

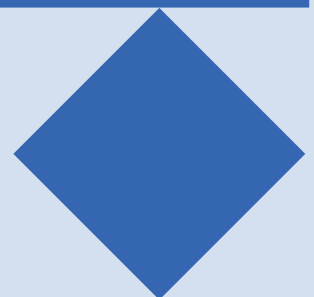
Testing a New Approach to Addressing Nonpayment of Child Support

Effects of the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration

Melanie Skemer



April 2023



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OVERVIEW

When a child does not live with both parents, the parent with whom the child does not live is known as the “noncustodial parent.” The noncustodial parent may be responsible for a share of the costs associated with raising the child. Parents who do not make their child support payments can be subject to enforcement measures such as license suspensions or interceptions of tax refunds. If these measures do not yield sufficient payment, child support programs can refer parents to the legal system for civil contempt of court. Civil contempt proceedings require noncustodial parents to attend hearings and may lead to arrest or jailing.

In recent years, some child support policymakers and researchers have questioned the fairness and effectiveness of pursuing civil contempt to secure child support payments, particularly for parents with low incomes. Civil contempt proceedings are costly, burdensome, and often counterproductive to the goals of the child support program. They can impede employment, increase child support debt, alienate noncustodial parents from their children, and decrease parents’ future cooperation.

The Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC) demonstration tested a different approach to improving child support payments. Developed by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, it integrated principles of procedural justice (the idea of fairness in processes) into enforcement practices in six child support agencies across the United States as an alternative to standard contempt proceedings. PJAC services aimed to address noncustodial parents’ reasons for nonpayment, promote their positive engagement with the child support program and the other parent, and improve the consistency and completeness of their payments, all while avoiding a court-led civil contempt process.

The PJAC demonstration used a random assignment research design. Parents who had reached the point of a contempt referral were assigned either to a PJAC services group, which had access to child support services informed by procedural justice, delivered by a specially trained PJAC case manager, or to a business-as-usual group, which proceeded to the standard contempt process. This report compares the outcomes of parents in these two groups. Findings include:

- The PJAC intervention did not meet its primary goals of improving payment compliance and regularity. It generated a small but statistically significant reduction in payment compliance and had no effect on payment regularity.
- PJAC successfully reduced reliance on civil contempt filings, both in the year after study enrollment and over a longer time frame of 30 months. Notably, however, this effect is a feature of the demonstration design, in that parents assigned to the PJAC services group were diverted from contempt

and, for the most part, were only referred to the contempt process if they were not responsive to their PJAC case managers.

All parents in the study were assessed as having an ability to pay. Nevertheless, both parents and child support staff members reported that, in actuality, many struggled with obtaining and maintaining consistent employment that paid enough for them both to meet their own basic needs and to make child support payments in the amount they were ordered. Noncustodial parents' difficulty meeting their child support obligations point to some of the limitations of the PJAC model: limited earnings may make it difficult for many parents to comply with their orders regardless of whether they perceive the process to be fair. However, it is noteworthy that only small decreases in payment outcomes accompanied PJAC's large reduction in civil contempt filings, suggesting that PJAC may still be a better option overall. A future report will compare the costs and benefits of PJAC services with those of business-as-usual child support enforcement.



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The Author



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

When a child does not live with both parents, the parent with whom the child does not live is known as the “noncustodial parent.” The noncustodial parent may be responsible for a share of the costs associated with raising the child. The primary goal of child support programs is to improve children’s well-being by emphasizing the roles of both parents in providing for them.

Some families receive child support from noncustodial parents regularly. For other families, however, payments may be sporadic, partial, or nonexistent. Parents who do not make their child support payments can be subject to enforcement measures such as license suspensions, interception of tax refunds, or seizure of bank accounts.¹ If these measures do not yield sufficient payment, child support programs can refer nonpaying parents to the legal system for civil contempt of court. Civil contempt proceedings require noncustodial parents to attend hearings and may lead to arrest or jailing if they fail to appear in court or continue not to meet their child support obligations.

In recent years, some child support policymakers and researchers have questioned the fairness and effectiveness of pursuing civil contempt to secure child support payments, particularly for parents with low incomes. Civil contempt proceedings are costly, burdensome, and often counterproductive to the goals of the child support program. They can impede employment, increase child support debt, alienate noncustodial parents from their children, and decrease parents’ future cooperation with the program.²

The Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC) demonstration project tested a different

¹ Enforcement measures are actions taken by child support agencies with the intention of collecting past-due child support and securing current and future payments.

² Elizabeth Patterson, “Civil Contempt and the Indigent Child Support Obligor: The Silent Return of Debtor’s Prison,” *Cornell Journal of Law and Public Policy* 18, 1 (2008): 95-142; Rebecca May and Marguerite Roulet, *A Look at Arrests of Low-Income Fathers for Child Support Nonpayment: Enforcement, Court and Program Practices* (Madison, WI: Center for Family Policy and Practice, 2005).

approach to improving child support payments. Developed by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), it integrated principles of procedural justice into enforcement practices at six child support agencies across the United States as an alternative to standard contempt proceedings (see Box ES.1).³ Procedural justice, sometimes referred to as “procedural fairness,” is the idea that “how individuals regard the justice system is tied more to the perceived fairness of the *process* and how they were treated rather than to the perceived fairness of the *outcome*.”⁴ Research suggests that if people perceive a process to be fair, they will be more likely to comply with the outcome of that process, whether or not the outcome was favorable to them.⁵ With oversight from the Georgia Division of Child Support Services, MDRC led a random assignment evaluation of the model’s effectiveness in collaboration with MEF Associates and the Center for Court Innovation. PJAC services aimed to address noncustodial parents’ reasons for nonpayment, promote their positive engagement with the child support program and the other parent, and improve the consistency and completeness of their payments, all while avoiding a court-led civil contempt process. Between 2018 and 2020, eligible parents were randomly assigned either to a group offered PJAC services or to a business-as-usual group sent through standard contempt proceedings. The research team compared the outcomes of these two groups over time.

Box ES.1

The Five Key Elements of Procedural Justice as Applied to the Child Support Context

- **Respect:** Parents should believe they were treated with dignity and respect and their concerns were taken seriously.
- **Understanding:** Parents should understand the child support process and have their questions answered.
- **Voice:** Parents should have a chance to be heard by sharing their perspectives and expressing their concerns.
- **Neutrality:** Parents should perceive the decision-making process to be impartial.
- **Helpfulness:** Parents should feel that the child support agency was helpful and interested in addressing their situations.

This is the third major report in the PJAC evaluation.⁶ Earlier reports assess the implementation of the PJAC service model and detail the contrast in service and enforcement experiences between parents in the PJAC services and business-as-usual groups.⁷ Building on those findings, the present

³ These six participating PJAC study agencies are hereafter called “sites.”

⁴ Emily Gold, “The Case for Procedural Justice: Fairness as a Crime Prevention Tool,” *Community Policing Dispatch* (website: https://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/09-2013/fairness_as_a_crime_prevention_tool.asp, 2013).

⁵ Tom R. Tyler, “Procedural Justice and the Courts,” *Court Review* 44, 1 (2007): 26–31.

⁶ Additionally, there are nine practitioner-focused briefs, all available at: <https://www.mdrc.org/project/procedural-justice-informed-alternatives-contempt#related-content>.

⁷ Louisa Treskon, Douglas Phillips, Jacqueline Groskaufmanis, and Melanie Skemer, *Procedural Justice in Child Support Enforcement: Lessons from an Implementation Study of the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration* (New York: MDRC, 2022); Melanie Skemer, Jennifer Hausler, Olivia Williams, Louisa Treskon, and Jacqueline Groskaufmanis, *A Comparison of Approaches Informed by Procedural Justice and Traditional Enforcement in the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration* (New York: MDRC, 2022).



report analyzes PJAC's overall effectiveness at improving parents' payment and debt outcomes, along with outcomes in other domains, in the year following study enrollment. This analysis primarily draws on child support administrative records.⁸ A future publication will compare the benefits and costs of PJAC services with those of business-as-usual child support enforcement.

Characteristics of Parents in the PJAC Demonstration

The target population for the PJAC demonstration project was noncustodial parents who were at the point of being referred for contempt because they had not met their child support obligations, yet had been determined by child support agency staff members to have the ability to pay. They owed an average of \$26,000 in child support debt when they enrolled in PJAC and had been in the child support program for an average of 10 years.

Most noncustodial parents in the PJAC study had low reported incomes: just over half were formally employed in the year before their enrollment into the study, earning about \$5,000 in that year.⁹ Ninety percent were identified as male and 62 percent were identified as Black or Hispanic. The demographics of noncustodial parents in PJAC have important implications for thinking about their prior experiences with the child support program, employment, and law enforcement. Men of color, who make up the majority of noncustodial parents in PJAC, face higher rates of discrimination in the labor market and criminal legal system (issues that reinforce one another). Additionally, a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic men experience unemployment and underemployment.¹⁰

Service and Enforcement Differences Between PJAC and Business-as-Usual Services

For parents in the PJAC services group, PJAC case managers conducted in-depth case reviews, outreach and engagement with both parents, and case-planning activities to address underlying reasons for nonpayment and connect parents to services and other forms of support. The principles of procedural justice underpinned this intensive casework. While PJAC case managers did not engage and thoroughly serve all noncustodial parents in the year after their study enrollment—for example, they only succeeded in making contact with about two-thirds—those whom they did engage received a

⁸ Administrative records are data collected in the normal course of administering a program.

