

What We Learned from Recent Federal Evaluations of Programs Serving Disadvantaged Noncustodial Parents

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In 2018, 27 percent of all children under 21 years old in the United States lived apart from a parent, often a father and referred to as a noncustodial parent by the child support program.¹ Research consistently shows that these parents are a heterogeneous group, some of whom do not provide financial support to their children because they lack steady employment.² However, a related question needs further research: Could a program that offers some form of employment services and other support services to unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents increase their earnings, parental engagement, and child support payments? This brief summarizes three recently completed federal evaluations that address this question, all of which used a random assignment evaluation design.³ As discussed below, these program models delivered positive impacts on noncustodial parent employment, earnings, child support payments, and parenting, but had no impact on the amount of child support paid.

Summary of Prior Evaluations

Before 2000, the only federal multi-site demonstration that examined the effectiveness of an employment program for disadvantaged noncustodial parents using a random assignment evaluation design was Parents' Fair Share (PFS). This evaluation was authorized by the Family Support Act of 1988 and conducted in the 1990s. The PFS program model was designed to help

¹ Grall, Timothy. (2020). *Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support: 2017*. Current Population Reports, P60-269, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC.

<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p60-269.pdf>

² Hall, Lauren, Letitia Logan Passarella, and Catherine Born. (2014). *Who Pays Child Support? Noncustodial Parents' Payment Compliance*. Family Welfare Research & Training Group, for the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

<https://www.ssw.umaryland.edu/media/ssw/fwrtg/child-support-research/cs-caseload-special-issues/paymentcompliance.pdf>

³ Yoonsook Ha, Maria Cancian, Daniel R. Meyer, and Eunhee Han. (2008). *Factors Associated with Nonpayment of Child Support*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

<https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/T7-FactorsNonPayCS-Report.pdf>

³ For a recent overview of noncustodial parent employment programs, see Landers, Patrick A. (2020). *Child Support Enforcement-Led Employment Services for Noncustodial Parents: In Brief* Congressional Research Service. R46365.

<https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RS22380.pdf>

low-income noncustodial fathers find more stable and better-paying jobs, pay child support on a consistent basis, and become more involved parents. Study participants eligible for PFS were court-ordered into the program, which offered employment services, short-term training, modified child support services, peer support, and mediation. The evaluation found that PFS increased the proportion of participants paying child support, but did not increase participants' employment or earnings, the amount of child support paid, or the amount of contact that participants had with their nonresident children.⁴

About ten years later, a Texas court-ordered employment program called NCP Choices was evaluated using a quasi-experimental design.⁵ NCP Choices is still in operation today. It is operated by the Texas Office of the Attorney General, Division of Child Support in collaboration with the Texas Workforce Commission, local Workforce Development Boards, and family court judges.⁶ The goal of the program is to increase child support payments by helping noncustodial parents become employed. The services provided to noncustodial parents mirror the services provided to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients under Texas' Choices program. NCP Choices participants must participate in 30 hours of work activities per week until they enter full-time employment. Work activities usually consist of job readiness and job search activities, but may also include short-term vocational training, work experience, on-the-job training, and subsidized employment. The evaluation examined the initial phases of NCP Choices in 10 sites between 2005 and 2009. The evaluation found that NCP Choices increased employment but not earnings, and it increased both the likelihood and amount of child support paid.

Quasi-experimental evaluations are generally viewed as providing less certain results than random assignment evaluations because they cannot ensure that impact results are unaffected by systematic differences in unobserved characteristics between the treatment and control groups. This issue is particularly relevant to the NCP Choices evaluation. In NCP Choices, members of the treatment group met the following criteria prior to enrollment: (1) they received an order to appear in court; (2) they appeared in court in response to that court order; and (3) they were determined eligible for services from NCP Choices at the time of their court appearance. In contrast, members of the control group did not meet these criteria. They were drawn from a statewide database of noncustodial parents with active child support cases in the

⁴ Miller, Cynthia and Virginia Knox. (2001). *The Challenge of Helping Low-Income Fathers Support Their Children: Final Lessons from Parents' Fair Share*. MDRC. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/full_529.pdf

⁵ Schroeder, Daniel and Nicholas Doughty. (2009). *Texas non-custodial parent choices: Program impact analysis*. Ray Marshall Center, LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin. https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/cs/ofi/ncp_choices_program_impact.pdf

⁶ For more information regarding NCP Choices employment services, see Noncustodial Parent Choices: A Comprehensive Guide (February 2020). <https://www.twc.texas.gov/files/partners/ncp-choices-guide-twc.pdf>

Texas child support program. They were selected from this database using a “nearest neighbor” approach, which ensures that members of the control and treatment group have similar observed demographic and economic characteristics. This database did not include information on whether the noncustodial parent had received a court order to appear in court, whether they appeared in court, or whether they met the eligibility criteria for NCP Choices. Thus, the NCP Choices evaluation could not control for these characteristics. Because the NCP Choices evaluation could not control for these differences, the impact findings from the NCP Choices evaluation are less certain than if random assignment had been used.

Overview of Recent Evaluations

Three recently completed federal evaluations measured the impact of different program models designed to increase noncustodial parents’ employment, earnings, and financial support of their children, all of which used a random assignment evaluation design.

The **Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD)** was launched by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) in 2011 to test the effectiveness of providing temporary, subsidized jobs and other enhanced services to noncustodial parents who were unable to meet their child support obligations and individuals who had been recently released from prison.⁷ DOL awarded seven demonstration grants, four of which targeted noncustodial parents. Three of those programs were operated by nonprofit agencies, and the fourth was run by a local Workforce Investment Board. Key services included up to four months of subsidized employment, other employment services, case management, and enhanced child support services (See Box 1). Between November 2011 and December 2013, nearly 4000 noncustodial parents enrolled in the evaluation. The evaluation was conducted by MDRC with funding from DOL and the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families (ACF), which contributed to the evaluation through its Subsidized and Transitional Jobs Demonstration.⁸

⁷ Barden, Bret, Randall Juras, Cindy Redcross, Mary Farrell, and Dan Bloom. (2018). *New Perspectives on Creating Jobs: Final Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs*. MDRC.

https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ETJD_STED_Final_Impact_Report_2018_508Compliant_v2.pdf

⁸ DOL and OPRE independently awarded contracts to MDRC to conduct the ETJD and Subsidized and Transitions Jobs Demonstration (STED) evaluations. After that, the two evaluations were coordinated. In addition, OPRE funded the evaluation of two of the four NCP ETJD sites.

