

# Child Support Engagement in Rural and Non-Rural Counties: More Engagement and Lower Amount Owed in Rural Areas

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This brief describes differences in engagement in child support for custodial parents living in rural and nonrural areas. Key findings are below:

## KEY POINTS

- Custodial parents in rural areas were more likely to have a formal child support agreement than those in nonrural areas over the entire period from 2010 to 2018.
- Between 2010 and 2018, there was a decline in the percentage of eligible custodial parent with a child support order, with the largest decline in rural areas. Though child support orders continued to be more common in rural areas than nonrural areas, the gap between rural and nonrural areas decreased from about seven percentage points in 2010 and to about four percentage points in 2018.
- On average, custodial parents in rural areas received less in child support and had lower child support order amounts—this is, they were supposed to receive less child support than those in nonrural areas. They also did actually receive less.
- Custodial parents in rural areas were more likely to have formal parenting time agreements than those in nonrural areas.

## INTRODUCTION

Child support policy can be an important family mediation tool to help facilitate the transfer of financial assistance from a nonresident parent to a child's caregiver. Child support policy can also encompass promotion of other aspects of family caregiving, such as parenting time agreements.

Congress established the Title IV-D child support program in 1975. The Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) within the Department of Health and Human Services partners with state, tribal, and community organizations to provide child support services to eligible families. In 2018, about 14.7 million children in the United States were part of the IV-D child support program (OCSE 2021) with another roughly 7.2 million children eligible to participate in child support services (Grall 2020). Box 1 defines key terms related to child support used in this brief.

The child support program is an important catalyst toward fostering families' economic well-being. Within the United States, families engage with child support services to varying degrees based on a number of factors. These could include demographics, economic opportunity, and geography. One factor that likely is a key determinant is whether a family lives in a rural or non-rural area.

To date, there is little research using nationally-representative data on factors related to different levels of engagement with child support enforcement programs across the rural and non-rural divide. Such information is vital to policy and programmatic development for one of the largest human services programs administered by HHS (Macartney and Ghertner, 2021). This analysis focuses on how rurality—whether the resident parent lives in a rural area—relates to engagement with the child support program. This understanding can help ensure that policy decisions at the federal and state levels consider systemic differences across different social and economic contexts appropriately.

There are several reasons to focus on rurality. Families in rural areas are often more economically disadvantaged compared to families in nonrural areas, particularly single parent families. In 2020, data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey Five Year estimates show that families in rural counties were more likely to have larger families than those in more metro counties and the median household income in rural areas was \$23,000 lower than for those in nonrural areas. Household income is a predictor of the need for child support payments among custodial parents and children, as well as the noncustodial parents' obligation amount, ability to pay, and access to the court to petition for legal visitation (Hodges et al., 2020). Other varying characteristics of rural and nonrural areas may also influence child support engagement. Noncustodial parents in nonrural areas often have more access to different types of employment and legal assistance programs than those in rural areas (Pruitt et al., 2018), which may help facilitate meeting child support obligations and assistance in obtaining formal parenting time agreements. Research has also demonstrated that general court monetary sanctions – not necessarily tied to child support – differ in complex ways across rural and nonrural communities. For example, one qualitative study (Kirk et al., 2022) found that in rural jurisdictions, lower caseloads and personal relationships between court staff and defendants resulted in more discretion and flexibility in assigning monetary sanctions than in urban areas, where larger caseloads and fewer personal ties led to more standardized sanctions. While this study didn't focus on child support enforcement in particular, it's findings may be applicable.

Engagement in child support programs can be thought about in different ways. In this analysis, we measure engagement in two different ways: having a formal child support agreement and payment and receipt of child support payments. We also measure having a formal parenting time agreement, which often occurs along with establishment of a child support order in case in which the parents are divorcing. Importantly,

### Box 1. Key Child Support Terms

- Custodial parents are eligible to obtain a *child support agreement* if one or both of a child's legal parents live outside the home. The agreement can be formal or informal.
- **Formal child support agreement** is a child support court order adjudicated by a legal entity. A child support order sets: (1) an amount of money that is to be provided by a parent for the support of the parent's child(ren) and/or (2) the responsibility to provide medical support for the child(ren). This form of agreement is obtained and enforced by the Title IV-D child support enforcement program.
- An **informal child support agreement** is a voluntary agreement directly between the custodial parent and the other legal parent(s) to provide support for the child. The agreement is not ordered by a court or child support agency. The agreement may include monetary and/or in-kind forms of support.
- **Shared parenting time** involves the navigation of the rights of both parents to visit or spend time with their children.
- A **formal shared parenting time** agreement is a court ordered arrangement that specifies how and when each parent shares time with the child.

there is no standard process for establishing parenting time among couples who never married. While the Title IV-D child support program has authority and funding to establish and enforce formal child support orders, the program does not have the authority to establish formal parenting time agreements unless it is incidental to the establishment of the formal child support agreement. As a result, very few child support programs establish formal parenting time agreements. In nearly all jurisdictions, if a parent wants to establish a formal visitation agreement, he or she must initiate a separate legal proceeding with the court.

