

IRP focus

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Designing more effective child support policies

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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, almost a third of children did not live with both parents in 2016.¹ The child support system 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. In 2015, 37 percent of children with a parent living outside the household lived in poverty. 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. For those low-income families who receive child support, it is often an important part of their household income.²

However, for many families the child support system does not work well. Only 43 percent of custodial parents had a formal child support order in 2015, and of these, only 44 percent received the full amount due. Many noncustodial parents,

including a disproportionate share of those whose children live in poverty, have limited earnings and ability to pay child support, and child support orders often constitute a high proportion of their income.³ In addition, since people tend to have children with other people of similar socioeconomic backgrounds, the noncustodial parents who are most challenged to pay child support often owe that support to the custodial parents and children who are most in need.

The child support system was initially designed to ensure child support payments through enforcement actions. When child support goes unpaid, a variety of enforcement actions may be triggered, including the suspension of driver's licenses, asset seizure, and incarceration. There is growing concern that these enforcement strategies may in fact add barriers to employment and child support payment, and thus be counterproductive to the child support program's goals.

In 2012, in an effort to develop and test a new approach that would not only enforce, but also enable, noncustodial parents' payment of child support, the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), began the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED). The target population for this demonstration was noncustodial parents involved with the child support program who were not regularly paying child support, or who were expected to have difficulty paying, due to lack of regular employment. The primary goal of CSPED was to improve the reliable payment of child support in order to improve child well-being and avoid public costs. Child support agencies in eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin) were selected to participate in the demonstration, which was conducted over a total of 18 sites.

OCSE specified that the lead agency for each CSPED program had to be a child support agency. The advantages of this structure were that child support agencies already had access to the target population of noncustodial parents, had information about the full family context, and were well-situated to reverse some of the punitive enforcement actions that had marked prior child support program operations. This strategy, however, came with the major challenge that the child support program had a negative reputation among many noncustodial parents, who might be unwilling to cooperate with a program that they did not believe was truly interested in helping them.

OCSE also required that a comprehensive set of core services had to be provided, including case management, enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting activities. Child support agencies were to partner with other agencies to deliver parenting and employment services. Details of the core CSPED services are provided in the text box.

CSPED Services

CSPED services were provided from October 2013 through September 2017. Participating agencies provided services in four core areas: case management, enhanced child support, employment, and parenting.

Case management. Each CSPED participant was assigned a case manager to assist them in obtaining the services they needed and ensure that they followed through with the program. Case managers were expected to assess participants' needs, develop personalized service plans, provide individualized assistance to participants throughout their time with the program, and monitor participant progress. Case managers were also expected to work with the program's partners to assure that participants received the right mix of services and adhered to the program.

Enhanced child support services. CSPED was designed to offer a package of enhanced child support services to promote reliable payment of child support. These could include expedited review of child support orders, order modification if appropriate, and temporary suspension of discretionary enforcement tools while participants were actively engaged in the program.

Employment. Employment services were intended to help noncustodial parents obtain and keep stable employment. The services participants received were to be based on their needs and the design of their programs. OCSE expected all programs to provide job search assistance, job retention services for both the noncustodial parent and the employer, and rapid re-employment services immediately following job loss. OCSE also encouraged programs to provide work supports, such as transportation assistance, education-related services, and training opportunities.

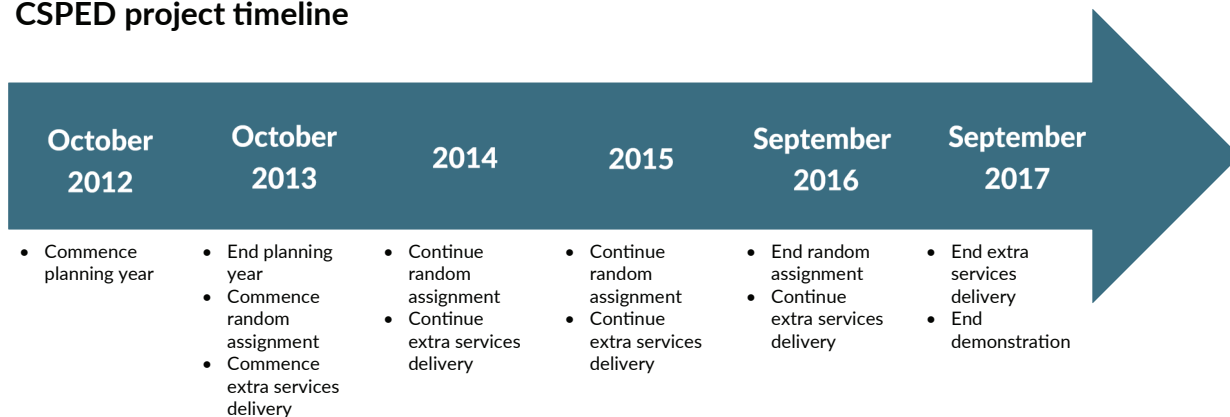
Parenting. Parenting services were intended to promote positive child support outcomes by addressing the importance of being a responsible parent. They consisted primarily of parenting classes with peer support. A specific curriculum was not required, but classes had to include the following topics: personal development, responsible fatherhood, parenting skills, relationship skills, and domestic violence. The parenting component of programs was expected to include 16 hours of instruction.

CSPED also provided screening and assessments for domestic violence, as well as referrals for services and information related to domestic violence in group-based classes. Some states also provided services related to financial education, parenting time or mediation, and assistance with expungement of criminal records.



CSPED programs were evaluated using a rigorous, random assignment design that allowed researchers to identify program effects. Half of the demonstration’s 10,161 enrollees were randomly assigned to receive CSPED services, and half were assigned to a control group that did not receive the extra services. The CSPED evaluation included three primary study components: an implementation analysis, an impact analysis, and a benefit-cost analysis. The evaluation also included a report describing the baseline characteristics of CSPED participants across grantees. To support the evaluation, in addition to collecting administrative data, evaluators conducted baseline surveys, 12-month follow-up surveys, and focus groups with CSPED participants. They also interviewed and conducted surveys with CSPED staff and gathered data on the services received by CSPED participants.

CSPED project timeline



The first article in this issue summarizes the implementation analysis, and the second article highlights key findings of the impact and benefit-cost analyses. The CSPED evaluation effort also provided an opportunity to learn more about an understudied population of interest to researchers and policymakers. The third article describes a study that used CSPED data to determine how many fathers who are behind in their child support obligation have multiple family responsibilities, and whether fathers with multiple responsibilities provide different amounts of financial support, have different amounts of contact, or report different relationships with children from their most recent relationship compared to older relationships. ■

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families was chosen to procure and manage an evaluation of CSPED through an independent third-party evaluator. The Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, along with its partner Mathematica Policy Research, was chosen to conduct the evaluation.

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¹M. Cancian, D. R. Meyer, and E. Han, 2011. “Child Support: Responsible Fatherhood and the Quid Pro Quo,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 635, No. 1 (2011): 140–162; U.S. Census Bureau, “America’s Families and Living Arrangements: 2016,” *Current Population Survey, 2016 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*, Table C.1., 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/demo/families/cps-2016.html>. Accessed October 23, 2017.

²T. Grall, “Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2015,” *Current Population Reports*, P60-262, Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018.

³D. R. Meyer, Y. Ha, and M. C. Hu, “Do High Child Support Orders Discourage Child Support Payments?” *Social Service Review* 82, No. 1 (2008): 93–118; M. Takayesu, “How Do Child Support Order Amounts Affect Payments and Compliance?” Report prepared by the Research Unit of the Orange County, California, Department of Child Support Services, 2011.

Culture change: Implementing a new approach to child support

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TAKEAWAYS

A child support agency-led intervention that includes case management, employment, and parenting components offers a feasible and promising approach to promoting the reliable payment of child support.

Keeping noncustodial parents engaged in program services requires a well-developed and flexible approach.

Culture change within child support agencies, from an enforcement-oriented to a service-oriented approach, is necessary to improve the way child support services are delivered.



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Changes in family structure have led to a substantial increase in single-parent households. The child support system is designed to ensure that noncustodial parents contribute financially to the upbringing of their children, but for many families it does not work well. As detailed in the introduction to this issue, the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Program (CSPED) offered a new approach to child support, intended to make child support payments by unemployed noncustodial parents more consistent. CSPED was a rigorous, randomized controlled trial with three primary study components; an implementation analysis, an impact analysis, and a benefit-cost analysis. This article summarizes the key findings of the implementation analysis; the second article summarizes the impact and benefit-cost analyses.

Our research questions include:

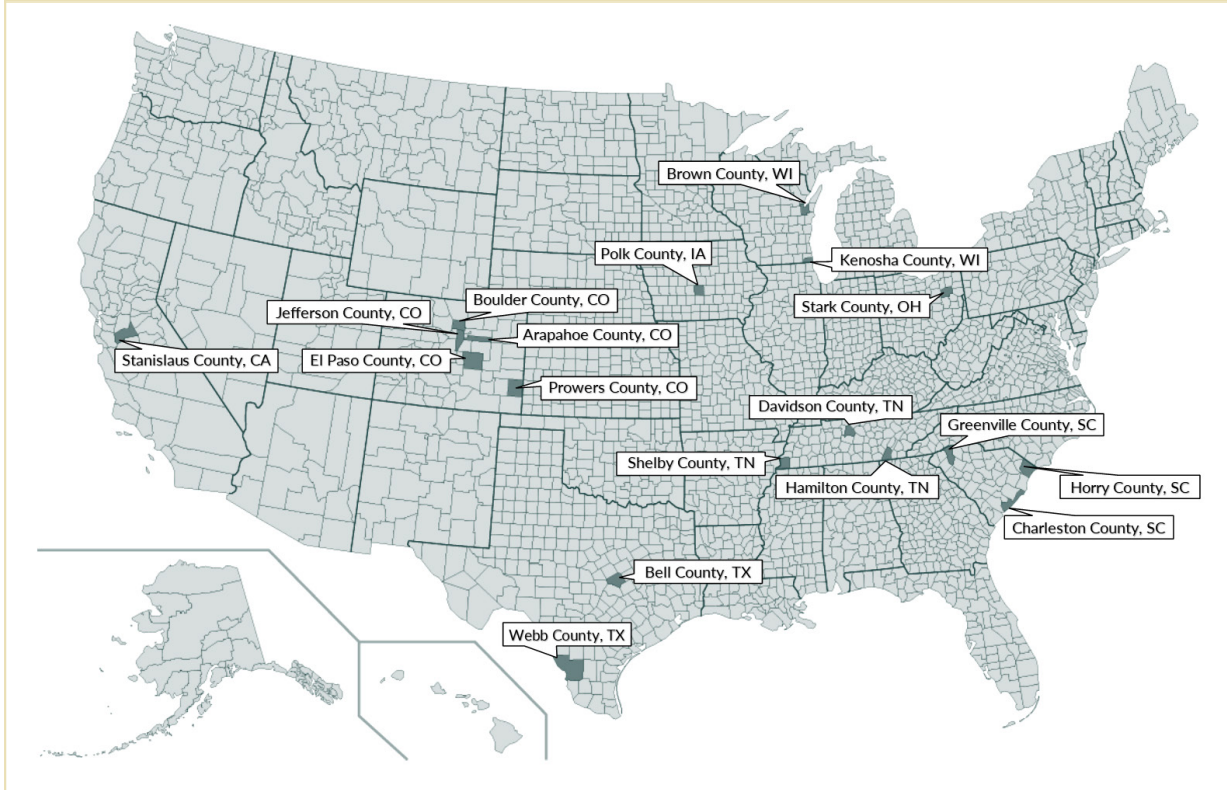
- How did CSPED programs operate?
- What services did participants receive?

In addressing these two questions, we sought to identify the challenges states faced in implementing CSPED programs as well as the promising strategies they developed to overcome these challenges. These research questions were assessed for the 18 sites across eight states (California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin) that participated in the CSPED demonstration (Figure 1). States had one year of planning time to develop participant recruitment and service delivery systems, and approximately three years to enroll participants. During this time, one-half of the noncustodial parents enrolled in each state were randomly assigned to receive CSPED services (the treatment group), and the other half to a control group that did not receive the extra services associated with CSPED. This randomized control structure allowed the research team to assess the effects of the intervention (see the second article in this issue for a summary of the results of this analysis).

