

Executive Summary

Introduction

In recent decades, changes in family structure have led to a substantial increase in single-parent households in the United States. As a result of high divorce rates and a growing proportion of births to unmarried parents (Cancian, Meyer, and Han, 2011), almost a third of children did not live with both parents in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The child support program is designed to address one of the potential negative consequences of children living apart from one of their parents by ensuring that noncustodial parents contribute financially to their upbringing. Changes in the social safety net, which no longer includes an entitlement to cash assistance for low-income single parents, have increased the importance of reliable child support. However, many noncustodial parents, including a disproportionate share of those whose children live in poverty, have limited earnings and ability to pay child support. Additionally, child support orders often constitute a high proportion of their limited income (Meyer, Ha, and Hu, 2008; Takayesu, 2011). Children in single-parent households could therefore benefit from a child support program that enables, as well as enforces, noncustodial parents' contributions to their support (Mincy and Sorensen, 1998).

In Fiscal Year 2012, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), used its grant-making authority under Section 1115 of the Social Security Act to launch the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED). As described in the program's Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA; DHHS 2012),¹ OCSE sought to examine the effectiveness of child support-led employment programs for noncustodial parents. The goal of CSPED was to improve the reliable payment of child support in order to improve child well-being and avoid public costs.

OCSE competitively awarded a cooperative agreement to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) to procure and manage an evaluation of CSPED through an independent, third-party evaluator. DCF chose the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, along with its partner Mathematica Policy Research, to conduct the evaluation. The Institute for Research on Poverty also partnered with the University of Wisconsin Survey Center, which worked in conjunction with Mathematica Policy Research to collect data from study participants. This report presents the findings from the analysis of the effects of the CSPED intervention, an analysis based on a random assignment research design.

Program Design

CSPED aimed to improve the reliable payment of child support by providing noncustodial parents behind in their child support with an integrated set of child support, employment, and parenting services, through a child-support-led program. Local child support agencies were the lead agency and they contracted with partners to provide employment and parenting services.

¹https://ami.grantsolutions.gov/files/hhs-2012-acf-ocse-fd-0297_0.pdf

OCSE laid the groundwork for the CSPED design through the FOA (DHHS, 2012), which specified that programs were to consist of the following core services:

- **Case Management.** Each CSPED participant was to be assigned a case manager to assess their needs, assist them in obtaining services, and monitor their progress.
- **Enhanced Child Support Services.** OCSE directed grantees to offer expedited review of child support orders, order modification if appropriate, and temporary abeyance of certain enforcement tools while participants were actively engaged in the program. In addition, OCSE encouraged CSPED grantees to negotiate potential reductions in past-due amounts owed to the government (state-owed arrears) when participants successfully met program goals.
- **Employment.** OCSE expected all programs to include job search assistance, job readiness training, job placement services, job retention services, and rapid re-employment services immediately following job loss. OCSE also encouraged grantees to include: short-term job skills training, on-the-job training, vocational training, education directly related to employment, and work supports, such as transportation assistance.
- **Parenting.** CSPED grantees were to provide 16 hours of parenting classes with peer support that covered personal development, responsible fatherhood, parenting skills, relationship skills, and domestic violence.

Grantees were also required to develop a domestic violence plan, in consultation with domestic violence experts. These domestic violence plans included staff training, a process for screening CSPED participants, referral resources for participants involved in domestic violence, and family violence safeguards.

In fall 2012, OCSE competitively awarded grants to child support agencies (or their umbrella agency) in eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin). Grantees chose a total of 18 implementation sites, ranging from one county each in Ohio, Iowa, and California to five counties in Colorado.

OCSE required that grantees enroll participants who had established paternity, were being served by the child support program, and were either not regularly paying child support or were expected to have difficulty making payments due to lack of regular employment. Using these eligibility criteria, grantees set out to find and recruit eligible noncustodial parents. Recruitment into the CSPED study began in October 2013 and continued through September 2016.² Recruitment efforts culminated in grantees enrolling 10,161 eligible noncustodial parents into the study.

