Are Negative Community Attitudes Toward Welfare Recipients Associated With Unemployment? Evidence From an Australian Cross-Sectional Sample and Longitudinal Cohort

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Abstract

Negative stereotyping and stigmatization of welfare recipients may account for the negative outcomes they experience. Much is known about the impact of stigma on welfare take-up, whereas much is hypothesized about the stigma–unemployment association. In two representative Australian samples, we show that individuals previously exposed to unemployment benefits held negative attitudes to welfare recipients only when these reflected those of their community. Temporal patterns in the data suggest this could reflect an internalization of negative community attitudes. These stigmatizing negative attitudes were not associated with prior unemployment but were linked with current employment, future employment, and a return to employment among the previously unemployed. Community attitudes had no direct effect on employment outcomes. Thus, the effects observed may have an indirect path through the internalization of negative community attitudes. These findings underscore the importance of multilevel analyses of social stigma and highlight that welfare stigma may promote recovery from the underlying characteristic.

Keywords

stigma, social status, self/identity, prejudice/stereotyping, norms

Negative stereotypes of welfare receipt are widespread, with recipients of government benefits labeled as “lazy and dependent” (Humpage, 2011; McKay, 2014; Schofield & Butterworth, 2015). In Australia, which has a welfare regime highly targeted toward those in need (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Esping-Andersen, 1989; Lam, 2014), the media labels welfare recipients as “dole bludgers” who are unwilling to work (Archer, 2009). When viewed from the perspective of the stereotype content model, welfare recipients appear stereotyped as low in warmth and competence relative to other social groups (Bye, Herrebrøden, Hjetland, Røyset, & Westby, 2014; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Across domains, such negative attitudes provide the foundation for stigma and prejudicial treatment (Link & Phelan, 2006; Phelan, Link, & Dovidio, 2008). The present work seeks to answer the question of whether the presence of these negative attitudes in the community is associated with unemployment.

Stigma is anticipated by those in need of benefits (O’Donnell, Corrigan, & Gallagher, 2015). It has often been postulated as a personal cost that explains imperfect welfare take-up rates (Baumberg, 2016; Blundell, Fry, & Walker, 1988; Contini & Richiardi, 2012; Garthwaite, 2013; Hernanz, Malherbet, & Pellizzari, 2004; Kayser & Frick, 2000; Moffitt, 1983; Stuber &

Schlesinger, 2006). However, little is known about how stigma impacts return to work. One possibility is that, like some other malleable stigmatized characteristics (e.g., obesity; Major, Hunger, Bunyan, & Miller, 2014; Puhl & Heuer, 2010; Vartanian & Smyth, 2013), welfare stigma will demoralize individuals and maintain the stigmatized characteristic. Another possibility is that it motivates individuals to shed the stigmatized characteristic so as to avoid continued shame and punishment associated with poverty (Sen, 1983).

Welfare stigma can occur at many levels. It may happen directly via acts of harm as suggested by the stereotype content model (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Stigmatization also

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occurs indirectly through the navigation of social and bureaucratic structures (Hatzenbuehler & Link, 2014). Specifically, stigmatization may result from exposure to negative media portrayals of welfare recipients (Archer, 2009; Golding & Middleton, 1983; Meers, 2014), through how government agencies and service providers interact with their welfare recipient clients (Baumberg, 2016) or even via exposure to negative attitudes within one's neighborhood (Galster, 2012). Individuals may also hold their own personal stigmatizing views of welfare recipients (Baumberg, 2016). This is labeled self-stigma when those with the characteristic are aware of the stereotype, agree with it, and apply it to themselves (Corrigan, Larson, & Ruesch, 2009). In the present work, we use negative welfare attitudes in communities as a marker of community stigma and negative individual attitudes as markers of self-stigma and negative attitudes.

There is limited evidence of a direct association between residing in a community where the population holds more stigmatizing, negative attitudes toward welfare on unemployment. Cross-national analyses indicate that countries with more negative attitudes toward welfare also have greater levels of long-term unemployment (Contini & Richiardi, 2012). Previous within-nation analyses, however, have shown no evidence of an association between areas characterized by high levels of benefit receipt and negative attitudes toward welfare recipients (Bailey, Gannon, Kearns, Livingston, & Leyland, 2013). Our research expands on this work by studying the association between area-level attitude measures and unemployment of individuals.

Community attitudes may instead have an indirect effect on behavior. Political geographers have articulated the mechanisms by which attitudes are transferred from community to individual (Galster, 2012; Johnston et al., 2004). The most relevant of these to the transmission of welfare attitudes are shaping via interpersonal communication, behavioral modeling, and knowledge acquisition (Bailey et al., 2013). However, there has been little evidence that area-level attitudes toward welfare recipients are actually transferred to individuals. One possibility is that community attitudes have a greater tendency to shape the attitudes of those individuals to whom they are relevant. This nuance is consistent with Cooley's notion of the looking glass self (Cooley, 1902; Shrauger & Schoeneman, 1979; Tice, 1992; Yeung & Martin, 2003): How individuals are treated while in possession of a characteristic teaches them about what it means to have the characteristic. This proposition is aligned with thinking regarding how self-stigma develops.

Considering the existing welfare stigma literature, the present research asks two core questions across two studies. First, we examine the association between community and individual attitudes. Specifically, we test whether former welfare recipients hold negative attitudes when these are more consistent with most of those in their community than do nonrecipients. Second, we ask whether stigmatizing attitudes, at either the level of the community or the self, are associated with unemployment. Particularly of interest is future unemployment and returning to work among the recently unemployed.

Study 1

Study 1 examined the cross-sectional associations between community attitudes, individual attitudes, and current employment. We tested whether the relationships between these variables differed for those with recent prior exposure to unemployment benefits and those without.