Methods

We used multiple sources and methods to collect a mix of qualitative and quantitative information about CSPED to understand how the program was implemented. We conducted two rounds of site visits, including on-site interviews, in all eight CSPED states, first between May and August 2014, interviewing 177 staff from child support and partner agencies, as well as leadership staff; and then again between June and August 2016, just prior to the end of random assignment, interviewing a total of 54 individuals.¹ Two web-based surveys were administered to child support and partner staff in May 2014 and February 2016. Qualitative analysis software was used to code, organize, and synthesize staff interview data. We also examined participation data collected across the full implementation period from the web-based system used to perform random assignment and track program participation. A baseline survey of program applicants was administered to all participants at the time of enrollment.²

Figure 1. CSPED was implemented in 18 sites across eight states.



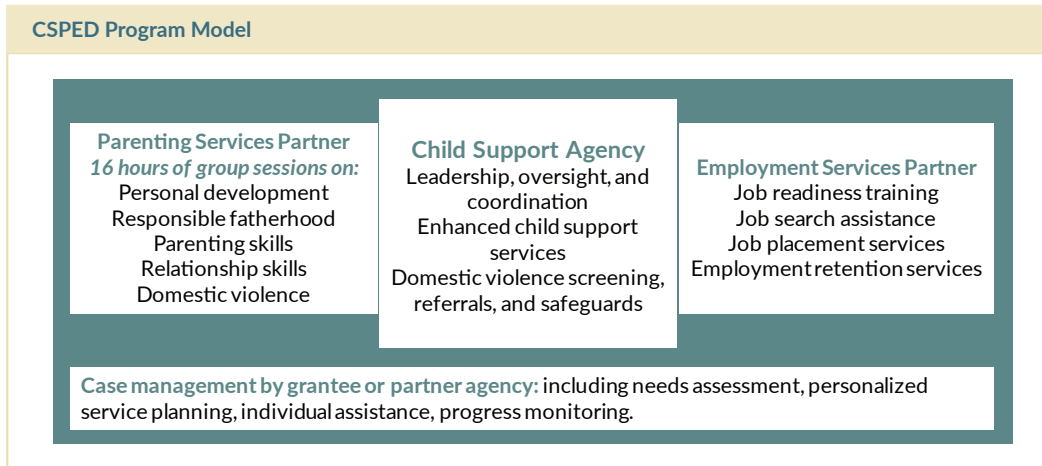
Finally, we reviewed program documents that were developed for the CSPED evaluation or developed by CSPED states in order to support service delivery.

CSPED design features

CSPED was created and funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), which is housed within the Administration for Children and Families. OCSE wanted to test whether providing a specific set of services through the child support agency could have an impact on the payment of child support. OCSE asked each state to design a new program that met the following criteria:

1. the lead agency for each program must be a child support agency;
2. a comprehensive set of specific core services must be provided including case management, enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting services; and
3. child support agencies should partner with other agencies to deliver employment and parenting services.

Using the child support agency as the door through which noncustodial parents access employment and parenting services was a novel approach. In the past, child support agencies have been focused on enforcement actions. However, for several reasons, OCSE saw untapped potential in the child support agencies' ability to link noncustodial parents who are behind in their child support to services that might improve their payment of that support. Child support agencies already have access to the target population of noncustodial parents. Child support agencies are more motivated than other agencies to see increasing child support payments as an explicit goal. In addition, child support agencies are well-positioned to address some of the barriers to employment to which the



enforcement system itself contributes (such as license suspension). As shown in the “CSPED program model” text box, serving as the hub, child support agencies participating in CSPED worked with employment service providers and parenting service providers to deliver the range of services outlined by OCSE.

Program operation

In order to implement the CSPED program model, child support agencies in each CSPED state needed first to recruit and enroll eligible participants, and then to deliver services in the four key areas in cooperation with their parenting services and employment services partners.

OCSE provided direction to states about the eligibility criteria that should be used to select CSPED participants, including that they:

1. had established paternity;
2. were being served by the child support program; and
3. were not regularly paying child support, or were expected to have difficulty making payments, due to lack of regular employment.

States were also able to modify or develop additional eligibility criteria, and most did so, as shown in Table 1. Most referrals of potential CSPED participants came from child support staff; some referrals also came from community-based providers, the courts, and other program participants.

Table 1. Most states modified or added CSPED eligibility criteria.

State	Allowed child support cases from adjacent counties	Allowed arrears-only cases	Allowed \$0 order cases	Allowed cases in the process of paternity or child support order establishment	Excluded full-time students	Excluded noncustodial parents for prior program participation
California	X					
Colorado				X	X	X
Iowa				X ^a		X
Ohio			X	X ^a		
South Carolina	X	X ^b				
Tennessee						
Texas		X ^c		X		
Wisconsin						

^aIf the noncustodial parent was unemployed.

^bAllowed on a case-by-case basis; added in January 2016 (after commencement of random assignment).

^cIf the noncustodial parent faced contempt for nonpayment of arrears.

Recruitment challenges

Each state was asked to recruit 1,500 study participants over a three-year period. In order to recruit the target population for the study, states used a variety of approaches, including referrals from child support staff, the courts, and other agencies, and direct recruitment methods such as letters and phone calls. Most states found it challenging to generate sufficient referrals to meet enrollment targets, for several reasons. First, to generate sufficient sample members for the CSPED evaluation's random assignment design, grantee staff were required to enroll twice as many participants into the study as they planned to provide with CSPED services. Grantees found that some potential participants resisted taking the time to go into the child support office, or to go through the effort of the random assignment process, when they had only a 50 percent chance to receive CSPED services. Additionally, random assignment and intake often lasted an hour or longer. Grantees found that some participants had difficulty with the time required to complete this process.

Another common challenge, particularly early on, was some noncustodial parents' negative perception of child support agencies. Participation in the demonstration was voluntary for noncustodial parents, many of whom had prior negative experiences with the child support program in its role as an enforcement agency. CSPED offered a new approach to child support, and participants often did not initially believe that the program would be beneficial to them.

Lack of buy-in among child support staff also contributed to participant recruitment difficulties early on, as child support staff who were not invested in the program did not prioritize identifying and referring prospective participants to CSPED. During the demonstration, child support agencies still needed to provide regular child support services, both to those in the CSPED control group, and to those not participating in the demonstration. Although most of the child support staff who worked exclusively on CSPED embraced the program, attitudes among the broader child support staff were mixed, particularly at the start of the demonstration. Some child support workers resisted the changes needed in order to implement CSPED as intended.

Overall, program staff found that recruitment sources that they expected to be highly productive, such as court-based referrals and mass mailings, did not work as well as anticipated. Many states also underestimated the number of staff required to generate high-quality referrals and recruit participants.

Recruitment solutions

CSPED staff used a variety of strategies to overcome recruitment challenges. These included placing child support staff in offices that were accessible to the public, sending recruitment letters in envelopes without the child support agency's logo to prevent the letter from being misidentified as a bill for child support, and making use of partner agencies, of which participants often had a more positive opinion. As one employment and parenting partner said:

*You have to have a partner who can get outside of the traditional realm of child support. Someone who can provide these services and create this trusting environment and help build that bridge to child support... Though child support has an equal amount of expertise on that side, it is great to have someone on this side because there are a lot of guys who will call here that would **never** call child support.*

Partner agencies were included in recruitment by, for example, having the employment partner agency director share information about CSPED to potential program participants

waiting to attend court hearings related to their child support order, or having CSPED staff attending partner agency and other community events.

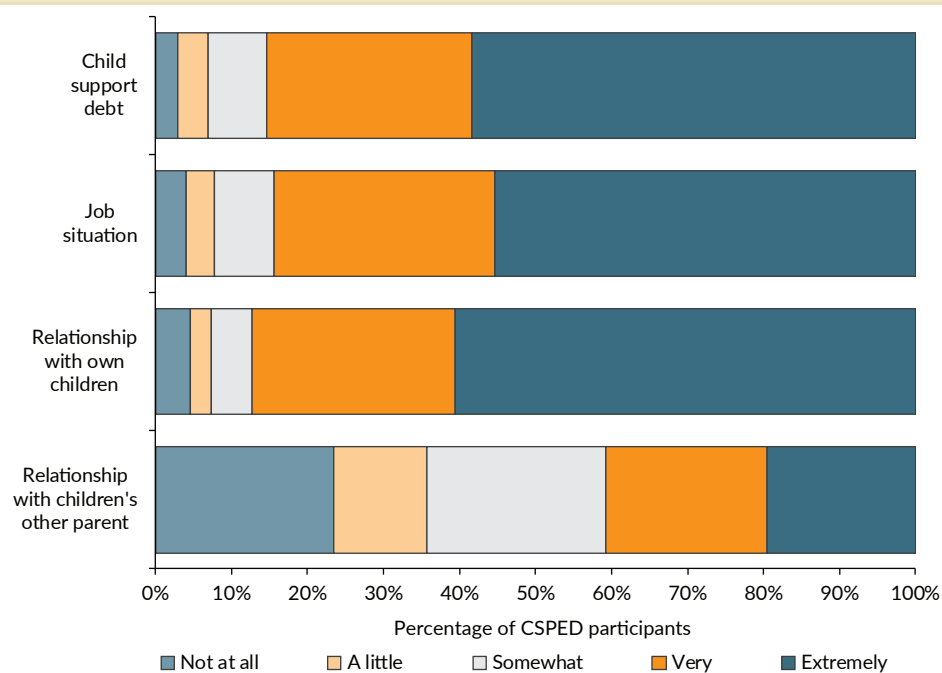
In order to get more buy-in to the program from child support staff, several states found it helpful to send these staff newsletters and emails about CSPED participant progress, highlighting success stories, and providing staff with information on child support receipt trends over time. As child support staff saw participants they worked with succeeding, their views towards the program became increasingly positive.

Programs also hired new, dedicated recruitment staff, expanded eligibility criteria to allow more participants to enroll, broadened their array of referral sources and recruitment strategies, and worked with court staff to arrange additional court dates for potentially eligible participants.

The key lesson learned from the CSPED recruitment experience is that it takes creativity to reach and enroll large numbers of participants into a child support-led program. States that expected to recruit from a single source, or primarily through passive means, had to broaden their approach in order to make progress toward enrollment targets. States that faced additional external constraints, such as delayed implementation, delays related to court filings on potentially eligible participants, and recruitment from only one implementation site, had a particularly difficult time meeting enrollment targets. Child support agencies found they needed to clearly communicate the benefits of CSPED services to gain both the trust of participants, and the support of child support staff who, ultimately, were the best recruitment source for CSPED.

Despite recruitment challenges, states as a whole enrolled 85 percent of planned enrollment, and more than 10,000 noncustodial parents participated in CSPED. As shown in Figure 2, over 80 percent of participants indicated that a very or extremely important reason for applying for CSPED was their child support debt, their current job situation, and

Figure 2. Major factors cited by noncustodial parents as motivation to participate in CSPED were their child support debt, their job situation, and their relationship with their children.



Source: Baseline survey.

their relationship with their children. Participant characteristics are summarized in the “participant characteristics” text box.

Service delivery and engagement

Once individuals were recruited into the program and service delivery began, states faced a new set of challenges in effectively providing services and keeping participants engaged. CSPED provided services in four core areas: case management, enhanced child support, employment, and parenting.

Case management services

States offered an array of case management services, as detailed in the text box. The multiple complex barriers to employment faced by many participants required more intensive case management. This created variations in the intensity of services offered at various points in time, at different sites, and across different case managers. Similarly, even when intensive case management services were warranted, several states found that high caseloads limited case managers’ ability to consistently engage in case reviews and to follow up with participants. In some instances, understaffing contributed to burnout among staff who struggled to keep up with their caseloads and who were required to take on multiple roles throughout the demonstration.

A promising strategy identified by CSPED staff to address these challenges was an integrated case management approach, in which child support staff and partner staff worked together to provide overall case management in addition to providing case management services within their respective domains. This approach allowed CSPED staff to spread their resources across staff members and agencies. For example, if one staff member was not able to reach a participant, or if a case manager was out sick, or there was turnover within an agency, staff at the other agency would help out. This approach also facilitated continuity of services because more than one person was aware of the participant’s needs, circumstances, and progress. Programs also hired additional staff, and created new roles, to help address demanding workloads and meet participant needs.

While child support agencies had previously acted primarily as enforcement agencies, implementing CSPED required them to approach service delivery in a new, customer-focused manner. This required case managers to shift from an enforcement-oriented perspective to an approach involving intensive guidance and follow-up. As a CSPED project manager said:

When you come from the other side of child support, [taking this] kind of approach to case management, I think is just new. Even though it is still case management, it is just more personalized. It’s not just trying to collect money; it’s about trying to build a relationship with these people.