²Random assignment and enrollment into the CSPED study ended in September 2016, and CSPED grantees continued to provide CSPED services to program participants through September 2017. CSPED programs received no-cost extensions, which some grantees used to enroll noncustodial parents into services outside of the CSPED evaluation until September 2018. These additional enrollees were not part of the CSPED study and any such service activities were not documented, tracked, or analyzed for the evaluation.

CSPED grantees enrolled a disadvantaged group of noncustodial parents. Only 55.2 percent had worked in the month prior to random assignment. Among those who reported working, their average monthly earnings were below the poverty threshold for a single person. Less than a third had more than a high school education. Most (65 percent) had been incarcerated.

Many noncustodial parents had complex family responsibilities. Most (62.2 percent) had children with more than one partner. Most (57.2 percent) reported that they did not pay any child support in the 30 days prior to random assignment. About 40 percent had no in-person contact with their youngest or oldest nonresident children in the 30 days prior to random assignment.

Study Methods

The CSPED impact evaluation used a random assignment research design. At study enrollment, program applicants were randomly placed into one of two research groups: (1) an extra services group that was eligible for CSPED services; or (2) a regular services group that was not. Study participants were divided equally across the two groups. A random assignment design ensures that the initial characteristics of the research groups are very similar. Therefore, any differences between the groups in outcomes that are too large to be due to chance can be attributed to the effect of the program. We compared the groups across a wide variety of characteristics to see if they were statistically equal at the point of random assignment. The groups were equivalent on baseline measures of nearly all variables tested. The results suggest that the randomization process worked.³

The evaluation estimates “intent-to-treat” (ITT) impacts, wherein all sample members are included in the analysis regardless of the amount of service they received. ITT impact estimates preserve the integrity of the random assignment research design and answer the question: “What is the effect of offering program services to eligible participants?” The evaluation uses a regression model that controls for the characteristics of participants measured at baseline to improve the precision of estimates. It weights the estimated impacts of the eight grantees equally to measure the average effect of CSPED across the eight grantees.

The design of the CSPED intervention is illustrated in an outcomes sequence chart (Appendix C). CSPED aimed to affect outcomes in three main areas: (1) child support, (2) employment and earnings, and (3) parenting. Although we examine a longer list of impacts in several domains, the primary test of CSPED’s effectiveness focuses on 14 confirmatory outcomes across these three areas (Table ES.1). We selected these outcomes before beginning our analysis. We kept the set of confirmatory outcomes relatively short to reduce the risk of finding statistically significant effects that were due to chance and that did not represent an actual impact of the program (Schochet, 2009).⁴ We also calculate statistical significance,

³There were small differences in the proportion with three nonresident children and mean Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits received by custodial parents associated with a participant. As described below, we control for these characteristics in all impact estimates.

⁴In this report we discuss only those outcomes that have less than a 10 percent probability of being due to chance ($p < .10$), noting the significance level for results that do not meet the more restrictive standard of less than a 5 percent probability of being due to chance ($p < .05$).

adjusting for multiple comparisons within the confirmatory outcome domains, and note any estimates that are not robust to the adjustment.

Data Sources

The impact analysis relied on three principal data sources:

- A **baseline survey**, which collected information on noncustodial parents' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics; economic stability; children and relationships; and other background measures. These data are available for all 10,161 sample members.
- A **12-month follow-up survey**, administered from December 2014 through December 2016, which focused on post-random-assignment activities, including participants' relationship with their children and their children's other parent(s); their satisfaction with child support services; the services they received; and their employment outcomes. Follow-up survey data are available for 4,282 of the 6,308 sample members who enrolled through June 2015.
- **Administrative data** on child support, public benefits receipt, and criminal justice involvement, which were collected from each grantee. Employment and earnings data were obtained from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) from OCSE through a request by the Wisconsin Bureau of Child Support. Child support, employment, and earnings data were available for nearly all participants.⁵ Availability of other administrative data was more limited.

⁵However, in South Carolina, administrative data from child support were more limited.