Method

Respondents

The first study investigates respondents ($N = 3,243$) in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes 2009 (Evans, 2009). The data set is available via the Australian Data Archive (<https://www.a da.edu.au/>). This is a cross-sectional, nationally representative survey of Australians drawn from the electoral role (mandatory for adults, entry available from 17). We considered individuals who were not currently at high school and aged under 65 (the typical age at which Australians are eligible for a government provided Age Pension). Sample size was determined by the number of in-scope cases in the data set. The 2,369 respondents had their welfare attitudes measured and were used for the generation of community attitude scores. The majority had responses on the covariates and were subsequently used in the analyses of at least one of the two modeled outcomes. The group used to model individual attitudes is the largest subset and contained 2,251 respondents (1,290 women).

Measures

Attitudes. Individuals may hold distinct opinions about each part of the welfare system (Roosma, Gelissen, & van Oorschot, 2013; Schofield & Butterworth, 2015). Welfare attitudes may concern structural aspects of the system, specific payments, or the recipients of welfare. Previous analyses of the nine welfare attitude items included in this survey showed their multivariate segmentation into attitudes toward the recipients of welfare, the importance of a welfare system (i.e., "cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives"), and payments unrelated to unemployment (i.e., "all families deserve payments from the government to help with the costs of raising children" and "single parents deserve government payments, so they can be home to raise their children"; Schofield & Butterworth, 2015). Only the 6 items concerning the recipients of welfare were included in this analysis (e.g., "welfare makes people lazy and dependent" and "people could find a job if they wanted to"). Data from individuals who answered any of the 6 target items were used, with responses missing to 3.4% of items. All items were coded, such that higher scores indicate a more negative and stigmatizing view of welfare recipients.

Individual attitudes. Each item was standardized. The respondent's negativity toward welfare recipients was then calculated as the mean of the standardized items to which they responded. Standardizing items removes the cross-item variability in mean and variance and enables calculation of a less biased mean when responses to some items are missing. Scale reliability was

calculated from those who responded to all 6 items and was adequate ($\alpha = .794$). Principal components analysis suggested a single component with eigenvalue >1 which accounted for 50.41% of the variance. Prior work using an overlapping set of items in an Australian sample found that having negative attitudes toward welfare predicted opinions favoring reducing and enforcing welfare conditionality, while positive attitudes predicted opinions favoring targeting welfare and expanding services (Wilson, Spies-Butcher, & Stebbing, 2009).

Community attitudes. A measure of negative welfare attitudes in the community was created by taking the sampling-weight weighted mean of all individuals within each respondent's federal electoral division (150 divisions, $n_m = 15.73$, $n_{SD} = 4.94$). When weights are not available, the simple mean of respondents within region is typically used (Zhang, Zyphur, & Preacher, 2009). Weighting accounts for everyone's respective representativeness in the population. The correlation between community and individual attitudes was $r = .18$, $p < .001$.

Exposure to unemployment benefits. Unemployment benefits are not time limited in Australia, which allows long-term receipt of welfare. Prior exposure to unemployment benefits was defined as the respondent responding affirmatively to an item asking whether they or their partner had received unemployment benefits in the last 5 years. No other items in the data set concerned prior unemployment benefit receipt.

Unemployment. Unemployment was coded based on participants' self-reported work activities in the last week.

Covariates. We identified several sociodemographic covariates that could be controlled in the data set. These were age, gender, household income, whether an individual was partnered, whether they were born in Australia, level of education, and an indicator of not being in the labor force. With the exceptions of household income and level of education, the processing of which is described below, these variables were modeled as coded in the data set (see Table 1).

Household income. The data set contained two income variables, an individual income variable and a household income variable. One of the options for household income was the "same as above," referring to the individual income item. These two responses were merged as appropriate after harmonizing the levels of response available across the two questions. Due to low frequencies in some levels of income, the ordinal categories of household income were then grouped, so that each level contained at least 10% of nonmissing income data. An indicator of missing income was included.

Education. To generate level of education, we first classified secondary education into high school completers and non-completers. For those who reported no education since leaving high school, this indicator was used. Everyone else was categorized as having a nonuniversity tertiary qualification, a bachelor degree, or a postgraduate degree.

Analytic Strategy

Analyses were performed with multilevel mixed-effects models in STATA 14.2 to account for the regional clustering in the data. Two sets of models were considered: multilevel mixed-effect regressions predicting individual attitudes from community attitudes and multilevel mixed-effect logistic regressions predicting unemployment from individual attitudes and community attitudes. Random intercepts were modeled for each community in both model sets. Unadjusted models were first performed for each outcome, covariates were then added to the model, and finally, the interactions of attitudinal predictors with prior exposure to unemployment benefits were added.

Results

Descriptive statistics for those with and without prior exposure to unemployment benefits are presented in Table 1. Comparisons between these two groups indicated that people with prior exposure to unemployment benefits were represented across most regions (69%) and were no more likely to be in a region with negative attitudes about welfare recipients, $t(2249) = 1.58$, $p = .115$. However, those with prior exposure were less likely to hold negative attitudes about welfare recipients, $t(2249) = 6.08$, $p < .001$, and more likely to currently be unemployed, $\chi^2(1) = 42.61$, $p < .001$.

The first models predicted individual welfare attitudes. Results of the unadjusted model are presented only in text. Table 2 presents additional results of the adjusted model and the models containing the interaction terms. Negative community attitudes were reliably associated with negative individual attitudes, unadjusted: $b (SE) = 0.48 (0.06)$, $p < .001$; adjusted: $b (SE) = 0.44 (0.05)$, $p < .001$, and prior exposure to unemployment benefits was associated with less negative individual attitudes, adjusted: $b (SE) = -0.25 (0.05)$, $p < .001$. These two predictors interacted such that those with prior exposure to unemployment benefits held increasingly negative attitudes to the extent their community held negative attitudes, interaction: $b (SE) = 0.52 (0.20)$, $p = .008$. This interaction is plotted as marginal means at $\pm 1 SD$ of community attitudes in Figure 1. In communities with less negative welfare attitudes, prior recipients of unemployment benefits hold significantly less negative individual attitudes than those with no history of unemployment benefit receipt ($b = -0.37$, 95% CI $[-0.51, -0.23]$, $z = 5.29$, $p < .001$), but there was no difference due to prior exposure in communities with more negative welfare attitudes ($b = -0.10$, 95% CI $[-0.26, 0.05]$, $z = 1.33$, $p = .182$).