States set guidelines for child support order levels for the entire state, and do not account for different costs of living and other economic circumstances across rural and nonrural areas. Local administrators, including judges, have discretion in deviating from those guidelines, and one study in Maryland suggests that deviations are related to higher payment compliance (Demyan and Passarella, 2018). Little is known about how deviations relate to rurality – one study in New Hampshire found that different case characteristics led to deviations from guidelines in rural and urban areas (Ellis, 2008). While this analysis does not look specifically at deviations, it does include household income as a control variable in examining differences in order amounts and payments across rural and nonrural areas. To the extent that income is a factor in order deviations, results may indicate that child support administration – including deviations – differs by rurality. Such a finding would provide future direction understanding policy implications and interventions.

## DATA AND METHODS

This brief discusses the differences in child support engagement and child access between rural and nonrural areas. In this brief, rural is defined using the USDA Rural-Urban Continuum Codes<sup>1</sup> for counties, defined as counties outside of metropolitan areas. Engagement is measured in four different ways: whether a family has a child support agreement, the amount due under the child support agreement, the amount of child support paid, and having a parenting time agreement. This brief uses the Child Support Supplement (CSS) of the Current Populations Survey (CPS) from 2010 to 2018. The CPS-CSS is a unique, nationally representative survey conducted every other year over this time period, with 2018 being the latest available year of data. It is funded by the Office of Child Support Services and administered by the Census Bureau. The CPS-CSS is the only nationally representative survey that identifies custodial parents and provides information about their demographic and socioeconomic conditions, including the amount of child support they were supposed to receive, the amount actually received, and other factors related to the child support program. Child support may have changed since 2018, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to data limitations, this study cannot examine trends during and after the pandemic; as more data become available, the trends studied in this brief can be extended. One study in Wisconsin found that earnings declines for non-custodial parents were mitigated by economic stimulus, resulting in higher child support payment rates and amounts (Pilarz and Cuesta, 2022). The study also found that child support payments and safety net benefits to custodial mothers more than compensated for earnings declines during the pandemic. A qualitative study – also in Wisconsin – found that child support agency and court staff paused enforcement and were more lenient during the pandemic (Vogel et al., 2022).

This analysis includes all families eligible for IV-D services, not only those who currently have a child support case with a IV-D agency, in order to show opportunities for outreach and expansion. Results shown in the brief are bivariate comparisons between custodial parents in rural and nonrural areas. Standard tests of statistical significance were used, and all differences described are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level. Many factors can confound the relationship between rurality and child support engagement. The results in the body of the brief were verified using regression models that adjust for several important factors that are known to vary systematically by rurality and that also relate to child support engagement. These factors include household income, employment status, receipt of cash assistance through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), receipt of Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, gender, and race. While a direct measure of cost of living is not included, household

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/defining-rural-qc.pdf>

income can serve as a proxy to the extent that higher earnings are associated with higher costs across place.

Data limitations affect what this analysis was able to explore. In particular, the analysis could not measure child support compliance – that is, whether non-custodial parents pay the full amount that is owed to custodial parents. This analysis could not account for whether the parents are divorced or never married, which is a key factor used by child support agencies and courts in determining both child support orders and establishing parenting time orders. Establishing paternity, for example, increases the time and complexity of the actions that the child support agency needs to take to establish an order, particularly if the non-custodial parent has not voluntarily acknowledged paternity. According to the 2021 American Community Survey, marriage and divorce are both more common in non-metropolitan counties than metropolitan counties. Consequently, marital status could be a confounding factor in the differences between rural and non-rural child support engagement. More details on the data and methods, and the regression results, can be found in the appendices.

