



AUGUST 1, 2017

Racial and Ethnic Disparities in TANF

National Association for Welfare Research and Statistics

Pittsburgh, PA

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About this Project



This project is supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) (Contract #233201500064I). The contents of this presentation do not necessarily represent the official views or policies of OPRE, ACF, or HHS.

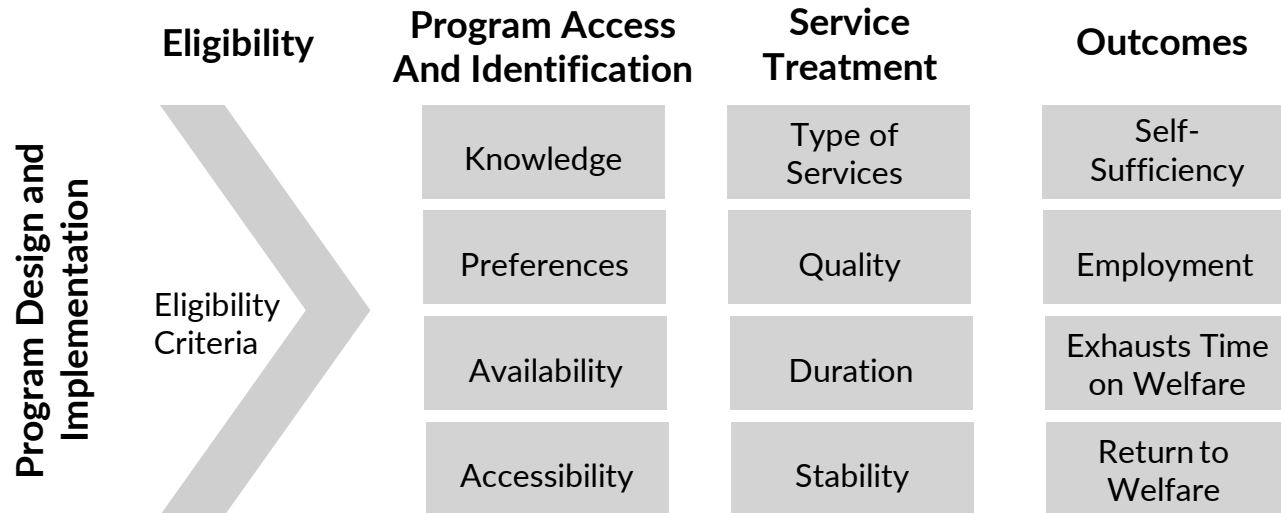
Framing Questions

- How can we conceptually understand racial and ethnic disparities in TANF?
- Where does the literature identify differences in TANF?
- Do those differences constitute disparities?
- What are future directions for research on racial and ethnic disparities in TANF?

