Poverty and the Economy

Faculty Research Grants Program

| 2010 |

UGA RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR PUBLIC SERVICE & OUTREACH
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
The Poverty and the Economy Faculty Research Grants Program at the University of Georgia is funded by the UGA Research Foundation, Inc., and administered by the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach.

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Text was compiled from final reports prepared by principal investigators and edited by staff in the Fanning Institute.

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August 2011
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Introduction

With 91 counties in persistent poverty, Georgia is at the heart of the South’s poverty belt — a 242-county region in the southern United States that has experienced persistent poverty for the last three decades and has not been served by federal initiatives.

To improve the economic well being and quality of life for Georgians, the University of Georgia’s Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach has undertaken an initiative that aims to address issues of persistent poverty and the economy. One aspect of that initiative is the Poverty and the Economy Faculty Research Grants program, which is jointly supported by the University of Georgia Research Foundation (UGARF) and the Office of the Vice President for Public Service and Outreach.

This grant program fosters applied research and creative scholarship related to poverty and contributes to the UGA research program. In particular, this program supports research that builds on understanding public policy barriers that inhibit or limit an individual’s ability to participate fully in the economy.

Multiple outcomes are expected, including a better understanding of how the university can address the issue of persistent poverty through teaching, research, and outreach; reinforcement of the linkages between research, application, and policy; and new knowledge about persistent poverty and the conditions associated with it. This grant program also will initiate new research programs that have the potential to be supported by extramural funding.

UGARF awarded a total of $100,000 for the fifth round of grants in 2010. Five proposals, representing 13 faculty members from nine academic and public service units were funded.

This report highlights the major findings for the 2010 grant recipients.
2010 Poverty and the Economy Grant Recipients

- Jung Sun Lee, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Department of Foods and Nutrition; Vibha Bhargava, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Department of Housing and Consumer Economics; Mary Ann Johnson, College of Family and Consumer Sciences, Department of Foods and Nutrition; and Rahul Jain, College of Pharmacy, “Poverty, Food Insecurity and Healthcare Utilization in Older Georgians;”

- Russell Gabriel, School of Law; Ed Risler, School of Social Work; and Ann Gowdy, School of Social Work, “Poverty in the Courts: Exploring the Impacts of the Financial Burden on Poor and Indigent Defendants;”

- John McKissick, Marcia Jones, Tommie Shepherd, and Sharon Kane, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Center of Agribusiness and Economic Development; “Using the Economic Vitality Index to Identify Successful Economic Development Strategies in Georgia Counties;”

- Tera R. Hurt, William A. and Barbara R. Owens Institute for Behavioral Research; and Ted Futris, Department of Child and Family Development, College of Family and Consumer Sciences; “Relationship Smarts Plus in Athens, GA: An In-depth Exploration of Programmatic Impact Among High School Youth;” and

Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Healthcare Utilization in Older Georgians

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In a time of rapid population aging and economic recession in the state of Georgia, it is more critical than ever to monitor poverty and related resource constraint phenomena and to make policy decisions to enhance the well being of low-income older Georgians. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship among poverty, food insecurity, healthcare utilization, and health status in low-income older Georgians. This study established and used the best available secondary dataset by merging the Georgia Advanced Performance Outcomes Measures Project and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid data on 1,155 older Georgians for year 2008 (mean age: 75.4±8.8, 68.7% women, 64.9% white). About 40% of participants were living below the poverty line, while 54.2% were food insecure. Poor older Georgians were more likely to be food insecure, but had a similar overall burden of chronic diseases than those living at or greater than poverty line. Those who were poor and food insecure (25%) were, however, at increased risk of having diabetes and heart diseases compared to their counterparts. They were more likely to use outpatient services and prescribed medications, but expended similar total Medicare expenditure and out-of-pocket medical expenditure than others. This study’s preliminary findings provide a better understanding of the complex relationship among poverty, food insecurity, and healthcare utilization in economically deprived older Georgians. This understanding will help us identify opportunities and challenges in improving food and healthcare security, and direct future research and application aiming for improving the quality of life for older Georgians.

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Poverty in the Courts:  
*Exploring the Impacts of the Financial Burden on Poor and Indigent Defendants*

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This study examined the financial burden that criminal prosecutions have on defendants and their communities in Athens-Clarke County. Defendants in criminal cases incur significant expenses even when a court-appointed lawyer represents them. In addition to fines, fees are charged by the jail, probation office, clerk’s office, courts, and treatment providers whose services are required as conditions of probation. Many fees pay for programs unrelated to an individual offender’s conduct.

