



## Circumstances Dictate Public Views of Government Assistance (OCTOBER 2003)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women who experience significant barriers to employment may be unable to either obtain or retain jobs and may require intensive services to help them overcome their problems and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

The National Center for Children in Poverty's innovative Vignette Study tested the opinions of the general public toward governmental assistance by creating a female subject, Lisa, whose description randomly varied 11 characteristics, including her obstacles to employment (physical disability, mental illness, living in an area with high unemployment, and trouble with reliable child care among them) and whether she works or receives welfare. In all cases, she was described as the mother of two children who faces difficulties providing basic necessities for her family.

**Support for many forms of assistance is similar regardless of whether a woman who faces economic difficulties is on welfare or is employed.**

- There were high levels of support for health insurance (76 percent) and educational assistance (87 percent), regardless of work status or type of barrier.
- Support for cash assistance, psychological counseling, job training, health insurance, and educational assistance are at least as strong when these women are on welfare as when they are employed.

**However, support for cash assistance is generally low.**

- When there is no barrier to employment, just 39 percent of Americans support cash assistance.
- The highest levels of support for cash assistance are found for women who live in an area with high unemployment (54 percent), have physical disabilities (49 percent), or a mental illness (49 percent).

**Tax relief is also endorsed less often overall than most other forms of assistance.**

- Without a barrier to employment, support for tax relief is 57 percent.
- Support increases to 70 percent if women live in an area with high unemployment.

**Support for job training is generally high.**

- When women are not working, 87 percent of the public supports job training.

For more information about how the public responds to specific characteristics of women who face economic struggles and research citations, please refer to Public Attitudes Toward Low-Income Families and Children Research Report 1: *Circumstances Dictate Public Views of Government Assistance*, by Mary Clare Lennon, Lauren D. Appelbaum, J. Lawrence Aber, and Katherine McCaskie, at [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org).

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