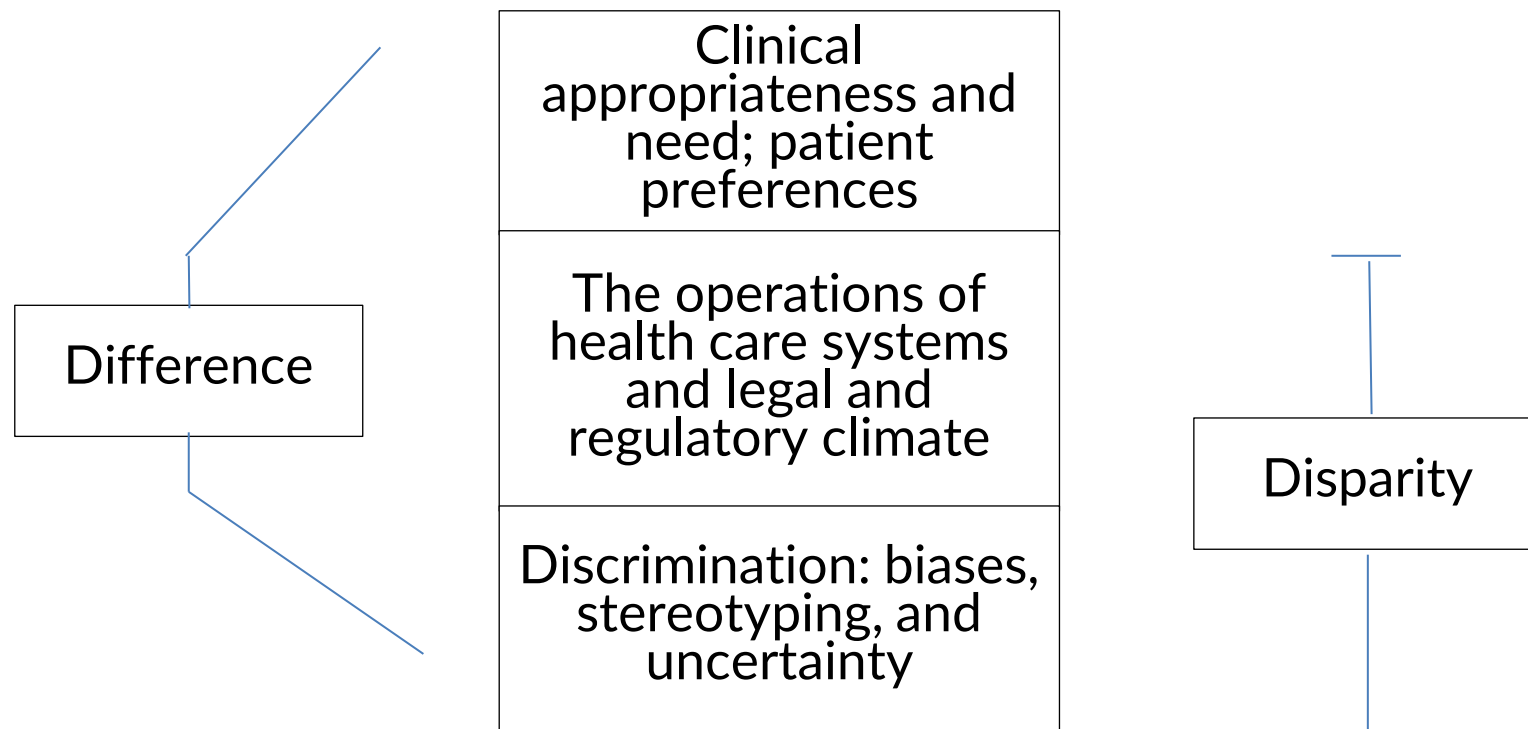
Conceptualizing Difference and Disparity

Differences Can Happen Anywhere Along Service Pathway

We might see racial and ethnic differences at several points along the service delivery path