The second models tested the predictors of unemployment. Again, the results of the unadjusted model are presented only in text. Table 2 presents the results of the adjusted and interaction containing models, reporting odds ratios (ORs). ORs greater than 1 indicate an increased likelihood of unemployment, whereas ORs less than 1 indicate a reduced likelihood of unemployment. Negative community attitudes were not associated with individual unemployment status, unadjusted: $OR (SE) = 0.49 (0.27)$, $p = .189$; adjusted: $OR (SE) = 0.38 (0.25)$, $p =$

Table 1. Descriptive Characteristics of Study 1 Sample on Prior Exposure to Unemployment Benefits in the Last 5 Years.

Characteristics	No Prior Exposure	Prior Exposure	
	<i>n</i> = 2,078	<i>n</i> = 173	
Regions represented	150	104	
Individuals per region	13.85 (4.37)	1.67 (0.93)	
Employment			$\chi^2(1) = 42.61, p < .001$
Employed ^a	98.36%	90.75%	
Unemployed	1.64%	9.25%	
Negative individual attitudes			$t = 6.09, p < .001$
Continuous	0.02 (0.70)	−0.31 (0.74)	
Negative community attitudes			$t = 1.58, p = .115$
Continuous	0.05 (0.26)	0.01 (0.27)	
Gender			$\chi^2(1) = 0.21, p = .648$
Female ^a	57.17%	58.96%	
Male	42.83%	41.04%	
Age			$t = 1.25, p = .212$
Continuous	45.22 (13.13)	43.93 (13.76)	
Household income			$\chi^2(12) = 102.33, p < .001$
Nil to AUD\$20,799	9.14%	27.17%	
AUD\$20,800 to AUD\$36,399	8.66%	17.92%	
AUD\$36,400 to AUD\$51,999	10.15%	12.14%	
AUD\$52,000 to AUD\$77,999	15.45%	18.50%	
AUD\$78,000 to AUD\$103,999	14.77%	9.83%	
AUD\$104,000 or more ^a	33.11%	7.51%	
Missing	8.71%	6.94%	
Partnered			$\chi^2(1) = 38.79, p < .001$
Yes ^a	74.06%	52.02%	
No	25.94%	47.98%	
Country of birth			$\chi^2(1) = 1.95, p = .163$
Australia ^a	78.01%	73.41%	
Overseas	21.99%	26.59%	
Education			$\chi^2(4) = 8.44, p = .077$
Some secondary or less	14.39%	16.76%	
Complete secondary	12.32%	10.40%	
Apprent./Cert./Dipl. ^a	40.86%	46.82%	
Bachelor degree	18.43%	19.08%	
Postgraduate degree	14.00%	6.94%	
Out of the labor force			$\chi^2(1) = 1.95, p = .163$
No ^a	73.44%	65.32%	
Yes	26.56%	34.68%	

Note. Data are counts, %, or mean (SD) within level of prior exposure to unemployment benefits.

^aReference category, this was determined based on the most common level.

.136, while negative individual attitudes were associated with a lower likelihood of unemployment in both the unadjusted and adjusted models, unadjusted: $OR (SE) = 0.36 (0.08), p < .001$; adjusted: $OR (SE) = 0.53 (0.14), p = .013$. Prior exposure to unemployment benefits was associated with a greater likelihood of unemployment, adjusted: $OR (SE) = 3.64 (1.47), p = .001$, but did not interact with either community attitudes, interaction: $OR (SE) = 1.79 (2.51), p = .679$, or individual attitudes, unadjusted: $OR (SE) = 0.61 (0.39), p = .442$. This remained true if each interaction was fitted separately.

Discussion

Although a history of exposure to unemployment benefits was associated with possessing less negative attitudes toward welfare recipients, those with recent experiences of unemployment

benefits were also more likely to hold negative attitudes if these were present in their communities. These findings extend prior cross-sectional work which showed an association between contemporaneous welfare receipt and attitudes (Bailey et al., 2013), by demonstrating an association between prior welfare receipt and current attitudes. The distinction between timing of welfare receipt and attitudes suggests the results may be consistent with the internalization hypothesis; that community welfare attitudes are internalized by those for whom they are self-relevant. We also found that the more negative an individual's attitudes toward welfare recipients, the less likely they are to be unemployed. This effect of negative individual attitudes complements prior work examining how welfare stigma acts as a deterrent to payment take-up (Baumberg, 2016; Blundell et al., 1988; Contini & Richiardi, 2012; Garthwaite, 2013; Hernanz et al., 2004; Kayser & Frick, 2000; Moffitt, 1983; Stuber & Schlesinger, 2006).

Table 2. Effect of Negative Community Welfare Attitudes and Prior Unemployment Benefit Exposure on Negative Individual Attitudes and the Effects of Attitudes on Unemployment in Study 1.