Parents and Children Together (PACT) was launched by OPRE in 2011 to test the effectiveness of four Responsible Fatherhood programs funded by ACF’s Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood Program.⁹ All four Responsible Fatherhood programs were operated by nonprofit

Box 1. Key Service Components

	Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration	Parents and Children Together	Child Support Noncustodial Parent Demonstration
Employment Services			
Dedicated case manager	✓	✓	✓
Skills Assessment	✓	✓	✓
Group sessions on employment issues	✓	✓	✓
Job search assistance	✓	✓	✓
Job development	✓	✓	✓
Short-term training	✓		✓
Basic education	✓ (2 programs)		✓
Subsidized employment	✓	✓ (1 program)	
Transportation assistance	✓	✓ (3 programs)	✓
Child Support Services			
Group orientation about child support		✓ (3 programs)	✓
Individual meetings		✓ (3 programs)	
Designated case manager	✓ (1 program)	✓ (1 program)	✓
Compromise state-owed arrears		✓ (2 programs)	✓ (6 programs)
Compromise interest on state-owed arrears	✓ (1 program)		
Initiate order modification as appropriate	✓ (3 programs)	✓ (3 programs)	✓
Release of suspended driver’s licenses	✓ (1 program)	✓ (3 programs)	✓
Suspend other enforcement actions			✓
Legal Services to assist with child support provided by Legal Aid or parenting program	✓ (2 programs)	✓ (2 programs)	
Parenting Services			
Group sessions on parenting/fatherhood	✓ (2 programs)	✓	✓
Group sessions on relationship skills		✓	
Legal Services (e.g. custody, visitation)	✓ (2 programs)	✓ (2 programs)	

Sources: see Endnote i.

⁹ Avellar, Sarah, Reginald Covington, Quinn Moore, Ankita Patnaik, and April Wu. (2018). *Parents and Children Together: Effects of Four Responsible Fatherhood Programs for Low-Income Fathers*. Mathematica Policy Research.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/parents_and_children_together.pdf.

For more information about ACF’s Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood program, go here.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/healthy-marriage#:~:text=The%20Healthy%20Marriage%20and%20Relationship,family%20formation%20and%20maintenance%2C%20responsible>

agencies. The target population for the evaluation was fathers, 78 percent of whom did not live with any of their children at the time of the start of the evaluation.¹⁰ Key services consisted of group sessions on parenting and fatherhood, relationship skills, and economic stability, as well as case management, and assistance with child support issues (See Box 1). Enrollment ran from December 2012 through March 2015, during which time 5,522 fathers enrolled in the evaluation. ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA) funded, and OPRE oversaw, a contract with Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the PACT evaluation.

The **Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)** was launched by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) in ACF in 2012 to test the effectiveness of child support-led employment programs for noncustodial parents behind in their child support.¹¹ Grants were competitively awarded to eight state child support agencies, which, in turn, distributed grant funding to 18 local child support agencies. Each of these local child support agencies operated a CSPED program. The key services provided were case management, employment services, enhanced child support services, and parenting classes (see Box 1). The local child support agencies were required to partner with local employment and parenting service providers to deliver these services. Enrollment ran from October 2013 to September 2016, during which time 10,173 noncustodial parents enrolled in the evaluation. OCSE awarded the evaluation grant to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) who partnered with the Institute for Research on Poverty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Mathematica Policy Research to conduct the evaluation.

Demographic Characteristics and Employment Barriers of Program Enrollees

Table 1 presents key demographic characteristics of treatment and control group members in the three recent evaluations discussed above. Nearly all program enrollees were male, ranging from 90 percent in CSPED to 100 percent in PACT. The average age of enrollees was 35 years old in PACT and CSPED and 38 years old in ETJD. Two evaluations -- ETJD and PACT -- had very high percentages of enrollees identifying as non-Hispanic Black: 83 percent and 77 percent,

¹⁰ Zaveri, Heather, Scott Baumgartner, Robin Dion, and Liz Clary. (2015). *Parents and Children Together: Design and Implementation of Responsible Fatherhood Programs*. Mathematica Policy Research, Table II.6.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/pact_initial_rf_implementation_report_9_11_15_508b.pdf

¹¹ Cancian, Maria, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert G. Wood. (2019). *Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED)*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/csped_impact_report.pdf

respectively. In contrast, less than half (42 percent) of CSPED’s enrollees identified as non-Hispanic Black. CSPED had the highest percentage of enrollees identifying as Hispanic/Latinx at 17 percent, followed by ETJD at 8 percent and PACT at 6 percent. These racial and ethnic differences among the evaluations reflect, in part, the different geographic locations of the demonstration sites, but also the different populations served by the lead agencies in the demonstrations. Most of the lead agencies in ETJD and PACT were nonprofit organizations, while all of the lead agencies in CSPED were local child support agencies.

Program enrollees in all three evaluations faced significant employment barriers. Most enrollees responded affirmatively when asked at enrollment whether they had ever been convicted of a crime, ranging from 69 percent in CSPED to 76 percent in ETJD. Between 26 and 31 percent of program enrollees had not completed high school. Many reported housing instability: between 52 to 55 percent reported that they were homeless, living in a halfway house, or paying reduced rent at enrollment. A sizeable percent of program enrollees were not working prior to enrollment, though each evaluation measured this differently. Enrollees in ETJD had the lowest employment rate – only 48 percent of ETJD enrollees worked in the year prior to enrollment. Enrollees in CSPED and PACT were asked at enrollment about their psychological well-being using a standard eight-item depression scale (PHQ-8), and about one quarter of enrollees were categorized as depressed.

