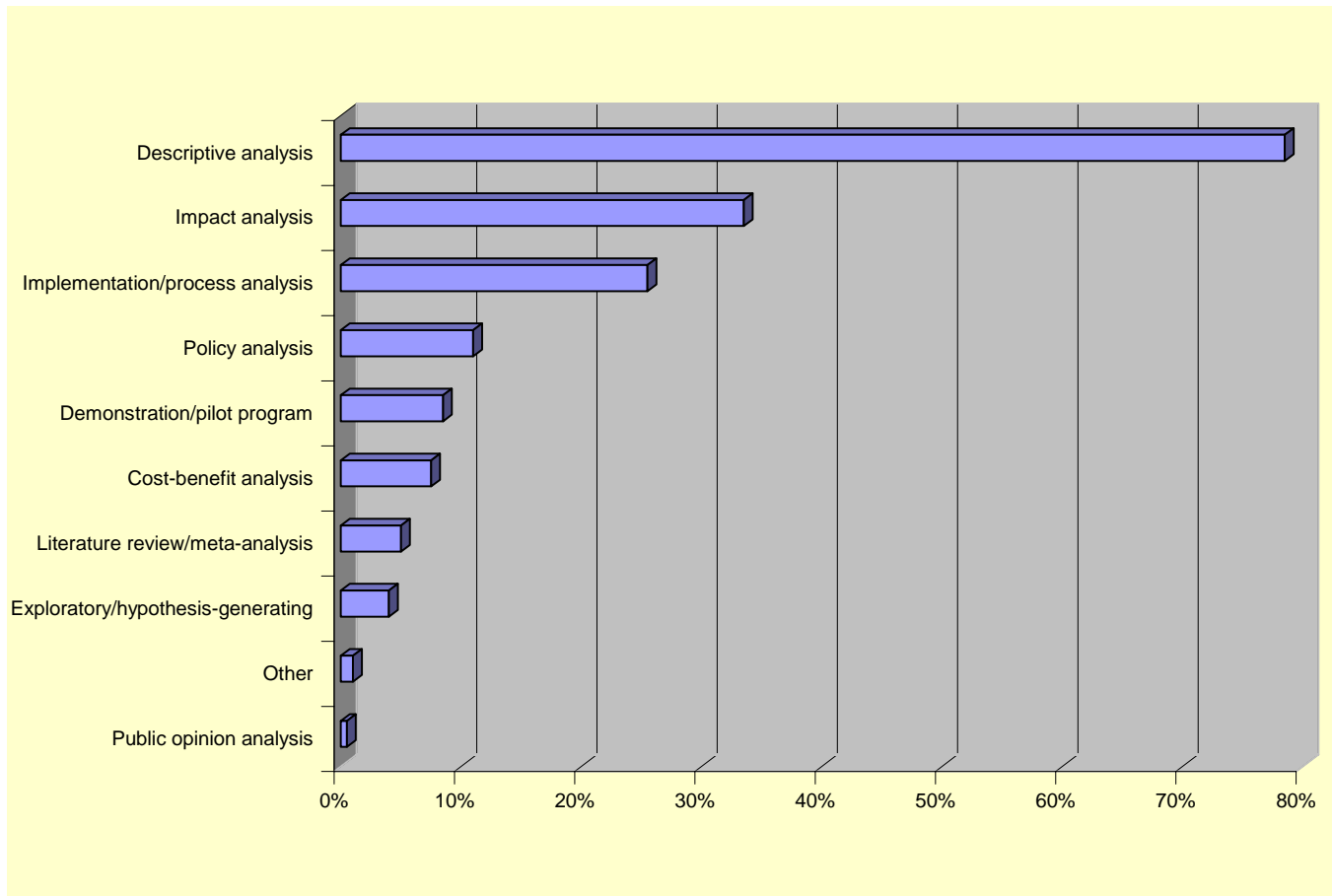


Research Methods Employed by Welfare-Related Studies Conducted in California

Figure 1. Study aim

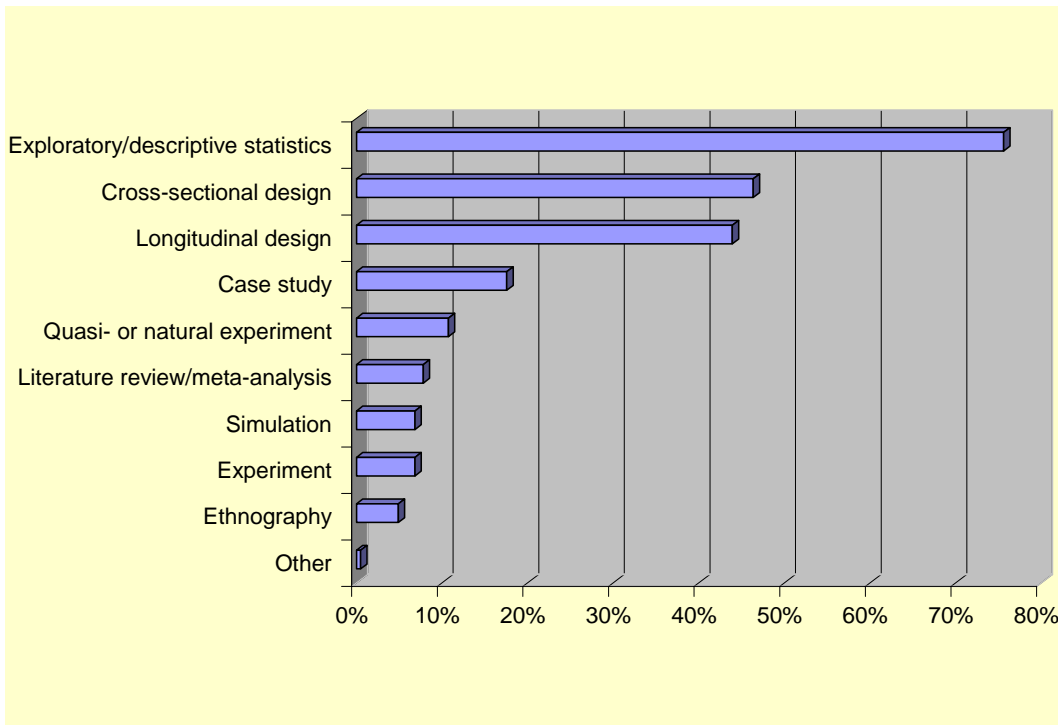


Policymakers are often keenly interested in answering causal questions, such as which service or policy works better or “best” in producing a desired outcome. For example, do full-family sanctions compel greater compliance with work requirements and increase employment and earnings more than partial sanctions or efforts to “cure” sanctions?

In accord with its legislative mandate, WPRP tracks studies involving low-income populations in California. These have a variety of aims, the most common of which is descriptive analysis (79%). Descriptive analyses provide a portrait of the topic or issue under study, but do not allow readers to draw confident conclusions about the factors that may have contributed to the observed outcomes. Impact analyses, which do aim to draw conclusions about causal factors, are the second most common, at 34%. Other types of analyses, less commonly conducted, include program implementation or “process” studies, policy analyses, and cost-benefit analyses.

Please note: This snapshot draws information from the entire set of 642 studies summarized in WPRP’s database. However, when information is missing about a particular characteristic, that study is necessarily excluded from the total count for that characteristic.

Figure 2. Methodological approach