Predictors	Individual Attitudes						Unemployment					
	N = 2,251						N = 1,631					
	Adjusted			Interaction			Adjusted			Interaction		
	b	95% CI	p	b	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p
Prior exposure to unemployment benefits	–0.25	[–0.36, –0.15]	<.001	–0.26	[–0.37, –0.15]	<.001	3.64	[1.65, 8.04]	.001	2.93	[1.05, 8.14]	.039
Community attitudes	0.44	[0.33, 0.55]	<.001	0.40	[0.28, 0.51]	<.001	0.38	[0.11, 1.36]	.136	0.33	[0.07, 1.48]	.148
Community Attitudes × Prior Exposure				0.52	[0.13, 0.90]	.008				1.79	[0.11, 27.96]	.679
Individuals' attitudes							0.53	[0.32, 0.87]	.013	0.58	[0.33, 1.03]	.061
Individuals' Attitudes × Prior Exposure										0.61	[0.18, 2.13]	.442
Gender												
Female	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Male	0.00	[–0.06, 0.06]	.992	0.00	[–0.06, 0.06]	.951	1.39	[0.71, 2.71]	.336	1.42	[0.72, 2.78]	.309
Age												
10 Years	–0.03	[–0.06, –0.01]	.007	–0.03	[–0.06, –0.01]	.006	0.86	[0.67, 1.12]	.263	0.86	[0.66, 1.11]	.236
Income												
Nil to AUD\$20,799	–0.31	[–0.43, –0.20]	<.001	–0.31	[–0.43, –0.20]	<.001	14.09	[4.74, 41.94]	<.001	13.72	[4.60, 40.92]	<.001
AUD\$20,800 to AUD\$36,399	–0.21	[–0.32, –0.10]	<.001	–0.21	[–0.32, –0.10]	<.001	2.19	[0.62, 7.77]	.225	2.22	[0.62, 7.88]	.218
AUD\$36,400 to AUD\$51,999	–0.06	[–0.17, 0.04]	.244	–0.06	[–0.16, 0.05]	.269	0.49	[0.09, 2.70]	.416	0.49	[0.09, 2.73]	.415
AUD\$52,000 to AUD\$77,999	–0.07	[–0.16, 0.02]	.105	–0.07	[–0.16, 0.02]	.104	0.93	[0.28, 3.07]	.907	0.96	[0.29, 3.17]	.949
AUD\$78,000 to AUD\$103,999	–0.05	[–0.14, 0.04]	.258	–0.05	[–0.14, 0.04]	.292	0.48	[0.10, 2.38]	.371	0.49	[0.10, 2.42]	.382
AUD\$104,000 or more	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Missing	0.35	[0.22, 0.48]	<.001	0.36	[0.23, 0.49]	<.001	0.18	[0.06, 0.58]	.004	0.18	[0.06, 0.59]	.004
Partnered												
Yes	ref			ref			ref			ref		
No	–0.08	[–0.15, –0.01]	.02	–0.08	[–0.15, –0.02]	.016	2.56	[0.20, 1.68]	.013	2.60	[1.23, 5.47]	.012
Country of birth												
Australia	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Overseas	0.02	[–0.05, 0.08]	.636	0.01	[–0.05, 0.08]	.676	0.87	[0.36, 2.10]	.757	0.88	[0.36, 2.15]	.784
Education												
High school not completed	0.04	[–0.04, 0.13]	.334	0.05	[–0.04, 0.14]	.267	0.62	[0.16, 2.32]	.477	0.61	[0.15, 2.41]	.482
High school	–0.09	[–0.18, 0.00]	.059	–0.09	[–0.18, 0.01]	.07	2.71	[1.12, 6.53]	.026	2.75	[1.14, 6.64]	.024
Apprent./Cert./Dipl.	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Bachelor degree	–0.28	[–0.36, –0.20]	<.001	–0.28	[–0.36, –0.20]	<.001	1.15	[0.43, 3.08]	.782	1.15	[0.42, 3.10]	.787
Postgraduate degree	–0.41	[–0.50, –0.32]	<.001	–0.41	[–0.05, –0.32]	<.001	1.33	[0.39, 4.54]	.649	1.35	[0.40, 4.61]	.631
Out of labour force												
No	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Yes	–0.12	[–0.19, –0.05]	<.001	–0.13	[–0.19, –0.06]	<.001	excl			excl		

Note. Age was mean centered based on participants in individual attitudes model at 45.13 years. ref = reference category; excl = subgroup excluded from analysis; OR = odds ratio.

Figure 1. Interactive effect of prior exposure to government benefits and negative community attitudes on the negative individual attitudes in Study 1. The values of community attitudes are -0.21 at -1 SD, 0.04 at the mean, and 0.30 at $+1$ SD. The unstandardized mean of individual attitudes is 0.00 with an SD of 0.71 . The 95% CIs of marginal means are plotted.

Secondary analyses of existing data are frequently limited by the original items. For instance, our metric of prior unemployment benefit receipt was limited to a single item covering the prior 5 years. There were no further items available to examine the effect over different periods of prior exposure, whether these were effects of prior unemployment or benefit receipt per se, or the contribution of individual relative to familial experience of benefits. The implications of not having true longitudinal information should also be considered. Perhaps rather than community attitudes being linked to internalization of stigmatizing attitudes among welfare recipients, welfare recipients select into communities that share their welfare attitudes through preference or economic necessity. All other variables were measured contemporaneously, which allows some alternate explanations of the results. For instance, given the same strength of relationship between attitudes and employment for welfare recipients and nonrecipients alike, it may be that negative attitudes to welfare are driven by current employment status. This would be expected if welfare attitudes are a self-serving consequence of current circumstances designed to ameliorate cognitive dissonance.

Study 2

Study 2 draws upon data from a different national study. This study is longitudinal and allowed more precise measurement

of prior welfare receipt and different specifications of employment status to be considered. First, we sought to replicate the findings from Study 1 in this new data set. Then, to more appropriately analyze the associations between welfare stigma and behavior, we tested whether welfare attitudes were associated with future unemployment. To directly test the return to work hypothesis, we examined continued unemployment among a subsample of recently unemployed individuals. Finally, to consider the alternate possibility that attitudes are a product of employment, we examined whether attitudes were also associated with prior unemployment.