It is worth noting that this description of noncustodial parents who enroll in employment-oriented programs has been a consistent finding of demonstrations of these types of programs. Parents’ Fair Share enrollees, for example, had very similar characteristics as those described here.¹²

¹² Miller, Cynthia and Virginia Knox. (2001).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics and Employment Barriers at Enrollment

Characteristics	ETJD	PACT	CSPED
Demographic Characteristics			
Percent Male	93	100	90
Average Age	38	35	35
Race/Ethnicity (%)			
Black, non-Hispanic	83	77	40
White, non-Hispanic	5	10	33
Hispanic/Latinx	8	6	22
Other/multiple race, non-Hispanic	4	7	5
Employment Barriers (%)			
Less than high school degree	31	31	26
Ever convicted of a crime	76	73	68
Homeless, Halfway house, or pays reduced rent	54	54	44
Worked (last year for ETJD, last 6 months for PACT, last month for CSPED)	48	71	55
Psychological Well-Being (%)			
At risk for moderate to severe depression		26	23

Source: See Endnote ii.

Summary of Impact Estimates on Service Receipt

I start by discussing the impact of the three programs on service receipt. Impact estimates on program outcomes can be diluted if members of the treatment group do not avail themselves of services and/or if members of the control group receive similar services. As such, all three evaluations measured service receipt using administrative and survey data. They did not report a global measure of service receipt that indicated whether participants received any service. Rather, they reported service receipt among the three broad service categories – employment services, child support services, and parenting services. All of the evaluations found that participants in the treatment group were significantly more likely to receive employment, child support, and parenting services than participants in the control group. Below, I highlight some of key results regarding service receipt.

As noted above, the primary employment service provided by ETJD was up to four months of subsidized employment. The evaluation measured subsidized employment using administrative data on the treatment group. It found that during the first year of enrollment, 72 percent of the participants in the treatment group worked in a subsidized job and those who worked in a

subsidized job averaged 55 days on the job.¹³ It also examined employment service receipt in its 12-month follow-up survey, using a series of questions about job search, job readiness, and skills assessment. In response to these questions, over 90 percent of the treatment group members in each of the programs reported that they received some form of employment service during the 12 months following enrollment.¹⁴ In contrast, an average of 67 percent of the control group members reporting receiving these services, a statistically significant difference in each of the programs ($p < .01$). PACT and CSPED focused their employment services on job search, group sessions on employment issues, and job development. Both evaluations measured the receipt of these services for treatment and control group members as part of their 12-month follow-up survey. Both evaluations found that over half of the treatment group reported receiving employment services during the 12 months following enrollment, while less than half of the control group reported receiving these services.¹⁵ These differences were large (exceeding 15 percentage points) and statistically significant ($p < .01$).

The only child support service that all three evaluations examined was order modification. ETJD and PACT asked participants in their 12-month follow-up survey whether they had help with modifying their child support; CSPED used child support administrative data to examine whether orders had been modified. All three evaluations found that participants in the treatment group were significantly more likely to have their orders modified (CSPED) or report that they received help modifying their orders (ETJD and PACT) than participants in the control group ($p < .01$).¹⁶

The key parenting service provided by PACT and CSPED was group sessions on parenting. Both evaluations measured receipt of this service in their 12-month follow-up survey. About 45 percent of the treatment group members in PACT and 38 percent of the treatment group members in CSPED reported that they had attended group sessions on parenting since enrollment. In contrast, 16 percent of PACT control group members and 12 percent of CSPED control group members reported attending such group sessions.¹⁷ Both differences were statistically significant ($p < .01$).

¹³ Redcross, Cindy, Bret Barden, and Dan Bloom. (2016). *The Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Next Generation of Subsidized Employment Programs*. New York: MDRC. Tables 2.3, 3.3, 4.3, and 5.3. Results are averaged across the four noncustodial parent sites. https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/ETJD_STED_2016_FR.pdf

¹⁴ Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, and 5.4.

¹⁵ Covington, Reginald, Ankita Patnaik, April Wu, Sarah Avellar, and Quinn Moore. (2020). *Parents and Children Together: Effects of Four Responsible Fatherhood Programs for Low-income Fathers Technical Supplement*. OPRE Report # 2020-46. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Appendix Table A.1. Vogel, Lisa Klein and the CSPED Evaluation Team. (2018). *Requested CSPED Information: Ancillary Outcomes; Mean E-C Differences in Baseline Measures of Outcomes; and Additional Information on Missings*. Institute for Research on Poverty and Mathematica Policy Research. Memo to the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement. Ancillary Table A.1.

¹⁶ Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, and 5.4. Covington, Patnaik, Avellar, and Moore. (2020). Appendix Table A.1. Vogel and the CSPED Evaluation Team. (2018). Ancillary Table A.1.

¹⁷ Covington, Patnaik, Wu, Avellar, and Moore. (2020). Appendix Table A.1. Vogel and the CSPED Evaluation Team. (2018). Ancillary Table A.1.

Summary of Impact Estimates on Program Outcomes

In this section, impact estimates for employment, earnings, child support payments, and parenting are compared across the three evaluations. When possible, specific outcomes within each subject area were selected if they were examined by all three evaluations. When that was not possible, outcomes were selected if they were examined by two of the three evaluations.

Not all evaluations measured outcomes in the same way. As explained in greater detail below, some outcomes were measured over different time periods. The ETJD evaluation examined outcomes during the first year after enrollment, but also during the final year of a 30-month follow-up period (i.e. 18 to 30 months after enrollment). During the first year follow-up period, most of the treatment group members were employed in subsidized jobs that strongly affected their employment and earnings outcomes, but by the final year of the 30-month follow-up period their subsidized employment had ended. Thus, the second timeframe reflects the post-subsidized employment effects of ETJD. PACT examined outcomes for one year following enrollment; CSPED examined some of its outcomes for one year and others for two years.

All of the results presented below are pooled across the programs in each evaluation. As noted above, ETJD and PACT consisted of four programs each; CSPED had eight programs. In general, the evaluations also pooled across the programs in the demonstration. The one exception is the initial 12-month ETJD impact evaluation report.¹⁸ It presented impact estimates for each program separately. Thus, when discussing the 12-month results for the ETJD evaluation, the average of the individual estimates for the four noncustodial parent programs is presented. Since impact estimates were not measured for all four noncustodial parent programs as a group, statistical significance for these estimates is noted differently in the figures below.