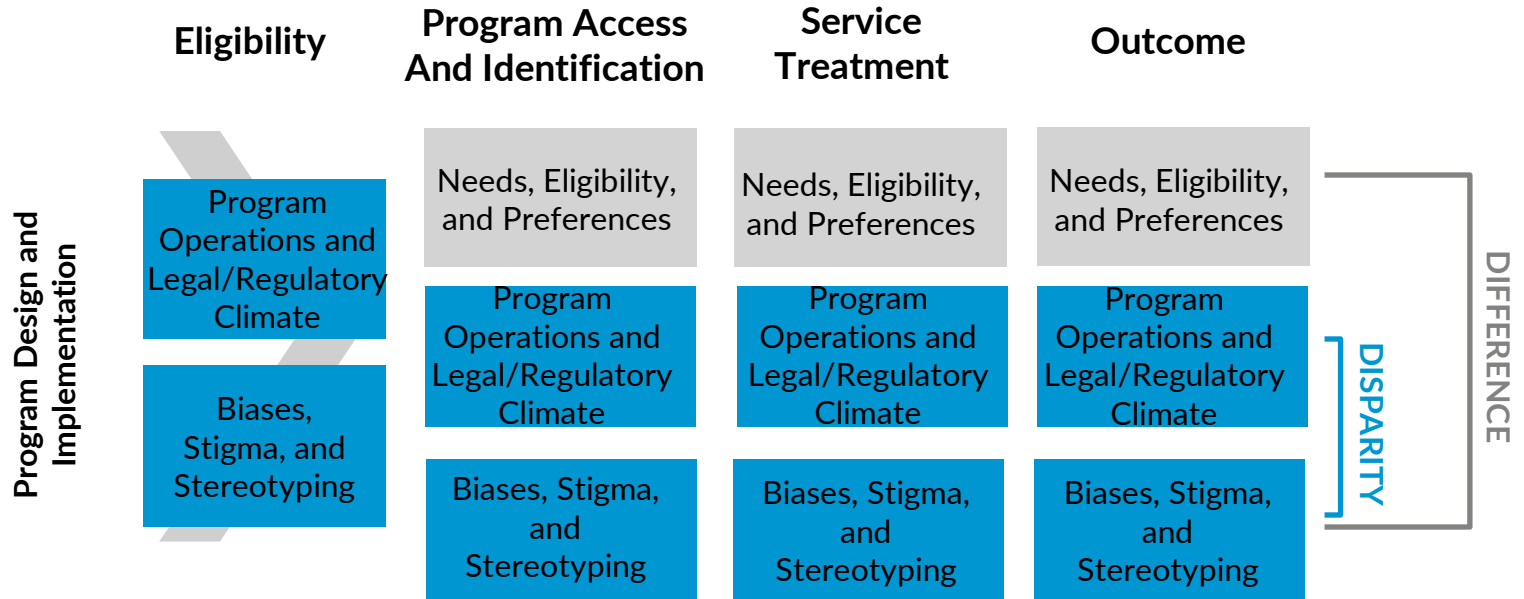
Difference and Disparity in Health



Adapted from Smedley, Brian D., Adrienne Y. Stith, and Alan R. Nelson, eds. 2003. *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health Care*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.

Difference and Disparity in Our Conceptual Framework

For any differences found along the service delivery path, is the reason related to...



Brief Background on TANF

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

- TANF has the following goals:
 - Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives.
 - End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage.
 - Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies.
 - Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

The Structure of TANF

- TANF is a block grant which means:
 - States set eligibility, requirements, benefit levels and time limits
 - States determine what activities count toward work requirements and what services to offer
- States vary widely in how they design and implement TANF

