Experimental Tests of Efforts to Improve Child Support Collections in Washington State

NAWRS Presentation, August 18, 2014
Asaph Glosser
The Challenge

• Automated methods responsible for the majority of child support collections in Washington… What about the rest?
• Hard to collect cases
  – Inconsistent payments
  – Population challenges
    • Limited/sporadic employment
    • More transient – locate is time intensive
  – Few automated methods
  – Labor intensive
• What works for these cases?
• How do we know if new approaches are making an impact?
How to improve enforcement?

• This grant enhances research capacity to support policy relevant solutions
• Collaborative team: MEF Associates, University of Washington, and WA Division of Child Support
• Be opportunistic and strategic
Role of Research

• Rigorous test of enforcement approaches
  – Random assignment
  – Impacts – more than just outcomes
• Research accompanies new resources and innovative ideas
  – Deploying research strategically increases potential for learning
  – Rigorous tests that are policy relevant
  – Low cost design
  – Informing broader policy/practitioner community
Two experimental efforts

• Collection from arrears only cases with only state owed debt
  – Specific appropriation
  – Specialized collections unit
  – Intensive outreach

• Sending statements
  – Varied approach across states
  – Standardize existing option – switch the default
  – Learning from private sector
  – Seeking to increase consistency and amount of payments from a less stable population
Methods

• Test differences in outcomes between treatment and control groups
• Regressions controlling for study design, NCP age, NCP gender, number of children on case, TANF status, address type, starting arrears, monthly order amount, marital status, residence region
## TANF 16 – Sample

- **Target population**
  - Randomly assigned: TANF 16 or business as usual
  - 5,555 NCPs in sample
    - 3,955 Initial sample, Fall 2012
    - 1,600 added in Spring/Summer 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCPs</td>
<td>3,555</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Male</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>75.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent with only 1 child</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>45.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting Arrears</td>
<td>$5,950</td>
<td>$6,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending Arrears</td>
<td>$5,357</td>
<td>$5,524</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TANF 16, cont.

• Timeframe
  – Initial random assignment, Fall 2012
  – Additional random assignment, Summer 2013
  – Track outcomes through Summer 2014

• Key outcomes
  – Amount of payment
  – Arrears reduction

• Implementation research
Monthly Statements – Sample

- Target population
  - New NCPs
  - Known addresses, not incarcerated
  - No employer when order is established
  - Children won’t age out before experiment ends
- Began March, 2013
- Sample built over several months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Control</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCPs</td>
<td>1,304</td>
<td>1,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of statements</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>received</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent Male</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>61.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent with only 1 child</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>70.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starting Arrears</td>
<td>$1,391</td>
<td>$1,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ending Arrears</td>
<td>$1,763</td>
<td>$1,818</td>
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</table>
Monthly Statements, cont.

• Key outcomes
  – Total payments
  – Percent paying
  – Percent of obligation paid

• Implementation notes
  – IT changes
  – Staff training
  – Potential benefit of added contact
Benefits to programs

- Research helps answer policy relevant questions
  - Relevance to state operations, funders, other IV-D programs
- Easy to understand experimental results
- Limited customer service implications
- Low cost
  - Limited new services
  - Uses data programs already have
  - Be strategic!
Contact Information

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