Impact on Earnings

Increasing earnings was a key outcome in all three evaluations and all three evaluations measured earnings using quarterly wage records from the National Directory of New Hires.¹⁹ This measure of earnings is particularly relevant to the child support program because these earnings are reported by employers who are legally required to comply with child support income withholding orders. These earnings were measured over different time periods in each evaluation. As discussed above, ETJD examined earnings during the first year after enrollment

¹⁸ Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016).

¹⁹ PACT and CSPED also measured earnings using a 12-month follow-up survey, but ETJD did not. Using survey data, PACT increased earnings by an estimated 3 percent and CSPED increased earnings by an estimated 4 percent during the first year, but neither of these estimates were statistically significant. Avellar, Covington, Moore, Patnaik, and Wu (2018) Table 8. Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019) Table 17.

and 18 to 30 months after enrollment. On the other hand, PACT examined earnings in the first year after enrollment while CSPED examined earnings in the first and second year after enrollment. In addition, the time periods covered different years.²⁰ All earnings figures are presented in nominal terms.

ETJD significantly increased earnings in the final year of the 30-month follow-up period by 13 percent (Figure 1). The treatment group earned an average of \$771 per month compared to \$683 per month among the control group in the final year of ETJD.²¹ During the first year after enrollment in ETJD, the treatment group earned, on average, \$515 per month compared to \$371 per month among the control group, representing a 39 percent increase. This difference in the average earnings between the treatment and control groups was statistically significant at the one percent level in each of the noncustodial parent programs in ETJD. However, this difference reflects the subsidized employment that the treatment group members received during this period.

The ETJD first year impacts are included, in part, to highlight the average monthly earnings of the ETJD control group during the first year after enrollment. Their average earnings were considerably lower than the average earnings of the control group members in PACT and CSPED during their first year follow-up periods. These findings suggest that ETJD enrollees were more disadvantaged than the PACT and CSPED enrollees.

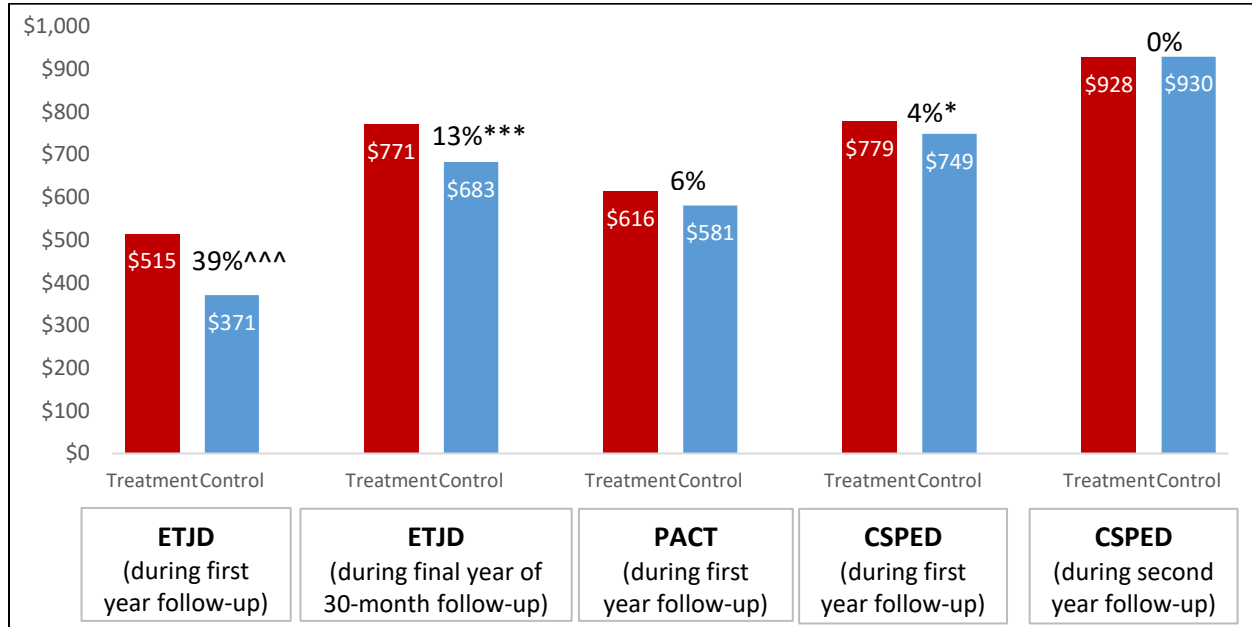
Figure 1 also shows that PACT increased earnings by an estimated 6 percent during the first year after enrollment. The average monthly earnings of the treatment group was \$616 compared to \$581 for the control group, but this difference of \$34 per month was not significantly different from zero. In contrast, CSPED increased earnings by an estimated 4 percent during the first year after enrollment, which was statistically significant at the 10 percent level. Treatment group members earned, on average, \$779 per month compared to \$749 per month among control group members, a difference of \$30 per month. However, CSPED had no impact on earnings during the second year.

²⁰ The ETJD evaluation measured first year outcomes from the end of 2011 to the end of 2013; it measured the final year outcomes from the middle of 2014 to the middle of 2016. The PACT evaluation measured its first year outcomes from the end of 2012 to March 2015. The CSPED evaluation measured its first year outcomes from the end of 2013 to September 2016 and its second year outcomes from the end of 2014 to September 2017.

²¹ The original evaluations presented earnings in annual terms. These figures were divided by twelve to convert them into monthly values.

Figure 1. Impact on Average Monthly Earnings

(Measured during the first and final year after enrollment using quarterly wage records)



^{***} statistically significant at the 1/10 percent level.

^{^^^} statistically significant at the 1 percent level in each of the noncustodial parent programs.

Source: See Endnote ii.