Table ES.1. Impacts of CSPED on 14 confirmatory outcomes

Key domain	Confirmatory outcome	Estimated impact
1. Child support		
1. Compliance with current child support orders ^a	1. Total current child support payments divided by total current child support orders during first year after random assignment, ^b measured using administrative records	0.16
	2. Total current child support payments divided by total current child support orders during second year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	0.74
2. Current child support orders	3. Average monthly current child support orders during first year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$-14.62***
	4. Average monthly current child support orders during second year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$-15.89***
3. Current child support payments	5. Average monthly current child support payments during first year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$-4.42*
	6. Average monthly current child support payments during second year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$-6.20*
4. NCP satisfaction with child support services ^a	7. Satisfaction with child support services, as reported in follow-up survey	21.39***
2. Employment and earnings		
5. NCP employment	8. Total hours worked during first year after random assignment, measured using survey data	-1.56
	9. Months employed during first year after random assignment, measured using survey data	-0.02
	10. Quarters employed during first two years after random assignment, measured using administrative records	0.09
6. NCP earnings	11. Total earnings during first year after random assignment, measured using survey data	\$489.72
	12. Total earnings during first year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$358.50*
	13. Total earnings during second year after random assignment, measured using administrative records	\$-23.93
3. Parenting		
7. NCP sense of responsibility for children	14. Index of attitudes toward importance of parental support and involvement with their children, using survey data	0.05**

^aThese impacts are percentage point differences.

^bThroughout this document, for most variables, the first year after random assignment begins on the calendar month (beginning the first day of the month) after random assignment; for earnings and employment variables from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH), it begins on the calendar quarter (January–March, April–June, July–September, or October–December, beginning the first day of the first month of the quarter) following random assignment. “Quarter 1” always refers to the first calendar quarter, beginning the first day of the first month of the quarter, following random assignment.

Source: Administrative data on child support from CSPED grantees; administrative data on employment and earnings from NDNH (except as noted).

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant’s baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of grantee-level impacts in which all grantees are weighted equally. Not all estimates are robust to multiple comparisons (see Table 2.1 in Cancian et al., 2019). Colorado child support data differ from those of other grantees; see Appendix B1 for results without Colorado.

***/**/* Statistically significant positive impact at the .01/.05/.10 level, two-tailed test.

Service Receipt

- **CSPED increased the amount of child support, employment, and parenting services noncustodial parents received, and reduced the likelihood of punitive child support enforcement actions during the first year.**

In the 12-month follow-up survey, noncustodial parents in the extra services group reported receiving, on average, 37 hours of employment, parenting, or child support services in the first year after study enrollment, compared with 15 hours for those in the regular services group, a difference of 22 hours.⁶ These additional hours of reported service receipt included 14 additional hours of employment services (including a mix of job readiness classes and one-on-one employment help), seven additional hours of parenting services, and one additional hour of child support services.

Our analysis of administrative data indicates that CSPED also increased the likelihood that noncustodial parents had their orders modified and had automatic income withholding established during their first year in the program. In addition, CSPED increased the likelihood that license suspensions were removed during the first two months in the program, an impact that was not sustained.

Consistent with the program design, CSPED also reduced the likelihood that noncustodial parents experienced punitive enforcement actions—such as contempt hearings, warrants issued, or license suspensions—during their first year in the program. The reduced likelihood persisted in the second year after random assignment for license suspension, but not for contempt hearings or warrants.

Child Support Impacts

As noted above, the primary goal of CSPED was to increase reliable child support payments. To assess this, we examined compliance with current child support orders, measured as the amount of current support paid as a proportion of the amount of current support owed. Since compliance is a ratio of current support paid to current support owed, the CSPED impact evaluation included three child support domains—current child support payments, current child support orders, and the ratio of payments to orders.

These three child support domains were examined using administrative data since child support administrative data are considered more reliable than self-reported data. Data precisely measuring current orders and payments were available for two grantees, with good approximations available for five others.⁷

⁶The implementation report (Noyes et al., 2018) includes more detail on service provision for those in the extra services group from the CSPED program management information system.