Participant characteristics:

- Nearly all were men (90 percent);
- Average age was 35, and most were between the ages of 25 and 39 (64 percent);
- They generally had low levels of educational attainment (26 percent had not completed high school or obtained a GED, 43 percent had only a high school diploma or a GED, and only 32 percent reported having attended college);
- More than one-quarter had major or severe major depression;
- Only 14 percent were currently married and about half had never married (52 percent); and
- Most participants identified as non-Hispanic black or African American (40 percent), non-Hispanic white (33 percent), or Hispanic or Latino (22 percent).

Case management services provided at full implementation:

Intake and needs assessments
Benefit-eligibility assessments
Court-related activities
Personalized service plans
Participant progress monitoring
Referrals to other services

All services were available in all eight states

To help staff adapt to this new model of case management, states selected current child support staff who already had, or were receptive to, a more client-centered approach, and hired new staff who shared this viewpoint. Programs also provided training to case managers on appropriate services and case management approaches.

Enhanced child support services

States offered a variety of enhanced child support services to CSPED participants intended to assist noncustodial parents to consistently pay their monthly child support orders, as shown in the text box. All states were able to remove driver's license suspensions if the suspension was due to failure to pay child support. However, this suspension removal did not automatically lead to license reinstatement, as participants may have owed fines and reinstatement fees. Some states took additional steps to assist participants in reinstating their licenses while others did not.

All states also offered expedited review of child support orders, and adjustment of those orders as appropriate. However, some states found that state policy on minimum order amounts and change thresholds disqualified some participants from having their orders lowered, and that even for those who were eligible for a modification, it often did not occur as quickly as expected.

Services that were excluded from the CSPED design included access and visitation services, mediation services, and legal assistance. The need for these services was identified by CSPED staff; many participants had difficulty gaining access to their children because of poor or nonexistent co-parenting relationships with the custodial parent, and some participants were reluctant to pay their child support if they were not able to spend time with their children. A child support staff member reported the following perspective of a participant:

I'm paying my child support, I'm working, but I can't see my child. Therefore, all of this other stuff that I am doing, it doesn't mean anything. Because I feel disrespected as a parent, as a father.

In most CSPED states, child support programs did not have a role in setting parenting time orders, or in helping noncustodial parents with parenting time issues. While some programs were able to help with mediation, parenting time, and legal aid needs through partners or outside grants, most were not.

Employment services

Each CSPED participant had an employment case manager who was intended to provide participants with an individualized set of services to help them find employment; available employment services are shown in the text box.

Enhanced child support services provided at full implementation:

- Case reviews
- Debt reduction planning (five states)
- Removal of driver's license holds
- Early intervention monitoring for missed payments
- Expedited child support order review
- Family-owed arrears compromise (seven states)
- Order modification
- State-owed arrears compromise (six states)
- Suspension of enforcement tools
- Wage withholding

Services were available in all eight states unless otherwise indicated.

Employment services provided at full implementation:

- Bonding* (seven states)
- Employment assessment
- Employment plan
- English as a second language classes (six states)
- Facilitated and self-directed job search assistance
- GED classes
- Internships (apprenticeships) (four states)
- Job development services
- Job readiness training
- Job referrals
- Job retention services
- On-the-job training (six states)
- Pre-employment assessments
- Rapid re-employment
- Records expungement (four states)
- Resume and cover letter training
- Short-term job skills training
- Subsidized employment (four states)
- Unpaid work experience (two states)
- Vocational training
- Voluntary drug testing (two states)
- Work supports

Services were available in all eight states unless otherwise indicated.

*Of the states in which bonding was available, all but two provided information and education to participants rather than facilitating the bonding process.

Employment partners reported difficulty in getting participants to engage in employment services. In addition to overcoming participant reluctance due to prior negative experiences with the child support program, some participants did not believe that they needed help finding work or obtaining employment services, or did not have a full understanding of the services available to them. As one staff member said,

If participants engage in services, the program usually works for them. The issue is getting participants to the program and helping them understand that the goal is to help them. They seem to get excited about it [at enrollment] and then life happens in between.

Employment partners also reported that some participants lacked the motivation to take advantage of available employment services. As one of the employment providers stated,

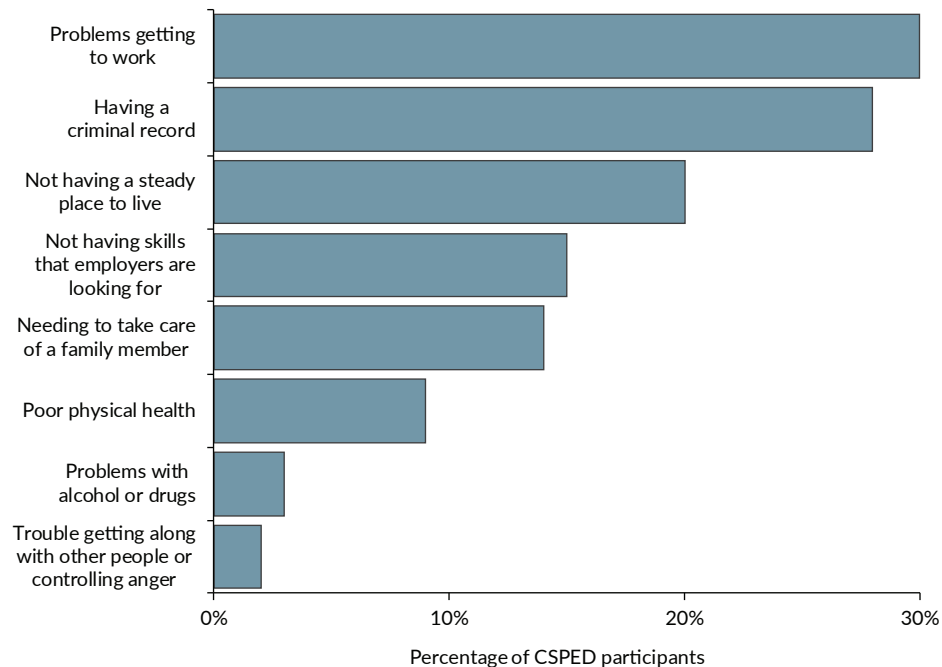
It's more than just getting a job. It's the idea in your head that, you know, I have family to support. I have obligations. My children are depending on me... A lot of these guys have never had that explained to them, someone to say, you know, you've got to get up. I know you might be sleepy. You might not be feeling well. You just started the job, you can't call in. That sense of responsibility—that has been the biggest challenge.

States also reported that participants often found it challenging to take part in job training programs because of the need to earn money to meet short-term expenses. As one employment staff member explained,

Part of the problem with [job training] is that people have to survive. And so it's hard for them and their family to go back to school if they are paying their child support, paying their rent, and everything else.

Even when noncustodial parents were willing to engage in employment services, many faced multiple barriers to both participating in those services and finding work (Figure 3). One particularly substantial barrier was having a criminal record. As one employment provider stated:

Figure 3. Many CSPED participants reported barriers to finding employment.



Source: Baseline survey.

Note: Figure shows proportion of respondents who indicated that the barrier made it “very” or “extremely” hard to keep a job.

Many employers are not willing to hire people with criminal backgrounds, and the jobs that are available to people with backgrounds are so low-paying, participants feel like it isn't worthwhile to work.

Other challenges faced by participants included unstable housing, mental health issues, substance abuse problems, literacy needs, lack of transportation, lack of health insurance, food insecurity, and sparse work histories. Program staff made referrals to community resources to help address these challenges when they were aware of them and when resources were available. However, services to help with these concerns, particularly housing, mental health, and substance abuse-related issues, were lacking in many of the communities in which CSPED programs were located. This created challenges for frontline staff who often found that these fundamental needs had to be addressed before participants could engage in program services and make any progress towards obtaining and maintaining employment. Most child support and partner agencies found that they could not fully address all of their participants' needs.

Despite these challenges, CSPED programs did find strategies that were helpful in overcoming barriers to employment and facilitating participant engagement. Positive relationships between employment agencies and employers were a critical factor in getting participants employed, both because employers trusted the recommendations of agency staff, and because getting to know both the employer and the participant helped ensure a good fit between employer and employee. Understanding employers' future hiring needs could also help employment partners to identify training opportunities that could prepare participants for those jobs when they became available.

Employment staff also emphasized the importance of job retention services, which meant that staff were available to help participants if they had problems on a job, or needed assistance in navigating a new work environment. As one employment partner agency director said,

You're going to have someone in your corner for six months to make sure you maintain that attachment to your job. If there's any issues on your job, anything that you need to talk through with someone, that's what we're here for. So call [the case managers], don't quit a job before you have another job, that sort of thing.

Employment staff who were flexible and accommodating allowed participants to make the best use of CSPED services. For example, offering employment-related workshops at different times of the day, or one-on-one services made it easier to accommodate participants' schedules. Staff commitment to the goals of CSPED was also key. As a project manager described,

It's the passionate [employment] case managers. Every single person that said they got something out of [the program], it was because of the person they worked with, not because of the services they received. They talk about the services—the services are great—but, it always comes back to that one individual who helped them. That is the number one thing.

Strong communication and coordination across child support and partner staff also facilitated provision of employment services. Frequent meetings, informal communication, and team-based case staffing gave staff an opportunity to share information about participant needs. Co-location of child support and partner staff, when present, improved communication and facilitated coordinated delivery of services.

Finally, employment partners found that incentives and work supports increased participant uptake of services. Many noncustodial parents were motivated to participate in

CSPED services by their ability to reduce accumulated child support debt owed to the state, and the opportunity to get driver's licenses and professional licenses reinstated. Work supports such as interview clothes, bus passes, gas vouchers, and help in obtaining work-related supplies also made it easier for participants to obtain employment.

It's the passionate [employment] case managers. Every single person that said they got something out of [the program], it was because of the person they worked with, not because of the services they received. They talk about the services—the services are great—but, it always comes back to that one individual who helped them. That is the number one thing.

Parenting services

CSPED was designed to provide parenting classes with peer support that covered responsible fatherhood, parenting skills, relationships skills, and personal development, with the goal 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.

Across all programs, parenting partners had difficulty in getting participants to attend parenting classes. CSPED was a child-support led, employment-focused demonstration, with a primary aim of increasing child support payments. This prioritization may have contributed to participants' lack of engagement in parenting services. For example, when participants who were already working, or found work while in the program, they were generally allowed to miss parenting classes that conflicted with their work schedules. Some parenting staff observed that this prioritization also contributed to participants skipping classes when they had other conflicts or did not “feel like going.”

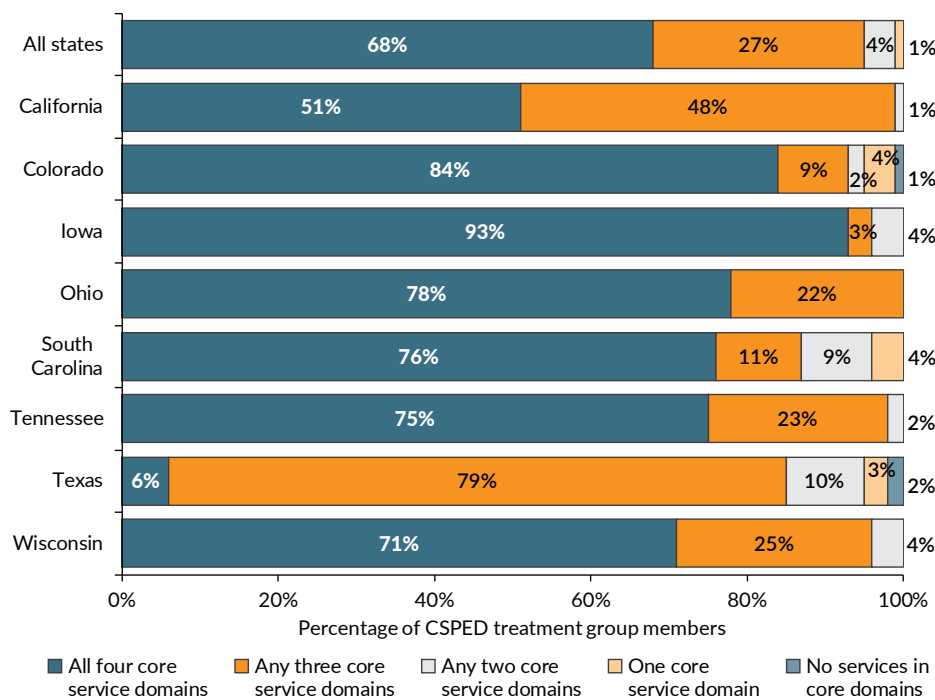
Other barriers to engagement in parenting services included lack of transportation, childcare responsibilities, the time required to complete up to 16 hours of classes, and negative feelings on the part of some participants about being in a classroom environment in general, and about being in a parenting class in particular.

