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Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging Noncustodial Parents in Employment and Other Services

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Abstract

This report, completed as part of the research agreement between the Bureau of Child Support (BCS) and researchers at the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP), examines approaches to overcoming barriers to compliance with formal child support obligations. Child support agencies have historically been specific in mandate and narrow in scope, focused on initiating new child support orders and enforcing existing orders on behalf of children living apart from a parent. However, in recognition that many noncustodial parents who do not meet their child support obligations face employment and other barriers to compliance, some agencies have embarked on a new approach to child support services, with an increased focus on identifying barriers to compliance and providing services to help noncustodial parents overcome them. The Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)'s Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), implemented in Wisconsin and seven other states from 2012 through 2017, is a large-scale example of a recent effort taking such an approach. Within Wisconsin, counties have also sought to leverage resources intended to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers.

The purpose of this report is three-fold. First, the report describes barriers to noncustodial parent compliance with formal child support orders, as identified through interviews conducted for the CSPED evaluation and for the Child Support Policy Research Agreement (Vogel, 2019). Next, the report describes services provided to noncustodial parents, primarily drawing on the experience of CSPED programs, in Wisconsin and in other CSPED grantees. Finally, we estimate the quantitative association between noncustodial parent barriers to compliance with formal support obligations and noncustodial parent participation in services intended to help them overcome these barriers.

Overall, this research finds that an array of factors make it difficult for noncustodial parents to comply with formal support obligations, including limited employment opportunities, low wages, and obligations across multiple families. Child support enforcement practices, and noncustodial parent experiences with the child support system, also contribute to noncustodial parents' ability and willingness to comply with formal support obligations. The complexity and multiplicity of these barriers implies that a multifaceted programmatic approach might be necessary to facilitate engagement in services and compliance with obligations. We identify potential policy implications of these findings, as well as programmatic supports and resources for future consideration.

Challenges and Opportunities for Engaging Noncustodial Parents in Employment and Other Services

BACKGROUND

Changes in family demographic patterns, together with changes to the social safety net, have contributed to the centrality of child support as an income source for many families. Almost a third of children in the United States did not live with both parents in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017), and in 2016, 37 percent of Wisconsin births were to unmarried mothers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Despite its importance as a resource for single parents and children, most custodial parent families do not receive the full amount of child support they are owed. In 2015, only 44 percent of all custodial parents (and 39 percent of custodial parents living in poverty) received all of the child support they were owed (Grall, 2018). Noncustodial fathers behind on paying child support are often maligned as "deadbeat dads," unwilling to financially support their children (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Sorensen & Zibman, 2001). However, a more complex array of factors, reflecting father constraints and preferences, might contribute to lack of financial support from some noncustodial fathers, especially when child support orders represent a large proportion of a noncustodial father's income. Given the importance of child support as a financial resource for many families, and the gap between child support owed and received, attaining a better understanding of why some fathers do not meet their formal support obligations is an important step in helping to improve the well-being of children in single-parent families.

Historically, the child support system has been specific in mandate and narrow in scope. Child support agencies have focused on initiating new child support orders and enforcing existing orders on behalf of children living apart from a parent. Child support agencies can refer parents to outside services, but historically have generally been disallowed from using federal

child support dollars for provision of employment or other services to increase capacity to pay child support (Solomon-Fears, 2013). Thus, experiences between child support agencies and noncustodial fathers have traditionally been payment- and enforcement-oriented (Miller & Knox, 2001). Despite this historical relationship, in recognition that many parents who do not meet their child support obligations face employment and other barriers to compliance, some child support agencies have sought innovative means to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers to paying child support. These efforts range from large-scale, federally-funded demonstration projects—such as the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)'s Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED), implemented in Wisconsin and several other states from 2012 through 2017—to state and local efforts to leverage available resources in order to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers.

This report represents an effort to better understand the factors that affect noncustodial parents' compliance with formal child support obligations, and to identify potential policy and practice solutions that could help increase compliance among noncustodial parents behind on their support payments. It analyzes information from two sources—the CSPED evaluation and Task 4A of the 2016–2018 Child Support Policy Research Agreement (CSPRA) (Vogel, 2019)—in order to identify barriers to child support compliance, and empirically test the relationship between some of these barriers and engagement in services intended to help overcome them. The outline of this report is as follows. We begin with a brief overview of previous literature on barriers to child support compliance. Next, we describe programmatic approaches to addressing these compliance barriers in Wisconsin and seven other states through the CSPED demonstration. We then describe the current study, and provide empirical findings on barriers to child support compliance identified through staff interviews. Finally, building upon the

empirically-identified factors affecting compliance, we examine the quantitative relationship between some of these barriers to compliance and engagement in services intended to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers. We conclude with policy implications of these findings, and a discussion of potential programmatic supports and resources for consideration.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON FACTORS AFFECTING CHILD SUPPORT COMPLIANCE

The child support system has been generally successful in facilitating payments to children whose parents were once married, but divorced, and those whose noncustodial parent has a moderate and regular source of income. The system is less successful in securing financial support from low-income families, especially those in which the parents were never married (Cancian & Meyer, 2018). A wide array of factors affect formal child support payments from noncustodial fathers. These factors are organized below into Bartfeld and Meyer's (2003) conceptual categories: ability to pay, incentives to comply (or willingness to pay), and strength of the enforcement system.

Ability to Pay

Four factors emerge from the literature as particularly important for ability to pay formal support. First, noncustodial parent income is positively associated with paying child support (Bartfeld & Meyer, 1994; see also Danziger & Nichols-Casebolt, 1990; Sonenstein & Calhoun, 1990). In many cases the children and mothers most in need of economic support, such as those receiving TANF, are associated with fathers who are also poorly positioned to provide for children financially (Cancian & Meyer, 2004), and a segment of noncustodial fathers remains impoverished across the lifespan (Meyer & Cancian, 2012; Mincy & Sorensen, 1998; Sorensen & Zibman, 2001). Next, for low-income noncustodial fathers, high-burden child support orders

make it difficult for low-income noncustodial fathers to cover their own expenses while also financially contributing to the needs of their children (Cancian & Meyer, 2004; Huang, Mincy & Garfinkel, 2005). High-burden formal support orders for low-income obligors are associated with reduced compliance (Bartfeld & Meyer, 1994; Huang et al., 2005; Meyer, Ha, and Hu, 2008), but are also associated with higher payments (Meyer et al., 2008). Third, competing obligations affect ability to pay. When a noncustodial father re-partners and has more children, his sense of responsibility to provide for new children may trump obligations to other children outside the home, when his resources are insufficient to meet his obligations to all of his children (Cancian & Meyer, 2004; Manning & Smock, 2000). Further, if he has a new child with a new partner, his total obligation generally increases; thus, having children with new partners often results in an increase in the ratio of income due for child support relative to retained income (Sinkewicz & Garfinkel, 2009). Finally, enforcement actions taken by the state can affect ability to pay. Driver license suspension for failure to pay support impedes employment and introduces the risk of legal trouble if noncustodial fathers chose to drive to work despite a suspension, and suspension of professional licenses can impede employment for fathers who work in professions that require a license. Contempt proceedings and resultant incarceration can cause fathers to miss work and lose employment (Pate, 2002).

Willingness to Pay

Previous empirical work identifies multiple factors affecting a noncustodial father's willingness to pay support. First, actions taken by the child support system can affect willingness to pay. Many fathers find that they owe substantial arrears to custodial mothers and the state upon paternity establishment, due to retroactive orders for support, birthing costs, and administrative or testing fees. Accrual of arrears and interest leads some fathers to feel their debt

cannot ever be overcome, and can demotivate them from trying (Maldonado, 2005). The prospect of paying down large debt on limited wages contributes to some fathers evading the system by working outside the formal job market (Cancian, Heinrich, & Chung, 2013; Heinrich, Burkhardt, & Shager, 2011; Miller & Mincy, 2012; Pate, 2002; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). Next, prior experiences with the system demotivate some fathers from complying. The complexity of the child support and legal system contributes to some noncustodial fathers' feelings of discouragement, resentment, and unwillingness to comply, as can state withholding of child support payments to offset the costs of public benefits. Similarly, fathers who have experienced the child support system as unfair, inflexible, uncaring, and punitive sometimes choose to evade the system (Edin & Nelson, 2013; Pate, 2002; Waller & Plotnick, 2001). Third, paternal attachment to children and frequency of contact with children are positively associated with willingness to pay support (Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010). For noncustodial fathers without visitation orders for their children, lack of access to their children can frustrate fathers and demotivate compliance (Edin & Nelson, 2013). Additionally, studies have produced mixed findings on the relationship between custodial parent income and compliance, ranging from a negative relationship (Beron, 1988; Peterson & Nord, 1990; Sonenstein & Calhoun, 1990), to a positive relationship (Smock & Manning, 1997), to differential outcomes by income levels (Meyer & Bartfeld, 1996).

Finally, preferences for informal support over formal support payments among some noncustodial and custodial parents can affect willingness to pay formal support. Many noncustodial fathers make informal cash support payments, or provide in-kind goods (such as diapers or groceries), to custodial parents and children. In 2015, 63 percent of custodial mothers who were owed formal support reported receipt of in-kind support from their child's father

(Grall, 2018). Kane, Nelson, and Edin (2015) find that low-income fathers provide a higher proportion of total support as in-kind support than as formal or informal monetary support. Low-income noncustodial fathers often prefer informal support to formal support because it allows them to: determine what kind, how much, and when to provide it (Waller & Plotnick, 2001); to pay when they have resources available (Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010; Sorensen & Zibman 2001; Waller & Plotnick 2001); to strengthen relationships with children (Kane et al., 2015; Pate, 2002); and to target support to specific children by providing support directly to that child (Meyer & Cancian, 2012). Some low-income mothers prefer informal support due to state practices of withholding child support from TANF recipients to offset public assistance costs (Cancian, Meyer, & Caspar, 2008; Edin & Lein, 1997; Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010). However, informal support is less predictable in frequency and amount, and diminishes with time (Nepomnyaschy & Garfinkel, 2010) and as families change (Berger, Cancian & Meyer, 2012; Meyer & Cancian, 2012).

Strength of the Enforcement System

Prior research has generally found an association between stronger enforcement and higher compliance rates or increased payments (Bartfeld & Meyer, 2003; Garfinkel, Miller, McLanahan, & Hanson, 1998; Freeman & Waldfogel, 2001). Beller and Graham (1991) found that child support enforcement tools were generally more effective at increasing the amount of child support paid by obligors meeting part of their obligation than at increasing the likelihood of receiving any payment; in other words, enforcement tools were most useful for those already paying something. Freeman and Waldfogel (2001) found that increases in child support enforcement expenditures and in the strength of enforcement legislation significantly increased

child support received by never-married mothers, and states that paired increased spending with strengthened enforcement experienced the greatest gains.