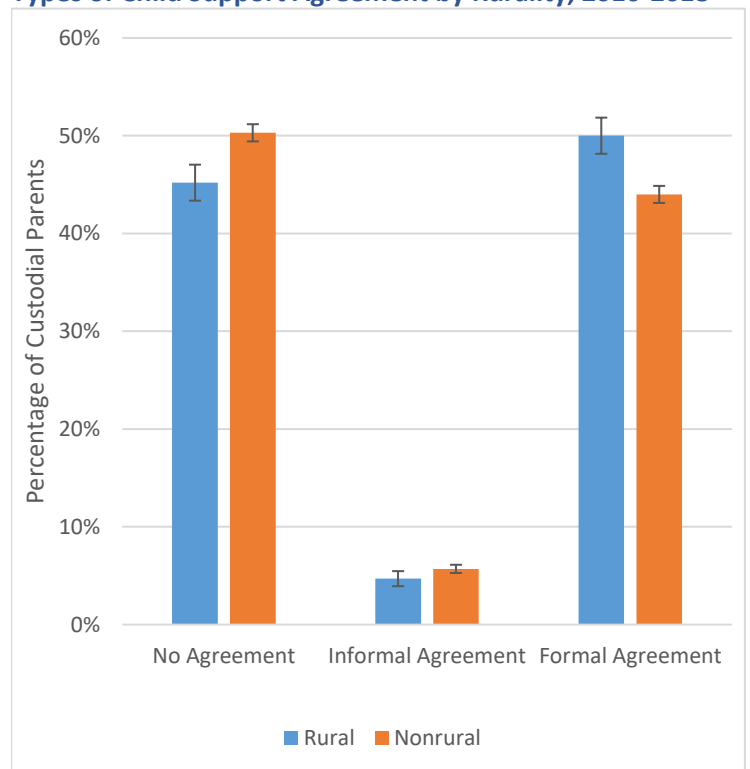
## RESULTS

### Rural Areas Had More Formal Child Support Agreements than Nonrural Areas

There are important differences across rurality in the types of child support agreements that eligible families have, as seen in Figure 1. These include: no form of agreement, informal child support agreements between parents, and formal child support agreements. There is no discernable difference between rural and nonrural counties on the percentage of custodial parents with an informal child support agreement.

In contrast, rurality matters when there is no agreement or there is a formal child support agreement. In rural counties, custodial parents are more likely to have a formal child support agreement than nonrural custodial parents. On average, 50 percent of rural custodial parents have formal child support agreements compared to 44 percent of nonrural custodial parents. The reverse is true for lack of any agreement, with rural custodial parents being less likely to have no agreement compared to nonrural custodial parents. In rural communities, approximately 45 percent of custodial parents lack a child support agreement. Comparatively, about half of custodial parents in nonrural counties have no child support agreement.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Custodial Parents with Different Types of Child Support Agreement by Rurality, 2010-2018**

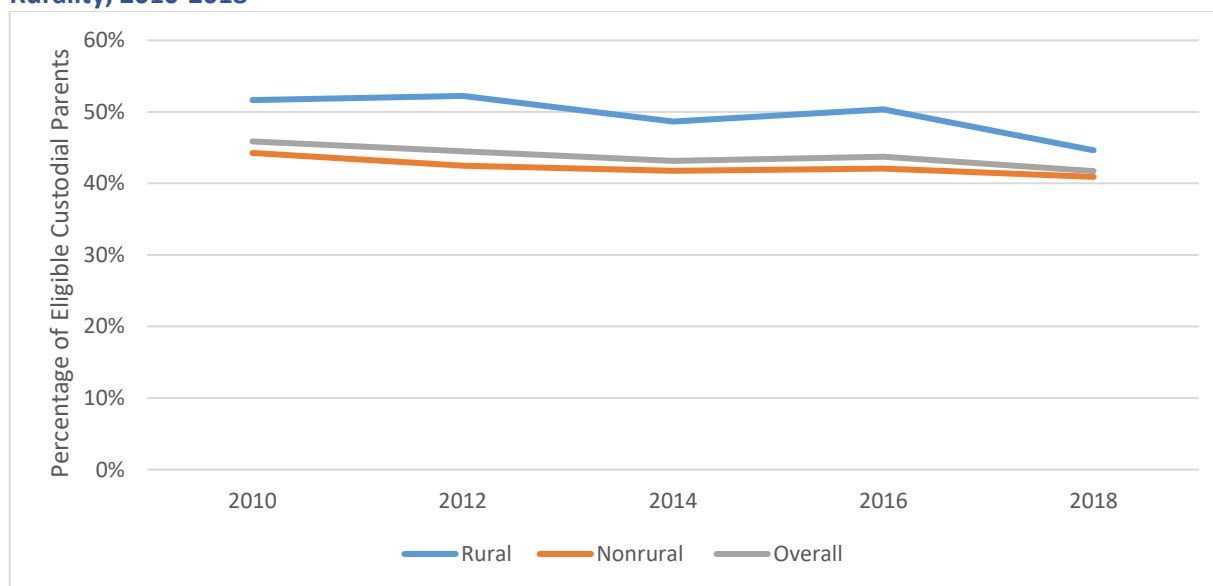


Note: Results are predicted probabilities in percentages. N = 19,479  
Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Detailed model results can be found in Appendix table B3.