The studies in WPRP’s welfare-research database employ a variety of methodologies. Experiments, considered to be the gold standard for isolating causal factors, are uncommon (employed 7% of the time). Among the fourteen studies in WPRP’s database that rely on random-assignment, experimental design (see Table 1, below), most focus on cash assistance programs (GAIN or CalWORKs). Ten of the fourteen studies began before Congress replaced AFDC with TANF in August 1996. Four of the studies ended in 1996 or earlier. Six of the studies ended in 1998 or earlier – before CalWORKs began. Only four studies are being conducted entirely in the TANF/CalWORKs era, and all of these are federal studies, usually with only one site in California.

When they take a quasi-experimental approach, researchers seek to create equivalent treatment or control groups without being able to randomly assign study participants. Such studies are generally considered to be the next best thing to true experiments. However, absent random assignment, it is more difficult to know whether observed outcomes are caused by the experimental treatment (e.g., a different policy or service) or by differences among the subjects in the treatment and control groups. Studies in WPRP’s database rely on quasi-experimental design 11% of the time.

By far the most common methodological approach is non-experimental or descriptive statistics: 76% of the studies in WPRP’s database employ this approach. Descriptive statistics include tables of percentages and mean values (e.g., the percentage of respondents with children under age 6 or the average age of the youngest child in the household) and may include simple multivariate results (e.g., household composition among different racial or ethnic groups).

Simulations, which use actual data to project outcomes for other times, places, or populations, are rare among studies in WPRP’s database: Simulations are performed only 7% of the time.