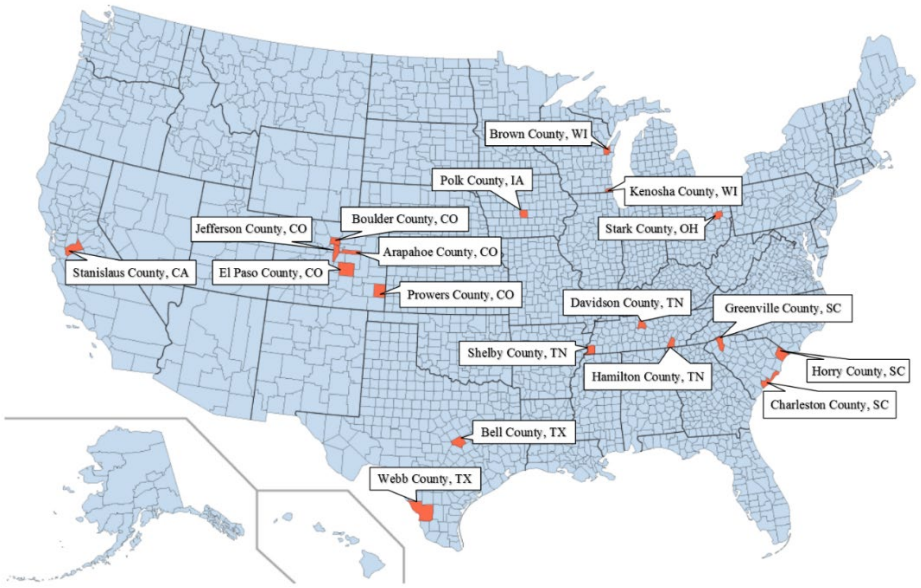
PROGRAMMATIC APPROACHES TO COMPLIANCE BARRIERS

The Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)

As described earlier, the child support system has historically been narrow in scope, focused on establishing and enforcing child support orders, rather than providing services to facilitate payments from noncustodial parents. A recent and noteworthy exception is CSPED, a federal Office of Child Support Enforcement-funded demonstration grant program that operated from October 2012 through September 2017. CSPED represented an alternative to traditional enforcement strategies by taking a service-oriented approach to facilitating payment of support. Through CSPED, OCSE sought to examine the effectiveness of child support-led employment programs for noncustodial parents. The goal was to increase the reliable payment of child support in order to improve child well-being and avoid public costs (Noyes, Vogel, & Howard, 2018).

OCSE competitively awarded grants to eight child support agencies to provide enhanced child support, employment, and parenting services to noncustodial parents having difficulty meeting their obligations. Grantees chose 18 implementation sites (Figure 1). CSPED programs targeted noncustodial parents who were not regularly paying child support, or expected to have difficulty paying, due to lack of regular employment (Noyes et al., 2018).

Figure 1. CSPED Implementation Sites



Source: Final CSPED Implementation Report (Noyes et al., 2018)

OCSE competitively awarded a cooperative agreement to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families to procure and manage an evaluation of CSPED through an independent third-party evaluator. The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families chose the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, along with its partner Mathematica Policy Research, to conduct the evaluation. The evaluators implemented CSPED using a random assignment design, in which half of study participants were randomly assigned to receive CSPED services, and the other half were assigned to a control group. Research products included an impact analysis, an implementation analysis, a benefit-cost analysis, and a report describing baseline characteristics of CSPED participants.

In total, 10,173 study participants were randomly assigned into CSPED. Nearly all noncustodial parents who enrolled in CSPED were men, and participants averaged 35 years of age. Participants generally had low levels of educational attainment; nearly 70 percent had a high

school education or less. They were also unlikely to be married, with only 14 percent married at the time of study enrollment. The largest racial or ethnic group was non-Hispanic African Americans (40 percent), followed by non-Hispanic whites (33 percent), and Hispanics (22 percent). Most (70 percent) of CSPED participants had been convicted of a crime. Participants' employment and earnings illustrate their economic disadvantage. For example, just over half (55 percent) reported working during the 30 days prior to enrollment. Among those who reported working, their mean monthly earnings were below the poverty threshold for a single person ($500 per month) (Cancian, Guarin, Hodges & Meyer, 2018).

Program services for CSPED participants spanned four core areas—case management, enhanced child support, employment, and parenting. Services were provided by child support agencies, which provided case management, child support services and acted as fiscal agents for the grant, and partner organizations, including parenting and employment partners. Some grantees also provided services related to financial education and visitation assistance. On average, participants received 21.7 hours of CSPED services (Noyes, et al., 2018).

Wisconsin Counties: A Selective Overview

In Wisconsin, in recognition that some noncustodial parents behind on their child support obligations could benefit from services to help them come into compliance, some counties facilitate access to services designed to help noncustodial parents overcome barriers. For example, 21 counties and two tribal regions take part in Wisconsin's Children First program, which provides employment and case management services to unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents struggling to meet their child support obligations. Some county child support agencies refer noncustodial parents to other entities that provide assistance with employment, such as the FoodShare Employment and Training (FSET) program, and to

parenting services when available; however, availability of these services varies across counties (Vogel, 2019). Two Wisconsin counties, Brown and Kenosha, took part in CSPED. Participating in CSPED allowed the counties to provide services throughout the demonstration and supported their implementation of a modified service array after the demonstration ended.

THE CURRENT STUDY

The current study has two components: (1) a qualitative component, which aims to identify and describe barriers to compliance from the perspective of staff who provide services to noncustodial parents; and (2) a quantitative component, which examines the relationship between these barriers and engagement in services intended to help noncustodial parents overcome them. The primary data source for the qualitative component is interviews with CSPED service providers across all eight grantees. When feasible, these data are triangulated with web-based surveys with CSPED staff, other CSPED analyses such as the CSPED Baseline Characteristics report (Cancian et al., 2018), and also with interviews conducted with child support agency and court staff from five Wisconsin counties for the "Child Support Enforcement Tools and Their Relationship to Payments: A Review of County Policy and Practice" report, developed under Task 4A of the 2016–2018 CSPRA (Vogel, 2019). For the quantitative component, we draw on some of the barriers identified by staff to predict levels of service engagement. We use data from the CSPED survey and administrative data to test these models.

PART A: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Data Sources

The primary data source for the qualitative analysis is semi-structured interviews with CSPED child support and partner agency staff. Semi-structured interviews were conducted

through site visits at each implementation site operating within all eight CSPED grantees. Interviews included in this analysis were conducted with 54 CSPED staff members from child support and partner agencies across all eight grantees, between June and August of 2016. Interviews targeted staff in leadership roles across child support agencies and partners. Interview length varied depending on the role of the staff member, and ranged from one hour to four hours.

This analysis also draws on data from web-based surveys of caseworkers who provided services to noncustodial fathers participating in CSPED. Sample members included case managers, staff who provided employment services, parenting service facilitators, and child support enforcement workers. The survey was administered twice, first in May of 2014, early on in the demonstration (with a response rate of 87 percent), and again in February 2016, two and a half years after the start of random assignment (with a response rate of 84 percent).

Additionally, this analysis triangulates findings from CSPED data sources with findings from interviews conducted by Vogel (2019). These interviews were conducted with child support and court staff in five Wisconsin counties during the summer of 2018. Within each county, we interviewed the CSA director or supervisor and one or more child support enforcement staff members. We also spoke to child support agency attorneys in four counties, and to court commissioners in four counties. On average, interviews lasted 75 minutes.

Data Analysis

We used a semi-structured interview protocol to conduct all interviews for both CSPED and the Wisconsin CSPRA analysis (Vogel, 2019). This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of practices and issues in a more flexible and context-specific manner than a survey instrument or other standardized technique might have. For both CSPED and the Wisconsin CSPRA interviews, our protocols were approved by the University of Wisconsin Social Sciences

Institutional Review Board, which oversees and approves research involving human subjects. Across both studies, to facilitate privacy, interviews took place in conference rooms or offices. Each respondent provided permission to audio-record their interview.

Analytic methods varied across data sources. For the CSPED interviews, data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying and exploring themes within qualitative data, using a systematic, multiphase analytic approach that includes reviewing the data, generating initial codes, and identifying and reviewing both explicit and underlying themes among codes (Braun & Clark, 2006; Braun, Clark, & Terry, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bonda, 2013). In thematic analysis, researchers seek to identify commonalities in themes across one or more interviews (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). For the Wisconsin CSPRA interviews, using NVivo software, the interviews were coded for themes using a conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Initial codes were derived directly from the data and refined after initial analysis. CSPED staff survey data were analyzed using Stata SE14. Descriptive statistics for each variable, and cross-tabulations for selected variables, were generated in order to identify patterns and trends within the data.

Qualitative Findings: Factors Affecting Child Support Compliance

We first present our findings on the qualitative component of this analysis. Throughout the qualitative findings section, we present information obtained through CSPED interviews as the primary area of focus; however, findings were generally consistent across grantees, including Wisconsin. Where available, we provide information from CSPED staff surveys and other CSPED analyses in order to triangulate or augment findings. We also highlight a number of findings from the Wisconsin CSPRA interviews, which generally suggest consistency between

barriers to compliance identified across grantees and those experienced by noncustodial parents in Wisconsin (Vogel, 2019). We include verbatim quotes where appropriate, sometimes altered to protect confidentiality while maintaining content.

Findings indicate three main factors contributing to lack of formal child support payments from low-income noncustodial fathers. First, we present practical impediments to meeting child support obligations, including an array of barriers to employment, and insufficient income to meet obligations even after obtaining employment. Next, we describe systems issues, including child support system-initiated barriers to paying support, and resistance to paying support without mechanisms to facilitate visitation. Finally, we describe factors identified by staff related to prior interactions with the child support system.

Barriers to Employment and Noncompliance

Child support staff, employment agency staff, and parenting agency staff across all eight grantees cited a host of barriers to employment for noncustodial parents served by CSPED programs—particularly to employment that paid sufficiently to meet their formal support obligations. Further, staff described in interviews that noncustodial parents who experienced these kinds of problems generally had multiple, complex issues getting in the way of employment, compounding the difficulty of helping participants overcome barriers to work. Without steady employment and regular income, noncustodial parents struggled to meet their own basic needs, as well as their child support obligations. These barriers included both employment-specific barriers to work, and problems that indirectly created barriers to employment. Both sets of barriers existed within a context of insufficient or out-of-reach community-based resources to help overcome these challenges. These findings are consistent with a common reason staff interviewed for the Wisconsin CSPRA interviews Vogel (2019)

identified as affecting compliance; as described by staff, most noncustodial parents who did not pay support had difficulty keeping work and meeting their own basic needs, rather than willfully declining to pay ordered support.

