

Substance use among low-income women is a major concern to policymakers, researchers, and citizens. With the passage of welfare reform legislation in 1996, there was concern that many low-income women would be unable to comply with new work requirements and the five-year cumulative time-limit on the receipt of federal cash aid, because these women experienced substance use disorders, defined to include the abuse or dependence upon alcohol or other substances.

Over the past decade, Harold Pollack, the Helen Ross Professor at the School of Social Service Administration and faculty chair of the Center for Health Administration Studies (CHAS), has examined these issues in a series of collaborations funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Substance Abuse Policy Research Program. This research demonstrates that illicit drug abuse and dependence, in fact, are rare among welfare recipients. Only about 20 percent of welfare recipients report illicit drug use in the past year, with the majority of these drug users engaged in "casual" marijuana use.

Pollack's research indicates that psychiatric disorders such as major depression and generalized anxiety are far more common than substance abuse or dependence. The findings suggest that broad-based drug testing of welfare recipients is likely to uncover "casual" marijuana users who do not satisfy clinical diagnostic criteria for abuse or dependence, but who do display high prevalence of psychiatric disorders.

In the wake of welfare reform, Pollack's research indicates that most low-income women who do use illicit substances are not recipients of public cash aid. This creates a significant policy challenge, since the welfare system has served as the main venue to identify women with substance use disorders and to finance their care. As fewer low-income women receive cash aid, fewer are screened for substance use disorders. Moreover, low-income women with substance use disorders often lack Medicaid eligibility to finance required services, and thus have reduced access to treatment services.

As an expert on the intersection of poverty policy and public health, Pollack's research has helped inform Washington and state policymaking. His collaborative substance abuse policy research, performed with researchers from the Universities of Michigan, Maryland and Miami, was presented at a policy briefing for United States Congressional staff during the reauthorization of welfare reform legislation and has been used by several state governments designing systems to identify and to serve low-income women with substance use disorders.

Over the past eight years, Pollack's public health policy research has been published in *American Journal of Public Health*, *Social Service Review*, *JAMA*, and many other peer-review publications. Pollack has been appointed to three committees of the National Academy of Sciences. His writings have appeared in *Washington Post*, the *Nation*, the *New York Times*, *New Republic*, *American Prospect*, and many other other publications. Co-director of the University of Chicago Crime Lab, his current research examines policy and clinical interventions to reduce violence and to address substance use disorder.