Impact on Employment

A variety of measures were used to estimate the impact on employment, but all three evaluations examined the likelihood of being employed during the follow-up period using quarterly wage records from the National Directory of New Hires (NDNH).²² This measure of employment is particularly noteworthy because it indicates whether a program increases the employment rate.

ETJD significantly increased the likelihood of being employed during the final year of the 30-month follow-up period by 7 percent (Figure 2). During the final year of the 30-month follow-up, 68 percent of treatment group members were employed compared to 63 percent among the control group members. During the first year after enrollment, 88 percent of treatment group members were employed compared to 61 percent of the control group members, a 45 percent

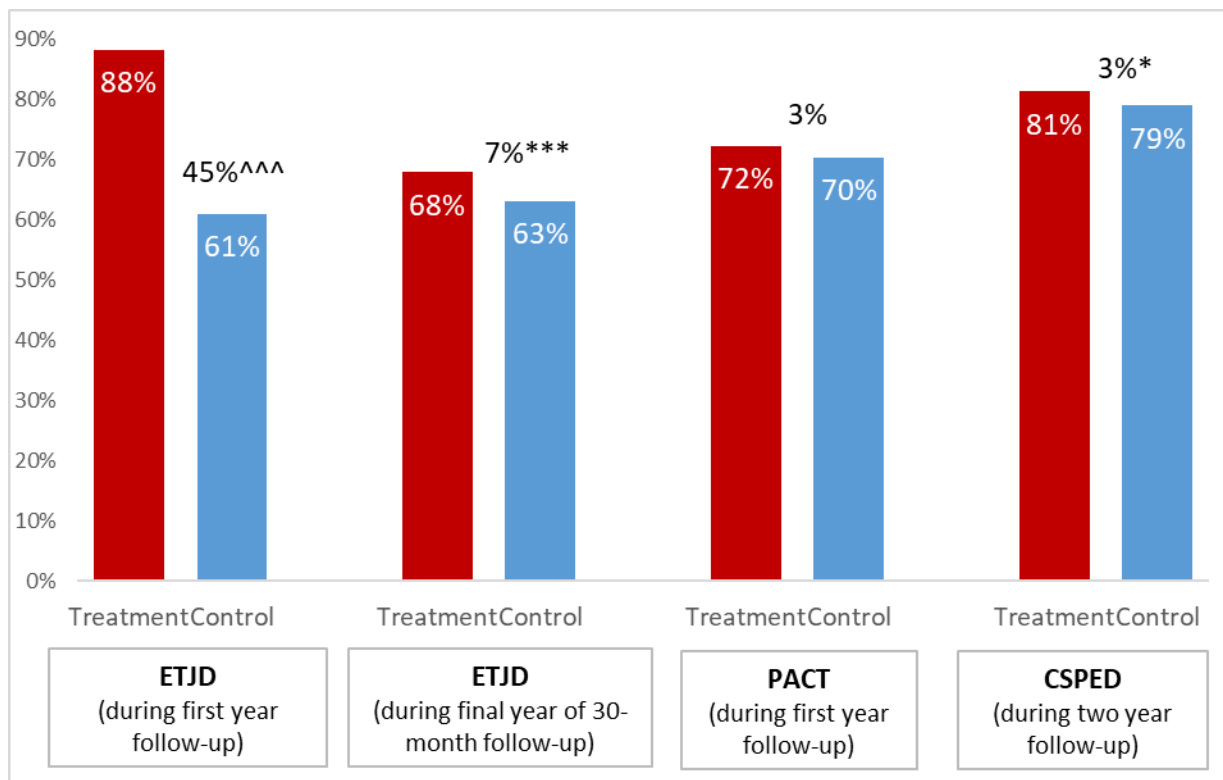
²² Another measure of employment that was similar among the three evaluations was the average number of quarters employed during the follow-up period, but PACT measured the average number of *consecutive* quarters employed during the follow-up while ETJD and CSPED measured the average number of quarters employed during the follow-up period.

difference. EJTD significantly increased the percent employed during the first year follow-up in each of the noncustodial parent programs.

The PACT evaluation measured the likelihood of being employed during the first year after enrollment and found that 72 percent of the treatment group were employed at some point during this period compared to 70 percent of the control group, a 3 percent difference which was not statistically significant (Figure 2). The CSPED evaluation measured the likelihood of being employed during the two years after enrollment. It found that the 81 percent of the treatment group was employed at some point during this period compared to 79 percent of the control group, a 3 percent difference which was statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

Figure 2. Impact on Percent Employed

(Measured during various periods after enrollment using quarterly wage records)



***/* statistically significant at the 1/10 percent level.

^^^ statistically significant at the 1 percent level in each of the noncustodial parent programs.

Source: See Endnote iv.

Impact on Child Support

All three evaluations included an outcome that measured financial support for children, but only two evaluations measured child support using administrative data – the ETJD and CSPED evaluations.²³ The ETJD evaluation measured the total amount of child support paid and the likelihood of paying child support using child support administrative records. The CSPED evaluation included a large number of measures of child support that were derived from child support administrative records, including the two child support outcomes measured by the ETJD evaluation. Thus, these two outcomes are examined below.

Figure 3 shows that neither ETJD nor CSPED significantly increased the amount of child support paid. During the ETJD’s final 12-month follow-up period, treatment group members paid, on average, \$109 per month compared to \$106 per month among the control group members, a statistically insignificant difference. During the CSPED’s 12-month follow-up period, treatment group members paid an average of \$171 per month, while control group members paid an average of \$176 per month, also a statistically insignificant difference. In contrast, during ETJD’s initial 12-month follow-up period, the treatment group members paid an average of \$93 per month while control group members paid an average \$68 per month, a 36 percent difference. This difference was statistically significant at the 1 percent level in three of the noncustodial parent programs and statistically significant at the 10 percent level in the fourth program. However, this difference is driven by the subsidized employment that treatment group members received. Child support was automatically withheld from participants’ earnings while employed in subsidized jobs.