Employment-Specific Barriers to Work

Staff cited three types of barriers directly related to employment that made it difficult for noncustodial parents to find and keep work in order to meet their child support obligations.

Limited or lacking work history. CSPED staff described the noncustodial parents struggling to meet their child support obligations served by CSPED programs as having limited or no work histories in the formal labor market. Some noncustodial parents' work histories were interrupted by periods of incarceration. Others had never or infrequently worked in the formal employment sector, either preferring or feeling forced into the informal economy. Findings from the CSPED baseline survey provides some context for this information provided by staff. At the time of study enrollment, over half of participants reported working in the previous month, any amount, in either the informal or formal labor market. About 30 percent of participants reported no work of any kind in a year or more prior to study enrollment. Of noncustodial parents who reported working at all, median earnings were only $500 (Cancian et al., 2018).

Lack of work history made obtaining employment difficult in several ways. First, employment staff found that sporadic work histories and lack of documentation about previous jobs made creating an appealing resume challenging; noncustodial parents sometimes did not know dates of previous employment, which made constructing an accurate work history difficult. While this created problems for marketing noncustodial parents to employers, it also created feelings of frustration, hopelessness, and diminished self-esteem among some noncustodial fathers, which in turn reduced their enthusiasm for continuing to search for work. One

employment staff member described that noncustodial parents sometimes did not realize it can take time for a person with an erratic or limited work history to find employment, and this realization could be discouraging. This staff member noted that for noncustodial parents who had worked a long time ago but struggled to find work recently, being out of the labor force for prolonged periods could cause them to feel "beaten down." Another employment staff member described finding work as feeling like "an impossible mountain to climb," particularly for noncustodial parents with other barriers impeding their search. A child support staff member noted that older noncustodial parents, laid off years ago, might have already had the best-paying job of their lives, and the idea of accepting a job with a $10 or $12 hourly wage sometimes led them to prefer not to work at all.

From the perspective of employment partner staff, lack of work history also introduced barriers related to work habits. Across grantees, employment staff described that for noncustodial parents who had never worked in the formal economy or had not done so regularly, lack of employment history contributed to unfamiliarity with the norms of workplace behavior. These included behaviors such as arriving on time, calling into work when absent, and accepting feedback from a supervisor. From the perspective of these staff, this affected not only the ability to find work, but also to shift to a mindset that would allow them to keep a job once obtained.

Lack of job skills and resources for obtaining them. Across grantees, CSPED child support and employment staff described that the noncustodial parents they encountered most frequently lacked the skills needed to help them obtain a living-wage job. The lack of "hard skills that they can take with them [across jobs]," as described by one employment staff member, made it difficult for noncustodial parents to build earning potential over time. Though this theme resonated across types of staff and grantees as a significant barrier to employment for many

noncustodial fathers, relatively few noncustodial parents (fifteen percent) cited this barrier to work and compliance on the CSPED baseline survey (Cancian et al., 2018).

Child support and partner staff lauded the potential benefits of employment training programs as a means to gain these hard skills. Having a "hard skill" allows noncustodial parents, in the words of an employment staff member, to show that "I know how to do this thing. I know how to weld. I know how to run a tow mower." Described another employment staff member:

> If there was something short-term that we can get someone in four weeks, six weeks, to get some type of credential or certification, that might make them more marketable and therefore lead to a better career path starting out at a higher wage. Some of our customers have to start out at eight, nine dollars an hour and work their way to a different career path, depending on their skills, so they can get the eleven, twelve, thirteen, fifteen dollar an hour job. But if we can provide some short term training off the bat and make them more employable, to me that would be more ideal.

Employment staff echoed these sentiments with regards to subsidized employment opportunities and work experience programs, which they felt could help noncustodial parents gain entry to a job in order to prove themselves as a capable employee. One job developer said:

> If we could offer work experience or a subsidized program, it would be a lot easier to get these people hired. Companies find that appealing. Generally, if a company has a subsidized worker and they are doing well, they will usually try to hire that individual.

Despite the potential benefits of taking part in such services, child support and partner staff found that few participants engaged in them. Staff described three main barriers to noncustodial parents' partaking in programs to help them acquire job skills. First, across grantees, staff described employment training programs and subsidized employment opportunities as limited within their local communities. Some staff also described barriers to entry for such services, including criminal records, which many noncustodial parents served by CSPED programs had, and eligibility requirements that precluded many noncustodial parents.

Next, CSPED employment staff experienced pressure from courts to get noncustodial parents, particularly those facing contempt for failure to meet their ordered support obligations, to work as quickly as possible in order to start paying. As one employment staff member described, this contributed to some noncustodial parents taking the first job they could find, rather than pursuing training to increase their earning potential. He stated:

> I think we felt, you know, some pressure to get these guys in and paying because they're behind already and they're risking jail, they're on probation for 10 years for nonpayment. You know, you're in contempt; they didn't go to jail so they're putting you on probation and into this program. Let's get 'em . . . to go to work quickly. I would have liked to slow down and say, "Okay, let's do a little bit more thorough assessment of your skills compared to the labor market and see where maybe we can help with some training."

In addition to pressure from the courts, child support and partner staff found that noncustodial parents themselves also sought work rather than job training. Staff explained that noncustodial parents needed income to meet basic needs, and employment training programs often require a period of time out of the labor force. 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.

Education and literacy barriers. Beyond employment training, staff reported that many noncustodial parents had low levels of education. Staff reported that when noncustodial parents lacked a GED or high school diploma, the absence of this credential often precluded noncustodial parents from taking part in occupational training programs and sometimes even entry-level employment venues. Employment staff in most grantees cited literacy issues as barriers to employment for some participants. Not only did low literacy levels make it difficult to apply to and perform in jobs, embarrassment prevented some participants struggling with this issue from seeking out help to improve these skills. Described one site manager:

> A lot of our guys, maybe they've never worked. So all of this is new to them. So maybe they don't know how to fill out the application. So if they can't fill out the application or maybe they can't even read, you know, maybe it's an underlying barrier to why they don't want to work. If I can't read, I don't want to tell you I can't read, because I don't want you to look down on me.

In addition to basic literacy skills, staff described that some noncustodial parents lacked computer skills and felt intimidated by jobs that require computers.

Indirect Barriers to Work

CSPED child support and partner staff cited commonly-encountered challenges that, while not directly related to employment, acted as impediments to noncustodial parents to finding and keeping work in order to meet their child support obligations. These included criminal records, substance abuse and mental health issues, and lack of accessible resources to cultivate the ability and will to comply with child support orders. One child support staff member described these barriers as "social barriers," and experienced them as more difficult to remedy than barriers directly related to employment. He stated:

> Helping them to overcome those social barriers is probably the most challenging thing. . . Once you remove those barriers, you remove that stress. Then they are better positioned to take an interview, do well in that interview, obtain employment, and sustain that job.

These barriers were beyond the scope of CSPED programs and community resources serving people with these barriers were lacking. Yet, child support and partner staff often experienced employment for noncustodial parents to be difficult or impossible without addressing them first. As one project manager described, "There may be other barriers that they need to rectify before they get a job—before they can even *look* for a job." Staff described that noncustodial parents who had these barriers typically had more than one, making then more difficult to overcome.

Criminal history. Across all grantees, child support and partner staff described noncustodial parents' criminal histories as the most pervasive and challenging barrier to employment. Over two-thirds of CSPED participants had been convicted of a crime, and nearly all who had been convicted of a crime spent some amount of time in jail or prison (Cancian et al., 2018). Child support and partner agency staff across programs echoed in interviews and on surveys that most noncustodial parents they encountered through CSPED had criminal records. On staff surveys, 86 percent of child support and partner agency staff reported hearing from noncustodial parents "very" or "extremely" often that their criminal records create barriers to finding or keeping work. Noncustodial parents, for their part, also viewed their criminal records as an impediment to finding or keeping work, though to a lesser extent; 28 percent of noncustodial parents self-reported that their criminal records acted as a barrier to employment on the CSPED baseline survey (Cancian et al., 2018). Staff described that participants' criminal histories ranged from petty misdemeanors to serious violent crimes, and participants with felony records typically had more than one felony conviction. For most noncustodial parents involved in CSPED programs, therefore, criminal records were a barrier that had to be mitigated or worked around in order to find employment. Described one project manager, "They all walk out the [prison] door unemployed. It takes time to get a job."

In most states where CSPED programs operated, communities lacked legal resources, such as expungement services, robust reentry services, and pro bono legal services to help mitigate these barriers. Further, even when expungement services were available, they were often not able to fully address the participant's record. One staff member described expungement services as a "clean up" that could help with misdemeanors or uncharged felonies, but not single

or multiple felony convictions. Another staff member noted that in her community, records expungement cost $350 per charge—a prohibitive amount for many noncustodial parents.

Criminal background imposed practical limitations to work, including employment restrictions due to the nature of criminal offenses, movement restrictions due to being on probation or parole, and prolonged periods of unemployment resulting from incarceration. Additionally, noncustodial parents faced stigma from employers as they sought work after returning home. Child support and partner staff generally found that employers did not want to hire people who had committed certain crimes, and participants with multiple felonies were especially difficult to place. One employment provider explained, "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, [noncustodial parents] feel like it isn't worthwhile to work." Child support and partner agency staff described that felony-friendly employers could be hard to find, and that if a given employer had an "iron clad" rule about not working with people with criminal backgrounds, the noncustodial parent would not get a chance regardless of their other qualifications. This introduced a compounding problem in which noncustodial parents, aware that employers were sometimes unwilling to work with people with criminal records, sometimes did not disclose their records to staff or employers. Several employment staff members described experiences in which noncustodial parents received job offers, then lost them upon the employer learned that the noncustodial parent had a criminal background. The struggles associated with looking for a job with a criminal record sometimes caused noncustodial parents to lose hope and motivation to continue their search.

Transportation barriers. Child support and partner agency staff described through interviews and staff surveys that transportation was a significant barrier for many noncustodial

parents in accessing employment. Without reliable transportation, noncustodial parents had difficulty getting to job interviews and making it to work on time regularly. Some sites in which CSPED programs operated were devoid of public transit, or had only infrequent or unreliable options, or options not well-aligned with noncustodial parent work schedules. Further, noncustodial parents often did not live on or near public transit routes, or in some cases, the places at which they found employment were located outside of city services.