Strategies for overcoming this lack of engagement included re-branding parenting classes as central to the program, offering individual makeup sessions for group classes, and modifying the times at which services were offered to better align with participants' schedules.

Amount of services received

Despite the challenges to service delivery, nearly all participants received at least one service in one of the four core service areas of case management, enhanced child support services, employment services, and parenting services. Sixty-eight percent received at least one service in all four service areas, though there was considerable variation across CSPED programs (Figure 4). On average, participants received almost 22 hours of services, comprising roughly 10 hours of employment services, 4 hours of parenting services, 3 and a half hours of child support services, and 2 and a half hours of case management services. Average hours of services across state programs ranged from 14 to 37 hours. Participants received most services during their first six months of CSPED enrollment, and nearly all

Figure 4. Nearly all CSPED participants received at least one core service, and 68 percent received at least one service in each of the four core service areas.



Source: Administrative data.

services were received during the first year. On average, about half of all service hours were provided in a group setting, and the other half were provided through individual meetings between caseworkers and participants.

Key service delivery lessons

The implementation evaluation revealed five key lessons about service delivery.

- 1. Cross-agency programs require strong partnerships and thoughtful communication strategies.** Just as including partner agencies helped CSPED programs to recruit participants, strong relationships helped in coordinating services and keeping participants engaged. Promising coordination strategies included frequent meetings and informal communication, co-location of agencies so that participants receive multiple services in the same place, clear assignment of roles and responsibilities, and presenting the case management team as a “united front” to participants.
- 2. Program staffing levels need to sufficiently address growing caseloads, participant needs, and staff turnover.** Case managers struggled at times to provide services of the intensity required to meet participants’ complex needs, particularly as caseloads grew. Promising remedies included hiring new or leveraging existing staff, cross-training staff to temporarily fill multiple roles, and sharing case management responsibilities. Programs that were able to successfully use these strategies to maintain relatively consistent staffing throughout the demonstration found this continuity helped build trust between staff and participants, which enabled participants to open up to CSPED staff about the challenges they faced. Consistent staffing also allowed staff to witness program benefits, which strengthened their dedication and commitment to the program goals.

3. **Services for noncustodial parents behind on their child support obligations should be designed to meet multiple and complex needs.** Many participants had complex concerns that limited their ability to engage in services, as well as to secure employment. These included criminal records, lack of work history, and lack of education and training. For some participants, these concerns presented barriers to program participation that CSPED programs could not overcome. Fully addressing these needs would require an expansion of the CSPED model.
4. **Sustained engagement with program services requires a well-developed and flexible approach.** Maintaining participant engagement was an ongoing challenge; promising strategies for promoting engagement included front-loading group-based classes, co-location of services to facilitate ease of access, and flexibility in service-delivery timing. Program staff also used reminder calls ahead of appointments, follow-up calls after missed appointments, incentives to maintain engagement, and work supports, such as bus passes and gas cards, to overcome barriers to participation.
5. **A new approach to service delivery requires a cultural shift within organizations.** For many child support workers, both those directly and indirectly involved in CSPED, the demonstration represented a distinct change from their previous focus on using enforcement actions to secure child support payments. Implementing this new approach required them to undergo a philosophical shift to a more client-centered approach, which differed from how most child support staff were trained. If child support leadership backed this change, the entire child support office sometimes underwent a cultural shift as child support staff saw the benefit of referring customers to CSPED. As an employment and parenting partner explained:

I know the culture has changed over at [child support]. I know it. Because they have to sit and talk to these people. You know what I'm saying? They had to become fatherhood, not [child support]. It gave [the Project Manager] and them a chance to see that [the noncustodial parents] are really trying. I'm not saying that they didn't care before. But now they say, 'OK, I should look at this person a little more...' it shows that everyone needs to be listened to.

Many states point to the cultural shift their child support agency experienced during the demonstration period as a key outcome.

Conclusions and policy implications

The experiences states had in planning and implementing their CSPED programs offer valuable considerations across the domains of planning for services; identifying, recruiting, and enrolling participants; developing partnership, leadership, and staffing structures to support service delivery; and service implementation. CSPED programs represented a new way of approaching services for noncustodial parents with barriers to meeting their child support obligations. CSPED programs identified promising strategies for overcoming recruitment difficulties, building trust among the target population, and working as partners to provide services. CSPED programs developed a variety of services intended to meet participant needs in the areas of case management, employment, parenting, and child support. CSPED implementation results suggest the potential advantage of expanding services to include additional services such as substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment services, and assistance with parenting time.

Many states point to the cultural shift their child support agency experienced during the demonstration period as a key outcome. Specifically, states that experienced culture change and buy-in among agency leadership believe that this culture change will continue, regardless of future funding. In particular, several staff stated that regardless of the services they provide, they will provide them with “more empathy and [in] a more client-centered and family-centered manner moving forward,” because “staff have changed the way they view noncustodial parents.” This attitude, coupled with an interest in continuing to work with partner agencies and making referrals for services in the community, is consistent with strong effects of CSPED on noncustodial parents’ satisfaction with child support services, detailed in the next article. The effects of this cultural shift may be felt far into the future. ■

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Type of analysis: Implementation

Data sources: (1) Semi-structured interviews with CSPED staff; (2) web-based staff surveys; (3) program participation data; (4) a baseline survey of program applicants; (5) program documentation; and (6) participant focus groups.

Types of data: Survey, program participation, interview

Unit of analysis: CSPED programs within a state

Sample definition: Eight CSPED states

Time frame: October 2013 through September 2017

Limitations: Program participation data were entered by CSPED staff in each state. Data were reviewed monthly by OCSE and program staff, but not formally checked against case files or other records. Survey data are self-reported and rely on participants’ memory.

¹The evaluation team also conducted a focus group with participants during six of the eight 2014 site visits.

²A detailed evaluation of data from the baseline survey can be found in M. Cancian, A. Guarin, L. Hodges, and D. R. Meyer, “Characteristics of Participants in the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) Evaluation,” Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, December 2018. Available at: <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/csped-final-characteristics-of-participants-report/>.

Can a redesigned child support system do better?

Maria Cancian, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert G. Wood

TAKEAWAYS

Satisfaction with the child support system improved substantially for noncustodial parents when a less punitive and more individualized approach was used.

Effects on other child support outcomes were modest.

CSPED also had some positive effects on earnings and parenting.

Costs outweighed benefits in the short-term, but in the longer term it is expected that benefits would outweigh costs.



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Changes in family structure have led to a substantial increase in single-parent households. The child support system is designed to ensure that noncustodial parents contribute financially to the upbringing of their children, but it does not work well for many families. As detailed in the introduction to this issue, the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Program (CSPED) offered a new approach to child support, intended to make child support payments by noncustodial parents struggling to find and keep work more consistent. CSPED was a rigorous, randomized controlled trial with three primary study components: an implementation analysis (summarized in the first article in this issue); an impact analysis; and a benefit-cost analysis. This article summarizes the key findings of the impact and benefit-cost analyses.

The research questions examined in this article are:

- Did CSPED increase the reliability of child support?
- Did CSPED change the attitudes of noncustodial parents towards the child support system?
- Did CSPED have any effect on noncustodial parent employment and earnings?
- Did CSPED have any effect on measures of parenting?
- Did the benefits of CSPED outweigh the costs?

Additional research questions are addressed in the full CSPED impact report.¹

Methods

The CSPED impact evaluation used a random assignment research design. At the time of enrollment, noncustodial parents applying for the program were randomly placed into one of two

Evaluation components

The evaluation was conducted across all eight CSPED states and all 18 sites.

The three main study components are:

Implementation analysis

The implementation analysis allowed researchers to learn from the participating states about the challenges they faced in implementing CSPED, and the factors that supported program implementation and helped staff to overcome those challenges.

Impact analysis

The impact analysis allowed researchers to compare outcomes between those randomly assigned to receive the additional CSPED services (the treatment group) and those not assigned to receive additional services (the control group). Because assignment to the two groups was random, any differences between the groups can be attributed to CSPED. The outcome measures relate to noncustodial parents' (1) child support orders, payments and compliance, and attitudes toward the child support program; (2) work and earnings; and (3) sense of responsibility for their children.

Benefit-cost analysis

The benefit-cost analysis allowed researchers to compare the benefits of the CSPED program as measured in the impact evaluation to the costs it took to administer the program.

research groups of equal size: a treatment group that was eligible for CSPED services; or a control group that was not.² This research design addresses at least two challenges that otherwise make it difficult to measure program effects: external changes may affect outcomes, for reasons unrelated to the program; and individuals may agree to participate in a program for reasons that influence outcomes but are not directly related to the intervention. Without a similar comparison group, these challenges make assessing outcomes before and after treatment (in this case, participating in the CSPED program) less reliable.

One notable external change that occurred during the CSPED evaluation period was an improving economy, which lowered unemployment rates in all eight CSPED states, as shown in Figure 1. Given this improvement in the economy, we would expect employment and earnings to increase on average for all study participants regardless of whether they received the additional CSPED services. Indeed, among those in the control group, the rate of employment rose 3 percentage points between the year prior to random assignment and the year after, and average annual earnings increased by about \$975.

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.

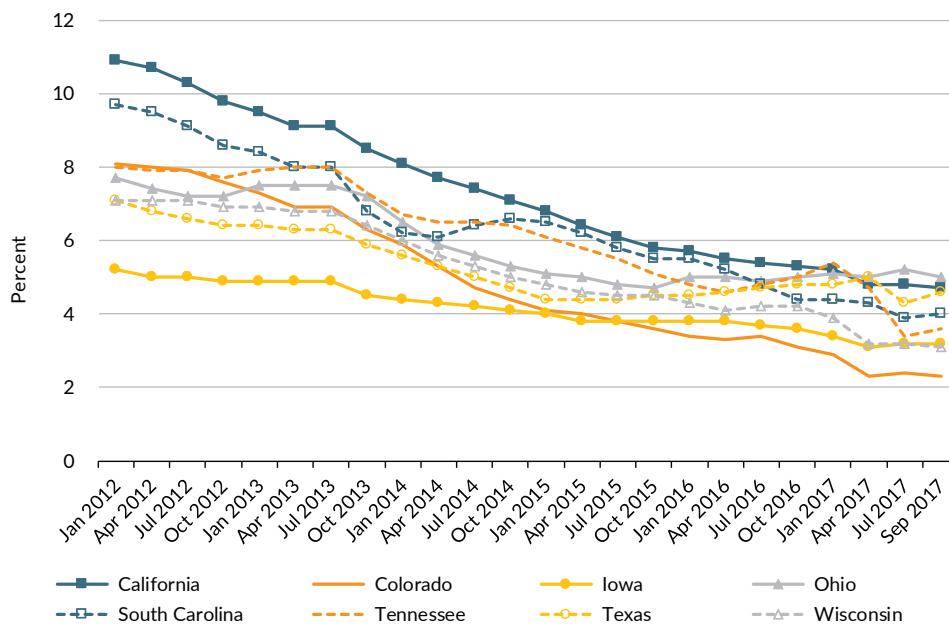
Advantages of a random assignment design

At study enrollment, program applicants were randomly placed into one of two research groups: a treatment group that was eligible for CSPED services; or a control group that was not. Study participants were divided equally across the two groups. 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.

This random assignment structure ensures that the initial characteristics of the research groups are very similar. Any external factors that could affect outcomes will be experienced by both groups; for example, over the study period unemployment declined substantially in all states. Because the two groups have very similar initial characteristics and any external factors apply to both groups, 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.

Because the treatment and control group members are randomly selected from the pool of noncustodial parents who agreed to participate in the demonstration, this design also addresses the concern that individuals may have agreed to participate in a program for reasons that influence program outcomes but are not directly related to the intervention. For example, individuals who had been incarcerated could be more (or less) likely to agree to participate in CSPED. (While a history of incarceration could certainly affect program outcomes, it is not directly related to the CSPED treatment.)

Figure 1. State unemployment rates fell over the CSPED evaluation period.



