

# **New and Emerging Populations**

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# New and Emerging Populations

Marcia Calicchia, Cornell University

- This presentation is an update of the ones given here last October, as well as at NYPWA this January. An electronic version will be sent to you shortly. I want to thank you for originally suggesting this topic last October. This is the second time in the last few years (the first time was your suggestion to research bullying in the workplace) that you have asked me to look into something I wasn't paying enough attention to. And some good outcomes have been the result.
- First I will summarize what I continue to hear from people working in the eligibility and child welfare programs, as well as add some corroborating details from research, media accounts, and the OCFS data warehouse. Mike Prevost from OTDA will give some specific data related to eligibility. (Mary McCarthy would love to have been here, but she is away.)
- Then we'll have a dialogue to see if what we present continues to match your specific experiences, and also discuss some additional ideas about what might be done to help with regard to training. (I prepared a summary of the discussion that took place after our NYPWA presentation that is in your packet, to help add context.)
- I continued to check in with over 30 districts, including NYC, and with workers and managers at all levels. (Thank you to those who helped with this). While there were of course some local variations, there were many similarities. And there do appear to be patterns that are holding steady.
- The new people coming into DSS agencies for the first time have often been trying to hold out, and hoping things would turn around in the economy. Their income levels are usually above what DSS has traditionally seen, and many are coming in for FS, MA, HEAP, emergencies, or "one shots." In many instances, they have had a reduction in hours, or have been forced to take lower paying jobs. As one county official put it, "the solidly middle class have fallen into the social safety net."

I'd like to create more of a context for what the workers in your agency are seeing, as the effects of this "Great Recession" have been so deep and widespread. (So we have enough time

for discussion, I will read just a few of the statistics that are contained in the electronic presentation.)

- More than 44 percent of unemployed Americans have been out of work for six months or longer, the highest rate since World War II.
- A recent analysis by the Pew Economic Policy Group found that nearly a quarter of the nation's 15 million unemployed workers have been jobless for a year or more.
- Information derived from the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics shows there were 5.5 job seekers for every job in the US in February.
- The average length of unemployment, 31 weeks, is at its highest level since 1948.
- While NYS is not in as challenging a situation as some of the "sand states," NYS has an unemployment rate as of March that is 8.6 percent. (This is down from 8.8 percent in February), and less than the national rate of 9.7 percent. There were now "only" 831,800 unemployed in NYS this March looking for work.
- The number of New Yorkers collecting unemployment benefits remained high; more than 665,000 were collecting weekly benefits, with most of them having collected for more than six months. One cause for concern is, despite NYC's unemployment falling in March to 10 percent from 10.2 percent in February, the persistent loss of jobs in NYC's most lucrative fields, investment banking and securities trading. A few thousand more of those jobs were lost in March. They pay about six times the average job in the city outside of finance and help drive the state's economy.
- While those with college degrees have a lower overall unemployment rate than those without (5 percent compared to 9.7 percent), one of the most striking findings of the Pew study was that a college education has not been much of a defense against long-term unemployment. "Twenty-one percent of unemployed workers with a bachelor's degree have been without work for a year or longer," the report found, "compared to 27 percent of unemployed high school graduates and 23 percent of unemployed high school dropouts."

- More than eight million jobs vanished during the recession, a period during which three million new jobs would have been needed to keep up with the growth of the population. So we are missing eleven million jobs from this recession.
- In a speech at the Harvard Kennedy School two weeks ago, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka talked about Americans “trying to hold on to a good job in a grim game of musical chairs where every time the music stopped, there were fewer good jobs and more people trying to get and keep one.”

While the effects of the recession may vary some from county to county, and the global economy appears to be improving, there are still serious long-term implications for your agencies. Most labor experts agree there is no plan currently being considered at a national level that could be expected to result in job creation strong enough to help all of those who need to find jobs. And the three sectors that have traditionally led the way out of recession: automobiles, home building, and banking, are all facing serious challenges.