⁹ Formal employment is work with an employer that reported earnings to the government so that its employees would be eligible for unemployment insurance. Among only those parents who were formally employed in the year before study enrollment, annual earnings from that employment averaged \$8,819.

¹⁰ Harry J. Holzer, *Why Are Employment Rates So Low Among Black Men?* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2021); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Civilian Unemployment Rate" (website: <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/civilian-unemployment-rate.htm>, 2022); Ryan Nunn, Jana Parsons, and Jay Shambaugh, "Race and Underemployment in the U.S. Labor Market," *Up Front* (<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/08/01/race-and-underemployment-in-the-u-s-labor-market>, 2019); Devah Pager, "The Mark of a Criminal Record," *American Journal of Sociology* 108, 5 (2003): 837-975.

different set of services than parents in the business-as-usual group. Though some elements of the PJAC model were present in business-as-usual services, they were ad hoc and enforcement workers did not apply them systematically.

PJAC parents who participated in interviews reported improved interactions with their case managers relative to their business-as-usual peers in terms of experiencing the elements of procedural justice.¹¹ Additionally, compared with business-as-usual enforcement, PJAC services generated modest increases in parents' receipt of child support services such as order reviews, license reinstatements, and debt forgiveness, and a modest reduction in license suspensions, an enforcement action.¹² When examining PJAC's effects on civil contempt filings within one year of enrollment, the research team estimated a large reduction of about 60 percentage points.

Taken together, the implementation of core PJAC service components, effects on the receipt of child support services and enforcement actions (though these effects were generally modest), and substantial reductions in contempt filings reflect a meaningful service contrast. This contrast suggests that the evaluation provided a fair test of whether PJAC services were effective.¹³

Effects of PJAC Services After One Year

Table ES.1 presents PJAC's effects on confirmatory and secondary outcomes. This executive summary focuses only on these outcome categories; additional discussion of exploratory outcomes is available in the full report.¹⁴ Confirmatory and secondary outcomes were all measured using state child support administrative records.

Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt

- The PJAC intervention did not meet its primary goals of improving payment compliance and regularity. It generated a small but statistically significant reduction in payment compliance and had no effect on payment regularity.

As shown in Table ES.1, the first confirmatory outcome is the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid. This measure is intended to capture overall payment compliance. It is calculated as the sum of all payments a parent made across cases over the one-year follow-up period divided by the

¹¹ Louisa Treskon and Jacqueline Groskaufmanis, "Parents' Reflections on Their Experiences with the Child Support Program in the Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt Demonstration" (New York: MDRC, 2022).

¹² Order reviews are reviews of the terms of a child support order to determine whether a modification is warranted. Licenses can be suspended as a means of compelling payment and reinstated if sufficient payment is made or other terms are met. Debt forgiveness is when some amount of a parent's child support debt is forgiven, meaning it is no longer owed.

¹³ Skemer et al. (2022).

¹⁴ In an impact evaluation, confirmatory outcomes generally relate to the study's main research questions. They are selected before data analysis begins and are used to test whether the intervention succeeded. Secondary outcomes usually relate to the study's secondary research questions or reflect factors that may help explain effects on confirmatory outcomes. Exploratory outcomes are typically not directly connected to the main research questions and may be less likely to show an effect, but are still of interest for future research.



TABLE ES.1 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt and Civil Contempt Filings After One Year

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^a (%)	24.8	27.1	-2.3***	(-3.7, -0.9)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	25.1	25.9	-0.8	(-2.0, 0.4)
Civil contempt of court filed (%)	20.9	80.0	-59.0***	(-60.9, -57.2)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	62.5	64.7	-2.2*	(-4.3, -0.1)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,156	1,315	-159***	(-256, -62)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	28,291	28,230	60	(-485, 605)
Sample size (total = 5,628)	3,650	1,978		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,278; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

total amount the parent was ordered to pay across cases during that same period.¹⁵ PJAC services had a negative effect on the proportion of monthly child support obligations parents paid, reducing it from 27 percent to 25 percent. Though small, this effect is statistically significant.¹⁶ Notably, compli-

¹⁵ This measure of overall compliance differs somewhat from the measure that is typically used by the child support program. The standard child support measure focuses on current support on a monthly basis, and is intended to reflect reliability. To illustrate, the measure here treats a one-time payment of \$1,200 on a \$100 monthly current support order the same as 12 monthly payments of \$100 per month over a one-year period. The child support program measure considers the first case to have 8 percent compliance (1 month of compliance in 12 months, thus 1 divided by 12) and the second to have 100 percent compliance. Moreover, the child support program measure's compliance rates are often calculated without including orders on debt.

¹⁶ Statistical significance refers to differences that are larger than would generally be expected if an intervention had no true effect.

ance levels are quite low for both groups, suggesting that neither the standard contempt process nor the PJAC approach is particularly effective at increasing payment compliance.¹⁷

The second confirmatory outcome in this domain is the proportion of months with any payment. This measure calculates the number of months in the one-year follow-up period in which a parent had an open case and any payment was made, divided by the number of months in the follow-up period in which that parent had an open case.¹⁸ This measure is intended to capture the regularity of payments, as promoting regular payments was a main goal of the PJAC service model. The hope was that—contrary to the contempt process, which often compels one-time “purge payments” due to the threat of jail time—PJAC services could improve parents’ overall cooperation, resulting in more regular monthly payments on which families could rely. However, PJAC services had no significant effect on the proportion of months with any payment. Parents in both research groups made a payment in about one-fourth of follow-up months.

Secondary payment and debt outcomes include the proportion of parents who made any payment in the one-year follow-up period, the total amount they paid, and their debt level at the end of this period. PJAC is associated with statistically significant declines in both making payments and payment amounts. Sixty-three percent of parents in the PJAC services group made any payment in the one-year follow-up period and the average total payment for this group was \$1,156. Meanwhile, 65 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group made payments, and their average total payment was \$1,315. While a goal of PJAC services was to reduce debt, both by increasing payments and decreasing the amount owed through debt forgiveness and adjustments, the research team did not observe a statistically significant effect on this outcome. At the end of the follow-up period, parents’ debt levels were similar across research groups, at a little over \$28,000. A likely explanation for PJAC’s small, negative effect on compliance without a corresponding increase in parents’ debt levels is that PJAC decreased the amount parents owed through debt adjustment and forgiveness.

Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings

- PJAC achieved its goal of reducing reliance on civil contempt filings, both in the year after study enrollment and over a longer time frame of 30 months, showing that the large, statistically significant effect persisted. Notably, however, this effect is a feature of the demonstration design, in that parents assigned to the PJAC services group were diverted from contempt and, for the most part, were only referred to the contempt process if they were not responsive to their PJAC case managers.

¹⁷ In the year before their enrollment into the PJAC study, parents paid about 17 percent of their total child support obligations, indicating that both PJAC services and the business-as-usual approach are associated with some improvement in payment compliance.

¹⁸ PJAC services had no effect on the number of months of the follow-up period in which parents had an open case.



As shown in Table ES.1, PJAC services led to a large, statistically significant reduction in civil contempt filings in the year following study enrollment.¹⁹ About 80 percent of business-as-usual parents had a civil contempt filing during this time frame compared with 21 percent of parents in the PJAC services group, amounting to an effect of 59 percentage points. This reduction in filings resulted in declines in subsequent aspects of the contempt process, such as being served with notice to appear in court, having a bench warrant issued, and attending court hearings (since the reduction in filings meant fewer parents in the PJAC services group were required to attend hearings, not shown).

However, given the findings presented in the previous section that show PJAC did not improve parents' compliance with their child support obligations, a natural question is whether PJAC's downward effect on civil contempt filings lasted beyond the first year. Did PJAC merely delay parents' experiences of the contempt process past the initial follow-up period for the study, with filings coming later as parents continued not to make their required payments despite receiving PJAC services? To address this question to the extent possible, the research team extended the time frame for its analysis of PJAC's effects on civil contempt filings from 12 months following study enrollment to 30 months following study enrollment. This 30-month measure includes three sites—Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia—as these were the sites where sufficient follow-up data were available.

PJAC did sustain its effect on civil contempt filings over this longer, 30-month follow-up period. While the percentage of parents with a contempt filing increased slightly for both groups over time (to 87 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group and 31 percent of parents in the PJAC services group), the difference between the two groups remained large, at 56 percentage points.²⁰ In interviews, PJAC case managers said they generally referred parents for contempt only if they were not responsive or if the custodial parent was pressing for a contempt filing. Payment was not necessarily a criterion, as it was for business-as-usual parents, thus explaining the lower contempt filing rate for parents in the PJAC services group even in the absence of improved payments. Therefore, even at 30 months, it appears that the effect on contempt filings is largely a feature of the intervention and study design.

Notably, extending the follow-up time frame to 30 months means that all parents' follow-up periods include months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic disrupted child support and court operations and made child support staff members more reluctant to refer parents for contempt

¹⁹ The shorter-term measure of civil contempt filings, based on a one-year follow-up period, was conceived of as both a measure of service contrast and an impact outcome. It is a measure of contrast in that it reflects a difference in the service experiences of the two research groups that occurred as a direct result of the intervention and study design. Simultaneously it can be thought of as an impact outcome in that, for the PJAC services group, it measures how effective PJAC services were at engaging parents in activities aimed at increasing their payment compliance so that PJAC case managers did not resort to contempt filings. Thus, the contempt filing outcome measures the performance of the PJAC intervention at reducing the use of contempt, a central goal of the project.