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS).

CSPED aimed to affect outcomes in three main areas: (1) child support, (2) employment and earnings, and (3) parenting. Before beginning our analysis, we selected 14 specific outcome measures across these three areas. We kept the set of outcome measures relatively short in order to reduce the risk of finding statistically significant effects that were due to chance rather than to an actual effect of the program.

Our 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. Child support, employment, and earnings data were available for nearly all participants. Availability of other administrative data was more limited.

Results of the CSPED impact analysis

In order to assess the effects of the offer of CSPED services on our outcomes of interest, we compared the changes in those measures before and after CSPED for those in the treatment group to the equivalent changes for those in the control group.

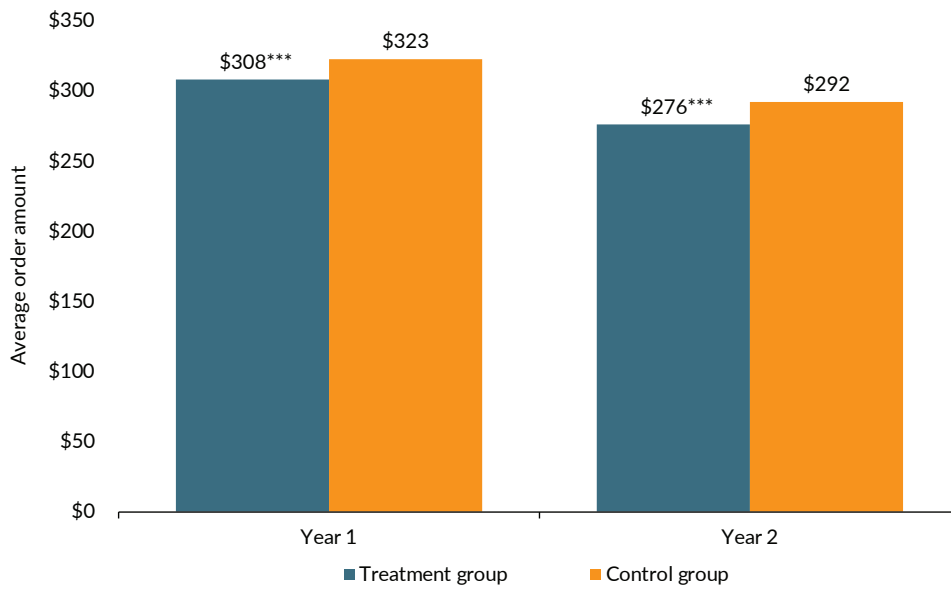
Effects of CSPED on child support outcomes

The primary goal of CSPED was to increase the reliability of child support payments. To assess this, we used three measures: (1) the child support order amount (the amount owed to the custodial parent each month); (2) the amount actually paid towards that monthly order (not counting any payments towards past-due amounts); (3) and compliance with the monthly order, measured as the ratio of child support paid to the amount owed (so, if a noncustodial parent paid \$200 on a \$200 order, compliance would be 100 percent, and if they paid \$100 on the same order, compliance would be 50 percent).

CSPED had a large effect on noncustodial parents' level of satisfaction with child support services.

Consistent with the goal of “right-sizing” child support orders to put them better in line with noncustodial parents' ability to pay, we find that CSPED reduced current child support orders by \$15 to \$16 per month (Figure 2). While both the treatment and the control groups saw a decline in their order amounts, the treatment group had a larger decline. This finding may reflect the fact that, as part of the enhanced child support services component, the CSPED treatment included a review of child support orders with order modifications requested if appropriate. Given the low income and work history levels among the CSPED target population, we expected that most modifications would result in lower order amounts. Along with the decrease in order amounts, we also found a corresponding small

Figure 2. CSPED reduced current child support orders by \$15 to \$16 per month.

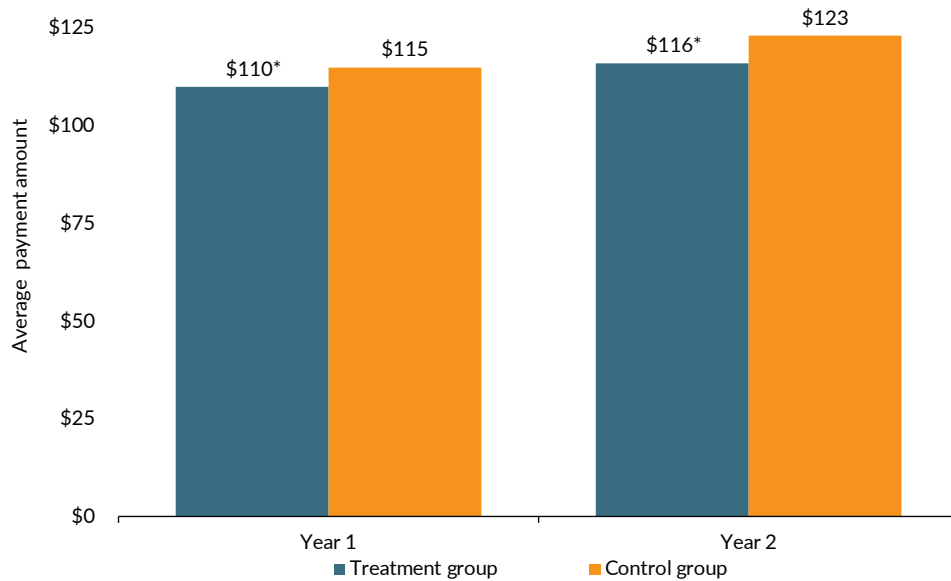


Source: Administrative data.

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally. Child support outcomes from administrative data are based on the 9,703 participants for whom administrative data were available.

*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

Figure 3. CSPED led to a small reduction in current child support payments, of about \$4 to \$6 per month over the first two years.



Source: Administrative data.

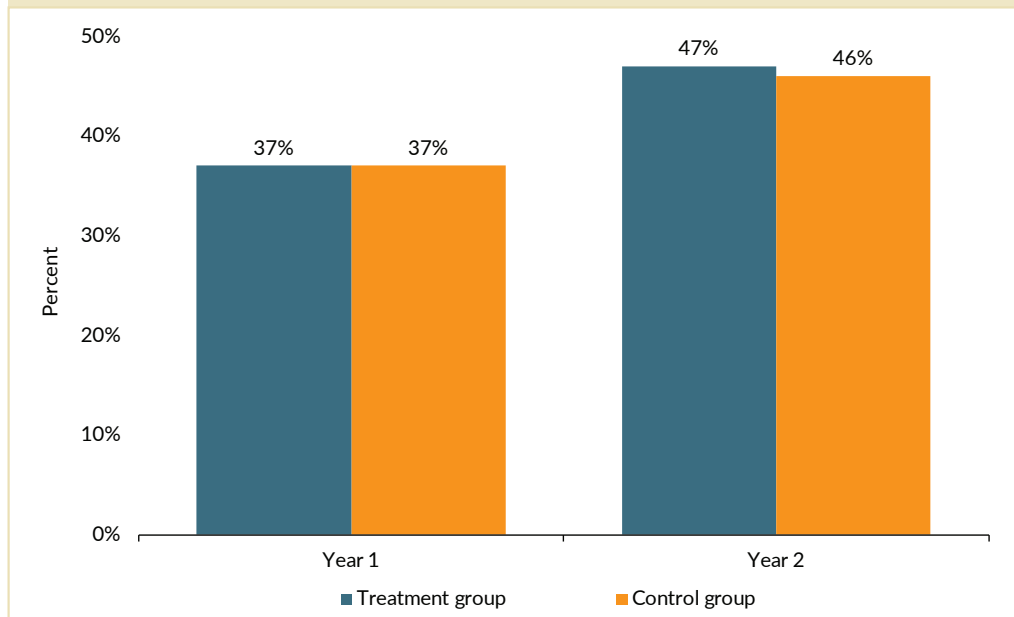
Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally. Child support outcomes from administrative data are based on the 9,703 participants for whom administrative data were available.

* Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .1 level, two-tailed test.

reduction in current child support payments, of about \$4 to \$6 per month over the first two years (Figure 3). Note that payments increased from Year One to Year Two for both groups, but by a larger amount for the control group compared to the treatment group. The decline in payments held in our base model, but it was not robust to alternative specifications or analyses.

The primary measure used to assess progress towards CSPED's central goal of improving the reliability of child support payments was child support compliance, the ratio of child support paid to the amount owed. We find no effect of CSPED on this measure, as shown in Figure 4. The proportion of child support paid in the first year was 37 percent for both groups, increasing in the second year by about 10 percentage points for both groups. While the treatment group had slightly higher compliance in the second year, the difference was not statistically significant.

Figure 4. CSPED had no effect on child support compliance, the ratio of child support paid to the amount owed.

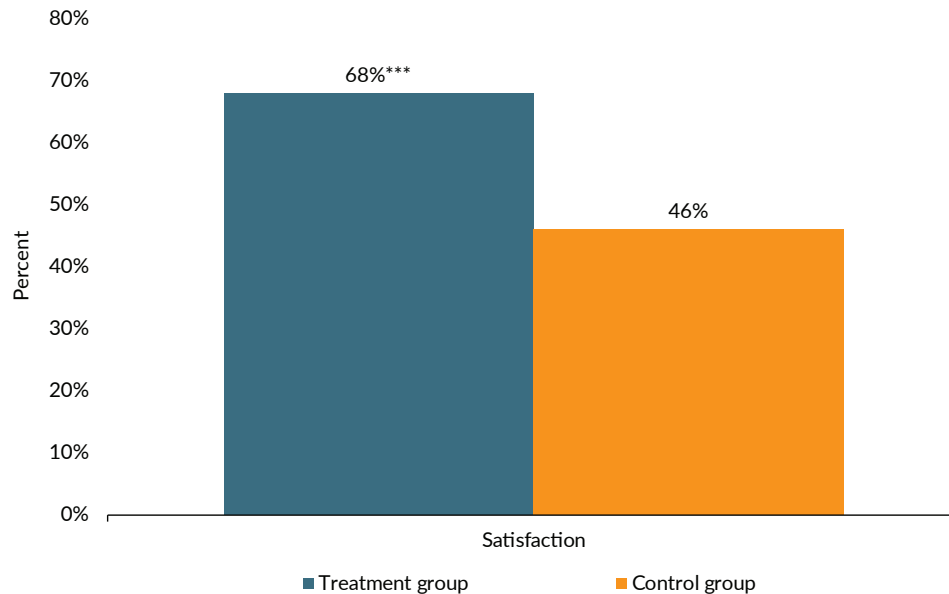


Source: Administrative data.

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally. Child support outcomes from administrative data are based on the 9,703 participants for whom administrative data were available.

While CSPED had only modest effects (or no effects) on various child support outcomes, it did have a large effect on noncustodial parents' level of satisfaction with child support services. Nearly 70 percent of parents in the treatment group reported that they were satisfied, compared to less than half of those in the control group (Figure 5). Improving noncustodial parents' opinion of the child support program was a key element of the CSPED model, reflecting concerns that many low-income noncustodial parents had negative attitudes about the program, which then reduced their cooperation with it.³ Thus an increase in satisfaction is important since it suggests that there are steps that child support programs can take to reduce noncustodial parents' dissatisfaction, which could increase cooperation and, over a longer time period, lead to better child support payment outcomes.

Figure 5. CSPED substantially improved noncustodial parents' level of satisfaction with child support services.



Source: Follow-up survey.

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally.