Method

Respondents

A sample of working age individuals (i.e., 15 to the age of eligibility for the age pension) was drawn from the Household, Income, and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey Waves 1 (2001) to 6 (2006), a nationally representative household panel survey of Australians. Information on data access is available via the Melbourne Institute (<https://www.melbournstitute.com/hilda/>). Sample size for the various models was determined by the number of in-scope cases in the data set. The 9,285 respondents had their welfare attitudes measured and were used for the generation of community attitudes scores. The majority also had responses on the covariates and were subsequently used in the analyses of at least one of the five modeled outcomes. The group used to model individual attitudes is the largest subset and contained 7,945 respondents (4,051 women).

Measures

Attitudes. A single-item measure of negativity toward receiving government welfare was available in Wave 5 of the HILDA Survey. Respondents were asked to rate from (1) *not at all important* to (7) *very important* whether a benefit from paid employment was “not having to be reliant on the Government for income support.” Higher scores indicate a more negative attitude toward welfare receipt. Responses to this item were centered at the midpoint of the scale (i.e., 4) and formed the measure of individual attitudes.

Community attitudes. The measure of negative welfare attitudes in the community was created by taking the sampling-weight weighted mean of all individuals within each respondent’s community. In Wave 1, 488 Census Collection Districts ($n_m = 19.14$, $n_{SD} = 7.89$) were used as part of the sampling design. They are available in an anonymized form. Census Collection Districts are compact regions with visible boundaries (main roads, train lines, and rivers) and that were walkable in urban areas. There is no more recent area variable that could have been used for community clustering. Therefore, the Census Collection District provides a proxy for current area and does not account for those who have moved

since initially sampled. The correlation between community and individual attitudes was $r = .21, p < .001$.

Exposure to unemployment benefits. Prior exposure to unemployment benefits was defined from reporting current personal receipt of unemployment benefits at the prior waves. For replication of the contemporaneous models of Study 1, this was Waves 1–4. Exposure was defined from Waves 1–3 for prediction of prior unemployment and Waves 1–5 for future unemployment.

Unemployment. Unemployment was coded based on respondents reported employment and labor force status.

Covariates. Several sociodemographic covariates were again controlled. These were largely the same as Study 1, with age, gender, and equivalized household income, whether an individual was partnered, level of education, full-time student status, and an indicator of whether the person was not in the labor force included. Country of birth was not included as it showed no significant effects in Study 1. Variable levels are presented in Table 3. Reference categories were selected based on Study 1 for comparability. Partner status now considered previously partnered individuals separately from never partnered individuals because information on being divorced, separated, or widowed was available. Processing of education and income is described below. Two area-level characteristics, unemployment rate, and socioeconomic circumstances (SES) were also controlled.

Household income. The continuous measure of household income was equivalized for household size and composition using the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)-modified formula (Hagenaars, De Vos, & Zaidi, 1996). Equivalization is used to reflect the practical benefit of household income. Insufficient detail was available in Study 1 to equivalize household income. Examining those participants described in Table 3 indicated a median value of AUD\$42,550 (Inter-quartile range [IQR]: AUD\$28,487 to AUD\$59,142) but a maximum of AUD\$847,008. As this range created the possibility of undue influence from extreme outliers, we coded equivalized household income into quintiles. Reported results did not change if the continuous measure was used instead.

Education. Examining those participants described in Table 4 indicated insufficient counts of postgraduate degrees in those with prior exposure to unemployment benefits to consider these as a distinct category ($n = 9$). As such, postgraduate degrees were grouped with other university qualifications.

Area-level metrics. The area-level unemployment rate is based on the state or its capital city in October of the interview year. Area SES is based on decile of the Australian Bureau of Statistics's Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage in each Statistical Area Level 1 in 2011 (approximately

400 people). The location of the respondent is not identifiable as just the decile value is provided.

Analytic Strategy

The multilevel mixed-model regressions predicting individual attitudes from Study 1 were first replicated. Next, we replicated and extend the multilevel mixed-model logistic regressions predicting unemployment. While Study 1 just tested contemporaneous unemployment as an outcome, we also sought to test associations with unemployment in the past and future. We also modeled continued unemployment using the future unemployment outcome in the subset of people unemployed in the previous wave as this best fits the idea of not returning to work. The measures of individual and community attitudes were taken from Wave 5 in all models. The outcome measure (unemployment) and covariates came from Wave 4 for the prior unemployment models, Wave 5 for current unemployment, and Wave 6 for future unemployment including the continued unemployment model. The indicator of prior unemployment benefits came from the waves prior to the outcome measure (i.e., 1–3, 1–4, and 1–5, respectively).

Results

Descriptive statistics for survey respondents included in the individual attitudes models are presented in Table 3. People with prior exposure to welfare were represented across most regions (57%) and were no more likely to be in a region with negative attitudes about welfare recipients, $t(7943) = 0.01, p = .991$. On the other hand, those with prior exposure to unemployment benefits were marginally less likely to hold negative attitudes about welfare recipients, $t(7943) = 1.80, p = .071$, and significantly more likely to currently be unemployed than those who had no recent prior exposure to unemployment benefits, $\chi^2(1) = 313.93, p < .001$.

The first models tested the predictors of individuals' current negative welfare attitudes. Results of the unadjusted model are reported in text. Table 4 additionally presents the results of the adjusted and interaction containing models. Negative community attitudes were reliably associated with negative individual attitudes, unadjusted: $b (SE) = 0.76 (0.04), p < .001$; adjusted: $b (SE) = 0.74 (0.04), p < .001$. Prior exposure to unemployment benefits was only marginally associated with more positive individual attitudes, adjusted: $b (SE) = -0.12 (0.07), p = .066$, but moderated the effect of negative community attitudes. Those with prior exposure to unemployment benefits held increasingly negative individual attitudes to the extent their community held negative attitudes, interaction: $b (SE) = 0.45 (0.16), p = .004$. This interaction is plotted as marginal means at $\pm 1 SD$ of community attitudes in Figure 2. In communities with less negative welfare attitudes, prior recipients of unemployment benefits hold significantly less negative individual attitudes than those with no history of unemployment benefit receipt, $b = -0.29, 95\% CI [-0.47, -0.12], z = 3.28, p =$

Table 3. Descriptive Characteristics of Study I Sample at Wave 5 Divided on Prior Exposure to Unemployment Benefits in Waves 1–4.