When public transit was not an option, noncustodial parents had to find transportation on their own. However, child support and partner agency staff described that for many noncustodial parents, not owning a car, or lack of gas money, negated this option. Further, staff found that some noncustodial parents did not have a driver's license, or could not easily get one due to fines and unpaid fees. This left some noncustodial parents dependent on rides from others, an option that often proved unreliable. Transportation problems were also the most frequently-cited barriers to employment by CSPED participants at the time of the baseline survey, with 30 percent of participants reporting this challenge. On staff surveys, child support and partner staff reported transportation barriers as pervasive, with 72 percent reporting that noncustodial parents tell them "very" or "extremely" often about transportation issues making it difficult for them to find and keep a job, and 25 percent reporting "sometimes" hearing of this barrier.

Housing instability. Child support and partner agency staff described housing instability and homelessness as pervasive challenges for noncustodial parents struggling to meet their child support obligations. Housing instability created challenges for obtaining and maintaining employment. Staff reports align with self-reports from noncustodial parents enrolled in CSPED programs. Only 4 percent of CSPED participants owned their home. Half rented or paid part of the rent for their apartment; almost a third lived with another person without paying rent; and 2

percent reported being currently homeless. Twenty percent of CSPED participants self-reported housing instability as a barrier to finding and keeping work on the baseline survey (Cancian et al., 2018). On staff surveys, child support and partner agency staff reported housing instability as a common barrier to employment among noncustodial parents, with 46 percent reporting that they hear of this barrier from noncustodial parents "very" or "extremely" often, and another 46 percent reporting "sometimes" hearing of this barrier from noncustodial parents.

In interviews, several grantees identified community-wide housing shortages as exacerbating these challenges, and resources to help noncustodial parents obtain housing were lacking. In communities where housing prices were high, child support and partner agency staff found that noncustodial parents struggled to make down payments on apartments or meet their high rent obligations. Housing instability made it difficult for noncustodial parents to find and keep work; immediate worries about losing or keeping housing sometimes superseded job search efforts and employment obligations. Further, child support and partner agency staff described that housing struggles were often coupled with other barriers; that is, barriers such as criminal records or mental health and substance abuse issues often exacerbated housing instability. One project manager described the compounded struggles of a noncustodial father struggling to obtain employment given housing and other barriers, stating:

> This one participant we're trying to serve is really stuck between a rock and a hard place. He has no income coming in. He can't work. He's in a transitional housing facility that's charging him $75 a week, which he can't pay, but he's staying there and not on the street because he's determined not to be homeless. And, he's got a felony conviction, so he's not eligible for the rental assistance. It's awful.

Mental health challenges. CSPED child support and partner agency staff described mental health challenges as a barrier to employment for many participants. Twenty-eight percent of CSPED participants self-reported symptoms consistent with major or severe major depression

(Cancian et al., 2018), and staff reported encountering noncustodial parents through CSPED programs with untreated mental illness in interviews and on staff surveys. Twenty-nine percent of staff reported that they hear from noncustodial parents "very" or "extremely" often about issues with mental or physical health making it difficult to find and keep a job, and 50 percent reported "sometimes" hearing of this barrier from noncustodial parents. Across grantees, child support and partner agency staff described community resources for addressing mental health as lacking, and untreated mental health concerns as "huge issues" for securing employment. One project manager explained that for noncustodial parents with untreated mental health conditions, participants successful in finding work often struggled to keep it. Grantees generally described few mental health resources available in the community, and not enough to keep up with the need; in some grantees, mental health services that existed within the community were not readily accessible to noncustodial parents due to lack of transportation, waiting lists, or eligibility restrictions. Further, child support and partner staff described that mental health issues often co-occurred with other barriers to employment, including housing instability and substance use.

Substance use issues. In interviews, child support and partner agency staff described that substance use issues interfered with employment for some participants. In one grantee, staff estimated that one-third or more of participants experienced addiction to substances. One project manager described alcoholism as a pervasive problem stating, "We have so many people in the grant who have alcohol problems." Other staff cited the growing opioid crisis as an issue for many noncustodial parents in their communities; stated one project manager, "The opioid addiction problem is real and we are seeing it." Staff reports of substance use issues on staff survey align with this finding from interviews. On surveys, 43 percent of staff reported that they "very" or "extremely" often hear from noncustodial parents that issues with alcohol or other

drugs make it difficult for them to find and keep a job, and 39 percent reported that they "sometimes" hear of this barrier from noncustodial parents. In some grantees, resources for addressing substance use issues were limited or out-of-reach financially for noncustodial parents with limited or no incomes. One project manager stated:

> I would like to see mental health or drug treatment. That seems to be a common barrier that comes up, drugs especially, but they kind of go hand in hand. I think that . . . treating that would help families. Treating that would help their ability to get to that employment search. But I also know those things are very hard to treat and it's hard to see long-term outcomes . . . that is something that comes up a lot.

In other grantees, staff described resources as available, but said participants did not know how to access them or resisted treatment. Across grantees, staff felt that for noncustodial parents with these issues, addressing them was a crucial first step prior to the individual finding and keeping work. In contrast, only three percent of CSPED participants reported on the baseline survey that problems with alcohol or drugs acted as employment barriers (Cancian et al., 2018).

Physical health issues. In interviews, CSPED child support and partner agency staff described that noncustodial parents often lacked health insurance and experienced physical health problems that, left untreated, affected their abilities to find and keep work. Similarly, Wisconsin CSPRA staff identified medical issues as a common barrier to employment and compliance. One CSPED employment staff member described that many noncustodial parents experienced unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking or high blood pressure, and many are on the brink of developing chronic diseases; other participants experienced or acquired medical problems during periods of incarceration that were left untreated. She noted that these conditions affect employment and therefore ability to pay child support, explaining, "Men's health is too often ignored as a major barrier to employment or to providing financially for their children." A

project manager echoed these sentiments, noting that noncustodial parents seeking work often struggle with medical issues:

> I just feel like the poor and the disabled are really beat up by the system. I will see somebody in court, and they are so sick, and so disorganized . . . they just keep coming back to court. Maybe they end up being incarcerated. And they don't have the wherewithal, or they don't have the money to go to the doctor, or maybe they don't have the transportation to get to the doctor.

Childcare. One-third of noncustodial parents enrolled in CSPED had children living at home, in addition to the children from whom they lived apart (Cancian et al., 2018). CSPED partner agency staff described that for some noncustodial parents, lack of affordable childcare presented a barrier to employment, and thus a barrier for meeting formal child support obligations from children living outside of the home. Lack of childcare made it difficult to obtain childcare coverage for job interviews and find employment compatible with childcare needs. The high costs of childcare relative to the low wages many noncustodial parents could have earned in the formal economy contributed to decisions to stay home with children. Twenty-three percent reported that they hear from noncustodial parents that care obligations for family members make it difficult for them to find and keep a job "very" or "extremely" often, and 47 percent reported that they "sometimes" hear of this barrier from noncustodial parents.

Inadequacy of Earnings Relative to Obligations

Noncustodial parents struggled to obtain employment given their many complex and interlocking employment barriers. However, equally problematic from the perspective of child support compliance was the inadequacy of noncustodial parent earnings relative to their orders. With low wages, even with a job, child support and partner agency staff found that noncustodial parents struggled to meet their formal support obligations. For all of the aforementioned reasons, when noncustodial parents participating in CSPED obtained work, the jobs they found were

often low-paying. Child support and partner agency staff found that many noncustodial parents lacked the education, work experience, and job skills to attain higher-wage employment. Limited income was particularly problematic for participants with multiple child support cases and high-burden orders. When noncustodial parents owed obligations to multiple children, child support comprised a large share of their limited income. Described one project manager:

> We have several guys with multiple cases. When you're getting limited income, and, you know, the job pays $10 an hour, but when half of what you are making is still getting taken out in child support, sometimes the guys get discouraged.

Noncustodial parents with a single high-burden order relative to their income also saw child support absorb a substantial portion of their limited earnings, according to child support and partner staff. Child support staff explained that policies such as imputing wages based on the court's expectation for income, rather than setting orders based on actual income, contributed to this problem. Further, partner agency staff explained that some noncustodial parents struggled to get help from child support agencies to adjust their orders downward when they lost a job or transitioned to a lower-paying job. Staff described that when noncustodial parents had orders that left them with insufficient funds to meet their own basic needs, they felt overwhelmed, unable to catch up, and sometimes, unmotivated to try to meet what felt like an impossible obligation. One employment staff member described that noncustodial parents in this situation "feel like they are working <u>for</u> child support, not <u>with</u> child support." Child support and employment staff in several grantees noted that high burden orders made some noncustodial parents reluctant to obtain work in the formal economy, in which their wages could be garnished, because they expect that the child support agency will "take it all." Stated an employment staff member:

> The majority . . . were either getting paid under the table, or would jump from job to job just to hide from child support. Or did not want to work because child support was taking half their check. What's the point of me working when I can't afford to pay my rent?

Across CSPED child support and partner agency staff, and across grantees, a commonly-voiced opinion from staff was that noncustodial parents with very large orders might be more willing to make payments if their orders were made smaller and more manageable. These findings comport with those identified in the Wisconsin CSPRA interviews; staff described looking for indications that a modification was appropriate for cases in which noncustodial parents were behind on their formal support obligations as a means to help facilitate compliance.

System-Based Barriers to Compliance

From the perspectives of child support and partner agency staff, some actions taken by child support agencies diminished the ability of noncustodial parents to comply with their formal support obligations. Further, the lack of a relationship between child support and access to children also reduced the willingness of participants to pay support. Child support and partner agency staff described five types of actions taken by child support agencies and child support courts that impeded the ability of noncustodial parents to meet their child support obligations.

License suspension. All child support agencies were able to, as an enforcement action to compel compliance with a child support order, suspend noncustodial parents' driver, recreational, and professional licenses. Though some staff noted that such actions could have a positive effect for some cases under some circumstances, a common theme across CSPED staff and grantees was that license suspension was an overused tool that generally caused more harm than good. Staff found that for noncustodial parents struggling to find work, license suspension introduced further limitations for finding employment, reducing their ability to comply with their child support obligation. As discussed previously, without a car, noncustodial parents had a harder time getting to interviews and to work, particularly for jobs outside the range of public

transportation. This caused noncustodial parents to either depend on others for rides to work, which often proved to be an unreliable or untenable solution, or to drive without a license.

Staff described that if detected, noncustodial parents driving without a license accrued additional fines and fees entirely separate from their child support hold, making it increasingly difficult to get their license back in the future. One fatherhood partner described, "To allow a person to keep their dignity and be able to drive themselves to work—that is critical." These findings align with interviews conducted in Wisconsin for the CSPRA. Staff described reducing or eliminating their use of license suspension as an enforcement tool due to the potential barriers to employment that result from this practice.