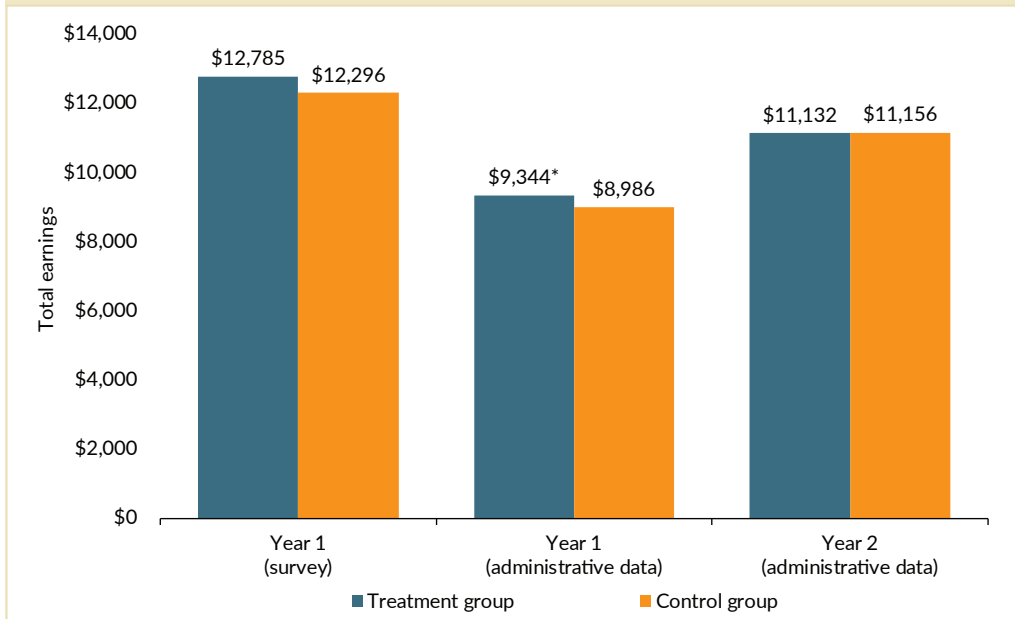
*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

Effects of CSPED on labor market outcomes

CSPED was also intended to help participants find and keep employment, which was then expected to improve noncustodial parents' economic well-being, and increase their ability to pay child support. We use both survey and administrative data to examine the effect 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 rely on participants' memory. 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, and are available for two years following enrollment. We find no effect of CSPED on the duration of participant employment. In the participant survey, noncustodial parents in both groups reported working, on average, a total of about 1,000 hours and during about seven months in the first year. Similarly, using administrative data we find that noncustodial parents in both groups were employed for just over four out of eight quarters in the two years after random assignment.

CSPED significantly increased contact of noncustodial parents with their nonresident children over the prior month by one day, and decreased use of harsh discipline strategies among respondents who had in-person contact with nonresident children.

Figure 6. CSPED increased participants' earnings according to administrative data in the first year after random assignment but not the second; this finding is not reflected in participant reports from survey data.



Source: Follow-up survey and administrative data.

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally.

* Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .1 level, two-tailed test.

Based on an analysis of administrative data, CSPED increased participants' earnings by about 4 percent in the first year, though this effect did not persist to the second year, nor is it reflected in noncustodial parent reports of first-year earnings in the participant survey (Figure 6).

Effects of CSPED on parenting outcomes

The third and final major area that CSPED was intended to address was parenting. 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 treatment group had an average score of 4.27, compared with an average of 4.22 for those in the control group.

We also find that CSPED significantly increased contact of noncustodial parents with their nonresident children over the prior month by one day, and decreased use of harsh discipline strategies among respondents who had in-person contact with nonresident children. However, there were no effects on any of the

Other effects of CSPED

In addition to the effects described on child support, labor market, and parenting outcomes, we find:

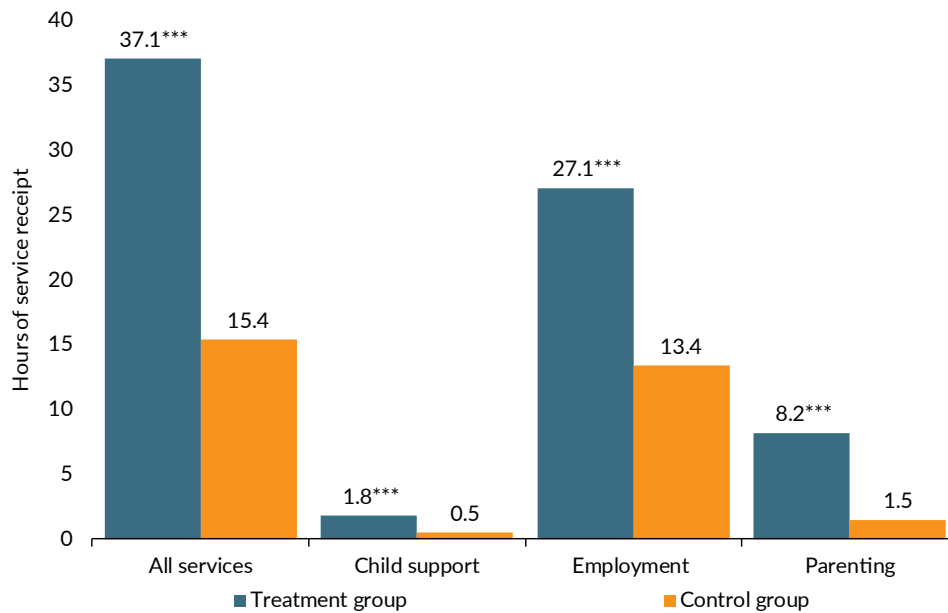
- No effect on criminal justice involvement.
- No effect on emotional well-being.
- Some positive effects on economic well-being: less housing instability, more participants with bank accounts, and higher personal income in the first year.
- Some effects on measures of benefit program use: increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) benefits and Medicaid months in the second year.

other additional parenting measures including confidence in parenting skills, the quality of relationships with children, parenting activities, or parental warmth.

Reasons for the relatively modest CSPED effects

Several factors may have contributed to the relatively modest effects found in the CSPED impact evaluation. First, the program targeted a very disadvantaged population of noncustodial parents; as noted in the first article in this issue, most participants had low levels of education, many had little recent work experience, and nearly two-thirds had been incarcerated. The services provided through CSPED may not have been sufficient to overcome these barriers to employment.

Figure 7. Those in the treatment group did receive more services than those in the control group.



Source: Follow-up survey.

Notes: Impacts are adjusted using a pooled regression controlling for participant's baseline characteristics. Impact estimates are calculated using a weighted average of state-level impacts in which all states are weighted equally.

*** Impact estimates are statistically significant at the .01 level, two-tailed test.

Second, CSPED was a relatively modest intervention. Noncustodial parents in the treatment group reported receiving, on average, 37 hours of employment, parenting, or child support services in the first year after enrollment, compared to 15 hours for the control group, a difference of about 22 hours (Figure 7). Given the substantial barriers to employment faced by many CSPED participants, a more intensive set of services may be required in order to improve labor market outcomes to a sufficient degree to permit noncustodial parents to meet their child support obligations.

Third, programs like CSPED that aim to change both the nature of the relationship between agencies and participants and the culture of the agencies themselves can be difficult to evaluate. For example, changes in the attitudes of child support staff towards punitive enforcement tools may have affected not only those in the treatment group, but also those in the control group. Finally, CSPED is a new program, evaluated over a fairly short period of time. Child support program staff were using these approaches for the first time, and often

working with new partner agencies in order to deliver them. Given more time for staff to develop and strengthen these new strategies and partnerships, the program may have become more effective. In addition, although effects were measured over only a two-year period, we did identify two important changes in attitude among noncustodial parents, in their higher degree of satisfaction with the child support program, and their greater sense of responsibility for their nonresident children. These shifts in attitude may result in effects that develop over time and eventually result in increased reliability in child support payments.

CSPED benefits and costs

The CSPED evaluation also included a benefit-cost analysis. To establish the costs of CSPED, we compared the average cost of serving a noncustodial parent in the treatment group (\$2,647), to the average cost per participant to provide child support services to those in the control group (\$142) and found that the additional cost of CSPED services was \$2,505 per participant.

We estimate that CSPED's total benefit to society relative to the control group was \$1,663 per participant over the two-year study period. To develop this estimate, we looked at benefits for a range of affected parties. Custodial parents and children benefited from CSPED by a total of \$852 per participant over the two-year period. These benefits resulted in part from increased earnings and increased public welfare. For noncustodial parents, the net benefit of CSPED over the two years was on average \$546 per participant. Increased noncustodial parent earnings, fringe benefits, and SNAP receipt contributed to this total. Finally, from the government's perspective, CSPED generated \$244 in benefits per person over the study period, primarily from the reduction in child support enforcement activities.

The CSPED results suggest that while increasing the reliability of child support payments is challenging, there is potential for having a more collaborative and less punitive relationship between the child support program and noncustodial parents.

Over the two-year follow-up period, benefits from CSPED did not outweigh the costs of the program. However, we project that over a ten-year rather than two-year follow-up period, the benefits of CSPED could exceed the program operation costs. Full details of this analysis can be found in the CSPED benefit-cost analysis report.⁴

Conclusions and policy implications

The evaluation showed that CSPED had modest effects on child support order amounts, an even smaller (and less robust) impact on payments, but no effect on child support compliance, the outcome chosen to gauge the program's progress towards its central goal of increasing the reliability of child support. There is also some evidence that CSPED modestly increased noncustodial parents' earnings, although these effects did not continue into the second year of follow-up. Since relatively few employment programs have been shown to increase the earnings of low-income adults, and particularly low-income men, these results are promising, though they highlight the continuing challenge of finding policy approaches that will improve labor market outcomes for low-income adults.⁵

CSPED did greatly increase noncustodial parents' level of satisfaction with the child support program. This is important since noncustodial parents' negative experiences may contribute to nonpayment of support. Another notable result is that CSPED increased noncustodial parents' sense of responsibility for their children. This finding is similar to recent results from the Parents and Children Together evaluation, which found that responsible fatherhood programs offering employment, parenting, and relationship services improved several aspects of participants' parenting behavior.⁶

The CSPED results suggest that while increasing the reliability of child support payments is challenging, there is potential for having a more collaborative and less punitive relationship between the child support program and noncustodial parents. In fact, new federal child support regulations currently being implemented by states continue the evolution of the child support program.⁷ For example, states are to employ additional efforts to ensure that orders are consistent with noncustodial parents' ability to pay, and address some of the challenges facing incarcerated noncustodial parents. These efforts to better match child support orders to noncustodial parents' resources are consistent with the CSPED model, and represent a potentially more productive approach to providing sufficient support to children in lower income families. ■

The three authors were the CSPED Principal Investigators; Maria Cancian is Dean of the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University and an IRP Affiliate; Daniel R. Meyer is Professor of Social Work at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and an IRP Affiliate; Robert G. Wood is Senior Fellow at Mathematica Policy Research.

¹M. Cancian, D. R. Meyer, and R. G. Wood, "Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration," Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin–Madison, March 2019. Available at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CSPED-Final-Impact-Report-2019-Compliant.pdf>

²Note that the CSPED program refers to the treatment group as the "extra services" group, and the control group as the "regular services" group.

³J. Noyes, L. K. Vogel, and L. Howard, "Final Implementation Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration Evaluation," Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin–Madison, December 2018. Available at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CSPED-Final-ImplementationReport-2019-Compliant.pdf>

⁴Q. Moore, K. A. Magnuson, and A. Y. Wu, "Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration: Findings from the Benefit-Cost Analysis," University of Wisconsin–Madison, March 2019. Available at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CSPED-Final-Benefit-Cost-Analysis-Report-2019.pdf>

⁵S. Avellar, R. Covington, Q. Moore, A. Patnaik, and A. Wu, *Parents and Children Together: Effects of Four Responsible Fatherhood Programs for Low-Income Fathers*, OPRE Report 2018-50, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children

Type of analyses: Impact and benefit-cost, using a random-assignment design. Because outcomes were measured for all noncustodial parents in each group, regardless of the amount of services received, this is an "intent-to-treat" (ITT) analysis. 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?"

Data sources:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Administrative data on child support, public benefits receipt, and criminal justice involvement, which were collected for 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. Availability of other administrative data was more limited.

Type of data: Administrative and survey

Unit of analysis: Individuals

Sample definition: 10,161 noncustodial parents

Time frame: October 2013 through September 2017

Limitations: Program participation data were entered by CSPED staff in each state. Data were reviewed monthly by OCSE and program staff, but not formally checked against case files or other records. Survey data are self-reported and rely on participants' memory. Child support administrative data were based on each state's system, and not all elements are comparable across systems.

and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018. Available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/pact_rf_impacts_to_opre_508.pdf; A. Mastri and J. Hartog, *Gaps in the Evidence on Employment and Training for Low-Income Adults*, OPRE Report 2016-106. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016. Available at www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/eser_ib_gaps_111616_508.pdf; E. Sama-Miller, A. Maccarone, A. Mastri, and K. Borradaile, "Assessing the Evidence Base: Strategies that Support Employment for Low-Income Adults," OPRE Report 2016-58. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, November 2016. Available at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/eser_ib_summary_110116_508.pdf

⁶Avellar et al, *Parents and Children Together*.