²⁰ Among the three sites that contribute to the 30-month contempt filing measure, 22 percent of parents in the PJAC services group and 86 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group received a contempt filing in the first 12 months of the follow-up period.

The research team measured the percentage of parents in each research group who had any contempt filing during a 30-month follow-up period. It is possible that, in addition to being more likely to have had any contempt filing during this time frame, parents in the business-as-usual group may also have been more likely to experience multiple contempt filings. Due to data limitations, the research team cannot investigate this question empirically.

due to its economic fallout (as described in a previous report).²¹ The longer-term effect on contempt filings may have looked different in a more typical context.

Discussion

PJAC services significantly reduced contempt filings by nearly 60 percentage points in the year following study enrollment. The difference in contempt filings was a feature of the demonstration design and it was effectively implemented. Parents in the PJAC services group could have been referred to contempt in large numbers if they refused to comply with PJAC services. Instead, only about one-fifth of PJAC parents were referred to contempt during the 12 months following study enrollment. This marked reduction in contempt persisted when the follow-up time frame was extended to 30 months. Overall, this longer-term effect reflects a continuing decision by PJAC staff members to defer contempt filings for parents in the PJAC services group as long as they were responsive to outreach efforts, regardless of their level of payment compliance. This choice was probably in recognition that, in many instances, parents' underlying reasons for nonpayment required a longer period to resolve. Reducing reliance on contempt was a central aim of the PJAC model, one that was successfully met.

The overarching goal of PJAC, however, was to increase reliable child support payments and compliance with child support orders by improving noncustodial parents' perceptions of fairness in the child support process, thereby making them more likely to comply with their orders. Contrary to the goals of the intervention, PJAC services slightly decreased child support compliance and did not affect payment regularity. It is noteworthy, however, that only small decreases in payment outcomes accompanied PJAC's substantial downward effect on contempt filings.

All parents in the study were assessed as having an ability to pay as a condition of their contempt referral and study eligibility. However, the research team learned both from parents and child support staff members that, in actuality, many parents struggled with obtaining and maintaining consistent employment that paid enough for them both to meet their own basic needs and to make child support payments in the amount they were ordered. This enhanced understanding of parents' true ability to pay probably contributed to PJAC case managers' continued deferral of contempt filings. Both staff members and parents cited employment struggles as the primary reason for child support nonpayment, as previous PJAC evaluation briefs and reports describe.²² Administrative data from the National Directory of New Hires corroborate these struggles: fewer than half of parents in both research groups had formal employment in the year after study enrollment and, among those who did, annual

²¹ Skemer et al. (2022).

²² Danielle Cummings, "Who Is at Risk of Contempt of Court for Child Support Noncompliance?" (New York: MDRC, 2020). Treskon, Phillips, Groskaufmanis, and Skemer (2022); Treskon and Groskaufmanis (2022).



earnings from that employment hovered a bit over \$11,000, a figure that is below the federal poverty line for a one-person household.²³

Regardless, these findings suggest that a substantial portion of parents being sent to contempt do not have a current ability to pay, calling into question the validity of the screening tools and processes that child support agencies use when conducting ability-to-pay assessments. Common approaches to such assessments include checking state and national employment databases for evidence of employment in recent quarters, reviewing social media accounts for evidence of having recently spent money, and confirming the absence of an inability to pay (that is, being incarcerated, disabled, or otherwise unable to work).²⁴ These methods can fail to account properly for an individual's actual ability to find and keep employment that would make complete child support payments possible. Child support agencies may benefit from more robust guidance regarding how to assess parents' ability to pay. This guidance should take into account local labor market conditions, racism in hiring and wages, and the effects of mental health and substance use disorders on job stability. At the same time, if the child support program wishes to avoid applying enforcement measures to parents without a true ability to meet the terms of their child support orders, obligation amounts should be set within parents' means from the point of establishment, in accordance with federal guidance, and be more responsive to fluctuations in parental income over time.²⁵

A previous PJAC report focused on parents' perspectives found that parents in the PJAC services group reported improved interpersonal interactions with child support staff members and greater experiences of procedural justice principles relative to parents in the business-as-usual group. However, their overall perceptions of the child support program remained negative. Noncustodial parents may have felt that their case managers listened to them or tried to be helpful, but those perceptions did not seem to translate into them feeling that child support was taking their financial circumstances into account in setting their order amounts or using enforcement actions.²⁶ In addition, as parents described in interviews and as other studies have corroborated, factors other than perceptions of fairness influence the regularity and completeness of child support payments.²⁷ Noncustodial parents' difficulty meeting their child support obligations point to some of the limitations of the PJAC

²³ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Education, "2018 Poverty Guidelines" (website: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2018-poverty-guidelines>, 2018); Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Education, "2019 Poverty Guidelines" (website: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2019-poverty-guidelines>, 2019); Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Education, "2020 Poverty Guidelines" (website: <https://aspe.hhs.gov/topics/poverty-economic-mobility/poverty-guidelines/prior-hhs-poverty-guidelines-federal-register-references/2020-poverty-guidelines>, 2020).

²⁴ The limitations of sites' screening approaches have been discussed in a previous PJAC publication. See Cummings (2020).

²⁵ Office of Child Support Enforcement, "Final Rule Summary" (website: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/fem_final_rule_summary.pdf, 2017).

²⁶ While the PJAC model emphasized order modifications, only about 9 percent of parents in the PJAC services group received a modification during their one-year follow-up periods. State guidelines govern order setting and eligibility for modifications, and those guidelines meant that many parents probably could not receive modifications and continued to have orders that outstripped their ability to pay; the same may have been true even for parents who did receive modifications. See Skemer et al. (2022) for additional information about order modifications in the PJAC demonstration.

²⁷ Lisa Klein Vogel, "Help Me Help You: Identifying and Addressing Barriers to Child Support Compliance," *Children and Youth Services Review* 110, 2 (2020): 104763.

model: limited earnings may make it difficult for many parents to comply with their orders regardless of how fair they perceive the process to be. Procedural justice cannot address the structural barriers many noncustodial parents face in the labor market.

While the PJAC model was not designed to address parents' employment challenges, inadequate earnings seem to be at the heart of nonpayment for many parents in the PJAC study, indicating that many parents at the point of contempt referral are unlikely to be able to make the payments expected of them. Notably, other initiatives aimed at tackling employment issues for similar populations of parents have met with limited success.²⁸ This lack of success is probably a reflection of the scale of the problem: the U.S. economy is one in which workers with limited skills and education or past involvement with the criminal legal system often struggle to earn a living wage. A different policy tool outside the typical child support toolbox will probably be needed to tackle this systemic issue.

Regardless of the PJAC impact results, all people engaging with social service programs should be treated fairly and with respect. Procedural justice remains an important and useful framework to be applied by social service agencies. Additionally, PJAC is an example of applying procedural justice to child support at a late stage in that process, after parents have already had substantial, formative interactions with the system. It is possible that interventions that aim to incorporate procedural justice earlier in the process could prove more effective. At the same time, it is important to understand the limitations of the PJAC model in improving child support compliance for parents who have reached the point of a contempt referral, so that new solutions can be identified to assist families in need of additional financial resources.

Looking Forward

A future report will compare the costs and benefits of PJAC services with those of business-as-usual child support enforcement, allowing practitioners and policymakers to understand the economic costs or benefits of adopting the PJAC service model.

²⁸ Danielle Cummings and Dan Bloom, *Can Subsidized Employment Programs Help Disadvantaged Job Seekers? A Synthesis of Findings from Evaluations of 13 Programs*, OPRE Report 2020-23 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020); Maria Cancian, Daniel R. Meyer, and Robert G. Wood, *Final Impact Findings from the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration* (Madison, WI: Institute for Research on Poverty, 2019); Kyla Wasserman, Lily Freedman, Zaina Rodney, and Caroline Schultz, *Connecting Parents to Occupational Training: A Partnership Between Child Support Agencies and Local Service Providers* (New York: MDRC, 2021).



Introduction

When a child does not live with both parents, the parent with whom the child does not live is known as the “noncustodial parent.” The noncustodial parent may be responsible for a share of the costs associated with raising the child. The primary goal of child support programs is to improve children’s well-being by emphasizing the roles of both parents in providing for them. Programs do so by locating parents, setting financial obligations, and enforcing those obligations.

Some noncustodial parents pay child support regularly, while others make payments sporadically or not at all. In 2017, 24 percent of parents who were owed child support received only part of the amount they were owed and 30 percent received no payments.¹ Parents who do not comply with their child support orders can be subject to enforcement measures, such as license suspensions, interception of tax refunds, or seizure of bank accounts.² If these measures do not yield sufficient payment, child support programs can refer nonpaying parents to the legal system for civil contempt of court. Civil contempt proceedings require noncustodial parents to attend court hearings and may lead to arrest or jailing if they fail to appear in court or fail to meet the terms of their child support orders.

¹ Grall (2020). This 2017 statistic is based on all families owed child support, not just those receiving services from the child support program.

² Enforcement measures are actions taken by child support agencies with the intention of collecting past-due child support and securing current and future payments.