Accrual of child support arrears and interest. CSPED child support and partner staff described that many noncustodial parents accrued substantial arrears during periods of unemployment, insufficient employment, and incarceration. The substantial interest on this debt accrued quickly, and particularly for noncustodial parents with large orders, felt insurmountable. Child support staff described that participants with large arrears debt often felt hopeless, and these feelings caused some to believe it was not worthwhile to try to catch up on their debt. Similarly, staff interviewed for the Wisconsin CSPRA reported that many noncustodial parents became overwhelmed with arrears and interest; further, many noncustodial parents were unaware of how quickly arrears and interest accrued until they fell far behind.

Difficulty obtaining modifications. Partner staff described in interviews that noncustodial parents often experienced difficulty getting help from the child support agency with order modifications. Findings from staff surveys reinforce the difficulty of obtaining help with modifications. Only 13 percent of respondents described assistance with child support actions such as reviewing and modifying child support orders as easy to access outside of CSPED

programs. Thirty-five percent of respondents characterized these services as "not at all" easy for noncustodial parents to access outside of CSPED. CSPED child support and partner staff also found that noncustodial parents did not always know where to go for help with modifications, and in grantees operating in states with court-based modification processes, the cost and complexity of navigating the court system made obtaining a modification even more difficult.

Wisconsin staff similarly reported during CSPRA interviews that fear of the process, intimidation about the steps involved, or literacy barriers often prevented noncustodial parents from pursuing this option. This resulted in noncustodial parents having obligations that were unrealistic given their incomes, and in a perception among noncustodial parents that child support agencies did not want to help them. As one CSPED fatherhood partner described, after years of asking for, and not receiving, modifications, noncustodial parents often think, "Nothing good comes from child support."

Imputed orders. Child support staff described that imputing orders based on the expectation that a noncustodial parent could obtain full-time work, rather than on actual wages, resulted in unrealistic orders for some noncustodial parents. As one project manager described:

> We are doing orders on minimum wage. OK, this guy is not making minimum wage. We have a guidelines standard that says if this person is making $200 a month or $500 a month, this is what the order should be. But we're saying, this person is able bodied; they should be able to make at least minimum wage. Well, they are able bodied, but they are only making $500 a month. It should be based on actual rather than imputed income.

A project manager in another state described their state's guidelines as in conflict, resulting in child support staff following the lead of the courts and imputing wages. In this grantee, orders were technically able to be set as low as $0; however, in practice, courts typically set orders based on "capable earnings" guidelines assuming a 40-hour work week, and child support staff generally followed the courts' lead.

Court actions, including contempt. Practices for taking contempt actions against noncustodial parents upon failure to comply with child support obligations varied across grantees (Noyes et al., 2018). Most child support and partner staff found contempt to be a generally ineffective strategy for obtaining payments from the majority of noncustodial parents in this sample, because the process did not address the underlying barrier to compliance for most participants; ability to pay due to lack of earnings. One child support staff member described contempt as a "revolving door," in which a noncustodial parent's case goes to contempt, gets set over (postponed), and leads to a bench warrant for the noncustodial parent, causing additional barriers to compliance. Incarceration was a potential consequence of contempt actions across grantees. As described by partner agency and child support staff, for noncustodial parents who had jobs, incarceration often meant losing them during their jail stay. Even those not incarcerated for failure to pay experienced disruptions in work in order to take time off for court processes.

Lack of Assistance with Visitation

When married parents get divorced, court processes generally establish child support obligations and parenting time agreements, or arrangements for shared time or visitation with children, as part of the same process. In nearly all states, child support orders and enforcement for noncustodial fathers who have never been married to the custodial mother of their child are handled through entirely separate processes from establishing parenting time. As a result, many unmarried noncustodial parents lack formal arrangements for spending time with children living outside of their home (Brustin & Martin, 2014).

Across grantees, child support and partner agency staff described a lack of access to children for noncustodial parents as a significant barrier to their willingness to comply with formal child support obligations. Staff explained that noncustodial parents feel frustration due to

not being able to see their children, and sometimes do not find it worthwhile to support them without the ability to see them. As described by one project manager, "'I don't pay if I can't see my kids;' there is just that correlation . . . 'I want to have that relationship and if I'm not able to, I'm not going to pay.'" Another fatherhood facilitator described lack of visitation as noncustodial parents' greatest concerns. Other staff noted that visitation helped noncustodial parents to observe the needs of the child and therefore become more willing to comply. Described one fatherhood facilitator, "You can tell him his kid doesn't have any clothes all you want, but if he can't see the kid for himself he won't believe it."

Parenting staff in particular supported the notion that child support agencies should play a role in facilitating parenting time arrangements among noncustodial parents. Stated one parenting partner agency director, "I will harp on this one until the day I die. Child support needs to be as vigilant and committed to men having established visitation orders as they are to having child support orders." However, most child support agencies that served noncustodial parents through CSPED lacked both the ability to provide these services, and sources to which they could refer noncustodial parents for help. This frustrated not only partner staff, but many child support staff members. A child support staff member stated that without help obtaining visitation, some noncustodial parents become unwilling to pay support or engage with the child support agency at all. Paraphrasing a noncustodial parent, this child support staff member described, "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." A fatherhood facilitator also expressed that lack of visitation services through child support contributed "real and perceived advantages of mothers over dads," heightening the perspective of noncustodial fathers that child support agencies are on the "side" of the mother.

Another fatherhood facilitator concurred, stating that when noncustodial parents are not allowed to see their children, they feel like the child support system is against them. He elaborated, "Guys want to pay. Guys want to provide for the kids. But guys want to see their kids, too."

On staff surveys, child support and partner agency staff nearly universally reported that noncustodial fathers should be able to see their children regardless of whether or not they paid support. Only 10 percent of staff agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that noncustodial fathers should only be able to see his children if he paid regular support. However, many fathers reported difficulty seeing their children. Only 18 percent of CSPED participants reported on the baseline survey that they spent as much time as they wanted with their children, and the most common reason noncustodial parents reported (about a third of all reasons provided) for not doing so was that the custodial parent prevented it (Cancian et al., 2018).

Legal resources to help noncustodial parents obtain visitation were lacking within most communities in which CSPED programs operated. In a few grantees, staff members said that mediation services were available for a fee, but the fee was often cost prohibitive, especially for low-income families. One project manager explained:

> So here's the thing. This is where it gets so frustrating. You have one person who really wants to see their child. The other person is probably not willing to work with them to see the child. What's [the] likelihood that [the] other parent, who doesn't want them to see the child in the first place, is going to have to complete an eight page intake application and provide $100? It's a recipe for disaster.

Another child support staff member described resources for mediation and visitation as the resource most lacking for noncustodial parents served by CSPED programs:

> This is my biggest one. Mom and dad need to be in a room, and sit down at the end of the table, however they feel, with a mediator or a caseworker, and whatever the problem is between those two, they need to work it out. And realize that the child is the most important person.

Another project manager felt that more resources needed to be available to parents early on in the relationship, to establish healthy co-parenting relationship patterns early, stating:

> Why aren't we arming them with tools and knowledge about [what's] necessary to be able to co-parent regardless of if you're together or not? As a society, we're failing miserably. Here, locally, we need to do something about [it] while they're still getting along. Then, when they don't, we also need to offer them a service that tells them, "You don't have to get along, but you still have to co-parent, and here's how you can do that."

Prior Interactions with the Child Support System

Most noncustodial parents served by CSPED programs had current support orders on which they were behind at the time that they enrolled into the CSPED study; therefore, most had prior experiences interacting with the child support program. CSPED staff described that these prior experiences often left a negative perception of the agency on the part of noncustodial parents. CSPED child support and partner staff reported that some noncustodial parents experienced mistrust towards, fear of, and stigmatization by the child support agency, and that these prior experiences left some unwilling to interact with the system. Wisconsin staff also reported a need to overcome negative perceptions of the child support agency among noncustodial parents due to previous encounters with the system.

Mistrust. Most commonly, CSPED child support and partner agency staff reported a sense of mistrust from noncustodial parents towards child support. This mistrust came from prior experiences; for example, staff described past experiences in which child support agencies presented false offers of help as "sting" operations, which instead resulted in the arrest of noncustodial parents for being behind on their obligations. Mistrust about whether funds would be routed to, and used for, the noncustodial parents' children represented another aspect of mistrust. Staff reported that some noncustodial parents felt that their child support payments were used by the custodial parent, rather than spent on the child, which they perceived as an

invalid use of child support resources. Noncustodial parents also, according to some staff, did not trust that child support agencies could actually help them with their problems, even if the will to do so was real. Stated one fatherhood agency director:

> There are a lot of guys who will call here that will never call child support. And even if they did call, they can't help with his question, because they are so swamped with trying to establish and collect.

An employment caseworker echoed this sentiment, stating, "Child support has had such a negative rep for decades upon decades upon decades, as a collection agency. Some of their staff still think like that, and they have been around for 20 or 30 years."

Fear of consequences. Child support and partner staff also described that some noncustodial parents avoid interacting with child support due to fear of consequences. For noncustodial parents who had stayed off child support's radar, exposing oneself to the system brought risks. Noncustodial parents feared arrest, jail time, and loss of limited resources.

Stigmatization. Finally, child support and partner staff stated that some noncustodial parents resist interactions with child support because of staff's perceptions of them. Child support and partner staff explained that noncustodial parents are used to being viewed as "the bad guy" by courts and child support staff, rather than someone in need of help to become compliant. Noncustodial parents experience this treatment as demeaning, demoralizing, and demotivating. One child support staff member elaborated that noncustodial parents sometimes feel that they are viewed in a unidimensional manner by child support staff; that is, their lack of financial support becomes their defining quality, whereas other positive qualities go unrecognized by child support staff. She described:

> There are also a lot of people who have been lumped into this group of being, you know, bad parents because they aren't paying child support, but they are very active, hands-on parents. So, they struggle with what that means for them. So, I'm

> a bad person because I don't pay my child support. But, I get my kid on the bus every day, I get him off the bus, you know, this and that.

A fatherhood facilitator described that child support staff sometimes assume that parents fail to pay because they don't want to, when in reality, many struggle to pay or are unaware of how to:

> I think people . . . just kind of assume that because they don't show up or they don't pay their child support, they don't want to . . . they really don't know how. They get something in the mail and they don't know who to ask. The child support agency historically has always been seen as kind of a punitive agency. Guys in the community really don't have anywhere to go to say, "OK, what's the next step; what do I do?" And then if they haven't [paid] for a few years they say, "OK, now I've really blown it, so what's the use?"

