

Use of Cash Assistance by Non-Citizens in Missouri

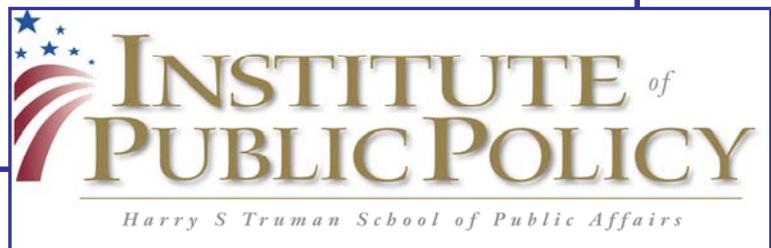
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Jane M. Mosley & Shannon Stokes ¹

Introduction and Background

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) set in place restrictions on many forms of assistance, including cash grants or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Specifically, these new federal guidelines limited assistance for certain categories of immigrants, most notably those who entered the country after the federal welfare bill was signed in August of 1996. Most of these immigrants were required to have a five year minimum waiting period before they were eligible for cash assistance. However, as with most provisions, states had some ability to modify federal regulations.

In Missouri, several groups of non-citizens are allowed to receive TANF. First, non-citizens who were in the country prior to August 22, 1996, and who otherwise meet criteria, maintained their eligibility. Additionally, certain groups who entered the country after August 22, 1996, were also classified as eligible. These included: refugees, asylees, and trafficking victims. According to a report by the Urban Institute, Missouri has a rather extensive safety net system still in place for immigrants, and is ranked among the top quarter of all states (Tumlin, Zimmerman, and Ost 1999).

Given these changes, it is important to understand the situation of non-citizens with regard to the safety net in Missouri. How many non-citizens are receiving benefits? Where do they live in Missouri? In this brief, we assess patterns of cash assistance for non-citizens from 1999 to 2003. We find that, overall, non-

citizens represent a very small percentage of the caseload, less than five percent at the peak in early 1999. Additionally, cases headed by non-citizens have declined substantially over the time studied, both in terms of raw numbers and relative to cases headed by citizens. The reason for the decline can not be known with certainty, but increased rates of naturalization have played a role. Finally, the non-citizen cases are not spread evenly across the state, but are concentrated in several counties, particularly those that have experienced recent increases in immigration.

Defining a Non-Citizen Case

We define a non-citizen case as one in which the head of the household is not a citizen, regardless of the status of other members. Thus, this definition includes many cases where other family members, particularly children, are classified as citizens.

Data and Results

We rely on monthly income maintenance files from the state of Missouri for the time period January 1999 through December 2003.² Figure 1 shows the number of cases that is comprised of non-citizens in each month and illustrates a clear declining trend from a high of 2,365 to only 849 in November of 2003.

Similarly, the percent of all cases that were headed by a non-citizen, dropped from 5.5 percent in January 1999 to approximately two percent in November 2003, a decline of 64 percent.

Figure 1.

The Number of Non-Citizen Head of Household Cases for Missouri by Month.

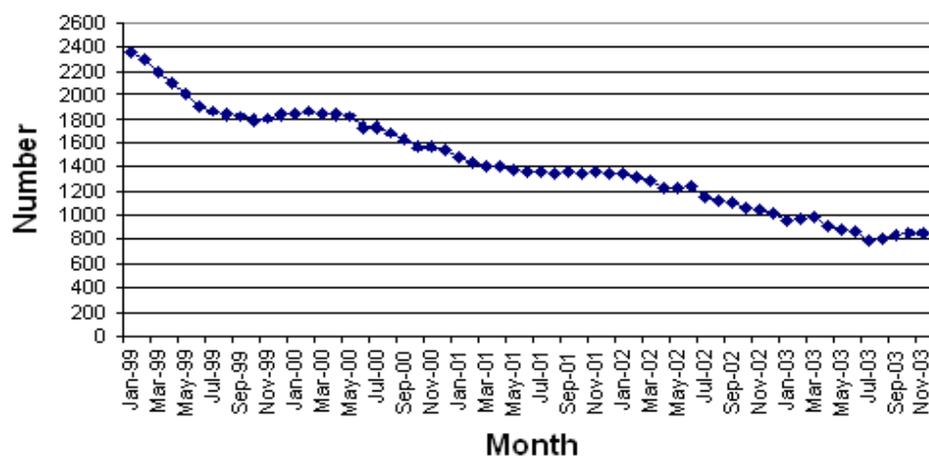
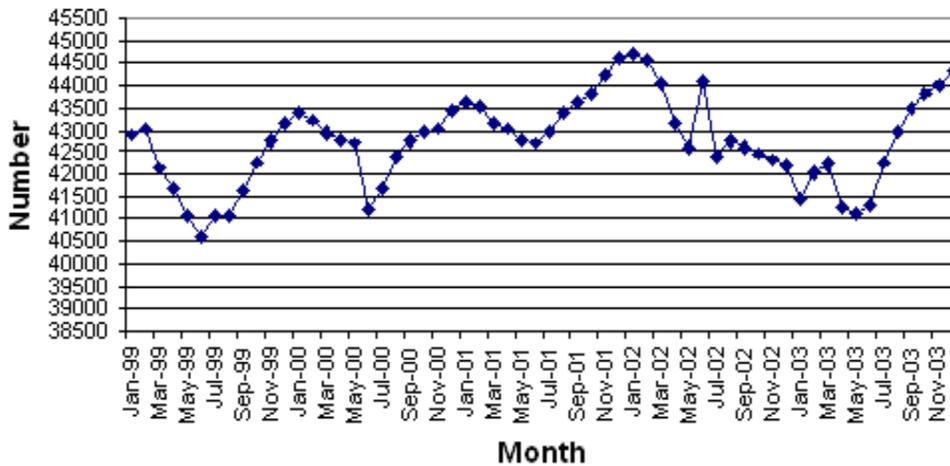