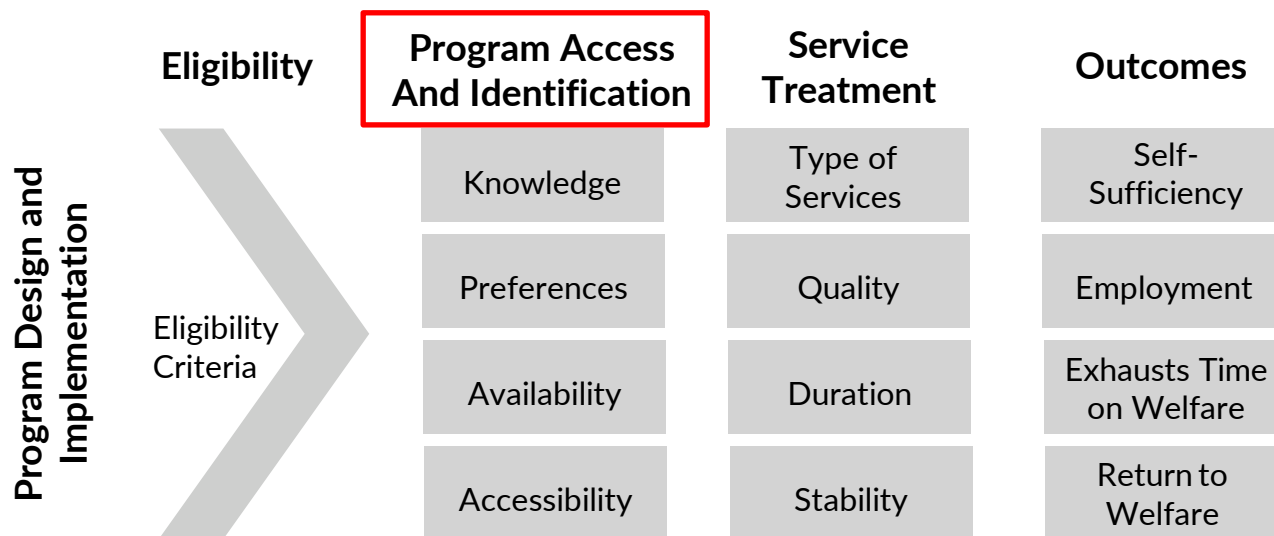
Racial Political Context of TANF

- Perceptions of welfare and welfare recipients include negative stereotypes of people of color
 - Who are the “deserving poor”?
- The language of “barriers” treats challenges as individual and personal problems rather than structural issues
 - Examples: childbirth, substance abuse, lack of transportation, domestic violence, low skills levels and education

Findings from the Literature

Program Access and Identification

We might see racial and ethnic differences at several points along the service delivery path

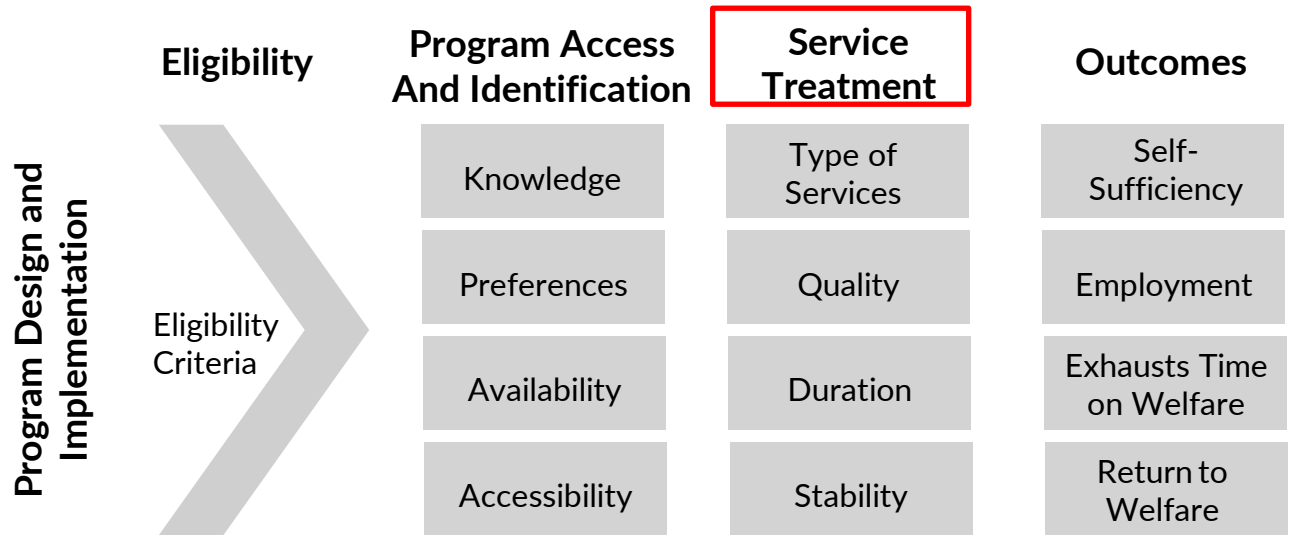


Access and Identification

- African American and Hispanic families are disproportionately poor
 - 26.2% of African Americans, 23.6% of Hispanics, 12.7% of Asians and 10.1% of non-Hispanic whites
- African American and Hispanic families receive TANF at higher rates than white families
- African Americans are more likely to live in states with less welfare coverage and stricter policies.