⁷Data precisely measuring current orders and payments were available from only two grantees; the remaining six grantees' measures included ancillary payments and orders (e.g., medical support and alimony) or back support payments or orders (i.e., arrears). Cancian et al. (2019) explains the basis for our conclusion that including ancillary amounts is inconsequential for the results. Cancian et al. (2019) also explains the basis for our conclusion that our

- **CSPED reduced current child support orders by \$15 to \$16 per month.**

Our analysis of administrative data shows that CSPED reduced the amount of child support participants were expected to pay. Those in the extra services group had average monthly child support orders of \$308 in the first year and \$276 in the second year after random assignment, compared with averages of \$323 and \$292 in the first and second years, respectively, for those in the regular services group.⁸ The reduction in orders was \$15 a month in the first year and \$16 a month in the second year.⁹ These results are consistent with program expectations.¹⁰

Based on additional analysis of administrative data, we find that CSPED significantly reduced current child support orders in every quarter during participants' first two years in the program. CSPED also reduced the percentage of noncustodial parents with burdensome current child support orders (defined as orders totaling more than 50 percent of their earnings) by 4 percentage points in the first year (53.2 percent of those with extra services and 57.2 percent of those with regular services). There was no impact in the second year. Again, these findings were expected given the focus of CSPED on right-sizing orders.

- **CSPED led to a small reduction in current child support payments, of about \$4 to \$6 per month over the first two years.**

The analysis of administrative data shows that noncustodial parents in the extra services group had average monthly child support payments of \$111 in the first year and \$116 in the second year after random assignment, compared to average payments of \$115 and \$123 in the first and second years, respectively, for those in the regular services group. These impacts are about \$4 and \$6 a month (both $p < .10$). After adjusting for multiple comparisons, the impact in the first year is no longer statistically significant; the negative impact in the second year remains statistically significant.¹¹

- **CSPED had no effect on the confirmatory measure of child support compliance.**

Based on administrative data, we find that both those in the extra services group and those in the regular services group paid about 37 percent of their current support order in the first year. In the

technique for excluding arrears is inconsequential for the results in all grantees except one, Colorado. Because Colorado data do not allow us to distinguish current support and arrears, we also provide estimates of child support order, payment, and compliance results excluding Colorado.

⁸Current support orders were lower, on average, in the second year than the first, for participants in both the extra and regular services groups, in part because the number of participants without a current support order increased over time.

⁹Excluding Colorado, (for which our measure of orders and payments includes current child support and arrears), the estimated impact on orders is similar: a decline of \$14 and \$15 per month in the first and second years, respectively (compared to \$15 and \$16 with Colorado included).

¹⁰CSPED grantees were instructed to review current child support orders once participants enrolled in CSPED and request order modifications if appropriate; given the CSPED target population, it was expected that most modification would result in lower orders.

¹¹Excluding Colorado, the impact on payments is not statistically significant in either year.

second year, noncustodial parents in both groups paid 46-47 percent of their current child order. These differences are not statistically significant.¹² Based on additional impact estimation using administrative data (beyond our confirmatory analysis), we found modest impacts on compliance in two of the first eight quarters after random assignment. Specifically, we found compliance was two percentage points higher in the second quarter (41.6 percent for the extra services group and 40.0 percent for the regular services group) and the fourth quarter (45.5 percent and 44.1 percent, respectively, $p < .10$). There was no impact in any of the other six quarters.¹³

Further, based on administrative data, CSPED reduced total arrears (past-due support) ($p < .10$) and arrears owed to the state 24 months after random assignment, though there were no impacts on arrears owed to the family at 24 months or to any measure of arrears owed at 12 months. The reduction in state-owed arrears was expected, even in the absence of changes in compliance, in that OCSE encouraged CSPED grantees to negotiate such reductions in exchange for successful program outcomes.

- **CSPED increased satisfaction with child support services.**

CSPED had strong and positive impacts on the extent to which noncustodial parents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with child support services (67.6 percent versus 46.2 percent), as reported in the 12-month follow-up survey. Improving noncustodial parents' view of the child support program was a central element of the CSPED model. This centrality reflects concerns that many low-income noncustodial parents had negative attitudes regarding the child support program, reducing their cooperation with the child support program (Paulsell et al., 2015; Waller & Plotnick, 2001; Noyes et al., 2018), and increasing enforcement costs.