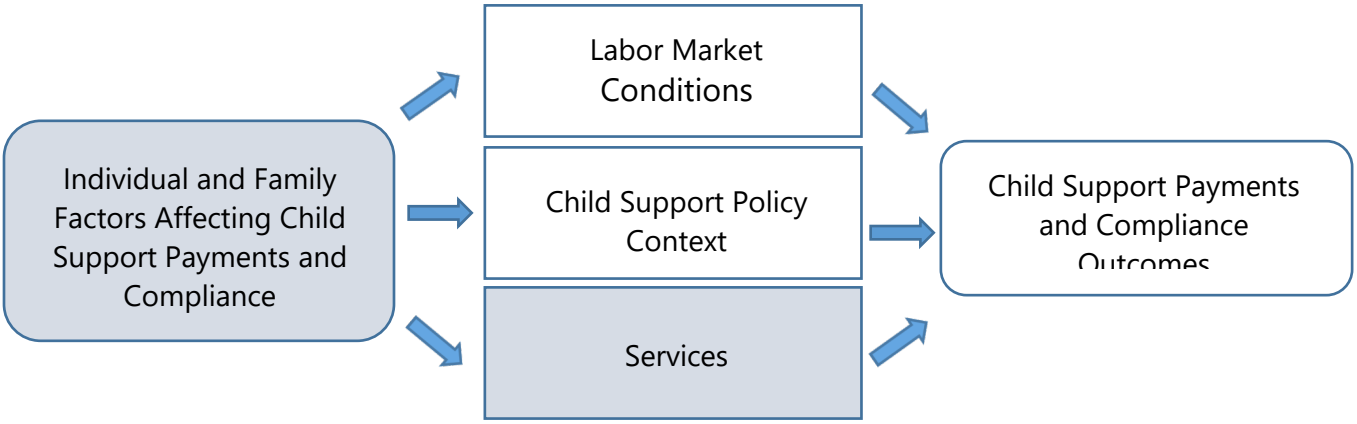
PART B: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

As described in Part A of these report findings, a wide array of factors affect noncustodial parent compliance with formal support obligations. Factors that reduce compliance may also reduce engagement with services—if, for example, noncustodial parents have health barriers, or are reluctant to interact with the child support program. On the other hand, noncustodial parents with greater barriers to child support compliance may have great needs and be more motivated to participate in services designed to address barriers. In the quantitative analysis, we explore the extent to which some of the factors identified by staff as consequential for noncustodial parents' level of compliance, also predict engagement in services intended to address compliance barriers.

Through the qualitative findings, staff identified an array of factors related to compliance. Some of these factors relate to the individual's capacity for meeting their support obligations, whereas others emphasize the role of the structure and systems surrounding the individual. An ideal statistical model would examine factors of both types; that is, individual-level and family-level characteristics, but also the labor market circumstances, local child support policies, and

service environment surrounding the noncustodial parent which could moderate the relationship between these factors and child support outcomes. This analysis addresses one part of this ideal model, by testing the relationship between a subset of individual- and family-level characteristics and service engagement (Figure 2). Though this limited exploration does not directly address child support compliance and payment behaviors, it does provide insight into a potential mechanism for improving child support outcomes. Providing services, rather than relying solely on punitive enforcement techniques, might help some noncustodial parents become better positioned financially and attitudinally to meet their child support obligations. This reasoning has gained traction in the policy domain in recent years and has served as the basis for recent demonstrations, such as CSPED. A better understanding of this relationship could provide insight into the attributes of and barriers faced by noncustodial parents behind on their child support who engage in services intended to overcome these barriers. This information could contribute to the development of services better-aligned with the needs of noncustodial parents behind on child support, potentially bringing them a step closer to meeting their obligations.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework: Child Support Payments and Compliance Outcomes



Data Sources

This analysis draws from three CSPED data sources. First, to construct baseline measures of noncustodial parent attributes and potential barriers to compliance to be used as explanatory variables, the analysis utilizes CSPED administrative data and baseline survey data. All CSPED study participants completed a baseline survey at intake, prior to random assignment, between October 2013 and September 2016. Administrative data on child support, public benefits receipt, and criminal justice involvement were collected from each grantee; employment and earnings data were obtained from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) through OCSE. The key outcome measure, amount of services received, came from self-reported data on employment, parenting, and child support service receipt, as provided by CSPED participants on the CSPED follow-up survey. Nearly 70 percent of CSPED participants in the follow-up sample completed a follow-up survey approximately one year after random assignment.

To be considered eligible for the analysis, noncustodial parents were required to: (1) have been assigned to the extra services group, (2) be male, (3) have completed a follow-up survey and answered all questions related to service dosage received, and (4) resided in any grantee state except Texas.[1] These criteria yielded a final analytic sample of 1,499 participants.

Measures

All outcome measures for this analysis came from respondent self-reports of service receipt on the CSPED follow-up survey. Respondents were asked, across a variety of service

[1]Participants in the Texas grantee received an abbreviated version of the CSPED baseline survey instrument and were missing nearly half of key predictor variables. For this reason, Texas participants were excluded from the analysis.

categories, whether or not they received each type of service, and for those that they did, the amount of time that they spent engaged in the services. We measure service outcomes as follows:

(1) **Any service receipt:** Whether or not the respondent answered "yes" to receiving any service within the employment, parenting, or child support service domains.

(2) **Substantial service receipt:** Whether or not the respondent reported receipt of any services from all of the three service categories included in this analysis; employment services, parenting services, and child support services.

(3) **Total service hours received:** The sum of all self-reported service hours in the domains of employment services, parenting services, and child support services.

(4) **Total employment service hours:** The total number of self-reported hours the respondent spent in job readiness classes, one-on-one help with job readiness, or in an employment training program.

(5) **Total parenting service hours:** The total number of self-reported hours the respondent spent in parenting classes, groups, or workshops.

(6) **Total child support service hours:** The total number of self-reported hours the respondent spent receiving help with a child support issue from someone in child support.

Predictor variables for this analysis came from the survey of baseline characteristics and administrative data. We measured predictors as shown in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. Predictor Variables

Grantee in which respondent was randomly assigned (baseline survey)
- California, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Wisconsin

Age of NCP (baseline survey)
- Less than 25 years old, ages 25 to 40, age 40 or older

Race/ethnicity (baseline survey)
- Hispanic, non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic other/multiracial

Marital history (baseline survey)
- Never married, married/divorced/separated/widowed

Educational attainment (baseline survey)
- Less than high school diploma, high school diploma or GED, some college/associate's degree, bachelor's degree or more

Multiple-partner fertility: Number of custodial parents of NCPs minor children (baseline survey)
- One, two, three, four or more

Marital or nonmarital children (baseline survey)
- All children nonmarital, all children marital, both nonmarital and marital children

Number of nonresident children under age 18 (baseline survey)
- No nonresident children, 1, 2, 3, 4 or more

Compliance with child support orders in year before random assignment (administrative data)
- Total current child support payments divided by total current child support orders during first year after random assignment

Order burden in the year before random assignment (administrative data)
- No earnings, no order or order less than 50% of earnings, order 50% of earnings or more

Informal child support (cash or noncash support) in past 30 days (baseline survey)
- Provided any informal cash or noncash support to any child, provided no informal cash or noncash support

Employment (administrative data)
- Percentage of quarters employed in year before random assignment

Earnings (administrative data)
- Total logged earnings in the year before random assignment

History with criminal justice system (baseline survey)
- Ever convicted of a crime, never convicted of a crime

Depression categories (baseline survey)
- Not depressed, major depression/severe major depression

Motivation to participate in CSPED (baseline survey)
- Not at all/a little/somewhat, very, extremely

Days of in-person contact with any nonresident children
- Number of days

Assessment of parenting team for nonresident children, averaged across co-parents (baseline survey)
- Agree or strongly agree good parenting team, not sure, disagree or strongly disagree

Number of self-reported barriers to employment
- No barriers reported, 1 barrier, 2 or more barriers

Data Analysis

We present descriptive statistics showing, for each category within predictor variables: (1) the proportion of participants within each category who received any services; (2) the proportion who received "substantial" services; (3) total self-reported hours received by the

participant; (4) the proportion who received any employment services, parenting services, and child support services; and (5) the self-reported number of hours the participant received in each subcategory of service. We also present findings from a multivariate probit model, used to predict the likelihood of a participant's receipt of "substantial" CSPED services.[2]

Findings

Tables 1 and 2 display the descriptive statistics for the predictor variables included in this analysis, across each outcome. We discuss findings related to noncustodial parent characteristics, then family characteristics, below. We also highlight areas of alignment or discord with the multivariate model throughout this discussion (Table 3).

Noncustodial Parent Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics for predictor variables included in this analysis related to noncustodial father characteristics. Within these variables, noncustodial father age, educational attainment, criminal history, and self-reported baseline motivation to participate in program services showed significant differences across groups of fathers in multiple domains of service engagement. For noncustodial parent age, Table 1 shows that fathers under age 25 were less likely to receive any services, or substantial services (consistent with the multivariate model), than older fathers. The descriptive table also shows that they received fewer total hours than older fathers—11 to 14 hours fewer in total. This pattern holds across all service categories, with differences in parenting and employment hours driving the difference in total service hours.

[2]We also performed an alternate analysis using an OLS regression model. Results of this model were generally consistent with the multivariate model and therefore are not shown. We also estimated, but do not show the results of, models using only Wisconsin data. The relatively small sample size for Wisconsin cases (n=231) limited our ability to identify statistically significant relationships. The results patterns, however, were generally consistent with the estimates based on all seven grantees.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Service Engagement by Noncustodial Father Characteristics *(N=1499)*

	N	Received any services Percent	Received substantial services Percent	Total service hours received Mean	Received any employment services Percent	Employment service hours received Mean	Received any parenting services Percent	Parenting service hours received Mean	Received any child support services Percent	Child support service hours received Mean
Grantee										
California	287	77%	15%	29.1	62%	24.0	27%	3.6	48%	1.4
Colorado	249	84%	31%	32.5	60%	20.3	51%	9.0	58%	3.3
Iowa	223	78%	28%	46.2	69%	32.3	58%	12.7	38%	1.2
Ohio	199	65%	20%	39.8	55%	31.1	32%	7.7	39%	1.0
South Carolina	26	54%	8%	13.9	31%	4.0	35%	8.9	23%	0.9
Tennessee	284	81%	23%	41.8	68%	32.2	43%	7.6	48%	2.0
Wisconsin	231	74%	17%	38.3	62%	27.1	35%	9.3	41%	1.9
Significance of Differences Between Categories		***	***	**	***	**	***	***	***	***
Age										
Under 25	112	67%	7%	25.2	53%	21.2	22%	3.0	29%	1.0
25–40	889	76%	22%	39.1	62%	28.5	41%	8.7	45%	1.8
Over 40	498	79%	26%	36.5	66%	26.3	44%	8.2	51%	2.0
Significance of Differences Between Categories		**	***	*	**		***	***	***	*
Race/Ethnicity										
Black (non-Hispanic)	278	75%	18%	29.7	57%	22.7	34%	5.0	46%	1.9
Hispanic (any)	520	76%	23%	36.6	62%	26.3	42%	8.7	46%	1.6
White (non-Hispanic)	616	78%	24%	40.9	65%	30.3	44%	8.6	46%	2.0
Other (non-Hispanic)	85	73%	16%	38.2	62%	25.7	36%	11.2	38%	1.3
Significance of Differences Between Categories							**	***		
Marital History										
Never married	768	75%	20%	37.4	61%	27.6	39%	8.0	42%	1.8
Ever married	731	78%	24%	37.0	63%	26.8	42%	8.3	50%	1.9
Significance of Differences Between Categories			**						***	
Education										
No high school degree	334	67%	14%	29.7	50%	21.8	32%	6.4	38%	1.5
High school degree/GED	631	77%	21%	38.2	64%	28.3	39%	8.1	45%	1.8
Some college/associate's degree	482	82%	27%	40.6	69%	29.5	47%	9.1	51%	2.0
Bachelor's degree or more	52	79%	35%	41.0	62%	27.4	56%	11.3	56%	2.2
Significance of Differences Between Categories		***	***	*	***		***	**	***	