In late January the US Conference of Mayors called for a second stimulus package, saying that the next fiscal year looks even worse, and that a second stimulus is desperately needed. Many economists predict that even if there is additional stimulus help, it is going to take several years to recover from this deep recession, and the country will remain profoundly affected for many years. (Headline from the satirical journal the Onion in July of 2008- “Recession-Plagued Nation Demands New Bubble to Invest In.”) No “new bubbles” appear to be on the horizon. Whether action will be taken that can help address the serious long term consequences remains to be seen. In the interim, local districts are coping with increasing demands while their own resources struggle to keep pace. Many human services agencies are likely to continue to see increases in the number of new people they serve for a long time. So that is the context...

- Many of the new clients who have never been in a DSS agency before don’t know anything about how this works; how to access benefits, or how the benefit cards work. So some districts are putting together handouts for them.
- Another dynamic occurs in the agencies when clients are not happy to find out “all that work and all I am eligible for is \$12 of FS?”
- Some are very deferential, others quick to contact their legislators about how they feel they have been treated by staff, or about how long they have had to wait.

- A significant number coming in for the first time are also those who were last hired and first fired, so these are people that are more on the margins. They are also often younger or older people. (Some districts are getting more requests for the applications to have much larger type.) Blue collar jobs have also been hit very hard in this recession. Blue collar job loss, and the recession in general, has affected more men than women.

The Pew Research Center recently did a study of the 50 million millennials (those 29 or younger) and while finding out some kind of fun things, such as 38 percent have tattoos and 20 percent have posted videos of themselves on line, 37 percent of 18 to 29 year olds are unemployed or no longer looking for work, the highest share in more than three decades. Only 41 percent have a full time job, down from 50 percent in 2006. One likely reason for this is the jobs they would have had are being taken instead by more experienced workers who have lost their own jobs. Proportionately, more millennials have recently lost jobs; ten percent more than those 30 and older. About a third say they are receiving financial help from their families and 13 percent of 22 to 29 year olds have moved back with parents after living on their own. According to the census, 56 percent of men age 18 to 24 and 48 percent of women in the same age group live under the same roof as their parents. They are sometimes referred to as “boomerangers.” Another satirical Onion Magazine headline last month read, “New College Graduates to be Cryogenically Frozen Until Job Market Improves.” For workers in your agencies who have children in this age group, workers may be feeling pressure from this situation as well.

Many jobless workers who are 55 or older are struggling to find employment. Thirty percent have been jobless for a year or more.

And blue-collar workers are suffering through a crisis characterized as a “depression” by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University in Boston. Blue-collar job losses during this recession surpassed 5.5 million, and it is expected by many labor experts that many of those jobs will never be available again.

- Another significant group coming to DSS agencies are those who had been on TA, had been able to get off and have had some modest success for quite awhile, and have since lost their jobs. Doing just “one shots” for this population is often not enough, so some are back on cash assistance.

- Several local districts have also reported increases in the number of foreign born applicants and participants.
- The number of homeless and immediate needs cases is increasing significantly. Across the country, suburbs are being particularly hard hit. For example, in Nassau County, the number of people seeking shelter increased by 40 percent in December, compared with the year before. In a national Associated Press story published in February, Suffolk County Commissioner Greg Blass is quoted as saying, “We are seeing many families that never before sought government help. We see a spiral in food stamps, heating assistance applications; Medicaid is skyrocketing. It is truly reaching a stage of being alarming.” In Nassau County, currently over 1000 people are coming to their reception area each day seeking services.

Across the state and country, job losses are now creating a second wave of foreclosures. Part of the problem is unemployed homeowners losing their property because they still can't find work, or are being paid much less. For those who rent, many of the newly homeless have been evicted either because their buildings have gone into foreclosure or because landlords suddenly need to house members of their own families, or those who are renting have lost their jobs.