Exploratory analysis shows consistently higher satisfaction with child support services in every area we measured. Those in the extra services group were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the child support program treated them fairly (68.2 percent versus 53.0 percent); helped them provide support to their children (57.2 percent versus 44.4 percent); helped their relationship with their children (50.8 percent versus 33.7 percent); and helped in their relationship with the custodial parent (37.7 percent versus 25.5 percent).

Employment and Earnings Impacts

Another major area that CSPED intended to influence was the employment and earnings of participants. CSPED was designed to help participants find and keep employment, which, in turn, was expected to expedite child support payments and improve the participants' economic well-being.

The evaluation uses both survey and administrative data to examine the impact of CSPED on employment and earnings. Survey data have the benefit of measuring all types of employment, including informal and formal employment, but they are self-reported and susceptible to recall

¹²We also estimate compliance without Colorado and find similar results—no impacts on compliance in the first or the second year.

¹³In the results without Colorado, the positive impact in the second quarter remains significant ($p < .10$) but there is no impact in the fourth quarter.

bias. They are also available only during the first year. Administrative data have the benefit of measuring employment in the formal economy, where earnings can be more readily withheld by the child support program. They are also available for two years following enrollment.

- **CSPED had no effect on the confirmatory measures of participants' employment.**

Based on analysis of survey and administrative data, we find that CSPED did not increase the amount of time that participants were employed. In the year after random assignment, noncustodial parents in both research groups reported working, on average, about 1,000 hours in the first year and just over half of the months in the first year. Using administrative data, we find that noncustodial parents in both research groups worked just over half of the quarters in the two years following enrollment.

Additional exploratory analysis of administrative data suggests that CSPED led to a modest increase ($p < .10$) in the likelihood that participants were employed at any time during the first and second year after random assignment (81.4 percent for extra services, 79.0 percent for regular services). In addition, employment was higher in the first ($p < .10$), second ($p < .10$), and third quarters, but not in the final five quarters.

- **CSPED increased participants' earnings by about 4 percent in the first year, based on administrative data. CSPED had no significant effect on earnings in the first year, based on survey data.**

Based on analysis of administrative data, noncustodial parents in the extra services group earned an average of \$9,344 in the first year, \$359 more than the average of \$8,986 for those in the regular services group ($p < .10$). This impact represents an increase in earnings of 4 percent and is not robust to adjustment for multiple comparisons. There is no impact on earnings in the second year. Based on the 12-month follow-up survey, there is no impact on earnings.

Parenting Impacts

The final major area that CSPED intended to influence was parenting outcomes. CSPED provided parenting classes with peer support that covered responsible fatherhood, parenting skills, relationships skills, and personal development, with the intent of increasing participants' sense of responsibility for their children, improving their parenting and co-parenting skills, increasing reliable child support, and ultimately improving child well-being.

- **CSPED increased noncustodial parents' sense of responsibility for children.**

Using the 12-month follow-up survey, we find that CSPED resulted in a statistically significant increase in the degree to which participants thought it was important for noncustodial parents to be involved in their children's lives and support them financially. On a five-point scale indicating the favorability of their responses to four questions, such as, "How important is it for parents who live apart from their children to support their children financially?" and "How important is it for parents who live apart from their children to try to be involved in their children's lives?" those in the extra services group had an average score of 4.27, compared with

an average of 4.22 for those in the regular services group. This impact represents an effect size (difference in standard deviation units) of 0.08 standard deviations.

Based on additional analysis of follow-up survey data (beyond the confirmatory outcomes), we find that CSPED also significantly increased contact with nonresident children (12.8 out of the last 30 days for the extra services group and 11.8 days for the regular services group) and decreased use of harsh discipline strategies ($p < .10$) among respondents who had in-person contact with nonresident children (0.52 days using harsh discipline in the last month for the extra services group and 0.64 days for the regular services group). However, there were no impacts in any of the other additional parenting domains; for example, in confidence in parenting skills, the quality of relationships with children, parenting activities, or parental warmth.