## Rural Areas Had a Large Decline in the Percentage of Custodial Parents with a Formal Child Support Order

The percentage of eligible custodial parents who have formal child support orders has declined over the last decade. Figure 2 displays the percentage of custodial parents from 2010 to 2018 that had a child support agreement. From 2010 to 2018, the percentage of eligible custodial parents with a child support order declined from 46 to 42 percent. Results from the CPS-CSS align with administrative records from the Office of Child Support Enforcement, which also show a decline in IV-D cases over this period. However, the results show that the overall decline in the number of custodial parents with child support orders is mostly driven by the rural trend. Figure 2 shows that the decline is greater in rural areas compared to nonrural areas. There was a 15 percent decrease in the percentage of custodial parents with a child support agreement in rural areas between 2010 and 2018, compared to eight percent in nonrural areas. The greater decline in participation in rural areas closed the gap between rural and nonrural areas from about seven percentage points in 2010 and to about four percentage points in 2018.

**Figure 2. Percentage of Eligible Custodial Parents with a Formal Child Support Agreement Order by Rurality, 2010-2018**



Note: Results are annual percentages from 2010 to 2018 . N= 18,485

Source: CPS Child Support Supplement

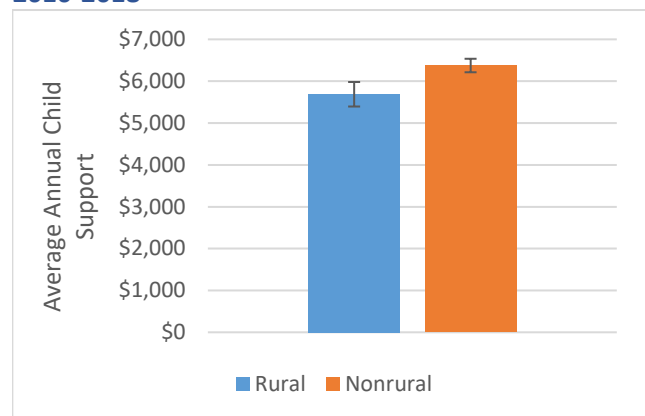
## Custodial Parents in Rural Areas Were Supposed to Receive Less Child Support

The average amount of child support noncustodial parents were legally ordered to pay to the custodial parents (based on the child support order amount) differed significantly between rural and nonrural counties, displayed in Figure 3. Custodial parents in rural areas were owed significantly less child support than similarly situated custodial parents who lived in nonrural areas. The average amount of child support custodial parents in rural areas were supposed to receive was \$5,677 per year during 2010 to 2018 and the average amount owed custodial parents in nonrural areas was \$6,375 per year during the same period. Thus, custodial parents living in rural areas were supposed to receive 13 percent less (\$687) annually than custodial parents in nonrural areas. Figure 3 reports average differences without accounting confounding factors. When adjusting for some of these factors, including household income, the difference between rural and nonrural areas remains and is comparable (See appendix Table B4). As stated above, state guidelines for order amounts do not consider the cost-of-living difference between rural and nonrural areas. These results indicate that, even when taking into account earning differences, rural areas continue to have lower order amounts. To the extent that income is a proxy for cost of living and other economic circumstances, other factors must account for systemic differences in order amounts across rural and nonrural areas.

## Custodial Parents in Rural Areas Received Less Child Support

Similar to the difference in child support that custodial parents were supposed to receive, custodial parents in rural areas actually received less child support on average than those in nonrural areas. As shown in Figure 4, on average custodial parents in rural areas received \$750 dollars less per year than those living in nonrural counties, a difference of nearly 15 percent. Families receiving child support in nonrural areas received an average of \$5,374 per year in child support over the 2010 to 2018 period, compared to \$4,628 per year received by rural families. When accounting for household income and other factors, the average difference between rural and nonrural areas remains consistent. This suggests that income and demographic differences between rural and nonrural areas do not explain the difference in child support received. Other factors associated with rural and nonrural areas must account for this difference.

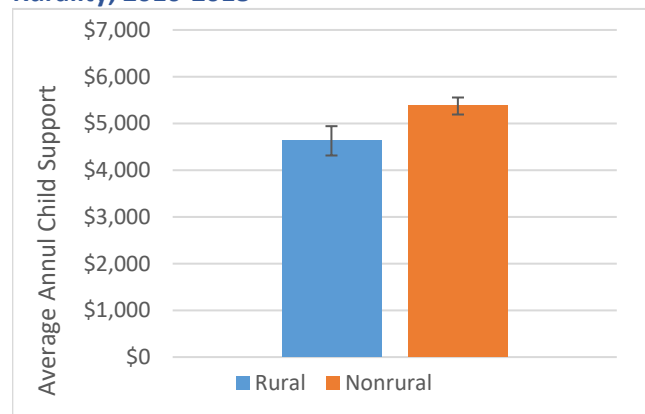
**Figure 3. Average Annual Child Support Custodial Parents Were Supposed to Receive by Rurality, 2010-2018**



N = 8,733

Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Regression adjusted results can be found in Table B4 in the appendix.

