TANF PARTICIPANTS’ PERCEPTIONS ON BRIDGING THE GAP TO ECONOMIC SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND DIGITAL LEARNING: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

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# Abstract

This study examined TANF participants’ perceptions of integrating digital literacy training with the TANF job readiness program to bridge the gap between TANF and earning higher wages to provide for their families without government assistance. A combination of qualitative content analysis and focus group discussions, informed by an interpretative framework was used to investigate the problem that some TANF participants may not possess the digital competencies needed to provide for their families without government assistance. The investigation was guided by the participants' discussions in their focus group session about what was working and what was not working for them in the current program. This included making suggestions they thought would improve the program. Their comments and suggestions were often in alignment with the current literature, including the notion that the TANF program failed in its promise to place participants in jobs that would lead them to economic self-sufficiency (Pavetti & Safawi, 2021; Chang, 2021; Breitkreuz & Williamson, 2012). However, there was also opposing literature to this notion that believed the program was successful because, unlike the former programs, this one held recipients responsible and reduced the number of people receiving government assistance. Yet, the literature indicates there is still an overwhelming number of people still experiencing poverty once they leave the program and are no longer eligible for TANF benefits (Shrivastava & Thompson, 2022). This study found that digital skills are needed for higher-paying jobs in today’s digital economy.