Other Impacts

We conducted additional analyses of criminal justice involvement, emotional and economic well-being, and public benefits use of CSPED participants. None of these outcomes were part of our confirmatory analysis. We found no impacts on criminal justice involvement or emotional well-being. However, CSPED improved three of the five outcomes in economic well-being: it reduced housing instability ($p < .10$), increased the likelihood of having a bank account, and increased total personal income in the first year ($p < .10$). We also found impacts in two of the eight measures of benefit use: noncustodial parents in the extra services group received higher Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and spent more time on Medicaid than noncustodial parents in the regular services group in the second year.

We also examined the impact of CSPED on custodial parents associated with the noncustodial parents in the study. We examined the amount of child support received, the amount of public benefits received, and the amount of earnings. All of these outcomes were measured using administrative data for the first and second year. None of these impacts were significant.

Grantee and Subgroup Analyses

- **There were few differences across grantees and no differences among subgroups.**

We conducted grantee-level analyses for our 14 confirmatory outcomes to evaluate whether the program was successful in some locations and not others. In general, there were not strong patterns of differences.¹⁴

¹⁴To minimize the risk of highlighting impacts that could have occurred by chance given the number of tests we were conducting, before conducting the analyses, we determined that we would highlight only grantees that had a pattern of significant impacts, defined as impacts (at the $p < .05$ level) in at least two domains, one of which was either compliance or payments. Only California and Ohio met this threshold. In California, CSPED reduced child support payments; participants had higher satisfaction with child support services; and a stronger sense of responsibility for children. There was no impact on the other confirmatory outcomes. In Ohio, CSPED reduced child support orders and payments and participants reported higher satisfaction with child support services. There was no impact on the other confirmatory outcomes in Ohio. While these grantees showed a pattern of significant impacts, there were no strong differences from the other grantees.

The CSPED program may have been effective for some subgroups and not others. We estimated the impact of CSPED on the 14 confirmatory outcomes for eight pre-determined subgroup categories. Of the eight categories considered—based on history of incarceration, employment, child support payments, and age of youngest child—none of the subgroups showed a distinct pattern of significant impacts.¹⁵

Discussion

Many noncustodial parents face challenges getting and keeping jobs that pay wages high enough to support themselves and their children. These economic difficulties contribute to nonpayment of child support, which can trigger a variety of enforcement actions, including the suspension of driver's licenses and warrants for arrest. There is growing concern that these enforcement actions may be counterproductive: the lack of a license or interactions with the criminal justice system may make it even more difficult for a noncustodial parent to get or keep employment, leading to further difficulties with child support payments, creating a vicious cycle. Moreover, these enforcement actions contribute to some noncustodial parents' belief that the child support program is not "on their side," leading to lower levels of cooperation. Finally, the complex responsibilities of those who have had children in multiple families but do not have enough resources to provide for them all may lead to discouragement and further nonpayment.

With these issues in mind, CSPED was designed to provide an innovative approach to serving noncustodial parents who were behind in their child support payments. The federal Office of Child Support Enforcement aimed to test whether a child support-led program that offers an integrated package of services and a new approach to child support would improve child support, employment, and parenting outcomes. A rigorous evaluation using random assignment provides a strong test of the effects of the intervention.

Based on this evaluation, we find that CSPED had some important successes with regard to child support outcomes. CSPED modestly reduced child support orders, which is consistent with efforts to right-size orders for low-earning noncustodial parents. The reduction in orders coincided with an even smaller (and less robust) reduction in child support payments. On the other hand, CSPED did not improve child support compliance, the outcome used to operationalize CSPED's central goal of increasing reliable child support.

CSPED also substantially improved noncustodial parents' level of satisfaction with child support services. Less than half of the parents who received regular services expressed satisfaction with the child support services they received, but nearly 70 percent of parents who received extra services indicated they were satisfied. This is an important achievement and suggests that there are steps that child support programs can take to substantially reduce the dissatisfaction of low-income noncustodial parents with child support services.

