Welfare Is Still Necessary for Women and Children in the U.S.

What defines an American woman? Women in the United States play numerous roles; many are successful executives, mothers, wives, and scholars. Women have broken many barriers throughout U.S. history and have become, in general, a very successful group in society. But what about the women who haven’t broken the barriers? What about the women who had children at a young age with a boyfriend or husband who left them soon after? What about the women who can’t find a job because their education level hinders their prosperity? What about the women who can’t seem to find their way above the poverty level and have to seek help from the government?

In the United States, poverty is not abnormal—especially for women and children. With “44.6 percent of the children who lived in [female-headed households] in 1994, and almost half of all children who are poor living in female-headed households,” doesn’t it seem ironic that the government continues to cut welfare expenditures for women and children? (Wellstone 1). Many government officials believe that “the welfare system and its recipients are the cause of the problem” (Rank 1). What these lawmakers aren’t considering, however, is that poverty is essentially the catalyst in a circle of controversy, and that the only way out of the problem is to provide adequate educational opportunities for welfare recipients, ample child care programs and options, and a sufficient minimum wage for all citizens. Until methods such as these are instituted, it is necessary for the government to maintain a supportive welfare system for the women and children of our country.

In refutation of opposing arguments, most women aren’t poor and having children because they want more welfare money or because they are lazy, but because they don’t have a sufficient education. As Nicholas Zill, a writer for Public Health Reports, states, “Girls and boys who become parents while they are still of school age are . . . predominantly those with low test scores and grades, who are disengaged from school or in active conflict with parents, teachers, or school authorities” (6). Recent studies by the National Center for Health Statistics show that “nearly one in every four children in the U.S. is born to a mother who has not finished high school” (Zill 2). The government needs to provide an educational system that focuses not only on the successful student, but also on the student who is performing poorly.
Because “parent education is linked to children’s economic well-being,” positive programs need to be created that provide support and alternatives to mainstream education for students who are “high risk” or are not college-bound (Zill 3). Female students, specifically, should be educated about birth control and the negative consequences of having children at younger ages. Until our nation takes active measures to improve the educational system, welfare is necessary to support the children who are born because of the inadequacies of our schools. America should not be punishing and impeding children for the mistakes of their parents and the deficiencies of our school system. Welfare is indispensable for uneducated women and their children until a better system of education and support can be initiated and proven successful.

Another popular argument given by people who oppose welfare is that single women with children should be working, not accepting welfare. According to Charles Murray, a strong critic of the welfare system, we need to institute a “strict job program” that will force women to “drop out of welfare altogether” (285). According to Ruth Conniff, author of “Big Bad Welfare: Welfare Reform Politics and Children,” the welfare reform discussion “indicates that what happens to children doesn’t matter to Americans, so long as mothers are forced to work” (8). Unfortunately, however, for single women with children who either decide to work or are forced into the job market, there isn’t a child care system that could make a “strict job program” successful (Murray 285). With child care costing “about $116 a week for a toddler and $122 for an infant,” not only is American day care economically insensitive, but day care options are limited as well (Conniff 8). According to Mark Robert Rank, author of “Winners and Losers in the Welfare Game,” the “scarcity of affordable child care for low-income families” makes the current welfare system in this country a “losing game” (1). How can women be expected to get jobs when there aren’t sufficient means to care for their children? Ruth Conniff wonders that if our country “is so concerned about family values, wouldn’t it make sense to let mothers stay home with their young children?” (8). Welfare is essential to provide means for women to supply not only adequate care for their children but also positive values for their children’s future.

Another category of women on welfare who are quite often overlooked are those mothers who have minimum-wage jobs and who still need government assistance. The current method of getting women into the work place is the Job Training Partnership Act, or “the Government’s biggest training program” (Conniff 5). According to The Wall Street Journal, however, this program—which offers low-wage jobs such as fast-food work—has “actually led to lower wages for poor
young women compared with a control group” (Conniff 5). Once a woman is in the workplace, many people assume that she will be removed from welfare and become an independent member of society. What is not considered, however, is that the minimum wage can scarcely keep up with the needs of a single mother. According to a survey done of welfare recipients in Dane County, Wisconsin, “the average [welfare] recipient who gets a full-time job . . . makes $6.74 an hour—about $14,000 a year. Day care for two children can easily cost $12,000” (Conniff 7). It is obvious that after subtracting child care costs, this equation leaves a mother with virtually nothing left to provide herself and her children with necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter—making it necessary to stay on government assistance. Until the minimum wage has been raised to keep up with these strenuous living situations, Washington needs to continue providing welfare to help single mothers and their children survive.

One of the many roles that American women assume is often that of a poverty-stricken single mother. With current education programs that are not effective for “high-risk” women students, with child care costs that are overwhelming, and with a minimum wage so low that it can’t keep up with the needs of single mothers, it is not fair to assume that welfare can be abolished. As Michelle Tingling Clement of National Public Radio states, “What [women] truly need is . . . education, skills development . . . and not just any job but jobs that pay living wages with family health benefits and child care” (2). Until programs that can realistically assist women and children are created, welfare is still a definite necessity.

Works Cited


