to 2014 (2).
• Crime rates and number of arrests yearly per state were aggregated as the dependent variables from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for various types of crime, including: violent, property, murder, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, motor vehicle, arson, and fraud (2).
• The key independent variable is whether or not the state has a ban on welfare (SNAP) for drug felony convictions.
• The study compared the average crime rate between states with bans and states with no bans.

Results

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Property Crime Rates per Year

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Murder Rates per Year

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Burglary Rates per Year

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Rape Rates per Year

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Assault Crime Rates per Year

Comparative Analysis between States with Ban and those Without the Ban on Drug Convictions per Year

Discussion

• On average, the states with no ban were found to have lower crime rates as compared to the states who adopted the welfare bans due to drug felonies in Section 115.
• While states with no bans appear to have lower crime rates, trends in crimes over time were similar between the two groups of states (except for property crimes).
• Confounding variables that could affect the results include but are not limited to: unemployment rate, income per capita, minimum wage, substance abuse prevention, criminal justice expenditures, and poverty rates.
• In conclusion, the research indicates that the welfare bans on drug felonies enacted in Section 115 of PRWORA have little to no effect on crime rates.
• Further research is necessary to account for differences across states to determine whether the bans have unintended consequences.

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The Figures above are six examples of the crime rates researched (2). The orange line indicates the state average per 100,000 people for the states that chose to not institute the welfare bans for those convicted of drug felonies. The blue line indicates the state averages per 100,000 people for the states that did enact the welfare bans of Section 115. The graphs portray the affects of either the ban or no ban from 1995 (before PRWORA) until 2013.