**Figure 4. Average Annual Child Support Received by Rurality, 2010-2018**



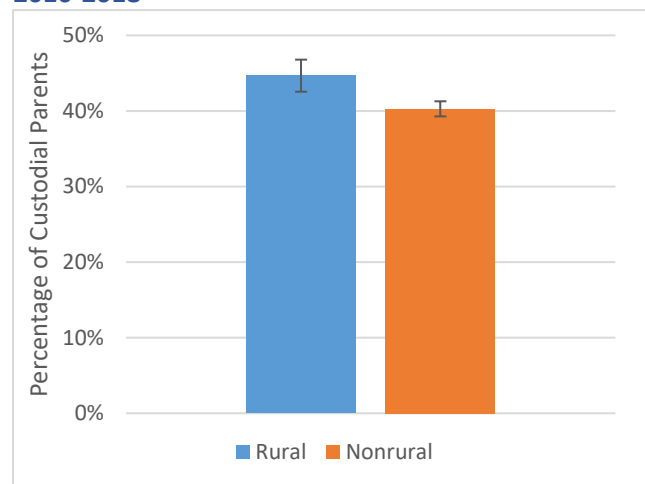
N = 7,266

Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Regression adjusted results can be found in Table B4 in the appendix.

## Custodial Parents in Rural Areas were More Likely to Have Formal Parenting Time Agreements than Those in Nonrural Areas

Among custodial parents with children who have a parent who lives outside the home, nearly 45 percent of those in rural areas reported having a formal parenting agreement in place with the noncustodial parents (see Figure 5). In comparison, about 40 percent of nonrural custodial parents reported having a formal parenting time agreement. As above, analysis accounting for income and demographics finds comparable results, again suggesting that other factors in rural and nonrural areas account for these differences.

**Figure 5. Percentage of Custodial Parents with Formal Parenting Time Agreements by Rurality, 2010-2018**



N = 14,445 Black bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Regression adjusted results can be found in Table B5 in the appendix.

## DISCUSSION

This brief uses Current Population Survey's Child Support Supplement data to examine the differences in various measures of child support program engagement by whether custodial parents live in rural or nonrural areas. The CPS-CSS is the only dataset currently available to study nationally-representative trends in the population eligible for and engaged in child support services. Generally, the analysis indicates that a substantial percentage of custodial parents benefit from the child support program. The extent to which families benefit is influenced by socioeconomic and demographic factors – this study focused on rurality, but other factors are likely important as well.

Over the period from 2010 to 2018, formal child support agreements were more likely in rural communities than in nonrural communities, though the gap closed as the decade progressed. Additionally, even after controlling for differences in selected characteristics, custodial parents in rural areas were more likely to have formal child support agreements than those in nonrural areas. The rural child support context may help explain the higher number of child support court orders in a couple of potential ways. One, in some states rural areas have fewer cases per caseworker, which may allow child support matters to be processed faster than in nonrural areas (McDonald 2022). Second, rural areas have a higher percentage of formerly married women than among women in nonrural areas (Daniels et al., 2018). During the dissolution of many of these marriages, child support and parenting time orders are likely to be included in the divorce judgement, which may also explain the increased likelihood of having one of these orders in rural areas compared to those in nonrural ones.

This analysis finds that on average custodial parents in rural areas are owed and receive less child support than similarly situated custodial parents in nonrural areas. Research shows that personal income – particularly stability of income - of noncustodial parents is a key predictor of payment (Hodges, 2020; Mincey et al., 2016; Ha et al, 2008). Per capita incomes in rural areas are lower than nonrural areas on average (Davis et al, 2022). A larger proportion of rural parents are likely to be among the working poor than nonrural parents (Slack 2010). Taken together, economic conditions in rural areas are more likely to produce lower child support obligations and less child support paid compared to nonrural areas.



The results reported in this brief did not substantively change the analysis after controlling for differences in earnings and economic structures of rural and nonrural areas<sup>2</sup>. This suggests that child support engagement – including how the program is administered – differs in rural areas relative to nonrural areas in ways that may not be explained by income, cost of living, and opportunity. State-level child support guidelines do not consider rural and nonrural differences in the administration of child support or the ordering of shared parenting time. However, judges and administrators may deviate from those guidelines, and these findings suggest that order amounts in rural areas may be the result of a deviation more often than nonrural areas. This signals that there is something else different about how child support is calculated in rural areas. Research should explore what factors associated with rural cases may explain this potential deviation.