Characteristics	No Prior Exposure	Prior Exposure	
	<i>n</i> = 7,424	<i>n</i> = 521	
Regions represented	485	278	
Individuals per region	15.31 (6.88)	1.87 (1.13)	
Employment			$\chi^2(1) = 313.93, p < .001$
Employed ^a	97.30%	79.40%	
Unemployed	2.70%	20.60%	
Negative individual attitudes			$t = 1.80, p = .071$
Continuous	1.78 (1.44)	1.66 (1.54)	
Negative community attitudes			$t = 0.01, p = .991$
Continuous	1.75 (0.37)	1.75 (0.41)	
Gender			$\chi^2(1) = 16.39, p < .001$
Female ^a	51.59%	42.42%	
Male	48.41%	57.58%	
Age			$t = 2.29, p = .022$
Continuous	38.89 (12.96)	40.23 (12.65)	
Equalized household income			$\chi^2(4) = 599.29, p < .001$
First quintile	17.23%	59.69%	
Second quintile	19.92%	21.11%	
Third quintile	20.73%	9.60%	
Fourth quintile	20.95%	6.33%	
Fifth quintile ^a	21.17%	3.26%	
Average (AUD\$10,000)	5.02 (3.70)	2.63 (1.76)	K-S $D = 0.46, p < .001$
Partnered			$\chi^2(2) = 123.32, p < .001$
Previously	8.24%	20.15%	
Never	24.39%	33.21%	
Yes ^a	67.36%	46.64%	
Full-time student			$\chi^2(1) = 5.33, p = .021$
No ^a	90.42%	93.47%	
Yes	9.58%	6.53%	
Education			$\chi^2(3) = 58.93, p < .001$
Some secondary or less	28.22%	40.31%	
Complete secondary	16.99%	13.82%	
Apprent./Cert./Dipl. ^a	29.28%	32.63%	
Tertiary	25.51%	13.24%	
Area SES deciles			$t = 12.94, p < .001$
Continuous	5.91 (2.78)	4.28 (2.72)	
Area unemployment rate			$t = 1.64, p = .100$
Continuous	4.85 (1.13)	4.94 (1.14)	
Out of labour force			$\chi^2(1) = 70.05, p < .001$
No ^a	84.78%	70.83%	
Yes	15.22%	29.17%	

Note. Data are *n*, %, or mean (SD) within level of prior exposure to unemployment benefit. Kolmogorov–Smirnov (K–S) test is used where there is no equality of variance. This is the sample used to predict individual attitudes.

^aReference category, this was determined based on equivalence to Study I.

.001; there was no difference due to prior exposure to unemployment benefits in communities with more negative welfare attitudes, $b = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.13, 0.22]$, $z = 0.54$, $p = .591$.

The second models tested the predictors of unemployment. Results of the unadjusted and interaction models are reported only in text. Table 5 additionally presents the results of the adjusted models. Irrespective of timing of unemployment, negative community attitudes were not associated with unemployment in the unadjusted models, prior: $OR (SE) = 0.99 (0.17)$, $p = .953$; current: $OR (SE) = 0.95 (0.17)$, $p = .795$; future: $OR (SE) = 1.01 (0.19)$, $p = .958$; continued unemployment: $OR (SE) = 1.25 (0.54)$, $p = .610$, whereas negative individual

attitudes were significantly, prior: $OR (SE) = 0.89 (0.03)$, $p = .003$; current: $OR (SE) = 0.90 (0.04)$, $p = .009$; future: $OR (SE) = 0.89 (0.04)$, $p = .006$, or marginally associated with unemployment in the unadjusted models, continued unemployment: $OR (SE) = 0.81 (0.09)$, $p = .060$. After adjustment, however, negative individual attitudes ceased being associated with prior unemployment, $OR (SE) = 0.98 (0.05)$, $p = .769$, but continued to be associated with lower current unemployment and future unemployment, even when the sample was restricted to the recently unemployed, current: $OR (SE) = 0.90 (0.04)$, $p = .022$; future: $OR (SE) = 0.90 (0.04)$, $p = .032$; continued unemployment: $OR (SE) = 0.75 (0.11)$, $p = .049$. Prior

Table 4. Effect of Negative Community Welfare Attitudes and Unemployment Benefit Exposure in Waves 1–4 on Negative Individual Attitudes Obtained via Linear Mixed-Model Regressions in Study 2.

Predictors	Individual Attitudes					
	Adjusted			Interactions		
	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	95% CI	<i>p</i>
Community attitudes	0.74	[0.66, 0.82]	<.001	0.70	[0.62, 0.79]	<.001
Prior exposure to unemployment benefits	−0.12	[−0.25, 0.01]	.066	−0.91	[−1.47, −0.36]	.001
Community Attitudes × Prior Exposure				0.45	[0.14, 0.76]	.004
Gender						
Female	ref			ref		
Male	−0.21	[−0.28, −0.15]	<.001	−0.21	[−0.28, −0.15]	<.001
Age						
10 Years	0.11	[0.08, 0.14]	<.001	0.11	[0.07, 0.14]	<.001
Income						
First quintile	−0.08	[−0.19, 0.03]	.136	−0.08	[−0.19, 0.03]	.134
Second quintile	−0.10	[−0.20, 0.01]	.068	−0.09	[−0.20, 0.01]	.075
Third quintile	−0.08	[−0.18, 0.02]	.104	−0.08	[−0.18, 0.02]	.109
Fourth quintile	−0.06	[−0.16, 0.04]	.226	−0.06	[−0.16, 0.04]	.251
Fifth quintile	ref			ref		
Partnered						
Yes	ref			ref		
Previously	0.09	[−0.02, 0.20]	.123	0.09	[−0.03, 0.20]	.134
Never	0.12	[0.03, 0.21]	.010	0.12	[0.03, 0.21]	.010
Education						
High school not completed	−0.01	[−0.09, 0.07]	.799	−0.01	[−0.09, 0.07]	.830
High school	−0.04	[−0.14, 0.06]	.425	−0.04	[−0.14, 0.06]	.440
Apprent./Cert./Dipl.	ref			ref		
Tertiary	−0.18	[−0.26, −0.09]	<.001	−0.18	[−0.27, −0.09]	<.001
Full-time student						
No	ref		<.001	ref		<.001
Yes	−0.27	[−0.39, −0.14]	<.001	−0.27	[−0.40, −0.14]	<.001
Out of labour force						
No	ref		<.001	ref		<.001
Yes	−0.27	[−0.36, −0.17]	<.001	−0.26	[−0.36, −0.17]	<.001
Area SES						
Decile	−0.01	[−0.02, 0.00]	.138	−0.01	[−0.02, 0.00]	.137
Area unemployment						
Percentage	−0.01	[−0.04, 0.02]	.455	−0.01	[−0.04, 0.02]	.441