Heads up in case you don't know/haven't heard: Many of the newly homeless are currently invisible to your counties, and may be coming in to your agencies once they realize they have no other options and things aren't getting better fast enough. Some workers in local districts are hearing from workers in the schools about those who are in this “currently homeless but not wanting to go to DSS” category.

The Orange County Times Herald-Record had an excellent article earlier this year about what is happening with this “as yet not known to your system” homeless population in Orange, Ulster and Sullivan Counties. (Other papers around the country, including the LA Times, have had similar articles.) Some quotes from the Orange County, NY article:

The new homeless are not necessarily the hundreds of mothers and fathers, sons and daughters packing the region's few shelters to capacity. They're the anonymous car dwellers in parking lots who sneak showers at truck stops and "couch surfers" in apartments, often swelling the number of people in a two-bedroom place to 10.

“It's not drug addicts or derelicts; it's ex-Wall Street workers, teachers, secretaries, truck drivers," says an ex-Wall Street worker, ticking off some folks he's met at soup kitchens.

The new homeless are often so hidden, they go uncounted.

Most have one thing in common in this region: they have no financial or family safety net.

When they get behind on their mortgages, rent, or lose their homes, they have no place to turn.

And while the traditional poor often know the ropes of the welfare system, the new homeless often have no idea that there are programs to help prevent homelessness. Plus, many of the new homeless are too proud to ask for help.

So they may rent an apartment that they can't afford, or live in a \$350 per week motel, which soon drains whatever money they have. And they end up on couches or in cars—clinging to whatever normalcy they can salvage.”

Unless the economy rebounds significantly soon, which again doesn't seem likely, many of you will be seeing more of this population in your agencies. (One county recently found other gathering spots are 24 hour stores and coin-operated laundries.)

- Back to who IS in the agencies right now: There are also more transients, and more of the homeless seem to be moving from county to county. There appears to be more people moving to NYS from other states, including the Deep South. Some clients are telling workers it's because NYS has a safety net and better benefits. (The Director of the Institute of Poverty at the University of Wisconsin has observed that “in most states, there is a work-based safety net without any work.”) And a number of the “border counties” are reporting they are getting more people from neighboring states such as Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Ohio. And more people are being turned away from the Canadian border.
- A significant number of the newly homeless appear to be young people who are not living with their parents and who also have the least skills and experience. These young people had been staying with friends or relatives, but now many of those friends and relatives are having their own financial problems, and can't afford to have them stay anymore.
- Another homeless group, while small in number, is symbolic of the times: a few managers of facilities, including drug and alcohol facilities, who have lost their jobs and their residence at the same time, as that was where they lived when they were let go and they could not find another form of housing.

- Adult protective workers in some districts are seeing more homeless former foster care youth, as well as more requests from banks and landlords to evict squatters from foreclosed properties (a number of the squatters are mentally ill and have stopped taking their meds).
- Quite a few districts also said the number of non-parental cases is going up, as other family members try to help when birth parents are losing their jobs, having income reduced, and/or feeling overwhelmed. In a few districts, the AARP and other advocacy groups are conducting media campaigns to let grandparents and older relatives know of the resources that are available to help them (child only cases, MA, etc). In some instances, the parents and/or grandparents could previously afford to help the children without any assistance from the government, and now they can't.
- A number of districts say they are seeing more cases with only FS as reported income.

The NY Times reported earlier this year that about one in 50 Americans now live in a household with a reported income that consists of nothing but a food stamp card. Some draw on savings or sporadic under-the-table jobs. Some move in with relatives. Some get noncash help, like subsidized apartments. While some go without cash incomes only briefly before securing jobs or aid, others rely on food stamps alone for many months. One in eight Americans now receives food stamps, including one in four children.