In recent years, some child support policymakers and researchers have questioned the fairness and effectiveness of pursuing civil contempt to secure child support payments, particularly for parents with low incomes. Civil contempt proceedings are costly, burdensome, and often counterproductive to the goals of the child support program. They can impede employment, increase child support debt, alienate noncustodial parents from their children, and decrease parents' future cooperation with the program due to their negative experiences.³ Even for noncustodial parents with the means to meet their child support obligations, there is no evidence that contempt leads to future child support compliance through ongoing, regular payments on which families can rely. Often, contempt proceedings result in one-time “purge” payments, in which the noncustodial parent pays a lump sum to avoid continued court action or jail.⁴ (See Box 1.1 for a glossary of terms.)

Box 1.1 Glossary

Bench warrant. A legal document issued by a judge that authorizes a person's arrest.

Child support payments. The formal payments that one parent makes to the other parent to help with the financial costs of caring for their child as part of a child support court order.

Civil contempt of court. A legal action that can be taken when a person is not in compliance with a court order. In the case of child support, parents who are not making child support payments in the amount ordered by the court can be subject to civil contempt proceedings, which typically include a legal filing, process service, and one or more hearings in front of a judge or magistrate. Failure to appear at a contempt hearing can result in a bench warrant.

Child support compliance. When a parent with a child support court order meets all terms of that order, including making complete, on-time payments in the amount of the obligation.

Process service. Delivery of legal paperwork that requires an individual to respond or appear in court.

Purge payment. An amount of money that must be paid toward child support debt to avoid going to jail after being found in civil contempt for failing to meet the terms of a child support order.

The PJAC Demonstration

The Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt (PJAC) demonstration project tested a different approach to improving child support payment compliance for parents who had fallen far behind in

³ Patterson (2008); May and Roulet (2005).

⁴ Office of the Attorney General for the District of Columbia, Child Support Services Division (2020).



their payments. Developed by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE), PJAC integrated principles of procedural justice into enforcement practices in six child support agencies across the United States as an alternative to standard contempt proceedings (see Figure 1.1).⁵ Procedural justice, sometimes referred to as “procedural fairness,” is the idea that “how individuals regard the justice system is tied more to the perceived fairness of the process and how they were treated rather than to the perceived fairness of the outcome.”⁶ Research has shown that if people perceive a process to be fair, they will be more likely to comply with the outcome of that process, whether or not the outcome was favorable to them.⁷ The PJAC demonstration applies this premise to the child support context with the goal of improving compliance with child support orders (see Box 1.2). With oversight from the Georgia Division of Child Support Services, MDRC led a random assignment evaluation of the model’s effectiveness in collaboration with MEF Associates and the Center for Court Innovation.

FIGURE 1.1 Child Support Agencies in the PJAC Demonstration



The target population for the PJAC demonstration project was noncustodial parents who were at the point of being referred for contempt because they had not met their child support obligations for several months or more, yet had been determined by child support agency staff members to have the ability to pay child support. PJAC services aimed to address noncustodial parents’ reasons for nonpayment, promote their positive engagement with the child support program and the other parent, and improve the consistency and completeness of their payments, all while avoiding a court-led civil contempt process. As part of an evaluation of PJAC’s effectiveness, between 2018 and 2020 over 11,000 parents were randomly assigned either to a group offered PJAC services or to a business-as-usual group sent through standard contempt proceedings. The research team is comparing the outcomes of these two groups over time.

⁵ These six participating PJAC study agencies are hereafter called “sites.” While two of the participating agencies are in Ohio—Franklin County and Stark County—they were operated independently and are therefore considered two separate study sites. On the other hand, California and Virginia had PJAC services available at multiple locations but those locations were operated centrally, so each is considered a single study site.

⁶ Gold (2013).

⁷ Tyler (2007).

The purpose of this report is to describe the impact of PJAC services on the primary domains it was designed to affect: child support payments and debt and civil contempt proceedings. Additional, exploratory analyses of PJAC's effects on jailing (in a case study of the participating child support agency in Arizona) and on employment and earnings are also included.⁸

Overview of the PJAC Service Model

PJAC services were primarily delivered by case managers [specially trained](#) in procedural justice, dispute resolution, responses to domestic violence, and trauma-informed care.⁹ PJAC case managers carried far smaller caseloads than is typical in child support programs, designed to allow them to provide more intensive, procedural justice-infused case management to parents with complicated case histories, high amounts of child support debt, and multiple challenges to making payments.

The main components of the PJAC service model are described below in the order in which they were typically delivered. When these efforts were unsuccessful in achieving compliance, PJAC case managers could take further enforcement action, including referrals to contempt.

- **Case review.** Case managers started by reviewing noncustodial parents' case histories to inform their approach to the rest of the components.

⁸ Arizona was selected for the one-site case study of jailing because it was believed to use jailing more frequently than other study agencies. Additionally, all parents admitted to jail at the Arizona PJAC site were sent to the Maricopa County jail, meaning the necessary data could be accessed in one request. Other PJAC agencies may send parents to several different county jails, which would mean separate data-sharing agreements with each jail; given study resource constraints, it was not feasible to execute those agreements. In an impact evaluation, *confirmatory* outcomes generally relate to the study's main research questions. They are selected before data analysis begins and are used to test whether the intervention succeeded. *Secondary* outcomes usually relate to the study's secondary research questions or reflect factors that may help explain effects on confirmatory outcomes. *Exploratory* outcomes are typically not directly connected to the main research questions and may be less likely to show an effect, but are still of interest for future research. See Chapter 2 for a further discussion.

⁹ For additional information regarding PJAC staff training, see Rodney (2019). According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2014), trauma-informed care "realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization."

Box 1.2

The Five Key Elements of Procedural Justice as Applied to the Child Support Context

- **Respect:** Parents should believe they were treated with dignity and respect and their concerns were taken seriously.
- **Understanding:** Parents should understand the child support process and have their questions answered.
- **Voice:** Parents should have a chance to be heard by sharing their perspectives and expressing their concerns.
- **Neutrality:** Parents should perceive the decision-making process to be impartial.
- **Helpfulness:** Parents should feel that the child support agency was helpful and interested in addressing their situations.



- **Outreach and engagement.** After the case review, case managers made initial contact with custodial and noncustodial parents to introduce the program and learn about their perspectives on their cases, followed by continued contact.
- **Case conference.** Case managers set up a case conference and invited both parents to attend. During the case conference, case managers facilitated a back-and-forth exchange between parents to identify reasons for nonpayment, come to a preliminary agreement about how to address these reasons for nonpayment, and develop a plan to achieve payment compliance.
- **Case action plan.** Together, case managers and noncustodial parents created individually tailored plans for noncustodial parents to become compliant with their child support orders. Case managers could connect parents to enhanced child support services (such as order modifications and child support debt forgiveness) or other supportive services (such as employment services or legal support) outside the child support agency.
- **Case maintenance.** Case managers monitored payments, met with parents, and modified case action plans as necessary to help noncustodial parents reach or sustain compliance.

Noncustodial Parents in the PJAC Demonstration

The eligibility criteria for the PJAC demonstration largely aligned with agencies' overall contempt eligibility guidelines. Each participating PJAC agency applied its own specific rules to verify that noncustodial parents were eligible for contempt before enrolling them in the study. Universal categories of eligibility included:

- Verification of the noncustodial parent's address
- A determination that the parent had some ability to pay (a subjective assessment that does not necessarily exclude parents without steady employment, as described further below)
- Confirmation of nonpayment or severe underpayment for several months
- Multiple attempts to reach the parent
- Exhaustion of most administrative enforcement actions¹⁰

Given these criteria, parents eligible for the PJAC study represented a group that was especially difficult to reach and obtain payment from. Once eligibility was confirmed, 65 percent of noncustodial parents were randomly assigned to the PJAC services group and 35 percent were randomly assigned

¹⁰ Treskon and Skemer (2021). Nonuniversal contempt eligibility criteria were applied relatively little; it is unlikely that they affected large numbers of cases.

to the business-as-usual group.¹¹ The random assignment research design ensured that parents' characteristics were very similar across research groups at the time they enrolled into the study. Therefore, any statistically significant differences in outcomes between the two groups can be attributed with some confidence to the effect of PJAC services.¹²

[Characteristics of noncustodial parents](#) in the PJAC study are presented in Figure 1.2 (with additional detail, including parent characteristics by site, available in Appendix A). Noncustodial parents enrolled in the PJAC study owed large amounts of child support debt after long periods of nonpayment, averaged more than one child support case, and often had long histories but minimal recent contact with the child support program.¹³ Comprehensive data across all participating agencies were not available to the study team, but an early analysis of case review data from three sites revealed that parents had not been in touch with the agencies for about two years, on average, when they were enrolled in the study.¹⁴ Additionally, substantial numbers had previously been referred to civil contempt, had cases with disclosures of family violence, or had other child support cases in which they were the custodial parents and thus were owed child support payments.

Most child support debt is owed by parents with low reported incomes.¹⁵ The background characteristics of noncustodial parents in the PJAC study align with this reality. While complete income information for parents was not available, Figure 1.2 shows that just over half of noncustodial parents in PJAC were formally employed in the year before their enrollment into the study, earning about \$5,000 in that year.¹⁶ It is possible that some of these parents had informal employment during this time frame, but the research team was unable to collect data on informal employment. (Two work arrangements that fall into the informal employment category are self-employment and independent contracting; these arrangements employed roughly 13 percent of noncustodial parents who reported they were working in 2017.)¹⁷

Ninety percent of parents in the PJAC study were identified as male, and 62 percent were identified as Black or Hispanic.¹⁸ The demographics of noncustodial parents in PJAC have important implications

¹¹ The research team applied a 65/35 random assignment ratio so that a sufficient number of parents would be assigned to the PJAC services group, allowing PJAC sites to meet their grant requirements in terms of number of individuals served, while still maintaining sufficient statistical power for the impact study.