Note. *n* = 7,945. Age was mean centered at 38.98 years. Reference categories are consistent with Study 1 where applicable.

exposure to unemployment benefits was associated with a greater likelihood of unemployment (*ORs* > 5.05, *ps* < .001) except when modeling continued unemployment, *OR* (*SE*) = 1.89 (0.85), *p* = .157. There were no interactions between prior exposure to unemployment benefits and either of the attitudinal measures for any of the four outcomes (*ps* ≥ .197).

Discussion

We found that those with recent prior exposure to unemployment benefits possessed more favorable individual attitudes toward welfare, except when their communities had negative welfare attitudes. In these communities, those who used to receive unemployment benefits had attitudes consistent with everyone else. This finding replicated Study 1. Moreover, individual but not community attitudes were again associated with

current unemployment. This replication occurred despite a briefer measure of negative welfare attitudes and a marker of individual rather than familial prior exposure to unemployment benefits. The extension involving the analyses of unemployment at different points in time did not provide evidence that unemployment is associated with future welfare attitudes; after accounting for covariates, individual attitudes were not associated with prior unemployment, they were only associated with current and future unemployment. The association of attitudes with future unemployment persisted in the subset of individuals unemployed one wave prior; as such, we conclude that negative welfare attitudes are associated with a lower likelihood of continued unemployment and thus a greater likelihood of return to work. Prior exposure to unemployment benefits was also associated with unemployment in all models except that examining continuing unemployment. Its nonsignificant

Figure 2. Interactive effect of prior exposure to government benefits and negative community attitudes on the negative individual attitudes in Study 2. The values of community attitudes are 1.37 at -1 SD, 1.75 at the mean, and 2.12 at $+1$ SD. The unstandardized mean of individual attitudes is 1.77 with an SD of 1.45. The 95% CIs of marginal means are plotted.

association with continuing unemployment may reflect its shift from a low-prevalence, highly identifying indicator (4.7–5.5%) to a common one (29.1%) in these analyses.

General Discussion

This pair of studies advances knowledge of the relationship between stigmatizing welfare attitudes and individual engagement with employment. Recipients of unemployment benefits normally possess sympathetic welfare attitudes (Baumberg, Bell, & Gaffney, 2012; Schofield & Butterworth, 2015). Indeed, in both studies, we found evidence that prior recipients of unemployment benefits also have less negative welfare attitudes, but this difference was conditional. Prior recipients of unemployment benefits in communities where people held more negative welfare attitudes did not hold less negative attitudes, but instead were comparable to everyone else in the community. This may reflect a process of internalizing negative community attitudes during the periods of welfare receipt. Moreover, in both studies, we demonstrated that negative individual attitudes toward welfare recipients, but not community ones, were associated with a greater likelihood of current employment. Given the associations between community attitudes and individual attitudes, this may reflect the fact that communities have indirect effects by shaping their members' attitudes rather than direct effects on behavior. Using multiple waves of a longitudinal

study, Study 2 then showed that negative individual attitudes were associated with an increased likelihood of employment in the present and future, but not the past. Finally, it was demonstrated that these effects held in the case of those who were recently unemployed returning to work. This pattern of results suggests that negative welfare attitudes may precede employment; however, experimental research would be required to test whether this relationship is causal and unidirectional.

The association between negative welfare attitudes and employment appears robust. One difficulty in contextualizing these findings is that welfare stigma has been blamed for the declines in mental health and psychological well-being observed over spells of unemployment (Butterworth, 2003; Coiro, 2001; Dooley & Prause, 2002; Ford et al., 2010; Jayakody, Danziger, & Pollack, 2000; Juon et al., 2010; Kiely & Butterworth, 2013). The apparent positive impact of stigma observed here on employment may be offset by adverse psychological impact. While the present results do not contradict this prior work, it does suggest that further consideration of a range of outcomes is necessary. Consideration of both welfare stigma's costs (e.g., to mental health) and benefits (e.g., lower likelihood of unemployment) may reveal distinct effects of being stigmatized by others and self-stigma (see Baumberg, 2016). It could also reveal the presence of two distinct outcomes among people: One set of individuals may experience the mental health decline, while another set promptly finds employment. If this is the case, it is important to determine the moderating factors responsible for determining which of these outcomes are more likely. The view that stigma can be used as a tool to drive economically desirable behavioral outcomes is routinely observed as a basis for governmental policy (Baumberg et al., 2012), has been suggested in the literature on benefit take-up rates (Kayser & Frick, 2000; Moffitt, 1983), and formally conceptualized of as stigma power (Link & Phelan, 2014). The current findings should not be taken as support for strategies advocating stigmatization of welfare recipients to promote employment until the comprehensive effects of welfare stigma are better understood.