Understanding why there are persistent differences between rural and nonrural areas is critical to whether these differences reflect inequities across place, or whether it is an appropriate “right-sizing” of child support amounts. Research in court and safety net participation literature may provide insight at the differences in child support obligation amounts across rural and nonrural places. Some studies have found that sentencing practices differ across rural and nonrural courts (Pup and Zane, 2021; Lu, 2018). Rural courts may be more lenient in sentencing than urban courts (Pup and Zane, 2021; Lu, 2018), due to greater use of extralegal factors (i.e. known personal factors) when making their decisions, based on relationships court personnel have with community members, and use of community knowledge to make decisions that align with community values (Lu 2018; Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells 2006; Fahnestock and Geiger 1993; Freudenberg 1986; Austin, 1981). Additionally, courts in rural areas have been found to be less bureaucratic than those in nonrural areas (Myer and Talarico 1986), which may allow for rural courts to use more discretion in sentencing. Although criminal sentencing and child support order setting is fundamentally different, rural courts may be using their discretion to adjust payment amounts based on the community context. If this is indeed the case, it would suggest that rural child support systems are more sensitive to the economic circumstances of custodial and non-custodial parents in setting orders.

Research also shows that safety net participation varies across rural and nonrural contexts. One explanation suggests that rural community perspectives lean more toward self-reliance, which leads to stigma around economic dependence on the state (Camasso and Jagannathan 2012; Sherman and Sage 2011). Additionally, economic opportunity constraints attributable to rural areas discourage safety net program use that is associated with work-requirements (Lee, Harvey, and Neustrom 2009; Nicoll 2015). If people in rural areas are less likely to participate in safety net programs such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid, this could lead to lower participation rates in child support due to mandatory cooperation policies the child support system often has with these programs. If only the families with the lowest income participate in child support as a result of their participation in safety net programs, this could partially explain why child support orders and payments are lower in rural areas.

Lastly, custodial parents in rural areas were more likely to have formal parenting time agreements than their nonrural counterparts. Divorcing parents can get parenting time orders when settling their divorce but in most states never-married parents have no regular access to parenting time agreement establishment through the child support program. As described above, most child support programs do not establish formal parenting time agreements because this is generally not an allowable use of federal program funds. Differences in rural and non-rural parenting time agreements may be related to programs in rural areas better able, or more willing, to establish such agreements generally.

The results in this brief point to opportunities for federal, state, and tribal agencies to better serve custodial parents and their children through the IV-D program and other services. One primary takeaway is that child support engagement is different in rural and nonrural areas, and consequently services provided by IV-D agencies should reflect those differences. In rural areas where there are a larger number of formerly married women and child support court orders, states may promote the child support services to

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix.



custodial parents who have child support orders included in their divorce decrees. State IV-D agencies can assist these families by acting as a low or no-cost child support record keeping and collection agent with access to additional tools like federal and state tax offset. Additionally, if the economic disadvantage in rural areas is associated with noncustodial parents being ordered to pay lower amounts of child support, states may partner with rural development agencies to invest in job creation, which may improve the economic conditions of custodial parents, children, and noncustodial parents.

There are limitations to this analysis that should be considered. Due to limitations in the data, estimates were not able to control for all factors potentially confounding the relationship between child support engagement and rurality. For example, data on prior marital status were not available. In addition, this analysis was not able to assess differences in compliance with child support orders. Future research should examine the extent to which compliance differs across rural and nonrural areas, which could indicate the need for policy and program interventions tailored to geography.<sup>3</sup> While the data are five years old, we believe these trends are still relevant to the current situation of child support services and engagement. That said, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child support engagement is still largely unknown. Increases in the social safety during the pandemic mitigated earning declines leading to more noncustodial parents making at least partial payments (Pilarz and Cuesta 2022). It is possible that the decline in rural area may have continued as child support services switched to virtual administration due to social distancing measures. Child support and court staff in at least some parts of the country paused enforcement and became more lenient (Vogel et al., 2022), though the extent to which these practices may have continued is unknown. Families in child support programs were also forced to rely on internet technology. As other ASPE research has shown, people living in nonmetropolitan areas had less access to the internet than in metropolitan areas (Swenson and Ghertner, 2021). This is particularly true for low-income households, for whom child support is a larger portion of their household income (Sorenson 2010). As future data becomes available, researchers should examine how the trends identified in this brief have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these limitations, these results provide the most accurate portrait available of differences in individual experiences with child support and parenting time across rurality in the U.S. These results point to the need for further research to uncover why rural areas experience child support differently, and how federal and state policies may affect rural areas in different ways than nonrural areas. Child support has the potential to improve the economic conditions of low-income families and improve relationships between noncustodial parents and their children. It also can lead to negative consequences for parents and children, if not implemented appropriately. More research is needed to identify specific factors explaining rural and nonrural differences, as well as the consequences of these differing trends. In the meantime, policymakers should be sensitive to how child support programs in rural areas may respond differently to policy decisions.