¹² Appendix Table A.1 confirms that the research groups were statistically equivalent with respect to nearly all baseline characteristics the research team was able to measure, suggesting that the randomization process worked.

¹³ In 34 states—including the 5 states in the PJAC demonstration—child support debts are subject to interest, increasing debt amounts further. See National Conference of State Legislatures (2021) for additional information.

¹⁴ Local child support agencies typically record information on contacts with parents in running case notes rather than in fixed data fields, making the information difficult to use for research/analytic purposes. For additional information regarding this case study and the characteristics of noncustodial parents in the PJAC demonstration more broadly, see Cummings (2020).

¹⁵ Sorensen, Sousa, and Schaner (2007).

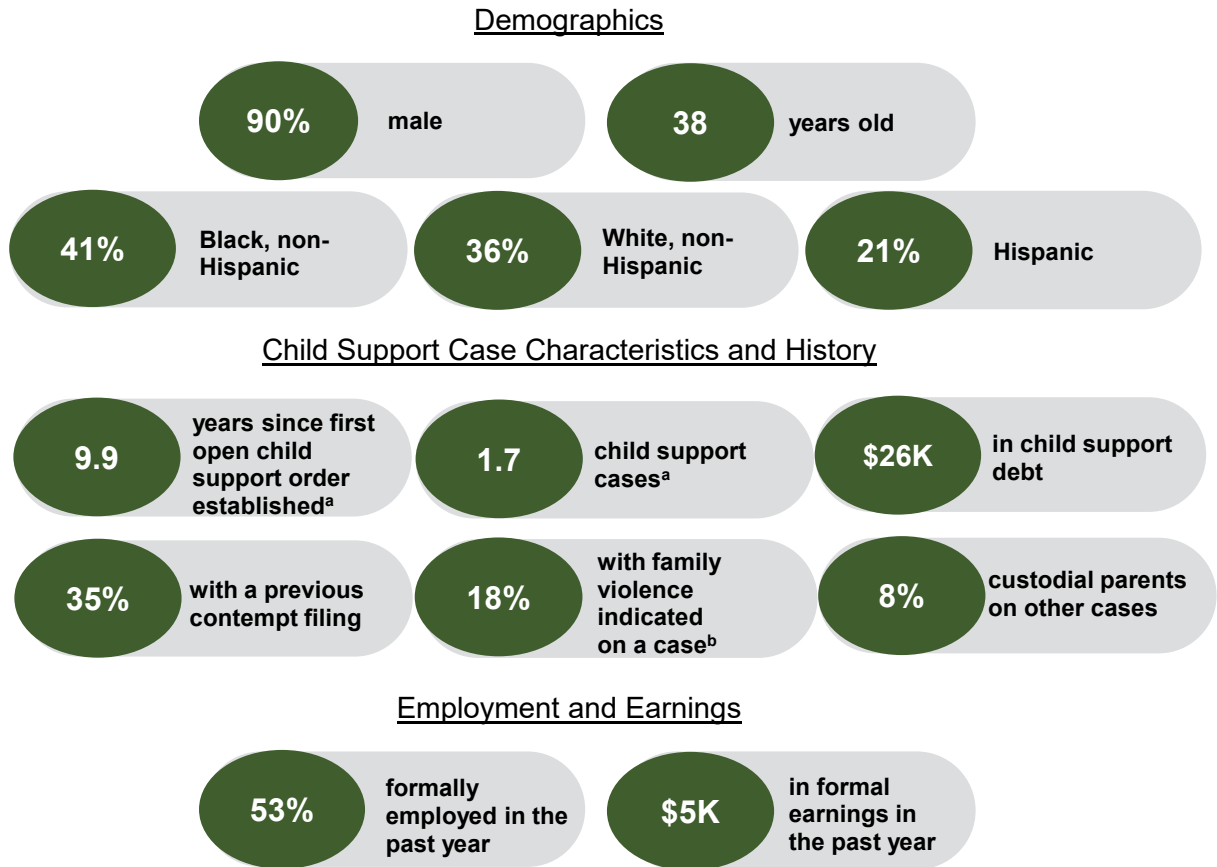
¹⁶ Formal employment is work with an employer that reported earnings to the government so that its employees would be eligible for unemployment insurance. Among only those parents who were formally employed in the year before study enrollment, annual earnings from that employment averaged \$8,819.

¹⁷ Sorensen (2022).

¹⁸ According to data from the 2018 Survey of Income and Program Participation, just 19 percent of noncustodial parents in the United States are Black, non-Hispanic, illustrating the overrepresentation of Black parents in the PJAC study sample relative to nonresident fathers overall. See Congressional Research Service (2021).



FIGURE 1.2 Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents at PJAC Enrollment



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative records and employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: This figure includes the full study sample: parents enrolled from February 1, 2018 through September 30, 2020.

^aThis measure includes cases in which the sample member was the noncustodial parent only (as opposed to cases in which the sample member was the custodial parent or child).

^bThis measure indicates family violence for either the noncustodial parent or the custodial parent on a noncustodial parent's cases, with the exception of one location (Arizona), where the data only include instances where the noncustodial parent was indicated as the victim of family violence.

for thinking about their prior experiences with the child support program, employment, and law enforcement. Men of color, who make up the majority of noncustodial parents in PJAC, face higher rates of discrimination in the labor market and criminal legal system (issues that reinforce one another). Additionally, a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic men experience unemployment and underemployment.¹⁹ This broader context aligns with both parents' and PJAC case managers' descriptions of inconsistent, low-wage work and challenges to obtaining employment as major reasons why PJAC noncustodial parents had not made child support payments.²⁰ Past research has also identified that,

¹⁹ Holzer (2021); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022); Nunn, Parsons, and Shambaugh (2019); Pager (2003).

²⁰ Treskon and Groskaufmanis (2022); Cummings (2020).

as appears to be true in PJAC, parents who are behind on child support often lack jobs in the formal economy; otherwise, they would be subject to income withholding and child support would be deducted from their paychecks automatically.²¹

Given their employment histories, noncustodial parents in PJAC may have had order amounts that were unrealistic for them to pay in full on a consistent basis. (PJAC parents averaged monthly order amounts of \$420, a high burden for a group that averaged about \$405 in formal earnings per month.) These difficulties may have particularly affected men of color; for example, their orders may not have adequately reflected the systemic disadvantages they faced in the labor market. This description may seem inconsistent with the fact that parents in the PJAC demonstration were determined to have the ability to pay. However, each state sets its own policy for making ability-to-pay determinations, and assessments can often be subjective. Common approaches include checking state and national employment databases for evidence of employment in recent quarters, reviewing social media accounts for evidence of having recently spent money (to detect informal employment not captured by employment databases), and confirming the absence of an inability to pay (that is, being incarcerated, disabled, or otherwise unable to work).²²

PJAC services could have helped disrupt some of the race-related inequity Black and Hispanic parents may have experienced in the child support program by diverting them from civil contempt and offering them case managers trained in procedural justice. This more personal, hands-on approach that focused on trying to make parents feel respected and helped, on helping them understand processes, and on making sure they had a voice and were treated in an unbiased manner could have led to fairer treatment and more appropriate services to address the realities faced by Black and Hispanic men in the labor market. For example, PJAC services could lower their monthly child support order amounts in lieu of the more coercive, punitive-feeling enforcement they had probably experienced before. At the same time, PJAC case managers might still have had only a limited ability to help parents facing structural barriers. Procedural justice and individually tailored child support services alone cannot address the broader challenges parents of color and parents with low incomes face in obtaining long-term employment that pays well enough to meet both their own living expenses and their child support obligations. Additionally, communities of color may have lower trust in government systems due to historic discrimination, which may make a goal of PJAC services—to promote positive engagement with the child support program by building legitimacy—tougher to achieve.

Overall, the complex circumstances of parents in the PJAC study sample speak to a population with numerous, intersecting payment challenges, the effects of which may compound to interfere with their ability to meet their child support obligations.

²¹ Berger et al. (2019).

²² The limitations of sites' screening approaches have been discussed in a previous PJAC publication. See Cummings (2020).



Overview of the PJAC Services Versus Business-as-Usual Contrast in Services and Enforcement

If there were not a meaningful contrast between the two research groups' service and enforcement experiences, it would be unlikely that the evaluation could determine whether PJAC services had effects on its intended outcomes. The research team determined that PJAC did, in fact, generate a meaningful service and enforcement contrast between PJAC services and business-as-usual enforcement, as detailed in a [previous report](#).²³ The top portion of Figure 1.3—which depicts the full PJAC demonstration logic model—illustrates the PJAC service-delivery experiences of parents in the PJAC services group and contrasts them with the standard child support enforcement approaches encountered by parents in the business-as-usual group.