Expenses were documented using Superior Court records and field interviews with former criminal defendant whose charges were filed in the Athens-Clarke County Superior Court during 2008. Most defendants surveyed were unemployed and live well below the poverty line. Out of the participants, 30% received a fine, 55% a statutory fee, 73% a monthly probation supervision fee, 79% paid telephone fees while in jail, and 61% had to pay for a condition of probation. Their narrative descriptions document the impact of these costs on themselves and their families.

The use of probationary sentences as a vehicle for rehabilitative and therapeutic programs is widespread. As legislatures have sought alternatives to traditional revenue sources, they have taxed criminal defendants, most of whom live below the poverty line. These fee-shifting policies transfer wealth away from poorer communities and toward the wealthier public. The aggregate effect of such policies has implications for the structural mechanisms that perpetuate inter-generational poverty.

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Using the Economic Vitality Index to Identify Successful Economic Development Strategies in Georgia Counties

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This research examines the relationship between economic growth and local economic development activities in rural Georgia. Economic development may be classified in two ways. One is self-development: an endogenous form of development that arises from local resources such as entrepreneurial activity, unique resources, or some combination of these. The second is industrial recruitment: an exogenous development that attracts businesses from outside the area by offering incentives for relocation. The Economic Vitality Index (EVI) — an index of economic variables designed to capture the overall economic health of Georgia counties — was used to identify 30 counties that experienced significant economic change between 1980 and 2008. Analysis of EVI’s components revealed that employment and wage rates are the primary drivers of economic vitality. Local economic development professionals were interviewed to determine what types of development activities were attempted between 1980 and 2008, including recruitment efforts and local resources available for self-development activities. This information was combined with secondary data to model the effectiveness of development activities. Results highlight a steady decline in economic vitality across south central Georgia, an area characterized by small towns with economies based largely on surrounding agricultural enterprises. Results also point to positive economic growth in areas of Georgia that are near already growing metropolitan areas whose economies are characterized by significant manufacturing and service related industries. These results offer important implications for tailoring economic development activities to specific local economic conditions in order to improve their likelihood of success.

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This qualitative study’s primary goal was to learn about the influence of a relationship development program in the lives of 22 low-income African American adolescents residing in Athens, Georgia (13 females, 9 males, mean age = 16, range = 13-19). Following participation in the Relationship Smarts Plus program, the adolescents developed increased confidence in relationships. They reported increased understanding about the importance of relationship expectations and intentions, as well as the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, and love and infatuation. They also underscored the significance of assessing compatibility, taking time to get to know someone prior to becoming romantically involved, and establishing trust. The teens were more effective in problem solving using the speaker-listener technique. The teens stated that they were better able to regulate their emotions and anger. Teens drew upon knowledge learned in the program to exit relationships easier and distance themselves from negative influences. The teens also took more responsibility for their actions and handled situations in a more mature fashion.

In relation to caregivers, the teens discussed having more respect for their caregiver’s authority and listened more to their caregiver’s guidance. Teens found themselves engaging in more open discussions about their lives with caregivers. With dating partners whose values aligned with theirs, the teens enjoyed better communication; other teens noted terminating relationships that they realized were unhealthy. Among friends, some teens took on a mentoring role, teaching their friends portions of the curriculum in an attempt to help their peers navigate romantic relationships.

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Disproportionality in Georgia’s Child Welfare System: 
*An Analysis of Socioeconomic Factors and Impacts*

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The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is becoming more common as an evaluation tool. The goal of this project was to use GIS to understand how child welfare outcomes vary across different geographic areas and to work with the state child welfare agency to understand how this type of investigation may inform practice and policy. The project used GIS methodology to investigate the relationship between key child welfare outcomes and key demographic variables. This project provided an opportunity to examine the usefulness of GIS within the child welfare arena.

Project accomplishments include:
- Maps of five counties from across Georgia representing a range of urbanization and child welfare experiences were created;
- Discussions were held with state child welfare agency leadership around the value of these types of maps, their potential uses, and the exploration of findings relative to these five counties and existing opportunities for future use of GIS technology;
- Presentations and educational tools for individuals in social work programs of study and other interested groups on the use of GIS technology to understand child welfare outcomes across geographic areas;
- Presentations of current project findings and future plans to present child welfare data to National Child Welfare Data Evaluation conferences using GIS maps;
- Collaborating with DFCS to expand the agency’s internal capacity to create and utilize GIS maps; and
- Expand the use of GIS mapping to other grants, projects, and agencies to help understand child welfare, early childhood education, and mental health service availability.

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