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

	N	Received any services Percent	Received substantial services Percent	Total service hours received Mean	Received any employment services Percent	Employment service hours received Mean	Received any parenting services Percent	Parenting service hours received Mean	Received any child support services Percent	Child support service hours received Mean
No order, or less than 50% order burden	543	76%	22%	37.0	62%	26.5	41%	8.7	45%	1.9
50% or greater order burden	494	76%	21%	35.8	61%	27.0	40%	7.0	43%	1.8
Significance of Differences Between Categories										
Informal Support Paid										
None	477	74%	22%	36.8	59%	26.9	40%	8.0	44%	1.8
Any	1022	78%	22%	37.4	64%	27.4	41%	8.2	46%	1.8
Significance of Differences Between Categories					*					
Criminal Conviction History										
Never convicted	435	72%	19%	31.1	58%	23.5	35%	6.0	43%	1.5
Ever convicted	1064	78%	23%	39.7	64%	28.8	43%	9.0	47%	1.9
Significance of Differences Between Categories		**	**	**	**	*	***	***		*
Depression										
Not depressed	1160	77%	23%	36.3	62%	26.3	40%	8.2	47%	1.8
Major or severe major depression	339	77%	21%	40.3	65%	30.6	42%	8.0	41%	1.8
Significance of Differences Between Categories									**	
Level of Motivation to Participate in CSPED Services										
Not at all/a little/somewhat	138	72%	15%	28.4	57%	22.3	30%	4.8	42%	1.3
Very	577	74%	19%	32.7	58%	23.3	39%	7.9	42%	1.5
Extremely	784	79%	26%	42.0	66%	31.0	44%	8.9	48%	2.1
Significance of Differences Between Categories		**	***	***	***	**	***	**	*	***
Number of Barriers to Finding and Keeping Work										
None	574	75%	22%	33.1	60%	24.4	37%	6.9	47%	1.8
1	464	76%	23%	40.0	63%	29.5	42%	8.8	44%	1.8
2 or more	461	79%	22%	39.4	64%	28.5	44%	9.0	44%	1.9
Significance of Differences Between Categories							*	**		

***/**/* Statistically significant differences at the .01/.05/.10 level, using ANOVA F-tests (for continuous outcomes) and Chi-Sq test (for dichotomous outcomes).

Table 1 also shows significant differences by educational attainment in total service hours received, the likelihood of receipt of any services, and the receipt of substantial services (consistent with the multivariate model). Noncustodial fathers without a high school degree received 8 to 11 fewer service hours in total than fathers with a high school degree or more. This pattern also holds across all service categories, with significant differences in receipt of any employment services, parenting services, and child support services by educational attainment. Though these trends are reflected in the service hours received across all categories, differences in parenting and employment hours drive the difference in total service hours received.

Whereas younger, less educated fathers engaged in services at lower levels, having been convicted of a crime was positively and significantly associated with service receipt across all categories of service engagement. Noncustodial fathers with a criminal history were significantly more likely to receive more total hours of service, and more of every subcategory of service, than their peers without convictions. Noncustodial fathers with a criminal history were also significantly more likely to receive any services, and to receive a substantial amount of services (consistent with the multivariate model), than their peers without convictions.

Finally, self-reported baseline motivation to participate in services emerged as one of the strongest predictors of service receipt. Noncustodial parents who self-identified as extremely motivated to participate were significantly more likely to receive any services, and to receive a substantial amount of services (consistent with the multivariate model). They were also significantly more likely to receive more total hours of service, and more of every subcategory of service, than their peers who self-reported lower levels of motivation. Hours of participation in employment services accounted for much of the gap between extremely motivated fathers and other fathers, with extremely motivated fathers receiving between 8 and 9 more hours of

employment services than very motivated fathers or somewhat, a little, or not at all motivated fathers. In contrast, very motivated and extremely motivated fathers received nearly the same amount of parenting services as each other, but both received 3 or 4 additional hours of parenting services on average than somewhat, a little, or not at all motivated fathers.

Other variables showed no or limited significant differences in service engagement based on father characteristics. Table 1 shows no significant differences by noncustodial father race or ethnicity, with the exception of receipt of any parenting services, and parenting service hours received. The multivariate model also shows a marginally significant negative relationship between receipt of substantial services and racial or ethnic background for those in the "other" race and ethnicity category (which includes noncustodial fathers who are not white, black, or Hispanic; and those who are multiracial), relative to the comparison group of black (non-Hispanic) fathers. Additionally, for the most part, fathers did not engage in services differently based on their depression status, except for likelihood of receipt of any child support hours as shown in Table 1. Findings regarding service engagement by marital status are limited and mixed. Whereas Table 1 shows differences in service engagement by marital status, with never-married noncustodial fathers significantly less likely to receive substantial services (consistent with the multivariate model), and significantly less likely to receive any child support services, the multinomial model shows a marginally significant negative relationship between having ever been married and receipt of substantial services.

There are also few statistically significant differences in service engagement based on noncustodial fathers' child support characteristics. There are no significant differences in engagement across fathers based on their order burden ratio or compliance in the year before random assignment. Table 1 shows a marginally significant difference in the likelihood of receipt

of any employment services based on provision of informal support, with noncustodial fathers who paid no informal support less likely to receive these services. However, Table 1 shows no additional relationships based on informal support, and neither Table 1 nor the multivariate model indicate differences in receipt of substantial services.

Similarly, for the most part, fathers also did not appear to engage in services differently based on their employment characteristics. The multivariate model shows no statistically significant differences in receipt of substantial based on quarters employed prior to random assignment and only a marginally significant difference based on logged earnings. For the most part, the analysis does not indicate differences based on the number of employment barriers reported by the noncustodial parent. One exception is receipt of parenting services. Table 1 indicates significant differences in likelihood of receipt of any parenting services and hours of parenting hours received, based on the number of reported employment barriers. Noncustodial parents with two or more barriers received more parenting service hours, and were more likely to receive any parenting services, than those with fewer barriers.

Family Characteristics

Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics for predictor variables included in this analysis related to noncustodial father characteristics. With regard to family characteristics, both the likelihood of receipt of substantial services and the number of hours received varied significantly across noncustodial parents according to the number of custodial parents with whom the noncustodial parent has children (an indicator of family complexity). These results are consistent with the multivariate model, which indicates significant differences in likelihood of receipt of any services for noncustodial fathers who had children with three or more custodial mothers.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Service Engagement by Family Characteristics *(N=1,499)*

	N	Received any services Percent	Received substantial services Percent	Total service hours received Mean	Received any employment services Percent	Employment service hours received Mean	Received any parenting services Percent	Parenting service hours received Mean	Received any child support services Percent	Child support service hours received Mean
Number of CPs with whom NCP Has Children										
1	713	75%	20%	34.0	61%	24.6	39%	7.7	43%	1.7
2	489	77%	21%	36.7	64%	27.4	39%	7.6	44%	1.7
3	198	78%	28%	46.7	62%	33.9	45%	10.6	54%	2.3
4 or more	99	81%	32%	43.9	67%	32.8	47%	8.7	52%	2.5
Significance of Differences Between Categories			***	**						*
NCP's Marital Children										
Has only nonmarital children	1000	76%	20%	37.0	62%	27.2	40%	8.0	43%	1.8
Has any marital children	499	78%	26%	37.6	63%	27.4	43%	8.4	51%	1.8
Significance of Differences Between Categories			***							
Number of Nonresident Children[a]										
1	635	76%	20%	37.9	62%	27.9	39%	8.2	45%	1.8
2	422	77%	22%	36.2	64%	26.9	43%	7.7	44%	1.7
3	231	73%	25%	36.2	61%	26.3	41%	7.9	45%	2.0
4 or more	185	81%	28%	40.4	65%	28.2	45%	10.0	50%	2.2
Significance of Differences Between Categories			*				***	*		
Assessment of Co-Parenting Team Quality (Averaged Across Nonresident Children's CPs)										
(Strongly) agree "good" parenting team	287	76%	24%	39.2	59%	27.5	47%	9.4	45%	2.3
Not sure if "good" parenting team	484	77%	21%	34.6	62%	25.1	39%	7.8	45%	1.7
(Strongly) disagree "good" parenting team	728	77%	22%	38.1	64%	28.6	39%	7.8	46%	1.7
Significance of Differences Between Categories							**			

***/**/* Statistically significant differences at the .01/.05/.10 level, using ANOVA F-tests (for continuous outcomes) and Chi-Sq test (for dichotomous outcomes)

[a] NCPs without any nonresident children at baseline not shown.

Another indicator of family complexity—the number of nonresident children each father reported having—showed some relationship to service engagement. Table 2 shows significant differences in receipt of any parenting services based on the number of nonresident children, and marginally significant differences in hours of parenting services received. It also shows marginally significant differences in receipt of substantial services, though the multivariate model does not indicate significant differences.

Finally, both Table 2 and the multivariate model identify a limited relationship between whether or not the noncustodial father had any marital children and service receipt, with noncustodial fathers who had any marital children significantly more likely to receive substantial services than those with only non-marital children. However, Table 2 shows no other significant differences between fathers based on whether or not they had any marital children.

Other variables show no statistically significant differences between family characteristics and engagement in services. The multivariate model does not identify differences in the amount of services received, types of services received, or likelihood of receiving any services, based on the number of days of contact noncustodial fathers had with their nonresident children. Fathers also did not appear to engage in services differently depending on whether or not they thought they made a good parenting team with their nonresident children's mother, except for differences in receipt of any parenting services.