Service Treatment

We might see racial and ethnic differences at several points along the service delivery path



Service Treatment

The literature focuses on sanctions and access to support services

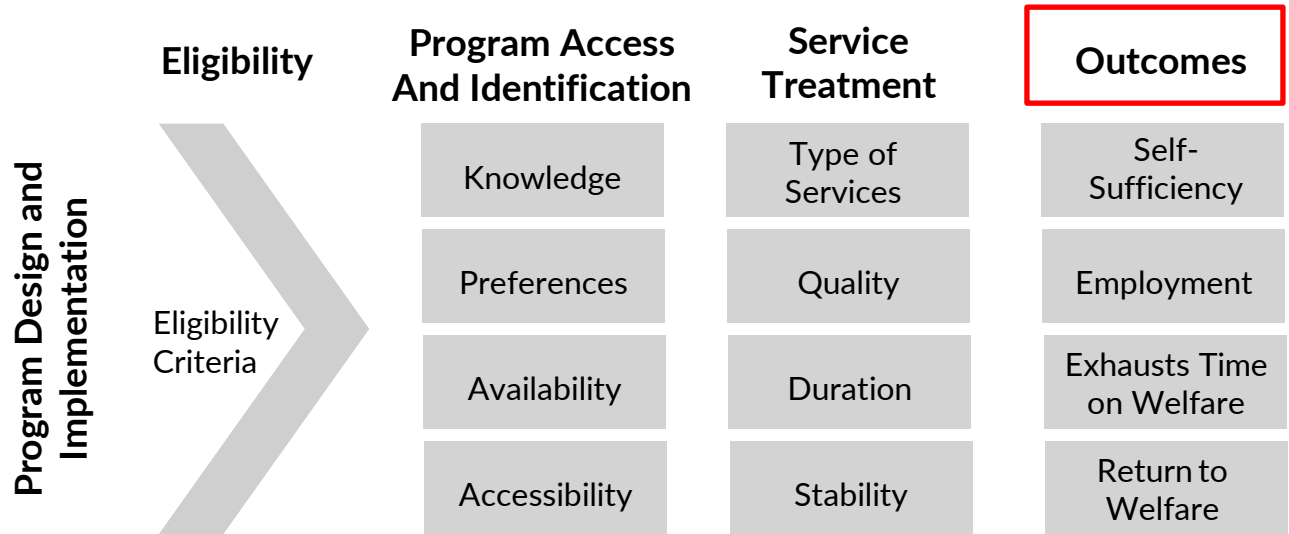
- Official state policies vary
- States have different ways of enforcing TANF policies
 - Site-specific policy implementation
- Caseworker discretion impacts decisions around sanctioning and supportive services
 - Bias and “discrediting markers”

Service Treatment

- Lower education levels, less work experience, less access to transportation and being unlikely to find employment are racial and ethnically linked
- African Americans with fewer of these “risk” characteristics are *still* more likely to face sanctions than white recipients
- White recipients receive more discretionary assistance than African American and Hispanic recipients

Outcomes

We might see racial and ethnic differences at several points along the service delivery path



Outcomes

- African American welfare recipients less likely to be hired than white recipients
- African American women most likely to exhaust time on welfare
- African American former recipients are most likely to cycle back to welfare

Summary

- African Americans and Hispanics are disproportionately poor
- Supportive services are offered more often to white recipients than to African American and Hispanic recipients
- Research finds consistent racial and ethnic differences in sanctioning and employment outcomes
- Some of these differences may indicate disparities
 - For example, higher sanctioning rates due to caseworker bias and stereotype, disproportionate risk of employer discrimination

Considerations for Future Research

- Given the variation in state policies and implementation, how do we assess a “national” picture when types of disparities, extent of disparities and reasons for disparities may vary by state or even locality?
- Because of this variation families may have very different experiences with TANF depending on where they live. A family “in need” in one state may not be considered “in need” in another. How do we understand regional differences, especially given the variation in racial and ethnic demographics across the country?



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Thank you!