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<sup>3</sup> For additional information about the limitations of the CPS-CSS, see Grall (2020).

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## APPENDIX A. METHODOLOGY

### Data and Sample

This brief uses the most recent years of data from the biennial United States Census Current Population Study's Child Support Supplement (CSP-CSS), a nationally representative sample of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population who are 15 years of age or older. The analysis include in the analytic sample respondents who live with their biological children, with a biological father or mother living outside the household. The analysis pooled data for survey years 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 to ensure adequate sample size. The survey questions used for this analysis involved child support and noncustodial parent access to their nonresident children. The survey items and design did not change over this time period.

After accounting for missing data, the final sample size for most analysis was 19,479. Sample sizes for specific subgroups can be found in the corresponding tables.

Additional information on the CPS-CSS can be located on the Census Bureau website, accessible here: <http://www.census.gov/topics/families/child-support.publications.html>.

### Measures

This analysis analyzed six dependent or outcome variables:

- If the respondent ever had a legal child support agreement;
- The type of child support agreement;
- The amount of child support due in the previous year to respondents owed child support;
- The amount of child support received in the previous year to respondents owed child support;
- If the non-custodial parent has visitation privileges with the children living with the custodial parent;
- If the visitation rights of the non-custodial parent are outlined in a court order.

All dollar amounts were adjusted for inflation to 2018 U.S. dollars. The analysis focused on how rurality relates to the outcome variables described above. Rural is defined using the USDA Rural-Urban Continuum Codes<sup>4</sup> for counties: —defined as counties outside of metropolitan areas. Sample size and the survey design did not permit a more granular analysis of rurality.

Some analyses incorporated other independent variables to account for potential confounding factors. Control variables in this analysis include household income, whether the respondent was employed last year, whether the respondent ever received TANF and/or SNAP, as well as the race/ethnicity and sex of the respondent. These analyses were not meant to be causal, and the controls are not comprehensive. These variables were chosen because they are known to be either highly correlated with both urbanicity and child support receipt (in the case of income, employment, race/ethnicity and benefits receipt), or because child support practice differs substantially for people of certain demographic characteristics (in the case of race/ethnicity and sex).

### Analysis

The analysis in this brief uses several statistical methods. All tests of statistical significance reported in the body of the paper were at the  $p < 0.05$  level. First, bivariate tests were done to examine differences in the outcome variables by metropolitan status. For analysis reported in Figures 2 through 5, regression models

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/opre/defining-rural-qc.pdf>

were used. Models without controls and with controls variables described above. The results were quite similar; therefore we presented the bivariate regression models in this brief.

For continuous outcome variables (child support due and received), the analysis used linear regression models. For dichotomous or binary outcome variables (type of court order, visitation privileges, and visitation court order), the analysis used logistic regression models. Type of court order is a multinomial outcome (three categories), and a multinomial logistic model was used. Logistic regression models report estimates as odds ratios or relative risk ratios, which can be difficult to interpret. Results in the body of the text are reported as predicted probabilities or percentages, and the detailed regression estimates in the appendix tables are reported as odds ratios or relative risk ratios.

All analyses consider the survey design of the CPS-CSS, using appropriate sampling information to create estimates, along with 95 percent confidence intervals. Difference discussed in this brief are statistically significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level unless specifically indicated in the findings. Detailed regression output can be found in Appendix B.

## Limitations

This analysis faces three notable limitations. First, the data used in this analysis cannot specifically identify if both adults in married couples are the biological/adoptive parents of all the children in the home (as opposed to stepparents). However, the data do delineate that the head of household reported living with their own children, who has a parent who lives outside the home. Second, the data do not include children who may have caretakers that are not their biological/adoptive parents (i.e., grandparents, siblings, and foster parents) who may be eligible to receive child support. Third, heads of household who receive TANF benefits may underreport the amount of child support received by the state for their child. Because of mandatory child support reassignment, some states retain all or some child support collected on behalf of their children.



## APPENDIX B. DETAILED DATA TABLES

**Table B1. Percentage of Eligible Custodial Parents with a Child Support Order, By Rurality 2010-2018**

Year	Total	Metro	Nonmetro
2010	45.9	44.2	51.7
2012	44.5	42.5	52.2
2014	43.3	41.7	48.7
2016	43.9	42.1	50.4
2018	41.8	40.9	44.6

Source: US Census Current Population Survey Child Support Supplement, 2010-2019 N =33,123. All differences between Rural and Nonrural are significant  $p<0.05$ .