Table 3. Multinomial Probit Model for Likelihood of Receiving "Substantial" Services on Selected Independent Variables

	Received substantial services	
Independent Variables	Estimate	Standard Error
Grantee (compared to Wisconsin)		
California	-0.061	0.104
Colorado	0.361***	0.092
Iowa	0.269***	0.092
Ohio	-0.027	0.103
South Carolina	-0.550***	0.201
Tennessee	0.044	0.098
NCP Age (compared to ages 25–40)		
Under 25	-0.612***	0.130
Over 40	0.158***	0.060
NCP Race/Ethnicity (compared to black, non-Hispanic)		
Hispanic (any)	-0.065	0.092
White (non-Hispanic)	-0.012	0.072
Other (non-Hispanic)	-0.233*	0.127
NCP Marital History (compared to never married)		
Ever married	-0.131*	0.076
NCP Education (compared to high school degree/GED)		
No high school degree	-0.248***	0.073
Some college/associate's degree	0.182***	0.060
Bachelor's degree or more	0.311**	0.133
Number of CPs with whom NCP Has Children (compared to one CP)		
2	0.073	0.069
3	0.282***	0.095
4 or more	0.379***	0.131
NCP's Marital Children (compared to only nonmarital children)		
Has any marital children	0.198**	0.078
Number of Nonresident Children (compared to one or zero children)		
2	-0.026	0.069
3	0.009	0.087
4 or more	-0.074	0.106
Compliance with Child Support Orders in Year Before Enrollment (continuous)	-0.200	0.105
Order Burden (Order to Earnings Ratio) (compared to no earnings)		
No order, or less than 50% order burden	0.313	0.196
50% or greater order burden	0.235	0.170
Informal Support Paid (compared to none)		
None	0.063	0.063
Percentage of Quarters Employed in Year Before Enrollment (continuous)	0.123	0.162
Earnings, Logged (continuous)	-0.044*	0.026
Criminal Conviction History (compared to never convicted)		
Ever convicted	0.121*	0.062
Depression (compared to not depressed)		
Major or severe major depression	-0.061	0.064
Level of Motivation to Participate in CSPED Services (compared to extremely motivated)		
Not at all/a little/somewhat	-0.399***	0.101
Very	-0.267***	0.056
Days of In-Person Contact (Averaged Across all Nonresident Children) (continuous)	-0.008	0.005
Assessment of Co-Parenting Team Quality (Averaged Across Nonresident Children's CPs) (compared to (strongly) agree "good" parenting team)		
Not sure if "good" parenting team	0.079	0.073
(Strongly) disagree "good" parenting team	-0.063	0.061
Number of Barriers to Finding and Keeping Work (compared to none)		
1	-0.094	0.065
2 or more	-0.103	0.069

***/**/* Statistically significant differences at the .01/.05/.10 level)

Discussion

The results of this analysis show that the CSPED participants who engaged in the most services were older and had high school degrees or more. This suggests that those with sufficient maturity and education to benefit from the program were more likely to participate. On the other hand, those who had criminal backgrounds, and those with relatively complex families, were also more likely to participate. Additionally, noncustodial fathers who self-reported extremely high levels of motivation to participate in services engaged in more services.

Given that CSPED targeted unemployed and underemployed fathers behind on their child support obligations, we expected to see more evidence of a relationship between employment characteristics and service engagement, and child support circumstances and service engagement. Though the descriptive tables did not show evidence of significant differences on most measures, the multivariate model provides suggestive evidence that fathers with lower earnings had higher levels of service engagement. These findings merit further exploration. For example, subsequent analyses could identify thresholds at which differences across these groups appear to matter more or less, and categorize noncustodial fathers into low-, middle-, and higher-earning fathers at baseline. Additionally, future analyses could examine the relationship between arrears balances and levels of service engagement, given staff emphasis on this constraint in the course of interviews and steps taken by most programs to attempt to reduce arrears balances.

Limitations

Though this analysis provides some insight into engagement in services, it has a number of key limitations. First, the analysis cannot be used to make causal claims. Though a number of the variables in this analysis showed a significant relationship to service engagement, these findings are correlations only; we do not claim that differences across fathers cause differences

in service receipt outcomes. Additionally, many of the predictor variables in this analysis could influence other variables in the analysis—for example, higher order burden likely has a relationship with number of nonresident children—introducing potential concerns about endogeneity. Additionally, our findings are limited to a sample of noncustodial parents who were willing to enroll into CSPED. Noncustodial fathers who did not choose to enroll likely differ on important characteristics that could affect their levels of service engagement.

We also acknowledge a host of limitations related to selection of measures. This analysis relies on a selection of variables intended to proxy a subset of issues identified by staff as affecting outcomes. We omitted some variables due to lack of a relevant proxy measure, such as attitudes towards the child support system, and omission of these variables likely biases our estimates. For other variables, we aggregated measures (such as measures of barriers to employment) into a single scale due to sample size issues; more detailed and precise measures might have yielded insights into specific barriers to service engagement. It is also possible that the variables we selected do not map adequately to the underlying constructs identified by staff. Further, our data rely entirely on self-reporting, which is subject to reporting error and social desirability bias. Finally, our models do not take into account factors outside of the individual and family that could affect service engagement. Results from the qualitative analysis indicate that a wide array of system-level factors affect compliance and employment, and might therefore also affect engagement in services intended to overcome these barriers.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study suggest a number of policy changes that could help facilitate child support compliance among noncustodial fathers. One set of suggestions addresses the practical barriers to payment of support. Qualitative findings from this research identified

considerable barriers to entry into higher-wage jobs for many noncustodial parents. A potential solution to this problem is greater investment in training programs intended to help low-income adults lacking job skills to obtain the skills needed to create a pathway to higher-paying professions, particularly in such a way that provides an income or stipend during the training period. A related solution involves the identification of noncustodial fathers with low incomes and skills who are behind on their child support payments, and providing them with services to build tangible skills. A policy change allowing child support funds to be spent on employment services could provide the opportunity for innovation and experimentation, and could inform service approaches for agencies working with other populations with skill-based barriers to work. Results from the quantitative analysis indicate that CSPED programs appeared less successful in engaging fathers with lower levels of education. Given that CSPED staff identified low levels of education as a barrier to work and compliance, future programs could aim to target recruitment efforts at fathers with lower levels of education, and provide them with services to help them to obtain a high school diploma or GED, or to become better prepared to enter the labor market.

In addition to employment training programs, greater investment in programs intended to help overcome physical and mental health issues, as well as substance abuse issues, could potentially help facilitate both noncustodial father employment and compliance with formal support obligations. Findings from interviews with staff indicate that assistance with these issues is, for many noncustodial parents, foundational to attaining the stability needed to find and keep work. Further, findings from this analysis suggest that these resources are currently lacking in many communities. Federal, state, and local prioritization of funding for these types of resources,

and consideration of implementation strategies to help facilitate access among those most in need, could potentially help address this barrier.

This research identified criminal history as an overwhelming barrier to many noncustodial parents' ability to find higher wage employment and contribute financially to their children. The quantitative analysis indicates that CSPED programs appeared relatively successful engaging fathers with criminal histories. Programs should capitalize on this willingness to engage by targeting services specifically to the needs of these noncustodial parents; developing and intensifying service arrays specifically to help these fathers prepare to enter the labor force and earn wages to help them meet their obligations could help to maximize the value of their engagement. Investing in reentry services for those who do spend time in jail or prison could help facilitate transitions to employment, and therefore improve the likelihood of compliance.

Within the realm of child support, child support programs and lawmakers could make administrative and statutory changes that would reduce the difficulty noncustodial fathers face meeting obligations due to enforcement actions, high burden orders and arrearage policies. "Right-sizing" orders based on a non-custodial father's actual income and with recognition of other financial obligations held by the father, and making modifications more accessible as father circumstances change, could increase compliance. This has implications for the achievability of meeting orders for the noncustodial father. However, reducing child support obligations must be considered carefully, as balancing the resource needs of children is crucially important given the limited cash resources available to custodial families through the social safety net. Future discussions related to modification practices should account for the perspectives of noncustodial parents as well as custodial parents and their children, particularly when all parties are struggling to meet basic needs.

Finally, policymakers could also consider providing noncustodial fathers who have never been married to the mothers of their children with pathways to visitation, when safe and appropriate. The staff in this analysis identified parenting time assistance as a significant unmet need for noncustodial fathers. Investing in mediation resources, similarly, could help improve noncustodial and custodial parent relationships and thus reduce the "cost" of staying involved in the lives of children from whom noncustodial fathers live apart.

Finally, while these practical changes could make strides towards facilitating compliance, attempts at culture change within child support agencies could also be helpful. This study indicates that staff see fathers' perceptions of treatment by agencies affects their willingness to engage with staff for the purpose of meeting formal support obligations. A service-oriented approach could help engage fathers, yielding more financial support for children. Service-oriented approaches could include changes such as staff training on successful interpersonal interactions with noncustodial fathers; basic education for fathers about the child support system presented in plain language, starting early in the noncustodial fathers' relationship with the child support system; and changes in messaging when fathers fall behind from threats to offers of assistance. Service-oriented approaches could also include greater personalization in services, and proactive outreach when noncustodial fathers fall behind on their child support obligations. Individualized and proactive approaches require facilitating sufficient staff capacity for such individualized attention through strategies such as lower caseworker-to-noncustodial parent caseloads and leadership directives regarding expectations for outreach.

CONCLUSIONS

This report aims to add to our understanding of the factors that get in the way of noncustodial parents meeting their child support obligations, in order to inform potential policy

solutions to these barriers. Interviews with staff indicate that a broad array of factors, related to both individual father backgrounds, family structures, and characteristics of the systems and communities in which fathers reside, affect noncustodial parent compliance with support obligations. Quantitative analyses of the relationship between father and family characteristics and participation in services designed to help overcome these barriers similarly identify a range of individual and contextual attributes affecting engagement. Taken together, these findings suggest that helping noncustodial parents who struggle to meet their child support obligations is not a straightforward task. The complex, interlocking barriers to employment and compliance likely require multifaceted solutions aimed at addressing both individual, family-specific, and institutional barriers to meeting obligations.

Additional research, as well as policy and practice innovations, could help to further inform barriers to and facilitators of child support compliance. Future qualitative analyses could examine the perspectives of noncustodial father perspectives on barriers to child support compliance directly. Future quantitative analyses could investigate the relationship between these barriers and child support compliance. Such analyses could incorporate systems-level attributes, such as interest rates on arrears, arrears forgiveness policies, and TANF pass-through policies, into their models. From a policy perspective, programmatic interventions could target the barriers identified in this analysis and related work, develop and implement programmatic changes, and examine outcomes. The CSPED demonstration and evaluation represents an important effort to test the effects of some of these changes. However, given the breadth of factors identified, including factors outside of the scope of CSPED, a considerable opportunity for innovation and experimentation exists at the local, state, and national level.

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