

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

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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

Variable	Treatment	Control
NCPs	3,555	2,000
Percent Male	75.4	75.5
Average age	40.2	41.0
Percent with only 1 child	48.3	45.3
Starting Arrears	\$ 5,950	\$ 6,136
Ending Arrears	\$ 5,357	\$ 5,524



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

Variable	Treatment	Control
NCPs	1,304	1,340
Mean number of statements received	3.5	--
Percent Male	62.3	61.0
Average age	30.9	31.3
Percent with only 1 child	73.1	70.8
Starting Arrears	\$ 1,391	\$ 1,445
Ending Arrears	\$ 1,763	\$ 1,818



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

Asaph Glosser, MEF Associates,
asaph.glosser@mefassociates.com