¹⁵To minimize the risk of highlighting impacts that could have occurred by chance given the number of tests we were conducting, before conducting the analyses, we determined that we would highlight only subgroups that had a pattern of significant impacts, defined as impacts (at the $p < .05$ level) in at least two domains, one of which was either child support compliance or payments. None of the subgroups met this threshold.

In addition, there is some evidence that CSPED modestly improved noncustodial parents' earnings, although these impacts did not persist into the second year. Relatively few employment interventions have been shown to increase the earnings of low-income adults and particularly low-income men (Avellar et al., 2018; Mastri and Hartog, 2016; Sama-Miller et al., 2016). In this context, the modest CSPED results are encouraging, though they underscore the continuing challenge of finding successful approaches to substantially improve the labor market outcomes of disadvantaged adults.

CSPED also increased noncustodial parents' sense of responsibility for children, another important achievement. This latter finding is similar to recent results from the Parents and Children Together (PACT) evaluation, which examined the effects of four responsible fatherhood programs that served primarily nonresident fathers and offered them a mix of employment, parenting, and relationship services. The PACT study found that the programs improved several aspects of participants' parenting behavior (Avellar et al., 2018). These two sets of results suggest the potential to improve the parenting outcomes of noncustodial parents through these types of interventions.

Several factors may have contributed to CSPED's overall modest impacts. First, CSPED represented a new approach to working with noncustodial parents, offering them employment and other services through a program led by child support agencies. Therefore, the programs included in the evaluation were typically new; and program staff were using these approaches for the first time and in many cases working with new partner agencies to deliver them. If program staff had had more time to develop and strengthen these new practices and partnerships, the programs may have become more effective. Second, CSPED targeted very disadvantaged noncustodial parents, and the services provided through CSPED might not have been sufficiently intensive or comprehensive to overcome their barriers in the labor market. Most participants had low levels of education. Many had little recent work experience; most (65 percent) had been incarcerated. These barriers to employment may have limited CSPED's ability to improve their employment outcomes. CSPED represented a fairly light-touch intervention (Noyes et al., 2018), with the program delivering, on average, an additional 21.7 hours of services to participants. Given the substantial barriers to employment many participants faced, a more intensive set of services may be required to substantially improve their labor market outcomes and, ultimately, their ability to meet their child support obligations. Third, while a random assignment design guarantees that the comparison group is equivalent to the services group (except by chance), an intervention like CSPED, which aims to foster a broad-based change in the relationship with participants and the culture of the serving agencies, can be difficult to evaluate. For example, changes in staff attitudes toward punitive enforcement tools may have affected both those in the regular services group and the extra services group. Finally, we tested impacts over only two years. Nevertheless, we did find two important attitudinal changes: CSPED increased noncustodial parents' satisfaction with child support services, and their sense of responsibility for nonresident children. These attitudinal changes may have effects that unfold over time and eventually lead to improvements in child support. In drawing conclusions, it is also important to note that CSPED was implemented in selected counties during a particular period. For example, because the economy was expanding throughout the period covered by the CSPED evaluation, more noncustodial parents in the regular services group may have been able to garner employment on their own, which could dampen the difference in employment between the extra services and the regular services groups.

The child support program continues to evolve in an effort to address longstanding and emerging challenges. The Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization in Child Support Enforcement Programs Final Rule¹⁶ aims to address a range of issues highlighted by the experiences of CSPED participants and grantees. For example, the new federal regulations call for additional efforts to assure that orders are consistent with noncustodial parents' ability to pay, and address some of the challenges facing incarcerated noncustodial parents. The CSPED results suggest that progress in improving the regular payment of child support will be challenging, but that noncustodial parents are open to reassessing their relationship with the child support program. These findings point to the potential for creating a more collaborative and productive approach to securing financial support for children from noncustodial parents who are unable to pay their child support, changes consistent with the new regulations.

¹⁶The final rule was published on December 20, 2016 (<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2016-12-20/pdf/2016-29598.pdf>).