Figure 2.
The Number of Citizen Head of Household Cases for Missouri by Month



This decline is in stark contrast to cases comprised of citizens. Figure 2 shows the monthly caseload counts for citizen cases. Two things are clear. First, there is no discernable pattern over time in the caseload counts for citizens. Sharp increases are evident at several points, peaking in about November 2001, followed by a sharp decline. Second, the number of cases headed by citizens has actually increased slightly since January 1999 (4 %).

Geographic Variation in Assistance

Non-citizens who receive cash assistance are disproportionately concentrated in a few counties. Cross-sectional snapshots of each year show that the highest ranking counties based on percent of the caseload are Dade, Cooper Andrew, and Audrain counties. In general, these counties are predominantly rural, are experiencing new influxes of migration, and have very small TANF caseloads. The one exception to this is St. Louis City and County, although both have experienced large increases in Bosnian immigrants in recent years.³ Montgomery, Buchanan, Polk, Gentry, Livingston, Maries, and St. Louis City and County both had between 5-9.99% of their caseload classified as non-citizens. No other county exceeds five percent of immigrants as part of the total caseload. Examining these maps over time, however, a decline is clearly evident. By the first quarter of 2003, only Dade County had more than ten percent of its caseload classified as non-citizens, and only four other counties (Andrew, Montgomery, St. Louis City and Osage) had levels between 5-9.99%.

What factors might account for such a sharp decline? First, fewer non-citizens could be applying for and/or receiving cash assistance either because they are no longer eligible, or because they perceive their eligibil-

Figure 3: Percentage of Non-Citizen Caseload by County: 1999.

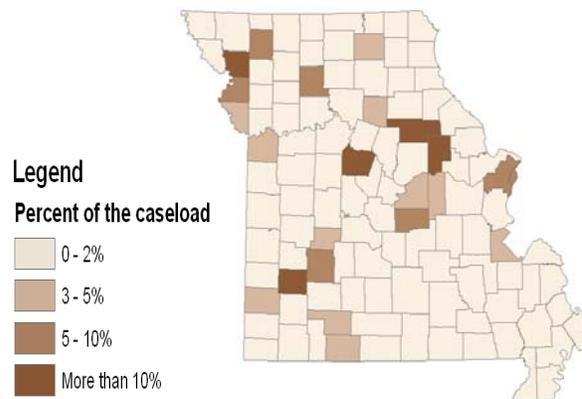
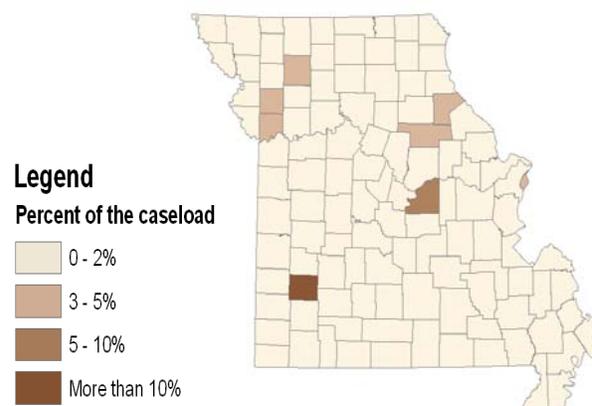