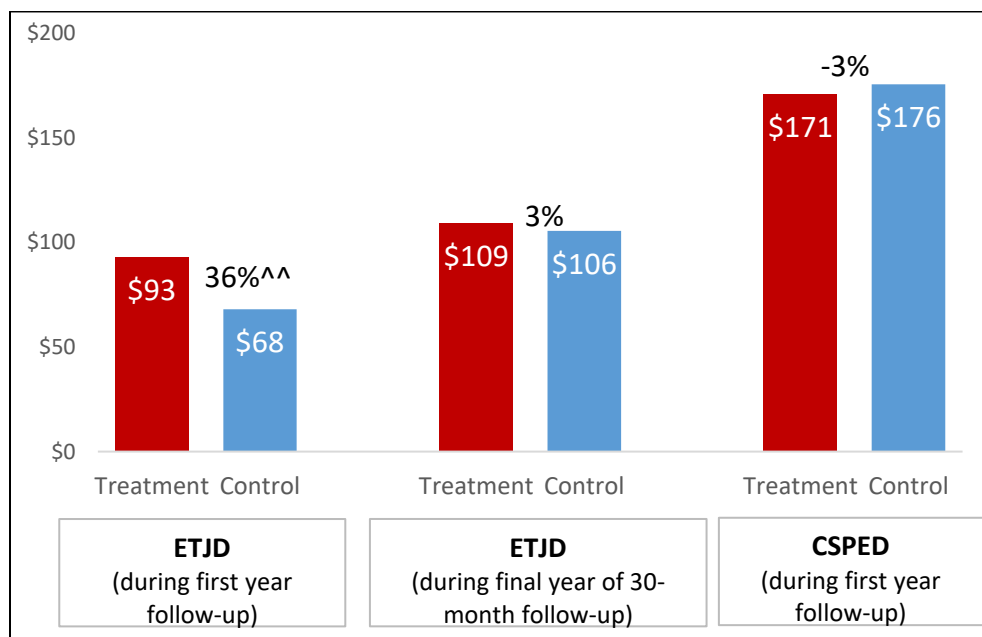
One possible explanation for why ETJD and CSPED did not increase the amount of child support paid is because three of the four sites in ETJD and all of the CSPED sites offered assistance to members of the treatment group with order modification, which reduced child support orders for many treatment group members. This, in turn, reduced the amount of child support withheld to pay child support obligations.²⁴ While control group members could also have their orders

²³ The PACT evaluation measured average monthly financial support per child, where financial support included formal child support payments, informal cash support, and the financial value of any in-kind purchases that the fathers made directly to their children. This information was gathered through a 12-month follow-up survey, rather than administrative data.

²⁴ Only one ETJD site (Atlanta) significantly increased the amount of child support paid in the final year of the 30-month follow-up and it was the only site that did not offer order modification services (Barden et al. 2018). In CSPED, only one site significantly increased the amount of child support paid in the first year after enrollment and it was one of three sites that did not significantly increase order modification in the first six months after enrollment (Cancian, Maria, Daniel R. Meyer, Lawrence M. Berger, Angela Guarin, Leslie Hodges, Katherine Anne Magnuson, Lisa Klein Vogel, Melody Waring. (2019). *Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED): Technical Supplement*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison. https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/programs/css/csped_impact_technical_supplement_report.pdf

reduced, they would have had to request an order modification themselves rather than it being a routine service they received. Order modification was included as part of the treatment package in ETJD and CSPED because prior research had consistently shown that low-income noncustodial parents tended to have child support orders that exceeded their ability to pay. However, because ETJD and CSPED offered order modification services that could reduce the amount of child support paid as well as employment services that could increase the amount of child support paid, these services worked at cross-purposes and could have been the reason why these programs did not have an impact on the amount of child support paid.

Figure 3. Impact on Average Monthly Child Support Paid
(Measured during first and final year after enrollment based on child support administrative records)



^{^^} statistically significant at the 1 percent level in three noncustodial parent programs; statistically significant at the 10 percent level in one noncustodial parent program.
 Source: See Endnote v.

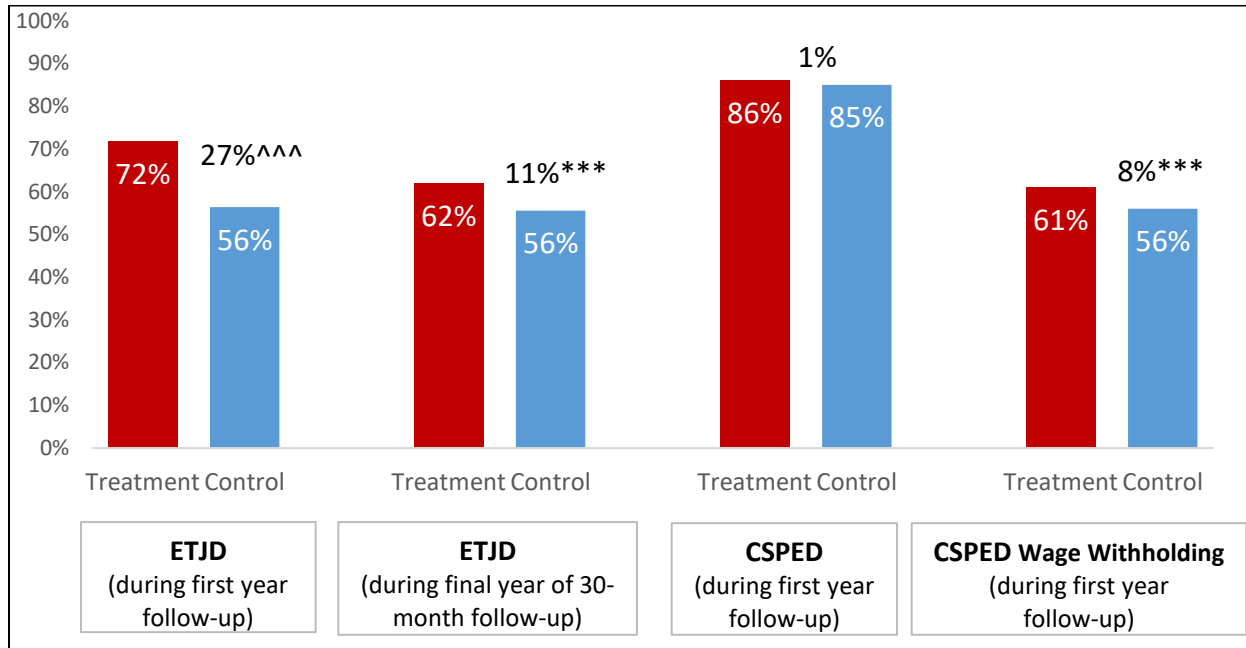
Figure 4 examines the percent who paid child support during various follow-up periods in the ETJD and CSPED. ETJD significantly increased the percent who paid child support during the final 12-month follow-up period. During that period, 62 percent of ETJD’s treatment group members paid child support compared to 56 percent of the control group members, an 11 percent

difference. In contrast, CSPED did not significantly increase the percent who paid any child support during the final 12-month follow-up period. About 86 percent of CSPED's treatment group members paid child support during that period compared to 85 percent of the control group members.