- Some clients have exhausted their UI benefits and can't find employment at previous pay levels, or find any jobs at all. They are applying for everything. A supervisor in Albany County described a banker who had been making over \$100,000 a year until his bank closed. He is now on TA. Once the 99 weeks of UI benefits run out, and if the economy does not improve and/or the benefits are not extended, districts are expecting TA applications to rise significantly.
- Another poll done by the Times and CBS in December of the **general population found that 3 in 10 people** said as a result of bad economic conditions their pay had been cut. (This has happened to staff in one NYS local district, and other districts are considering this option and/or abandoning pay raises as an alternative to layoffs. Or proposing no pay raises while also planning on laying off staff.)
- Many local districts say they are experiencing significant rises in the number of domestic violence cases, and of client divorces and separations.

- As we discussed last October, this is all traumatic for many of the eligibility staff; they are seeing people they know (sometimes people from high school, neighbors, family members) come in to DSS.

Some staff are having their own financial challenges, as their spouses or family members have been laid off or taken pay cuts, and they are worrying about their own situations. Some county elected officials are currently talking about laying off DSS workers. There is a lot of additional stress in the families of many DSS workers. Some have mentioned there are more marital difficulties in staff members lives. In what I hope is a very rare instance, as we heard here last year, in one NYS county, seven spouses of DSS workers committed suicide.

- To add even more pressure to the local districts, a report released earlier this year from the Brookings Institution states that from 2000 to 2008, even before all of the 2009 job losses, the number of poor people in the US increased by 5.2 million people, reaching nearly 40 million. This was an increase of 15.4 percent in the poor population, which was more than twice the increase in the population as a whole during that period.

In NYS, *before* the recession, from 2005-2008, the latest census data showed that more than 2.6 million people lived in poverty (14% of the population). This includes 852,000 children. Buffalo was the third poorest city in the country, with almost 30% of its residents living in poverty. In Troy, 21.4% were living in poverty, and there were 17.6% living below the poverty rate in NYC.

Suburbs gained more than 2.5 million poor individuals, accounting for almost half of the total increase in the nation's poor population since 2000. In 2008, a startling 91.6 million people, more than 30 percent of the entire US population, fell below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, which is a meager \$21,834 for a family of four. (The federal government will be raising the poverty level shortly, following the example recently set by NYC. To account for the cost of shelter, city officials raised the poverty threshold for a family of four to \$30,419. This means significantly more people will be considered living below the poverty level nationally, and in NYS. Using these calculations, 22% of those in NYC were living below the poverty level in 2008, before the recession began.)

- This combination of the newly poor and those who have always struggled is often resulting in serious backlogs in local districts.
- The high demand for services is having a deep effect on many workers as well. Many are working through lunches or breaks, and/or staying late. A number have told me they are

having trouble sleeping, worrying about what will happen to those on their caseloads, or those they haven't yet had a chance to serve. Clients are saying things to them like; "You can go home tonight knowing your kids will have food all month." In a number of instances, supervisors have told me they fear many examiners are suffering from vicarious trauma. Some examiners also worry they will be made into scapegoats if something goes wrong.

- **As one would expect, the impact of the economy on child welfare has been significant.**

Almost every NYS local district I have spoken with is reporting significant increases in cases, and nearly all cite the economy as a major factor. According to the OCFS data warehouse, as of April 8, 2010, statewide CPS reports are up 17.6% from 2008, and this report does not count county to county transfers or secondary reports.

I have checked with many of the states I've worked with and they are all reporting significant increases in cases that they are saying is linked to the economy.

Reuters had an excellent article (that will be at the end of the electronic version of this presentation) attributing the significant rise in cases around the country to the economy, and also highlighted the incredible increase in the number of shaken-baby cases. One hospital in Seattle admitted nearly three times as many cases last year; the vast majority from families who are struggling financially. Massachusetts General Hospital's Child Protection Team would normally see 12 to 14 serious inflicted head trauma cases in a typical year. They have had nine already in 2010. A university medical program in Syracuse treated 19 children with head injuries consistent with beatings or being severely shaken last year, including four who died, up from just a handful the year before. Victims averaged about 7 months old.