Forty-six percent of the time studies make use of cross-sectional, or point-in-time, data and 44% of the time researchers draw their conclusions using longitudinal, or over-time, data.

Table 1. Experimental studies with sites in California

	<i>Title</i>	<i>Analysis dates</i>	<i>Research Entity</i>	<i>Study Sites</i>
1	Evaluation of California's Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program	1988 to 1993	MDRC	Alameda, Butte, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego, Tulare
2	Evaluating the Differential Effects of Alternative Welfare-to-Work Training Components: A Re-Analysis of the California GAIN Program	1988 to 1997	RAND	Alameda, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Diego
3	National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies (NEWWS)	1991 to 1999	MDRC	Riverside, CA; Atlanta, GA; Grand Rapids, MI; Detroit, MI; Columbus, OH; Oklahoma City, OK; Portland, OR
4	Jobs-Plus Community Revitalization Initiative for Public Housing Families	1992 to 2003	MDRC	Los Angeles, CA; Baltimore, MD; St. Paul, MN; Cleveland, OH; Chattanooga, TN; Seattle, WA
5	California Work Pays Demonstration Project (CWPPD) — Impact/Outcome Evaluation	1993 to 1996	UCLA & UC Berkeley	Alameda, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Joaquin
6	Parents' Fair Share Demonstration	1994 to 1996	MDRC	Los Angeles, CA; Jacksonville, FL; Springfield, MA; Grand Rapids, MI; Trenton, NJ; Memphis, TN
7	Post-Employment Services Demonstration	1994 to 1996	Mathematica	Riverside, CA; Chicago, IL; Portland, OR; San Antonio, TX
8	Cal-Learn Demonstration Project	1994 to 1999	UCB	Alameda, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Joaquin
9	San Diego Healthy Families America (Healthy Families San Diego Clinical Trial)	1995 to 2000	Child and Adolescent Services Research Center (CASRC)	San Diego
10	Los Angeles Jobs-First GAIN Evaluation	1996 to 1998	MDRC	Los Angeles
11	The Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) Project	2000 to 2007	MDRC	Los Angeles, CA; Riverside, CA; Jacksonville & Tallahassee, FL; Chicago & East St. Louis, IL; Hennepin, MN; New York, NY; Cleveland, OH; Portland, Medford, Eugene & Salem, OR; Pee Dee, SC; Memphis, TN; Houston, Corpus Christi, & Ft Worth, TX
12	Work Advancement and Support Center Demonstration	2004 to 2008	MDRC	San Diego, CA; Dayton, OH
13	Opening Doors	2005 to 2007	MDRC	San Bernardino, CA; New Orleans, LA; Brooklyn, NY; Cleveland, OH; Toledo, OH
14	Youth Transition Demonstration	2005 to 2014	MDRC	CA, CO, IA, MD, MS, NY

About WPRP's California Welfare-Research Database

WPRP's database focuses on welfare-related research conducted in California from 1988 forwards. We collect information on new studies and update information on studies already in the database. The studies we include must incorporate substantial information about counties or regions in California and must focus on low-income populations or on policies affecting these populations. Studies we include in the database employ both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, they present results from a range of analyses, and draw on a variety of data sources—from case studies and focus groups to survey and administrative data. We also include literature reviews and other compilations of original research.

At present, we have information on 642 studies. We have collected in-depth information on 128 of these studies and made this information publicly accessible on our website (<http://wprp.ucop.edu>). We have partial information for another 514 studies, which we store on a restricted administrative site. When we obtain more complete information on a study, and have verified its accuracy with the principal investigator(s), we move the study to the publicly-accessible portion of the database on WPRP's website. Some studies are of tangential relevance or are never completed. For these items, we collect and store only limited information on our administrative site.

Future WPRP database snapshots

- Programs most studied;
- Areas of the state that are most and least studied;
- Populations most studied;
- The survey and administrative datasets that are used most and least often;
- Funding sources for welfare-related research in California.

Find the WPRP database

- Find it at <http://wprp.ucop.edu>.
- Note that only studies for which WPRP staff have completed a rigorous data entry and verification process are publicly accessible.
- Contact Jenna Allen, WPRP's Research Analyst, at jenna.allen@ucop.edu or (510) 987-0148 for more information or assistance.

Technical Assistance for State and Local Officials

WPRP conducts off-line searches of the entire database for state and county officials and for legislators and their staff. Contact WPRP's Research Analyst, Jenna Allen, at jenna.allen@ucop.edu or (510) 987-0148, to request an off-line search of studies in both the public and administrative portions of WPRP's database.