**Table B2. Descriptive Statistics, 2010-2018**

Variable	Mean Percentage
Rural	45.9
Nonrural	44.5
Household Income	43.3
Employed during last year	43.9
Female	41.8
Received TANF	0.20
Received SNAP	35.1
Black	23.5
Indigenous	2.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.2
Mixed Race	5.2
White	67.1

Source: US Census Current Population Survey Child Support Supplement, 2010-2019 N =33,123.

**Table B3. Multinomial Logistic Regression Results for Child Support Agreement Type Held by Custodial Parent, 2010-2018**

Reference: Formal Agreement	No Agreement				Informal Agreement			
	Model 1 (no controls)		Model 2 (with controls)		Model 1 (no controls)		Model 2 (with controls)	
	RRR	Std. Error	RRR	Std. Error	RRR	Std. Error	RRR	Std. Error
Nonrural County	1.27***	0.05	1.24***	0.05	1.36**	0.14	1.36**	0.14
Household Income			0.98***	0.00			0.97***	0.01
Employed Last Year			0.93	0.04			1.04	0.10
Received SNAP			0.98	0.04			1.19	0.11
Received TANF			1.09	0.09			0.62*	0.12
Female			0.41***	0.02			1.45	0.20
<i>Race (reference group = White)</i>								
Black			1.78	0.078			1.51***	0.14
Indigenous			1.25	0.18			1.24	0.39
Asian/Pacific Islander			1.72	0.20			1.27	0.32
Mixed Race			1.21	0.15			1.93**	0.46
Constant	0.90***	0.04	2.00***	0.15	0.07	0.01	0.07***	0.01
<i>N</i>	19,479		19,479		19,479		19,479	
<i>Likelihood Ratio X<sup>2</sup></i>	34.74		657.26		34.74		657.26	
<i>Prob &gt; X<sup>2</sup></i>	0.000		0.000		0.000		0.000	
<i>Pseudo R<sup>2</sup></i>	0.001		0.029		0.001		0.029	

Notes: RRR=Relative Risk Ratio with formal agreement as the reference category. \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

Source: US Census Current Population Survey Child Support Supplement, 2010-2019

**Table B4. Linear Regression Results for Child Support Custodial Parents To Receive and Received By Custodial Parent, 2010-2018**

	Child Support Due (\$)		Child Support Received (\$)	
	<i>Model 1 (no controls)</i>	<i>Model 2 (with controls)</i>	<i>Model 1 (no controls)</i>	<i>Model 2 (with controls)</i>
Nonrural County	686.73*** (170.59)	711.95*** (169.83)	745.19*** (185.06)	736.67*** (185.66)
Household Income		34.42* (15.58)		45.13* (18.03)
Employed Last Year		-91.31 (192.37)		-160.77 (208.89)
Received TANF		-665.08* (257.64)		-898.42*** (240.42)
Received SNAP		-852.10*** (173.36)		-1198.59*** (187.11)
Female		711.00** (216.44)		611.75* (262.50)
<i>Race (reference group = White)</i>				
Black		-1631.33*** (157.71)		-1460.52*** (166.55)
Indigenous		-1377.70*** (365.44)		-958.80* (443.06)
Asian/Pacific Islander		1817.49** (698.64)		1307.76 (768.76)
Mixed Race		153.80 (572.82)		-737.93 (483.88)
Constant		5464.74*** (339.06)		4587.22*** (374.27)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.002	0.029	0.002	0.032
N		8733		7266

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05

Source: US Census Current Population Survey Child Support Supplement, 2010-2019.

**Table B5. Logistic Regression Results for Formal Parenting Time Agreement**

	<i>Model 1 (no controls)</i>	<i>Model 2 (with controls)</i>
Nonrural	0.84*** (0.04)	0.89* (0.04)
Household Income		1.04*** (0.00)
Employed Last Year		1.07 (0.06)
Received TANF		0.74** (0.08)
Received SNAP		0.85** (0.05)
Female		0.99 (0.05)
<i>Race (reference group = White)</i>		
Black		0.34*** (0.02)
Indigenous		0.69* (0.12)
Asian/Pacific Islander		0.67** (0.08)
Mixed Race		0.86 (0.12)
Constant	0.81*** (0.04)	0.76** (0.06)
Pseudo R2	0.001	0.05
N		14,445

Note: Reported coefficients are odds ratios. Standard errors are in parentheses \*\*\* p<.001, \*\* p<.01, \* p<.05  
Source: US Census Current Population Survey Child Support Supplement, 2010-2019.

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