One strength of the current evidence that stigma may be associated with recovery from unemployment is that it comes from large, nationally representative data sets. However, although the studied samples were large for psychological research, the number of former welfare recipients and unemployed individuals were more modest. As the two studies used negative attitudes as markers of welfare stigma rather than measures of experienced discrimination due to welfare receipt, there is scope for future work to be guided by the discrimination literature (Baumberg, 2016; Major & O'Brien, 2005). Still, the use of attitudinal items as a proxy is consistent with typical conceptualizations of negative attitudes and stereotypes underscoring prejudicial behavior (Link & Phelan, 2006; Phelan et al., 2008). Future work may consider whether exposure to welfare-based discrimination predicts similar outcomes to those observed for negative attitudes.

The present research makes two novel contributions to the literature. First, we demonstrate that individuals with a history

Table 5. Effect of Negative Community and Individual Welfare Attitudes and Prior Unemployment Benefit Exposure on Prior, Current, Future Unemployment, and Continued Unemployment Obtained via Linear Mixed-Model Logistic Regressions in Study 2.

Predictors	Prior Unemployment			Current Unemployment			Future Unemployment			Continued Unemployment		
	Adjusted			Adjusted			Adjusted			Adjusted		
	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p	OR	95% CI	p
n = 5,931												
Community attitudes	0.93	[0.61, 1.43]	.747	0.87	[0.60, 1.26]	.469	0.91	[0.60, 1.36]	.659	1.53	[0.54, 4.35]	.423
Individual attitudes	0.98	[0.88, 1.09]	.769	0.90	[0.82, 0.98]	.022	0.90	[0.82, 0.99]	.031	0.75	[0.56, 1.00]	.049
Prior exposure to unemployment benefits	6.08	[4.03, 9.16]	<.001	5.05	[3.58, 7.11]	<.001	7.18	[4.94, 10.42]	<.001	1.89	[0.78, 4.57]	.157
n = 6,663												
Gender												
Female	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Male	0.94	[0.69, 1.28]	.685	1.08	[0.82, 1.43]	.574	0.84	[0.63, 1.12]	.228	1.63	[0.72, 3.69]	.239
Age												
10 Years	0.84	[0.72, 1.00]	.045	0.88	[0.76, 1.02]	.083	0.77	[0.66, 0.90]	.001	1.02	[0.97, 1.06]	.462
Income												
First quintile	3.92	[2.12, 7.23]	<.001	6.12	[3.37, 11.12]	<.001	4.51	[2.46, 8.28]	<.001	6.25	[0.55, 71.14]	.140
Second quintile	1.73	[0.90, 3.31]	.101	2.35	[1.26, 4.39]	.007	1.98	[1.05, 3.76]	.036	4.97	[0.42, 59.02]	.204
Third quintile	1.23	[0.61, 2.44]	.564	1.74	[0.91, 3.32]	.095	1.18	[0.60, 2.33]	.634	0.69	[0.04, 10.69]	.788
Fourth quintile	1.16	[0.57, 2.35]	.687	1.33	[0.68, 2.62]	.404	1.16	[0.58, 2.35]	.672	1.37	[0.10, 19.62]	.815
Fifth Quintile	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Partnered												
Yes	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Previously	1.44	[0.84, 2.47]	.182	1.63	[1.02, 2.60]	.039	1.80	[1.12, 2.89]	.015	1.47	[0.40, 5.37]	.561
Never	2.04	[1.36, 3.06]	.001	1.90	[1.32, 2.73]	.001	1.60	[1.09, 2.34]	.015	1.14	[0.44, 2.97]	.791
Education												
High school not completed	2.16	[1.41, 3.31]	<.001	1.68	[1.18, 2.38]	.004	1.58	[1.10, 2.25]	.012	1.47	[0.52, 4.14]	.466
High school	2.52	[1.58, 4.01]	<.001	1.13	[0.74, 1.74]	.578	0.83	[0.53, 1.30]	.409	1.12	[0.33, 3.84]	.854
Apprent./Cert./Dipl.	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Tertiary	1.19	[0.68, 2.10]	.538	0.96	[0.60, 1.54]	.873	0.93	[0.57, 1.51]	.771	0.81	[0.20, 3.24]	.769
Full-time student												
No	ref			ref			ref			ref		
Yes	2.07	[1.32, 3.24]	.001	1.70	[1.11, 2.60]	.015	2.23	[1.46, 3.40]	<.001	2.57	[0.81, 8.16]	.109
Area SES												
Decile	0.93	[0.88, 0.99]	.016	0.92	[0.87, 0.97]	.003	0.92	[0.87, 0.97]	.003	0.96	[0.83, 1.11]	.570
Area unemployment												
Percentage	0.99	[0.84, 1.18]	.933	0.98	[0.87, 1.11]	.769	1.00	[0.85, 1.19]	.956	1.04	[0.68, 1.50]	.865

Note. Only those in the labor force during the outcome wave were analyzed. In the continued unemployment analysis, only those unemployed in the prior wave were analyzed. Age was centered based on the sample analyzed in Table 4 at 38.98 years. Income quintiles were defined separately for the models concerning prior unemployment, current unemployment, and future/continued unemployment owing to the income variable being drawn from different years. Reference categories are consistent with Study 1 where applicable. OR = odds ratio.

of welfare receipt are more likely to hold negative views toward welfare recipients if this is consistent with others in their community. This suggests that stigmatizing community attitudes is perhaps more likely to be internalized by individuals to whom they are most directly applicable. Second, holding negative welfare attitudes is associated with current employment, future employment, and returning to work if recently unemployed. These results suggest that stigma can, in some cases, be linked to the shedding of a stigmatized characteristic. Importantly, these findings should not be considered a tool for policy action until causality is clearly demonstrated, and the economic benefits of a larger labor force are weighed up against the burden of mental health problems and other associated social costs.

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