PJAC case managers conducted in-depth case reviews, outreach and engagement with both parents, and case-planning activities to address underlying reasons for nonpayment and connect parents to services and other forms of support. The principles of procedural justice underpinned this intensive casework. While PJAC case managers did not engage and thoroughly serve all noncustodial parents in the year after their study enrollment—for example, they only successfully made contact with about 68 percent and established case action plans with 54 percent—those whom they did engage received a different set of services than parents in the business-as-usual group.²⁴ Though some elements of the PJAC model were present in business-as-usual services, they were ad hoc and enforcement workers did not apply them systematically.²⁵

In line with the expected immediate results of the PJAC service model shown in the first row of boxes in Figure 1.3, PJAC parents who participated in interviews generally reported improved interactions with their case managers relative to their business-as-usual peers in terms of [experiencing the elements of procedural justice](#) (respect, understanding, voice, neutrality, and helpfulness).²⁶ Additionally, compared with business-as-usual enforcement, PJAC services generated modest increases in parents' receipt of child support services such as order reviews, license reinstatements, and debt forgiveness, and a modest reduction in license suspensions, an enforcement action.²⁷ One explanation for the modest effects was that many child support services were not available for all parents or not all parents were eligible for them, which meant few parents of either research group had access to them in practice, limiting the degree of service contrast that was possible. However, when examining PJAC's effects on civil contempt filings within one year of enrollment, the research team estimated a

²³ Skemer et al. (2022).

²⁴ These figures are for the pre-COVID sample, as defined in Chapter 2.

²⁵ For more information, see Skemer et al. (2022).

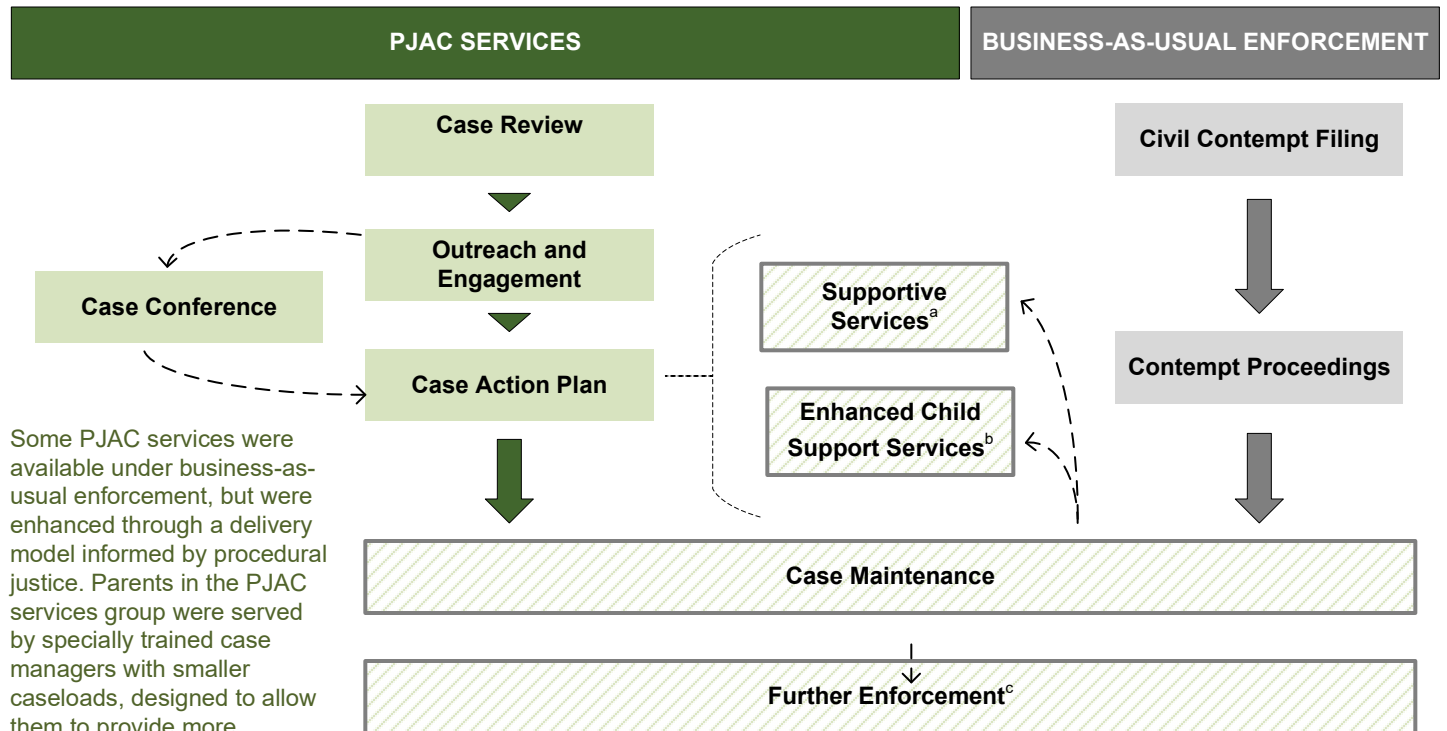
²⁶ Treskon and Groskaufmanis (2022).

²⁷ Order reviews are reviews of the terms of a child support order to determine whether a modification is warranted. Licenses can be suspended as a means to compel payment and reinstated if sufficient payment is made or other terms are met. Debt forgiveness is when some amount of a parent's child support debt is forgiven, meaning it is no longer owed.

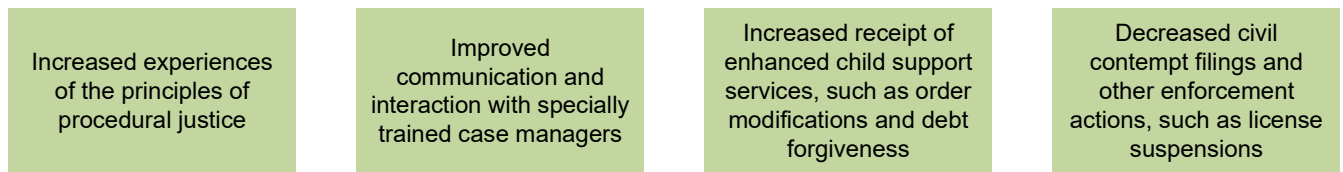
FIGURE 1.3 PJAC Demonstraton Logic Model

Noncustodial parents who have reached the point of a civil contempt filing are randomly assigned either to the **PJAC services** group, which is offered an array of services **infused with principles of procedural justice** as an alternative to civil contempt...

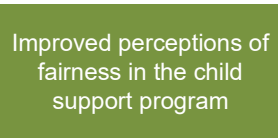
...or to a **business-as-usual** group, which instead proceeds with the **standard contempt process**, followed by a return to typical child support enforcement.



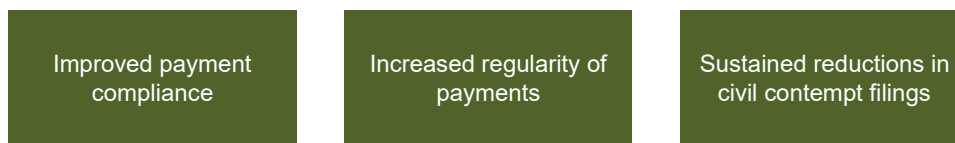
As a result of their differing service and enforcement experiences, relative to their peers in the **business-as-usual** group, parents in the **PJAC services** group will have...



Leading to positive short-term outcomes including...



Those improved perceptions in turn can lead to increased willingness to comply with child support obligations, resulting in positive longer-term outcomes:



NOTES: Dashed lines indicate services or steps that do not necessarily occur for all parents, but instead are determined based on specific circumstances.

^aExamples of supportive services include employment services, legal support, substance use services, and mental health services.

^bExamples of child support services include order modifications, debt forgiveness, and license reinstatements.

^cEnforcement actions are those taken by child support agencies with the intention of collecting past-due child support and securing current and future payments. Examples include license suspensions and asset seizures.

very large reduction of about 60 percentage points. Chapter 4 offers an overview of previously reported effects on contempt filings at one year and extends the analysis to include a 30-month follow-up measure for those sites where the necessary data were available.

Taken together, the implementation of core PJAC service components, effects on the receipt of child support services and enforcement actions (though these effects were generally modest), and substantial reductions in contempt filings reflect a meaningful service contrast between the PJAC services and business-as-usual groups. This contrast suggests that the evaluation provided a fair test of whether PJAC services were effective.²⁸

Roadmap to This Report

The remainder of this report is organized into six chapters. Chapter 2 offers an overview of the approach to the impact analysis, including various methodological decisions. Chapter 3 focuses on the effects of PJAC services on child support payments and debt after one year. Chapter 4 summarizes previously reported findings on PJAC's effects on civil contempt proceedings in the year following study enrollment and extends that analysis to 30 months for those sites where the necessary data were available.²⁹ Chapter 5 describes the effects of PJAC services on jailing, employment, and earnings after one year. Chapter 6 assesses whether differences in effects vary for different subgroups of parents. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the report findings, discusses policy implications, and outlines next steps in the PJAC demonstration.

²⁸ Skemer et al. (2022).

²⁹ Skemer et al. (2022).

Approach to the PJAC Impact Analysis

This chapter describes the research questions that guide the analysis of PJAC's effects presented in later chapters of this report, and identifies the data sources the research team used to estimate those effects. It also describes and justifies methodological decisions.