⁷Flexibility, Efficiency, and Modernization of Child Support Enforcement Programs, Final Rule, 45 C.F.R. § 301–305, 307 (2016).

Do low-income noncustodial fathers “trade” earlier families for newer ones?

Lawrence M. Berger, Maria Cancian, Angela Guarin, and Daniel R. Meyer

TAKEAWAYS

We find no evidence for the idea of “trading” families—that noncustodial fathers stop providing financial resources to earlier families in favor of newer ones.

Fathers may prioritize their newer families by providing slightly more informal support to them compared to earlier families.

The formal child support system appears to be working as intended in terms of ensuring support to all noncustodial children.



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In the United States, it is becoming increasingly common for parents to have children with more than one partner. This type of family complexity raises issues for any social policy that relies on family structure, including social security, income taxes, and child support; in this article, we look in particular at the implications for the child support system. One important challenge is specifying the rights and responsibilities of parents who live apart from their children, and whether these change in the event that one parent has children with a new partner. We focus on noncustodial fathers who have had children with more than one mother, and determine how support they provide to children from an earlier relationship compares to support provided to their youngest child (from a newer relationship). Our study is one of the few that includes measures of the total amount of economic support (not only formal child support and informal cash support, but also informal in-kind support) that noncustodial fathers provide to their nonresident children.¹

Our research questions include:

- Were fathers more or less likely to report providing formal or informal support to their oldest or youngest nonresident child from different relationships?
- Did the amount of formal or informal support that fathers report providing differ between their oldest and youngest nonresident child from different relationships?

Complex families and child support

Over the past 50 years, American families have changed dramatically, as more people are having children outside of marriage, more unmarried couples are living together, and many parents have children with more than one partner. In the study described here, we consider the implications of this last type of complexity—specifically, noncustodial fathers with nonresident children in multiple families—for child support.

Formal child support

The child support system is intended to ensure that noncustodial parents contribute financially to the upbringing of their nonresident children. Each state must develop a set of child support guidelines that specify how child support order amounts are to be calculated. When noncustodial parents (usually fathers) have children in multiple families, determining the appropriate amount to be paid to each child presents a particular challenge.² One approach is to treat multiple families as an ordered series of simple families, calculating the amount owed by a father to his children with his first partner, without regard to any later children, and then continuing to calculate orders for each subsequent family sequentially. Because any income allocated to the first partner in the form of a child support order is not considered as income in calculated orders to subsequent families, this strategy generally leads to larger orders for older children (see example A). An alternative approach is to require equal obligations to all children, regardless of birth order (see

Two approaches to calculating orders for parents with multiple families

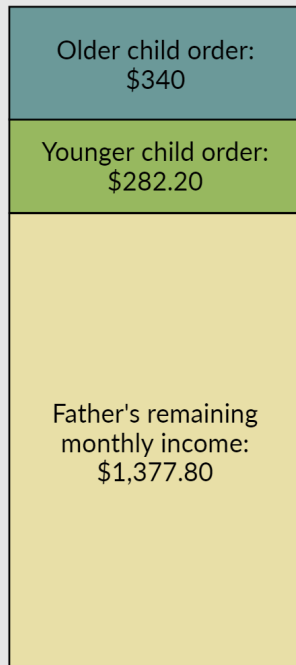
A father has two children, each with a different mother.

He has a monthly income of \$2,000.

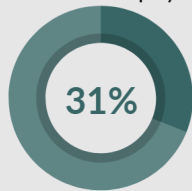
Each mother is owed 17% of his income.

Example A: Serial Child Support Orders

Father pays oldest child 17% of \$2,000. The younger child's payment is calculated based on the father's remaining income.



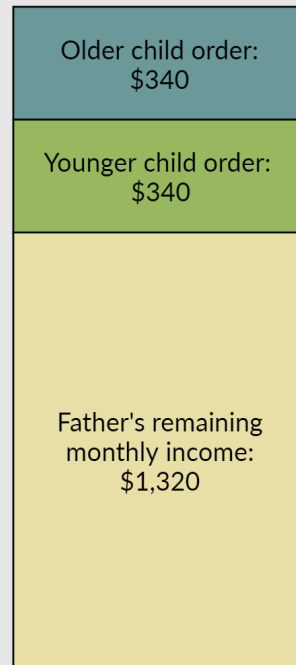
The father pays



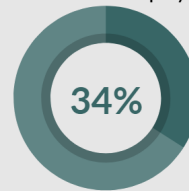
of his income in child support.

Example B: Equal Orders to all Children

Each child's payment is calculated as 17% of the father's \$2,000 monthly income.



The father pays



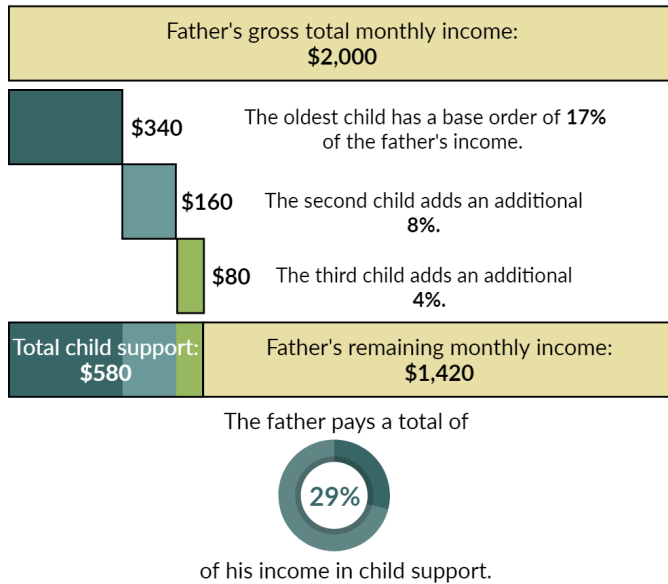
of his income in child support.

example B). With either of these approaches, the distribution of child support payments is out of the noncustodial father's hands. The formal child support system does not account for noncustodial parent preference—for example, if a noncustodial parent feels more connected to their more recently born children and thus wants to provide more to them.

State child support guidelines generally specify that the amount of child support is larger when there are more children included in a single order, though the amount added to the order declines for each additional child (see example C). So, for example, the amount a father owes for two children with the same mother would be less than twice what he would have owed for a single child. This approach assumes economies of scale—that some costs, such as housing, do not increase proportionally with each additional child—for fathers providing support for children who live in the same household.³ This approach is relatively straightforward when a father has children with only one partner, but becomes more complicated when children live in multiple households, some of which may include

Example C: Single order for multiple children

A father has three children, all with the same mother.
He has a monthly income of \$2,000.



children of other resident or nonresident fathers. In these cases, it is harder to determine whether and how economies of scale apply.

While family complexity clearly poses considerable challenges for the child support system, both in terms of providing adequate support to each child and ensuring equity across custodial parents, noncustodial parents, and children, formal child support is only one of the ways that noncustodial parents can provide for their children. In addition to formal child support, they may also provide informal cash or in-kind support—that is, providing items such as food, diapers, clothing, or school supplies. (See text box for definitions of terms.) Some research has been done on the interaction between formal and informal child support, and other dimensions of involvement such as father-child contact.⁴ For example, when children are born outside marriage, having a stronger child support enforcement system is associated with a higher probability that mothers will receive formal child support, but a lower likelihood that they will receive informal cash support.⁵ Research in this area has also considered whether formal and informal support are substitutes or complements, taking into account that informal child support is discretionary while formal support is not; there is some evidence that when fathers provide informal support, they pay less towards formal child support obligations.⁶ However, little is known about the provision of formal and informal support when fathers have obligations to multiple families.

Providing support to multiple families

Overall, fewer than half of custodial mothers who are owed formal child support receive the full amount due in any given year. The total amount of support provided by noncustodial fathers—formal

Definitions of child support terms:

Formal support: Financial support mandated by the courts.

Informal support: Any other support provided by the noncustodial parent to the custodial parent, including:

- Informal cash support
- In-kind support (provision of items such as food, diapers, clothing, or school supplies)

support, informal cash, and in-kind contributions—depends primarily on fathers’ ability and willingness to provide resources. Current evidence suggests that a significant number of fathers have limited financial ability to support their nonresident children.⁷ Because economically disadvantaged men are disproportionately likely to have children with more than one partner and, as noted above, economies of scale are less straightforward when children are in multiple families, few fathers have sufficient resources to provide adequate levels of economic support to all of their children when they are in multiple households.⁸ Noncustodial fathers’ willingness to provide for their children also matters. While noncustodial fathers’ incomes increase over time on average, the provision of informal support tends to decline.⁹ Indeed, informal and in-kind support are most common during the first few months after a couple separates, and then decline over time. This may be because noncustodial fathers are more likely than resident biological fathers to experience ambiguity about being a parent, and the expectations and responsibilities that come with that role.¹⁰ This ambiguity may increase over time, particularly if parents re-partner and have new children, perhaps reducing the extent to which fathers interact with their children and participate in decision making. Thus, fathers might have less sense of responsibility for the financial support of their older children.¹¹ In contrast, provision of formal support tends to increase over time, most likely as a result of both increasing involvement with the child support enforcement system and increases over time in fathers’ means to provide support.¹²

Some fathers may feel that they must choose between providing inadequate resources to all of their children, or else prioritizing some children over others.

Researchers have hypothesized that when fathers or mothers re-partner and have new children, noncustodial fathers have a reduced sense of connection and obligation to nonresident children, and thus their willingness to provide support, particularly informal support, declines. The limited research that has been done to date supports this hypothesis.¹³ When mothers begin a new relationship, noncustodial fathers may expect or assume that the new partner will take on responsibility for supporting the mother and all of her children. This may particularly be the case when the mother and her new partner have a child together. When fathers have children with a new partner, their sense of responsibility may shift towards the new family, both because their new partner and child are more present in their life, and because of their new partner’s expectations of them.

Given these patterns and the fact that many fathers with multiple families lack the resources to provide full support to all of their nonresident children, some may feel that they must choose between providing inadequate resources to all of their children, or else prioritizing some children over others. Some researchers have examined whether fathers prioritize their children from more recent relationships to the extent that they “trade” families—stop providing resources to earlier families in favor of new ones. There are, in fact, a few recent studies suggesting that, to some extent, noncustodial fathers do contribute greater financial resources to the children of their most recent relationship.¹⁴ There may, however, be explanations for unequal contributions other than trading families. In particular, more recent families by definition include younger children, and parents tend to spend more on younger compared to older children.¹⁵ Thus, any analysis of whether or not noncustodial parents trade families must account for differences in child age—as we discuss below.

Methods

In order to examine how noncustodial fathers distribute formal, informal cash, and in-kind support to children across multiple families, and the extent to which levels and types of support differ for nonresident children from more and less recent relationships, we use data from the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), described in the previous articles in this issue. Our sample is 2,765 noncustodial fathers who are behind in their child support payments and have at least two minor children from different families. We use data from a baseline survey administered to all participants prior to random assignment and program participation.¹⁶ For each father, we use data for his youngest and oldest nonresidential children from different families. Our outcome measures are self-reported formal child support, informal child support, in-kind support, and total support (the three types added together) paid in the month preceding the baseline survey. For each type of support, we take note of whether support was provided, and if so, how much.

Our main analyses use logit and ordinary least squares regressions, and we incorporate sensitivity tests to check the robustness of our results. Because we are interested in assessing differences in support provided by noncustodial fathers to their oldest and youngest child from different relationships, we control for a variety of factors associated with noncustodial fathers' investments in children, including fathers' socioeconomic and background characteristics. We also control for demographic and other characteristics specific to each child. A particular challenge is how to control for child age. We are interested in whether a father provides different support to a child from his more recent relationship, but this child is, by definition, younger than a child from a less recent relationship. As noted above, parents tend to spend more on younger children, and in particular, previous research suggests that older children in lower-income families are less likely to receive in-kind support compared to younger children.¹⁷

If we do not control for the age of each child, we could find more support provided for the youngest nonresident child simply because the child is younger, and not because the child is from the most recent relationship. We use a series of indicator variables to control for child age, with an additional indicator for whether a child is from the most recent relationship. In our sensitivity tests, we use different approaches.

Do low-income noncustodial fathers trade families?