However, CSPED did significantly increase the percent who paid child support through wage withholding. About 61 percent of CSPED's treatment group members paid child support through wage withholding compared to 56 percent of the control group members, an 8 percent increase. This finding is highlighted because increasing wage withholding is an important outcome for the child support program. Most child support is collected through wage withholding. It is a relatively inexpensive method of collecting child support, especially compared to other enforcement measures that focus on collecting child support arrears, such as suspending driver's licenses, and it tends to result in consistent payments over time. As long as the person remains with that employer, child support will be automatically withheld from the parent's paycheck.

Figure 4. Impact on the Percent Who Paid Child Support Overall and Through Wage Withholding

(Measured during first and final year after enrollment based on child support administrative records)



*** statistically significant at the 1 percent level.

^^^ statistically significant at the 1 percent level in each of the noncustodial parent programs.

Source: See Endnote vi.

Impact on Parenting

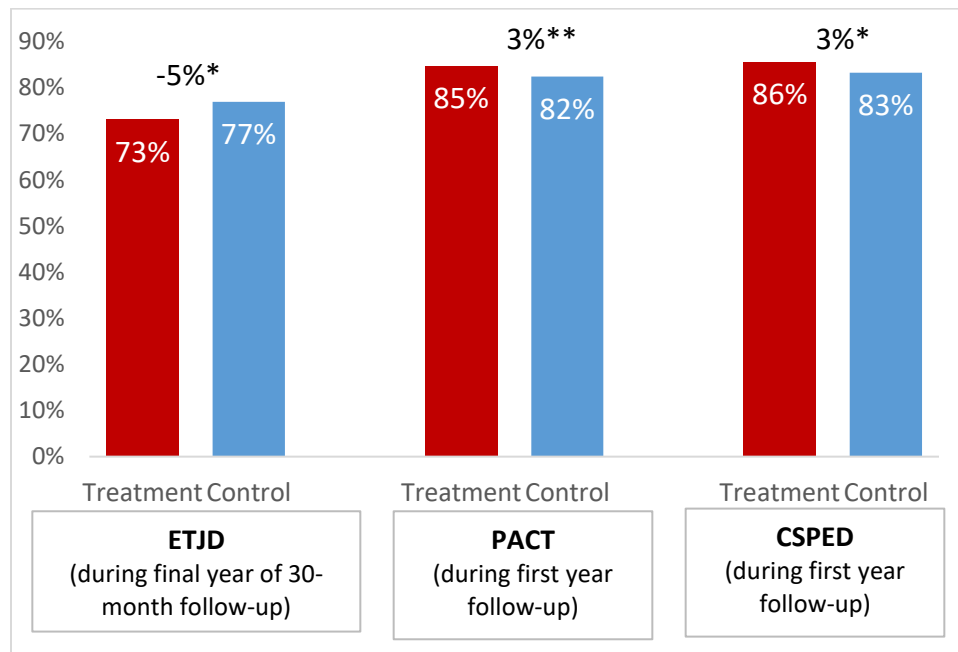
Only one parenting outcome was measured by all three evaluations -- the percent of enrollees who had contact with their children. However, the evaluations varied on their definition of contact, whether contact was with a specific child, and the time period covered.

ETJD had a negative impact on the percent of enrollees who had contact with their youngest nonresident child during the past three months, which was measured using a participant survey conducted 30 months after enrollment (Figure 5).²⁵ As noted earlier, ETJD did not include parenting services as a core service. However, prior research shows that child support and contact with children are closely related, and thus ETJD could have an indirect impact on

²⁵ In the ETJD evaluation, contact was defined as spending one or more hours a day with child. If a participant did not have a minor-age nonresident child, then he/she was asked about contact with their youngest minor-age resident child.

parenting outcomes.²⁶ This negative impact could be specific to ETJD, but it does provide a cautionary note that employment programs for disadvantaged noncustodial parents that do not include parenting services as a core service could lead to a reduction in parent-child contact.

Figure 5. Impact on Percent Who Had Contact with their Children
(Measured during first and final year after enrollment using survey data)



**/* statistically significant at the 5/10 percent level.
 Source: See Endnote vii.

In contrast, PACT and CSPED had a positive impact on the percent of enrolees who had contact with their children in the past month (Figure 5). Both PACT and CSPED had parenting services as a core program component and both evaluations found a 3 percent statistically significant difference between the treatment and control groups in the percent of enrolees who had contact with their children. Both evaluations used a participant survey conducted one year after enrollment, which asked participants about their contact with each of their children in the month prior to the survey. The PACT evaluation examined participants' contact with any of their children, while the CSPED evaluation examined participants' contact with any of their children by

²⁶ Nepomnyaschy, Lenna. (2007). Child Support and Father-Child Contact: Testing Reciprocal Pathways. *Demography* 44(1), 93-112. Peters, H. Elizabeth, Laura M. Argys, Heather Wynder Howard, and J. S. Butler. (2004). Legislating Love: The Effect of Child Support and Welfare Policies on Father-child Contact. *Review of Economics of the Household* 2, 255-274.

the child's resident status at baseline.²⁷ Figure 5 reports the percent of participants in CSPED who had contact with any of their nonresident children in the past month.