Research Questions and Data Sources

The research questions addressed in this report are:

1. Did PJAC services improve child support payment compliance and regularity? (confirmatory)
2. Did PJAC services reduce child support debt? (secondary)
3. Did PJAC services decrease civil contempt filings? (confirmatory)
4. Did PJAC services reduce jailing? (Arizona only, exploratory)
5. Did PJAC services increase employment and earnings? (exploratory)

The research team addressed these research questions using quantitative data that include information for noncustodial parents in both research groups at the participating PJAC study child support agencies. Though the PJAC model involves engagement with both noncustodial and custodial parents, because all outcomes of interest are associated with noncustodial parents, they are the unit of analysis for all impact findings described throughout this report. See Box 2.1 for an explanation of confirmatory, secondary, and exploratory outcomes, which are typically generated from confirmatory, secondary, and exploratory research questions, respectively.

Data Sources Used to Assess Effects

- **Child support administrative records.** These data were extracted from child support agency systems for all parents in the study sample. They include information on parents' background and case characteristics, civil contempt proceedings, child support payments, and debt amounts.
- **Jail records.** These data, made available by the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, include information on all Maricopa County jail admissions and discharges for parents in the Arizona PJAC study sample.
- **Employment and earnings records.** The research team used National Directory of New Hires (NDNH) data to measure quarterly employment and earnings. Maintained by OCSE, the NDNH contains data collected by state workforce agencies for jobs covered by unemployment insurance, as well as data on federal employees. These jobs include most employment, with the main exceptions of independent contract employment and self-employment.

Box 2.1 PJAC Evaluation Confirmatory, Secondary, and Exploratory Outcomes

In an impact evaluation, confirmatory outcomes generally relate to the study's main research questions. They are selected before data analysis begins and are used to test whether the intervention succeeded. The list of confirmatory outcomes is typically kept short to reduce the risk of finding statistically significant results by chance. Secondary outcomes usually relate to the study's secondary research questions or reflect factors that may help explain effects on confirmatory outcomes. Exploratory outcomes are typically not directly connected to the study's main research questions and may be less likely to show an effect for various reasons (for example, they may be more tangential to the theory of change or capture rarer but still important occurrences) but still be of interest for future research.

Other data sources offer additional contextual information and aid the research team in interpreting impact findings:

Contextual data sources

- **Child support staff and partner interviews.** In-person interviews were conducted during implementation site visits in Spring 2019, and remote interviews were conducted in Summer 2020 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic). In total, the research team conducted 196 interviews with PJAC and business-as-usual staff members and referral service partners. Some staff members were interviewed twice, once in each round.
- **Parent interviews.** The research team conducted phone interviews with 121 PJAC services and business-as-usual custodial and noncustodial parents in Fall 2020. Parent interviews were conducted for descriptive purposes and may not be representative of the larger sample of parents in the PJAC study.



- **PJAC management information system data.** The PJAC case management data document the rates and details of parent contacts, case conferences, case action plans, enhanced child support services, and referrals to supportive services for all PJAC services group members throughout PJAC implementation.
- **Court observations.** Research team members observed PJAC services and business-as-usual contempt hearings in person during Spring 2019 site visits.

Methodological Notes on the Impact Analysis

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an unanticipated change in the research team’s original data-analysis plans. Namely, the quantitative analysis of child support administrative records focuses primarily on the “pre-COVID” sample: noncustodial parents enrolled between February 2018 and April 2019, whose one-year follow-up period elapsed before the effects of the pandemic were widespread.¹ As a result of COVID-19’s disruptions, child support agencies—along with most other organizations—were forced to alter their operations in ways likely to affect service contrast (for example, court closures, paused and remote services due to closed offices, staff furloughs, etc.).² Additionally, there are complications to assessing payment outcomes during the pandemic time frame because there was a deep economic recession and, in response, the government made stimulus and increased unemployment insurance payments to people that were intercepted by the child support program for payment of child support debt.³ These intercepted payments occurred for both research groups.⁴ In light of these various factors, the research team believes that the pre-COVID sample is most relevant for assessing the effects of PJAC services.

The implementation study showed that the PJAC intervention was substantially similar across sites. Thus, to maximize statistical power, the pooled, cross-site effects take precedence in the discussion of results. This report also presents an exploratory analysis of site-specific differences in effects, with the role of local context taken into account in interpreting site-level results. Another exploratory analysis estimates differences in effects among certain subgroups. Both the decision to emphasize pooled effects and the subgroups chosen were prespecified in the PJAC impact analysis plan.⁵ Readers should give less weight to results of exploratory analyses, as these are designed to offer additional

¹ Although the pre-COVID sample is used for the impact analysis, the baseline characteristics presented in Chapter 1 are for the full sample enrolled between February 2018 and September 2020. This decision was made because the characteristics of the pre-COVID sample and the full sample are nearly identical and for consistency with past PJAC reports. For comparison, baseline characteristics for the pre-COVID sample alone are available in Appendix A.

² Baird, Hayes, Henderson, and Johnson (2020); Treskon, Phillips, Groskaufmanis, and Skemer (2022).

³ U.S. Government Accountability Office (2022); Gwyn (2022).

⁴ Chapter 6 offers a subgroup analysis assessing whether PJAC’s effects were different for parents in the pre-COVID-19 group (enrolled before May 2019) versus the COVID-19 group (enrolled in May 2019 or after). Many parents had their Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Economic Impact Payments, known as stimulus checks, intercepted to pay their child support debt. The same is true for CARES Act unemployment insurance payments. Notably, a second and third round of stimulus payments from the federal government were not subject to child support intercepts.

⁵ The PJAC impact analysis plan was finalized in March 2021 and is publicly available on Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/zps8w/>.

insight and generate hypotheses for future research rather than to provide definitive information regarding the overall effects that resulted from PJAC services.

Unless otherwise specified, all outcomes discussed in this report were measured using a 12-month follow-up period from the point of study enrollment, in which the calendar month of random assignment is considered the first month of the follow-up period.⁶ Each individual is weighted equally in the analysis, with site fixed effects controlled for in the pooled, cross-site analysis.

⁶ The National Directory of New Hires, the evaluation's source for employment and earnings records, collects and maintains data on a quarterly basis. Thus, one-year measures based on this source use four calendar quarters where the calendar quarter of random assignment is considered the first quarter of the follow-up period.

Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt

The goal of the PJAC service model was to improve noncustodial parents' overall compliance with their child support orders and the consistency of their payments while avoiding a court-led civil contempt process, all through case management infused with procedural justice that aimed to improve parents' perceptions of fairness and resulting willingness to engage with the child support process. Additionally, the model's designers hoped that it would reduce noncustodial parents' child support debt through increased payments and forgiven or adjusted debt amounts. This chapter presents findings about the extent to which PJAC services achieved these aims.

Findings include:

- Contrary to its goals, PJAC decreased overall child support compliance, though the effect was small.
- PJAC had no significant impact on the regularity of payments.
- A slightly smaller percentage of parents in the PJAC services group made a payment during the 12 months of the follow-up period than did parents in the business-as-usual group. Similarly, parents in the PJAC services group paid less during this year. Both

differences are statistically significant. Parents in the two research groups had similar levels of child support debt at the end of the follow-up period.

- PJAC's effects on payments and debt appeared to vary by site. Statistically significant decreases were observed for most payment outcomes in Michigan and Virginia. In Franklin County, conversely, parents' overall child support compliance increased, debt levels were reduced, and one measure of payment regularity was improved. Overall, the pattern of effects at this site suggests that it was successful at improving payment and debt outcomes.
- These results indicate that, overall, the civil contempt process experienced by the vast majority of parents in the business-as-usual group was slightly more effective at compelling child support payments than was the intensive casework infused with principles of procedural justice experienced by parents in the PJAC services group.¹ However, differences were small and these payments were elicited through a costly court process that can come with other harmful effects, as described in Chapter 1.

Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt

Table 3.1 presents effects on child support payments and debt. Outcomes are grouped by whether they were prespecified as confirmatory, secondary, or exploratory. For guidance on interpreting the impact tables in this report, see Box 3.1.

Confirmatory Outcomes

The first confirmatory outcome is the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid. This measure is intended to capture overall payment compliance and takes the sum of all payments across a parent's cases over the one-year follow-up period divided by the total amount the parent was ordered to pay across cases during that same period.² This measure includes payments related to all elements of a monthly order (current support, debt repayment, medical insurance costs, etc.).³ PJAC services had a negative effect on the proportion of monthly child support obligations parents paid, reducing it from 27 percent to 25 percent. Though small, this effect is statistically significant. Notably, compliance levels

¹ This finding is consistent with previous research showing that enforcement actions may be effective up to a point. See Meyer, Cancian, and Waring (2020).

² This measure of overall compliance differs somewhat from the measure that is typically used by the child support program. The standard child support measure focuses on current support on a monthly basis, and is intended to reflect reliability. To illustrate, the measure here treats a one-time payment of \$1,200 on a \$100 monthly current support order the same as 12 monthly payments of \$100 per month over a one-year period. The child support program measure considers the first case to have 8 percent compliance (1 month of compliance in 12 months, thus 1 divided by 12) and the second as 100 percent compliance. Moreover, the child support program's compliance rate measure is often calculated without including orders on debt.

³ The research team was unable to collect information on monthly amounts ordered for debt repayment for the pre-COVID study sample in Arizona and Virginia. In Arizona, these data were available across a limited number of months and only for later study enrollees. Because parent debt levels at enrollment were consistent across all enrollees (as demonstrated in Appendix A), the research team has taken the median amount ordered on debt for later enrollees and used this amount as a proxy for this component of pre-COVID enrollees' monthly amount owed. In Virginia, this component of orders was simply unavailable, but data providers have indicated that—for those with administrative orders—the regulatory minimum monthly amount ordered on debt is \$65. See Virginia Department of Social Services (2019). This regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, but a court may deviate from this amount. The research team applied the \$65 monthly amount for all cases with debts in lieu of a better proxy.



