



Improving Economic Mobility through Child Support: Opportunities for Future Research

The child support program lifts thousands of United States children out of poverty. Yet, it may not be reaching all of the children who could benefit from it. Child support and child poverty experts met at a [national convening](#) to discuss ways to increase the program's impact on reducing child poverty and promoting economic mobility for parents. That convening also identified knowledge gaps and research opportunities, which are outlined below. The questions under each topic can support key decisions currently faced by child support programs, though they do not cover the only important questions for study.



TOPIC: Barriers to participation

Key questions: What are the patterns of formal child support program participation among families who initially use informal agreements for child support? Do families with informal agreements receive more or less child support than they would if they had a formal child support agreement?

Research Opportunities

- Use longitudinal administrative data to understand patterns of how people enter and exit the child support system
- Document child outcomes with formal and informal child support



TOPIC: Child support and economic self-sufficiency

Key question: How does child support receipt interact with receipt of public assistance?

Research Opportunities

- Examine public assistance trends using state administrative data and representative survey data
- Examine child support's impact on public assistance expenditures using state administrative data and representative survey data



TOPIC: Expanding child support services

Key question: What are potential outcomes and implementation considerations regarding accepting in-kind child support as a form of formal child support?

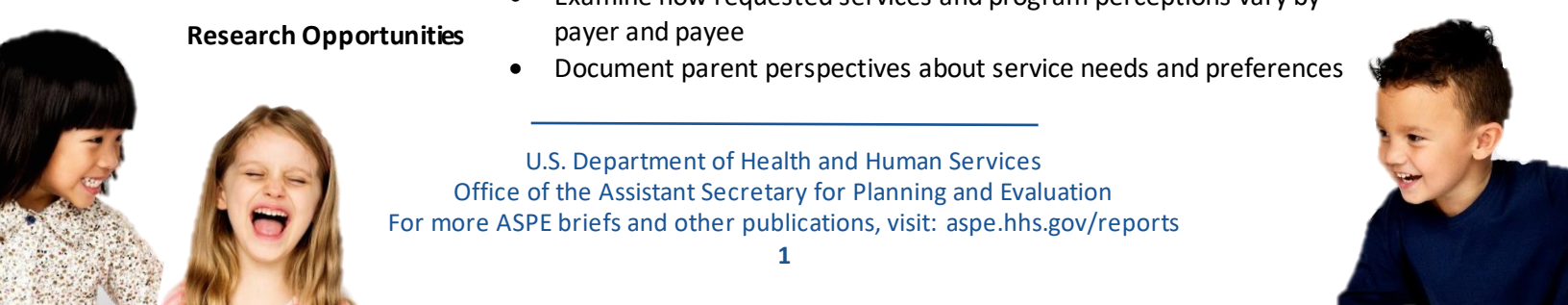
Research Opportunities

- Explore how Tribal child support programs accept in-kind child support contributions as formal child support.
- Examine trends in in-kind contributions using existing or new survey data
- Document participant perspectives and experiences with giving and receiving in-kind support

Key question: What services are parents looking for from the child support program?

Research Opportunities

- Examine how requested services and program perceptions vary by payer and payee
- Document parent perspectives about service needs and preferences





TOPIC: Exploring more effective enforcement

Key question: What are potential applications of behavioral economics, procedural justice, and other innovative strategies to make enforcement more effective?

Research Opportunities

- Broaden existing research to include findings from non-experimental research or focus on the implementation lessons from employment services studies
- Synthesize findings of behavioral economic intervention demonstrations and procedural justice interventions
- Document states' use of predictive analytics or machine learning



TOPIC: Including parents in decision making

Key question: How are states including parents in program improvement and decision making? How does this impact program effectiveness?

Research Opportunities

- Examine the extent to which child support programs across the country are collecting family input, how they are doing so, and what are the outcomes
- Document the facilitators for and barriers to programs collecting and using family input



TOPIC: Developing flexible service delivery options

Key question: How are child support offices using flexibility, currently offered through waivers, grants, or state plan exceptions, to meet the needs of the families they serve?

Research Opportunities

- Survey or interview program directors about their use of flexibilities to meet family needs



TOPIC: Best practices for staff training

Key question: To what extent do trainings improve customer satisfaction and program effectiveness?

Research Opportunities

- Produce a national snapshot of the trainings child support programs offer staff
- Hold focus groups with participants in states and localities where there is greater and less emphasis on staff training



TOPIC: Agency use of data for program improvement

Key question: What are process and outcome measures that can be captured in existing child support data?

Research Opportunity

- Analyze other factors that could be indicators of success such as:
 - Relationship quality of parents
 - Improving outcomes for customers
 - Regularity and consistency of payment
 - Customer satisfaction with the program
 - Parental engagement with children
 - Timeliness of order modifications
 - Order amounts based on ability to pay