The Syracuse head physician said, "Around December I saw much more than I usually see. And we were quadrupling that," she added. "I'm seeing more severe physical abuse. In general there's a lot more stress right now in society. And it comes out on the kids. They are the weakest link." Most local districts across the state are telling me they are getting many more serious cases. One CPS Director said, "We are longing for the good old days of being swamped with ed neglect cases. These cases are very serious, and the economy is definitely playing a big role."

A March poll by Mason-Dixon Polling and Research showed that 88 percent of 607 sheriffs, district attorneys and chiefs of police nationwide expect a rise in child maltreatment. They based their views largely on similar rises in past recessions.

And a number of NYS local districts have noticed more CPS cases with unemployed parents.

In a discussion I had last week regarding a recent sharp increase in cases and fatalities with executives in both LA County and NYC, both mentioned the significant development of shaken-baby syndrome as well as more men staying at home now taking care of infants and children while the woman in the relationship is working. The men have often lost jobs while the women have either found work or been able to continue their employment. (Loss of child care can also be a factor at times.) The men are upset, home alone with infants and small children, and they are not handling the pressure well. ACS is beginning a major PR campaign about “choosing your sitters carefully,” and is also going to do a PR campaign about shaken-baby syndrome for men in barbershops, bars, etc. (as they did with a domestic violence initiative). Since then I have checked with several other NYS local districts who have also observed this phenomenon. NYS OCFS is aware and working on a statewide strategy.

Other related issues:

- The loss of preventive services dollars while demand rises sharply is a serious development across the country.
- There has been an increase in adolescent pregnancies, at the same time that some preventive programs for this population are being cut.
- There may be elements of shame, depression, and anger involved when having to seek DSS services, and that needs to be kept in mind by caseworkers and examiners when working with families. Workers also have to be mindful of the possibility that their own emotional reactions to the situations of clients (and the workers’ own financial situations) could negatively impact case practice if they are not careful.

- The high caseloads contributes significantly to caseworkers feeling overloaded and weary, which can understandably lead to mistakes in assessments of cases. This can often lead to the cycle of blame, shame, reactive behavior (and sometimes not well thought out legislation), etc.
- Historically, many local districts have not always had caseworkers spending much time looking at financial circumstances of clients, and/or working closely with eligibility/employment units on how to help in that area. With this new population, this type of collaboration is needed more, as well as help in areas including financial literacy and assistance such as debt counseling, ways to help clients keep their houses, employment assistance, obtaining benefits, etc.
- It is an incredibly challenging time for all of you and after Mike presents the OTDA data we will be reviewing the NYPWA discussion summary and then discussing what might be done in training to help.

## **“Changing Populations” Presentation**

### **Caseload “Factoids”**

#### **Food Stamps**

- New York’s current Food Stamp caseload of 1,428,694 is the highest in state history. The number of Food Stamp cases statewide has increased 42% since December ’07.
- Currently one of every eight New Yorkers participates in the Food Stamp program compared to one of every twelve in December of 2007.
- Budgeting Earned Income and Unemployment Insurance (UIB) have become the top statewide agency error elements followed by Household Composition. The number of cases including UIB has increased 321% since November ’07.
- The statewide number of “Expedited Food Stamps” cases (emergencies) has increased 99% since December 2007.

#### **Temporary Assistance**

- New York’s Temporary Assistance (TA) caseload in November 2009 was 285,731 an 8% increase from November 2008.
- Twenty local districts experienced a 20% or higher increase in their TA caseload between November 2008 and November 2009 (ranging from 20.19% to 50%).
- The statewide number of Emergency Assistance to Adults (EAA), and Emergency Assistance to Families (EAF) cases increased 23% and 26% respectively from July 2007 to July 2009 (24% and 35% in NYC).