It is worth noting that the PACT and CSPED evaluations also examined in-person contact and both evaluations found no impact on this measure of contact (not shown). These findings suggest that programs like PACT and CSPED can have an impact on any contact with children, but not necessarily in-person contact.

The PACT and CSPED evaluations also examined three other parenting outcomes – age-appropriate parenting activities, nurturing/warmth behavior, and methods of discipline – but these outcomes were not measured in the same way. Specifically, the index of age-appropriate parenting activities were different, the questions used to measure nurturing/warmth behavior were different, and the questions used to measure methods of discipline were different. In addition, the child or children used to measure these outcomes differed between the two evaluations. PACT selected a focal child who met two criteria at baseline: (1) the child was younger than 21 and (2) the child lived with or had in-person contact with the father in the month before random assignment. CSPED selected up to three focal children, focusing on the youngest and oldest children by different custodial parents when necessary.²⁸ Both evaluations used the same time period to measure these outcomes – the month prior to the 12-month follow-up survey. Since these outcomes measured similar concepts, they are discussed further below.

PACT found a significant impact ($p < .01$) on age-appropriate activities and nurturing behavior, but it did not find a significant impact on the use of non-violent discipline strategies. In contrast, CSPED did not find a significant impact on its measure of age-appropriate activities or its measure of parental warmth, but it did find a significant reduction ($p < .10$) in the use of harsh discipline strategies, an outcome PACT did not examine.

²⁷ The CSPED evaluation considered children to be resident if the participant reported at baseline that the child spent at least 16 of the past 30 nights in the same place as the participant. If the child spent 15 or fewer nights in the same place as the participant, the child was considered nonresident.

²⁸ Cancian, Meyer, Berger, Guarin, Hodges, Magnuson, Vogel, Waring, Wood, Moore, and Wu. (2019).

Conclusions

These three evaluations find promising program models for serving disadvantaged noncustodial parents. ETJD, which offered all participants up to 4 months of subsidized employment, had the largest impacts on earnings and employment, which persisted through the final year of the 30-month follow-up period. CSPED, which offered considerably less intensive employment services than ETJD, also increased earnings during the first year after enrollment and increased employment rates during the two-year follow-up period. These impacts were smaller than those found in ETJD and were only significant at the 10 percent level, but they suggest that programs like CSPED can have small impacts on employment and earnings. PACT, which offered a similar package of employment services as CSPED, did not have a significant impact on earnings or the rate of employment, but the point estimates were similar in size to those in CSPED. The lack of statistical significance in the PACT evaluation may be due, in part, to its smaller sample size (PACT had 5,522 study participants; CSPED had 10,173).

Both PACT and CSPED offered parenting workshops as a core component of their service package and the evaluations found that several parenting outcomes improved, suggesting that offering parenting workshops along with employment services can improve parenting outcomes. ETJD, which did not include parenting workshops as a core component, did not see gains in parenting outcomes.

Both ETJD and CSPED aimed to increase the amount of child support paid, but neither was successful in generating this outcome. This may be because order modification was offered to treatment group members in all of the CSPED sites and three of the four ETJD sites, which resulted in lower orders for many treatment group members. In contrast, control group members had to take it upon themselves to request that their order be modified. When orders are reduced, wage withholding orders are reduced, which, in turn, reduces the amount of child support paid through wage withholding, the major source of child support payments. Thus, offering order modification services, which tends to reduce child support payments, appears to have worked at cross-purposes to the employment services, which aimed to increase child support payments. Future evaluations of employment services for disadvantaged noncustodial parents will want to tease out the effects of order modification on the relationship between employment and child support payments.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Sources for Box 1:

ETJD: Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016).

PACT: Zaveri, Baumgartner, Dion, and Clary. (2015).

CSPED: Noyes, Vogel, and Howard. (2018).

ⁱⁱ Sources for Table 1:

ETJD: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom (2018). Table 1.3, except for housing. Appendix Tables I.1 for housing.

PACT: For all results except housing and conviction rate, Avellar, Covington, Moore, Patnaik, and Wu. (2018). Table 5. For housing and conviction rate, Zaveri, Baumgartner, Dion, Clary. (2015). Table II.6.

CSPED: Cancian, Guarin, Hodges, and Meyer. (2018). Table 4.1, Appendix Table A.1, Appendix Table C.1.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sources for Figure 1:

ETJD: Early results are from Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, and 5.5. These are averaged. Later results are from: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom. (2018). Appendix Table A.1.

PACT: Avellar, Covington, Moore, Patnaik, and Wu. (2018). Table 8.

CSPED: Cancian, Meyer, and Wood. (2019). Table 17. Original CSPED results were presented as annual earnings. These were divided by 12 to produce monthly earnings.

^{iv} Sources for Figure 2:

ETJD: Early results are from Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, and 5.5. These were averaged. Later results are from: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom. (2018). Appendix Table A.1.

PACT: Covington, Patnaik, Wu, Avellar, and Moore. (2020). Appendix Table A.6.

CSPED: Cancian, Meyer, and Wood. (2019). Table 16.

^v Sources for Figure 3:

ETJD: Early results are from Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.7, 3.7, 4.7, and 5.7. These were averaged. Later results are from: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom. (2018). Appendix Table A.1. Original ETJD results were presented as annual payments. These were divided by 12 to produce monthly payments.

CSPED: Cancian, Meyer, and Wood. (2019). Table 16. Original CSPED results were presented as annual payments. These were divided by 12 to produce monthly payments.

^{vi} Sources for Figure 4:

ETJD: Early results are from Redcross, Barden, and Bloom. (2016). Tables 2.7, 3.7, 4.7, and 5.7. These were averaged. Later results are from: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom. (2018). Appendix Table A.1.

CSPED: Vogel and the CSPED Evaluation Team. (2018). Ancillary Table A.2.

^{vii} Sources for Figure 5:

ETJD: Barden, Juras, Redcross, Farrell, and Bloom. (2018). Figure 3.4.

PACT: Covington, Patnaik, Wu, Avellar, and Moore. (2020). Appendix Table A.2.

CSPED: Vogel and the CSPED Evaluation Team. (2018). Ancillary Table A.1.