Characteristics of the noncustodial fathers in our sample are shown in the text box. Overall this is a disadvantaged sample, which is expected as all participants were behind in their child support payments, had employment difficulties, and had children with more than one partner. Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for the provision of formal, informal cash, in-kind, and total support reported by our analysis sample. We find that both the likelihood of formal payment and the amount paid increase with a child's age. For example, fathers provided formal support to 25 percent of children age 3 or younger, averaging \$50 per month, compared to 36 percent of teenagers, averaging \$71 per month. Some of this difference has to do with the existence and amount of formal child support orders; fathers owed support to 61 percent of the youngest children, averaging \$127 per month, compared to 83 percent of teenagers, averaging \$184 per month. In contrast to the results for formal

Characteristics of noncustodial fathers in the sample:

- They had, on average, four children with three different mothers;
- Average age was 35 years;
- They generally had low levels of educational attainment—more than one-quarter had less than 12 years of education, and only 29 percent had more than a high school diploma or a GED;
- Forty-four percent had not worked in the prior month, and only 18 percent had earned more than \$800 in that month;
- More than three-quarters had been convicted of a crime;
- One-fifth had experienced depression;
- Fifty-seven percent identified as non-Hispanic black or African American, 24 percent as non-Hispanic white, and 13 percent as Hispanic or Latino; and
- More than half had never been married, while only 11 percent were currently married.

Table 1. The likelihood and amount of formal child support increase with child's age, while the likelihood and amount of informal cash and in-kind support decrease.

Variable	Child Age 0-3	Child Age 4-6	Child Age 7-12	Child Age 13+
	Mean/Percent	Mean/Percent	Mean/Percent	Mean/Percent
Paid formal cash support in last month	24.5%	32.3%	33.6%	35.9%
Average amount of formal support paid last month	\$49.70	\$68.70	\$69.90	\$70.50
Paid informal cash support in last month	52.7%	39.8%	37.1%	34.2%
Average amount of informal support paid last month	\$71.50	\$55.00	\$47.20	\$43.70
Provided informal in-kind support in last month	60.6%	50.4%	45.9%	35.6%
Average amount of informal in-kind support provided last month	\$72.10	\$63.60	\$57.20	\$47.50
Paid formal, informal or in-kind support in last month	75.1%	70.0%	66.6%	61.9%
Average amount of total (formal, informal and in-kind) support paid last month	\$193.40	\$187.20	\$174.30	\$161.70

payments, we find that both the likelihood and amount of informal cash and in-kind support decline with child's age.

The variation in payment with age of child further highlights the importance of adjusting for age, among other factors. Table 2 shows regression results for the probability and amounts of support paid to the youngest and oldest child, with all control variables included. For formal support, we find that the youngest and oldest child are about equally likely to receive support, and to receive similar amounts. For informal and in-kind support, however, we find consistent evidence that fathers are more likely to provide support to their youngest child. The probability that fathers provide informal cash support to their youngest child is 6 percentage points higher than the probability that they provide it to their oldest child, and the probability that they provide in-kind support is 4 percentage points higher. The differences in the amounts provided, however, are small and statistically nonsignificant. When we consider all types of support together, we find that the probability that fathers provide any support to the youngest child is 5 percentage points higher, but again we detect no statistically significant difference in the total amount.

Looking at other factors that affect payment (that is, the variables included in the regression analysis as controls), we find that, consistent with prior research, fathers are less likely to

Table 2. After controlling for child age and other factors, fathers are more likely to pay informal cash or in-kind support (but not formal support) to their youngest child, but there is no difference in the amounts paid.

	Probability of payment (marginal effect)	Amount of payment (coefficient)
Formal child support	0.00	-9.16
Informal cash	0.06***	5.84
In-kind	0.04**	6.07
Any support	0.05***	2.51

Notes: Table shows regression results for youngest child relative to oldest. Each estimate is from a separate regression model. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

provide informal or in-kind support to a custodial parent with a new partner, but are no less likely to provide formal support. This may suggest that fathers do not want to support other men's children.¹⁸ Fathers who report a poorer quality relationship with the child's mother are more likely to pay formal support, but much less likely to provide informal or in-kind support. A more negative assessment of the quality of co-parenting is associated with less informal or in-kind support. These results are consistent with fathers having little discretion in directing formal support to particular children, but more discretion when it comes to informal and in-kind support.

Our sensitivity tests for the most part indicate that our results are robust. However, using some alternate approaches to considering child age, we find that children in the most recent family are not only more likely to receive informal support, but also to receive a greater amount of support.¹⁹

Conclusions and policy implications

Prior research has identified a pattern of “serial fatherhood,” with men having close contact with children from their most recent relationship, but little contact with children from earlier relationships.²⁰ Our result that fathers favor younger children over older children in their provision of informal support is consistent with this fathering pattern. It is possible that over time, relationships between noncustodial fathers and children tend to become less strong. Since fathers can choose whether or not to provide informal support to a given child (while the distribution of formal support is out of their hands), they may opt to direct that informal support to more recent children with whom they have stronger relationships.

Although fathers are more likely to provide informal support to their youngest nonresident child, the average amounts provided do not vary greatly between youngest and oldest children.

Overall, however, our findings do not provide support for a literal version of trading families, in which nonresident fathers stop providing any resources to earlier families in favor of the newest one. In fact, we do not even find very strong support for a less extreme version of family trading, in which fathers provide substantially more resources to their youngest child. Although fathers are more likely to provide informal support to their youngest nonresident child, the average amounts provided do not vary greatly between youngest and oldest children.

This study does have several limitations, which should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, the data used are cross-sectional, meaning they capture information for our sample at a single point in time rather than following the fathers over time. While these data do allow us to assess whether and how much support fathers provide to oldest and youngest children at a point in time, they do not permit us to identify cause and effect. Second, we use fathers' self-reports of support payments, which may be exaggerated to cast them in a better light. Third, our sample includes fathers who are behind in paying child support. While this does limit the extent to which we can generalize these results to other groups of fathers, this population is of particular policy interest, and it is unusual to have a sample of such fathers that is of sufficient size to allow the identification of statistically significant differences.

Despite these constraints, our results have several policy implications. First, they suggest that the child support enforcement program, through which formal payments are channeled, and which is generally intended to ensure support to all noncustodial children, is indeed working as planned. Fathers appear to be choosing to prioritize more recent children through the only payment stream which allows discretion, informal support. If the distribution of formal child support also relied on parental preference, our results suggest that older children might be disadvantaged therein. Thus, given a policy goal of equitable parental responsibility for all nonresident children, our results caution against moving to a child support system such as that adopted in the United Kingdom that allows a greater degree of parental discretion in where child support payments are directed.²¹

Another important finding is that the amount of informal support reported by fathers—whether cash or in-kind—is substantial. The total amount of cash and in-kind informal support reported—\$122 to the youngest child and \$98 to the oldest child—greatly exceeds the \$62 to \$71 that fathers report paying through the formal child support system. If these self-reports are accurate, perhaps the child support system should look for ways to credit fathers for at least a portion of informal support provided.

Our findings also suggest several possible directions for future research. First, similar research could be done on the smaller population of noncustodial mothers, to identify the extent to which payments to multiple families differ from those of fathers. It would also be very helpful to know, given the high levels of informal (including in-kind) support reported by fathers in our sample: (1) how accurate these reports are; (2) what types of in-kind support are being provided; and (3) how these types of support affect child well-being. Future work could also examine the role of state guidelines for the amount of monthly child support ordered, use of enforcement tools, and other policies that are intended to support low-income fathers in the provision of formal child support payments and to promote involvement with their children.

Our study examines a very disadvantaged sample of low-income noncustodial fathers who are behind in their child support payments and tend to have spotty employment histories, low education levels, and criminal backgrounds. It is possible that the number and types of barriers that fathers face matter for the provision of formal and informal child support; we do not specifically test for such differential effects of cumulative disadvantage. Moreover, while we considered only the youngest and oldest nonresident children in this study, future work should also look at the effect on payments of intervening children. Finally, while this study looked solely at financial contributions, an examination of how and how often fathers interact with their children in different families could help us gain a better understanding of how fathers' behaviors affect child well-being. ■

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²¹This article draws on L. M. Berger, M. Cancian, A. Guarin, and D. R. Meyer, “Do Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Trade Families? Economic Contributions to Children in Multiple Families,” *Social Service Review* 93, No. 2 (June 2019): 183–217.

²²M. Cancian and D. R. Meyer, “Who Owes What to Whom? Child Support Policy Given Multiple-Partner Fertility,” *Social Service Review* 85, No. 4 (2011): 587–617.

²³Cancian and Meyer, “Who Owes What to Whom?”

⁴For example, see S. Garasky, E. Peters, L. Argys, S. Cook, L. Nepomnyaschy, and E. Sorensen, “Measuring Support to Children by Nonresident Fathers,” in *Handbook of Measurement Issues in Family Research*, eds. S. L. Hofferth and L. M. Casper (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2007).

⁵L. Nepomnyaschy and I. Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions to their Nonmarital Children,” *Social Service Review* 84, No. 3 (2010): 341–380.

⁶Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions.”

⁷R. B. Mincy and E. J. Sorensen, “Deadbeats and Turnips in Child Support Reform,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 17, No. 1 (1998): 44–51.

⁸D. R. Meyer and M. Cancian, “I’m Not Supporting His Kids’: Nonresident Fathers’ Contributions Given Mothers’ New Fertility,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, No. 1 (2012): 132–151; M. Sinkewicz, Marilyn and I. Garfinkel, “Unwed Fathers’ Ability to Pay Child Support: New Estimates Accounting for Multiple-Partner Fertility,” *Demography* 46, No. 2 (2009): 247–263.

⁹Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions.”

¹⁰L. M. Berger and S. H. Bzostek, “Young Adults’ Roles as Partners and Parents in a Context of Family Complexity,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654, No. 1 (2014): 87–109.

¹¹L. M. Berger, M. Cancian, and D. R. Meyer, “Maternal Re-Partnering and New-Partner Fertility: Associations with Nonresident Father Investments in Children,” *Children and Youth Services Review* 34, No. 2 (2012): 426–436.

¹²Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions.”

¹³Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions”; Meyer and Cancian, “I’m Not Supporting His Kids.”

¹⁴Nepomnyaschy and Garfinkel, “Child Support Enforcement and Fathers’ Contributions”; Berger, Cancian, and Meyer, “Maternal Re-Partnering and New-Partner Fertility”; L. Tach, K. Edin, H. Harvey, and B. Bryan, “The Family-Go-Round: Family Complexity and Father Involvement from a Father’s Perspective,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 654, No. 1 (2014): 169–184.

¹⁵M. Lino, K. Kuczynski, N. Rodriguez, and T. Schap, “Expenditures on Children by Families, 2015,” Miscellaneous Publication No. 1528–2015, United States Department of Agriculture Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion: Washington, DC, 2017.

¹⁶We use data from seven of the eight CSPED states: California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Wisconsin. The eighth state, Texas, used a shorter version of the survey that does not include many of the measures used in our analysis.

¹⁷Garasky et al., “Measuring Support to Children by Nonresident Fathers.”

¹⁸Meyer and Cancian, “I’m Not Supporting His Kids.”

¹⁹See full paper for more detail: Berger, Cancian, Guarin, and Meyer, “Do Low-Income Noncustodial Fathers Trade Families?”

²⁰K. Edin and T. J. Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can: Fatherhood in the Inner City* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013); Tach et al., “The Family-Go-Round.”

²¹In the United Kingdom parents make their own arrangements about child support, including the level to be transferred and how it will be transferred; parents can thus come to their own agreements whether children from one family should be treated differently from children in another family. The child support agency only becomes involved if parents cannot come to agreement, and then they must pay to use the services of the agency.

Type of analysis: Logit and ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions

Data source: Baseline survey from the National Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), which collected information on noncustodial parents’ demographic and socioeconomic characteristics; economic stability; children and relationships; and other background measures.

Type of data: Survey

Unit of analysis: Father-child pairs

Sample definition: Two observations (of support provided for youngest and oldest nonresidential children from different families) for each of 2,765 noncustodial fathers who:

- Had children with more than one partner;
- Had at least two nonresident children of different ages from different partners; and
- Had complete information on all key variables.

Time frame: Surveys were administered at CSPED randomization during the October 2013 through September 2016 enrollment period. Data on formal and informal child support cover the 30 days prior to survey administration.

Limitations:

- Survey data on in-kind support do not identify whether and how the types of in-kind support provided to children vary by age;
- Cross-sectional data (data collected at a particular point in time) limit causal inference;
- Fathers’ report of payments may be exaggerated; and
- Results are for a sample of disadvantaged noncustodial fathers and may not be generalizable to disadvantaged noncustodial mothers or other populations.

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