- Currently, 59% of new adult cases have achieved at least a High School/GED level education compared to 9.8% in 2007.
- The economic downturn has impacted New York's youngest (ages 16-24) and oldest (age 55+) the hardest. The unemployment rate among the youngest age group is more than twice as high as the state's overall jobless rate of 8.8% (Dec.'09).
- The statewide unemployment rate increased from 5.7% in October 2008 to 8.8% in February 2010. (NYC – 6.3% to 10.3%; Upstate – 6.0% to 8.0%) The national unemployment rate increased from 6.8% to 9.7% during the same period.
- Some districts are experiencing significant increases in foreign born applicants/participants.

### **Field Observations**

- The new "Situational Poor" are generally more "employable" (higher education/skills) than the pre-recession client base.
- The new "Situational Poor" have high expectations for information and quality service.
- Some districts have observed greater incidences of potential mental illness.

**NYPWA January 2010**  
**New and Emerging Populations Discussion**  
**What Can be Done to Help**

- Providing financial counseling for clients and staff.
- Providing more items to help clients understand what benefits are available and how to access programs and benefits. How to use an EBT card; what to expect.
- Making full use of the many courses (on-line, LearnLinc, and in person) provided through OTDA to learn how to work most effectively with clients and process cases. (For example, how to properly budget Earned Income and UIB.)
- Providing districts with county-specific case composition and trend data.
- On-site counseling for staff. Encouraging staff to take care of themselves.
- Making sure processes are as efficient as possible. Management /operational reviews are available through OTDA A&QI and process reviews are available through OTDA TAMA and OCFS.
- Using effective work management techniques for supervisors and workers. (A new course in critical thinking/work management will be offered by OTDA TAMA next fall, and material will also be available.)
- Being watchful and taking appropriate action to prevent clueless bullying and other counterproductive action as supervisors and staff are increasingly moved out of their comfort zones. Training on handling and preventing toxic workplace behaviors is available.
- Providing resources on vicarious trauma for staff.
- Providing desk aids to help cope with the challenging combination of complexity and high demand. (Workers and supervisors often not feeling mastery over program knowledge is a contributing factor in problematic behavior and agency errors.)
- Looking at and possibly adopting other ways of organizing the work. (For example, how Onondaga County has designed their handling of Food Stamps. The proper supervisory and computer systems need to be in place to do this).
- Creating peer support groups for agency staff.

- Creating peer support groups for clients, including the new populations.
- Reaching out to the business community (including Chambers of Commerce, Rotary Clubs, faith based organizations, and the community at large) to help with this crisis.
- Enhancing communications among the different DSS departments and units.
- Working with the federal government to simplify programs.

**SDC Advisory Board April 2010**  
**New and Emerging Populations Discussion**  
**What Can be Done to Help**

- This presentation can be shared not just with Commissioners, but also with staff to help them have more of a context for what they are seeing and experiencing in the agencies every day. Perhaps Learnlink and other mechanisms could be used.
- More creativity is necessary at times like this, and it is helpful to share promising practices. For example, Broome County’s “Biggest Loser” contest is an interesting way to help reduce CPS backlogs in paperwork, while providing positive incentives for workers and not harming case practice. (The PowerPoint summary of this approach will be e-mailed to participants.)
- SDC’s and other formal and informal leaders will need to leverage their talents and continue to act as effective internal consultants to help streamline processes, mediate conflict, and provide general organizational development support in such challenging times when there is more need for these skills. NYS OTDA and NYS OCFS provide relevant training in these areas.
- Succession planning is needed more than ever as more people are retiring. Documentation of key tasks and two new courses offered by OTDA/Cornell may be helpful. The first, “Leadership,” uses the critical incident and case study methods to help build the “patterns of recognition” so important in leading effectively. The second, “Critical Thinking,” to be offered later this year, will help managers deal with the challenges they are facing in working with eligibility units and cases. Both courses are based on interviews conducted with many experienced managers across the country.