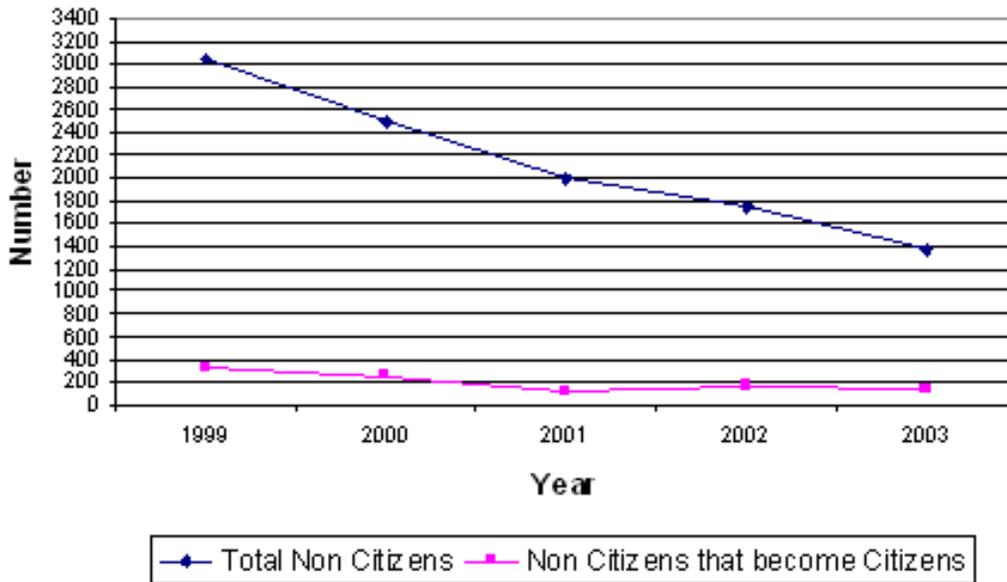
Figure 4: Percentage of Non-Citizen Caseload by County: 2003.



ity status has changed (Fix and Passel 1999). Fewer non-citizens could also be receiving assistance because they have changed their naturalization status. Recent



Figure 5.
Number of Non-Citizen Head of Household Cases That Become Citizen Head of Household Cases by Year.



research using national data (Van Hook 2003) shows that a large share of the decline in non-citizen cases at the national level could be explained by increases in naturalization. We explore this possibility below. Figure 5 shows the total number of non-citizen cases in a year as well as the number of cases which changed citizen classification, a change we assume reflects naturalization. There is a slight decline in the number of cases that are becoming naturalized, but as a percent of non-citizen cases, they have been fairly constant. In 1999, 2001, 2002 and 2003, approximately ten percent of non-citizen cases became naturalized. The only exception to this pattern is 2000.

Demographic Snapshot

Finally, we examine a typical non-citizen case at two points in time, July 1999, and July 2003, by comparing them to citizen cases in the same time frame. Table 1 compares cases headed by a non-citizen to those headed by citizens focusing on age of householder head and case size. Unfortunately, we are limited on the number of comparisons that can be made due to the type of information collected in the income maintenance records.

In July of 1999, there was little difference regarding the age of household head, but by 2003, non-citizen cases tended to be headed by slightly older individuals (26 compared to 22). Additionally, non-citizen cases tended to have slightly more people than citizen cases, although the average for both groups was under three.

Table 1.

Non-Citizen vs Citizen Head of Household Cases in July 1999 & July 2003.

	July 1999		July 2003	
	Citizen Cases	Non-citizen Cases	Citizen Cases	Non-citizen Cases
Mean age of the head of household	24.5	25.8	21.9	25.7
Percentage of head of households less than 25 years of age	56%	52%	66%	51%
Percentage of head of households between 26 - 40 years of age	37%	37%	28%	34%
Percentage of head of households over 41 years of age	8%	11%	6%	15%
Mean size of household	2.79	3.03	2.47	2.90
Percent of cases open at least 3 years ⁴	74%	69%	83%	69%

Finally, by 2003, a smaller percentage of non-citizen cases had been consecutively receiving TANF for at least three years. Overall, few differences exist between citizen and non-citizen cases in the time period examined.

Conclusion

We find that, despite relatively good access for non-citizens, they represent a very small percentage of the cash caseload. Although not directly comparable, these figures are much lower than is found in some



neighboring states. A recent report in Minnesota concluded that between 12 and 17% of cases contained non-citizens (Hirasuna 2003). Additionally, cases headed by non-citizens have declined substantially over the time studied, both in terms of raw numbers and relative to cases headed by citizens. Although we are limited in demographic information on caseloads, we find few differences between citizen and non-citizen cases. However, non-citizen cases tended to be headed by slightly older individuals, and to have slightly shorter stays on cash assistance.⁵

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Endnotes

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² Data from years earlier than January 1999 have large percentages of missing data on immigrant status and thus, it is difficult to discern trends from an earlier time period. We are grateful to the Missouri Department of Social Services for access to their data.

³ Unfortunately, we are not able to determine country of origin with these data.

⁴ The length of time a case is open is based on the start date which is in the file. We are using only a snapshot view and have not taken account of censoring with this variable.

⁵ As previously noted, this is a snapshot view only. In order to truly understand duration patterns, we would need to use event history models.

Author Biographies

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Dr. Jane M. Mosley is developing a number of children's policy research projects with partners in the University of Missouri and Missouri state agencies. In previous research she examined the role of private food assistance in Kansas City and she has conducted research on those who leave public assistance.

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