TABLE 3.1 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^a (%)	24.8	27.1	-2.3***	(-3.7, -0.9)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	25.1	25.9	-0.8	(-2.0, 0.4)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	62.5	64.7	-2.2*	(-4.3, -0.1)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,156	1,315	-159***	(-256, -62)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	28,291	28,230	60	(-485, 605)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	24.4	24.8	-0.4	(-2.3, 1.5)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	10.6	10.5	0.1	(-1.3, 1.5)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	1.5	1.4	0.1	(-0.4, 0.6)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	22,974	23,044	-70	(-730, 591)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	5,316	5,186	130	(-340, 600)
Sample size (total = 5,628)	3,650	1,978		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,278; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

Box 3.1 How to Read the Impact Tables in This Report

The impact tables in this report use the format shown in the excerpt below (taken from Table 3.1). This excerpt shows the proportion of their monthly child support obligation that parents paid, by research group. As per the excerpt, parents in the PJAC services group paid 24.8 percent of their monthly obligation over the 12 months following study enrollment, while parents in the business-as-usual group paid 27.1 percent of their monthly obligation over this same period.

The “difference” column in the excerpt shows the difference between the two service groups’ outcomes—that is, PJAC’s estimated effect on the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid. The estimated effect of PJAC on this outcome in the year following enrollment was calculated by subtracting 27.1 from 24.8, yielding a negative 2.3 percentage point difference.

Differences marked with asterisks in the impact tables are “statistically significant,” meaning they are larger than would generally be expected if the intervention had no true effect. The number of asterisks indicates whether the estimated effect is statistically significant at the 10 percent (one asterisk), 5 percent (two asterisks), or 1 percent (three asterisks) level. The lower the level (or the more asterisks), the less likely it is that a difference this large would have been observed if the intervention had no true effect. For example, as shown in the excerpt, PJAC services had a statistically significant, negative effect of 2.3 percentage points on the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid. This effect is statistically significant at the 1 percent level, which means that there is less than a 1 percent probability of observing a difference this large if the intervention had no true effect.

A confidence interval shows the range of values in which the true effect on an outcome probably falls given the specified confidence level. Using confidence intervals helps illustrate the degree of uncertainty in statistical estimates. In 90 percent of tests comparable to the PJAC evaluation, the true value of the effect on making a payment would fall within the range shown in the “confidence interval” column. The excerpt shows that the 90 percent confidence interval for PJAC’s effect on the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid is from -3.7 percentage points to -0.9 percentage points.

Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid (%)	24.8	27.1	-2.3***	(-3.7, -0.9)

are quite low for both groups, suggesting neither the standard contempt process nor the PJAC approach is particularly effective at increasing payment compliance.⁴ For some insights from parents’ perspectives regarding their struggle to reach compliance, see Boxes 3.2 and 3.3, which offer the viewpoints of

⁴ In the year before their enrollment into the PJAC study, parents paid about 17 percent of their total child support obligations, indicating that both PJAC services and the business-as-usual approach are associated with some improvement in payment compliance.



two noncustodial parents: one who received PJAC services and one who experienced business-as-usual enforcement.

Box 3.2 Parent Case Study 1: Michael (PJAC Services)

When Michael's initial child support order was set, he had a well-paying job that allowed him to keep up with payments. However, after being charged with a felony, serving time, and reentering the job market with a major barrier to employment, Michael struggled to find consistent work and pay for his own living expenses. In the last two years, he's worked different jobs in different industries to try to keep a steady income.

Michael does not think that child support treats most people with dignity. He also does not think that child support makes decisions with children's best interests in mind. However, since his enrollment in PJAC, he feels like the way he works with child support has changed for the better. "[My new case manager] wasn't looking down their nose at you. It was more like they were trying to help you instead of trying to kick you down." Michael has also taken advantage of a number of services. For example, he received a bus pass to help him get to and from work and went to a job fair that he heard about through employment services.

Although Michael says that he feels he is kept informed about how and when decisions are being made and has more of a voice in the process since PJAC, he still does not think his order amount is fair and says that he is not able to both make payments and avoid homelessness—a reality he recently experienced. "I can't even think about paying child support right now because every dollar I have is going towards keeping a roof over my head and the electric on."

The second confirmatory outcome in Table 3.1 is the proportion of months with any payment. This measure calculates the number of months in the one-year follow-up period in which a parent had an open case and any payment was made, divided by the number of months in the follow-up period in which that parent had an open case.⁵ This measure is intended to capture the regularity of payments, as promoting regular payments was a main goal of the PJAC service model. The hope was that—contrary to the contempt process, which often compels one-time purge payments due to the threat of jail time—PJAC services could improve parents' overall cooperation, resulting in more regular monthly payments on which families could rely. However, PJAC services had no significant effect on the proportion of months with any payment. Parents in both research groups made a payment in about one-fourth of follow-up months.

⁵ PJAC services had no effect on the number of months of the follow-up period in which parents had an open case.

Box 3.3

Parent Case Study 2: Marcus (Business-as-Usual)

Even though Marcus's children live with their mother, he sees them every day—whether he is picking them up from school, taking them bowling, or gathering for a special event such as a birthday. When his children's mother applied for public benefits to support herself and the kids, she was told that she also needed to open a child support case.*

Since then, that case has put Marcus in significant debt, surpassing \$50,000. Because Marcus was incarcerated for a time (which made him unable to work), and now has a criminal record (which acts as a barrier to finding new work), he says that he struggles to make ends meet and make payments on his case. He also says that some of the enforcement actions that child support has taken against him have made it even harder to get up to speed with his payments. "I think [child support] should quit taking people's licenses and putting warrants out because they're putting people in debt with that stuff going on," said Marcus. "How am I supposed to try to get back up, when you keep knocking me down?"

Marcus sees some benefits in the child support program. For example, he thinks that the child support program makes decisions with children's best interests in mind. He also thinks that the program treats people with dignity and respect. Still, he maintains that his order amount is unrealistically high and notes that a lack of employment is his main barrier to making consistent payments.

*When custodial parents apply to receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families benefits, they are required to cooperate with the child support agency, which often involves simultaneously opening a child support case.

Secondary Outcomes

The first secondary outcome in Table 3.1 is the proportion of parents who made any payment in the one-year follow-up period. PJAC services is associated with a small, negative effect on this outcome of 2 percentage points: 63 percent of PJAC services parents made any payment in the one-year follow-up period, compared with 65 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group.

The next secondary outcome in this domain is total child support paid in the year following study enrollment. Parents in the PJAC services group paid an average of \$1,156 during this time frame, compared with \$1,315 among parents in the business-as-usual group. This statistically significant difference suggests a PJAC-induced reduction of \$159. For both research groups, these levels are quite low for a yearly formal contribution to the costs of supporting children. Since noncustodial parents in the study averaged 1.7 cases and cases averaged more than one child, this money was often being stretched among multiple cases and children. (On average, the annual obligation amount of parents in the PJAC study was a bit under \$5,000. Notably, this amount loosely matches parents' average annual formal earnings, as shown in Figure 1.2.)



The final secondary outcome for this domain is parents' average debt amount at the end of the one-year follow-up period. A goal of PJAC services was to reduce debt, both by increasing payments and decreasing the amount owed through debt forgiveness and adjustments. At the end of the follow-up period, parents' debt levels were similar across research groups, at a little over \$28,000. A likely explanation for PJAC's small negative effect on compliance without a corresponding increase in parents' debt amounts is that PJAC decreased the amount parents owed through debt adjustment and forgiveness. Though data on debt adjustments and forgiveness were only available from three of the six PJAC sites (rather than the total pooled, six-site sample reflected in Table 3.1), a [previous report](#) showed that parents in the PJAC services group received nearly \$200 more in debt reduction as a result of adjustments than did parents in the business-as-usual group, a difference that is statistically significant. The research team also estimated that they received \$224 more in debt reduction as a result of forgiveness, though this estimate did not reach statistical significance.⁶

Exploratory Outcomes

The first three exploratory outcomes in Table 3.1 were selected as alternative measures of payment regularity to guard against the possibility that effects on payment regularity would go undetected only because of the research team's decision about how to measure it. However, effects on these outcomes were consistent with their confirmatory analogue.

The last two exploratory outcomes in Table 3.1 separate child support debt amounts at the end of the follow-up period into the amounts owed to custodial parents and the state, to reveal whether PJAC services had different effects on these two debt components.⁷ There are no statistically significant differences between research groups in debts owed to the custodial parent (\$22,974 among parents in the PJAC services group compared with \$23,044 among parents in the business-as-usual group) or debts owed to the state (\$5,316 and \$5,186, respectively).

A Note on Payment Requirements

To provide appropriate context for the outcomes described in this chapter, the research team assessed whether there were any differences between the research groups in parents' payment requirements over the 12-month follow-up period and found a small, statistically significant difference of \$98 in parents' total obligation amount: parents in the PJAC services group owed \$4,845 while business-as-usual parents owed \$4,943.⁸ This is a difference of only about \$8 per month. Given the outcomes analyzed, most of which are not particularly sensitive to this minor difference, the research team

⁶ For more information about debt adjustments and forgiveness, see Skemer et al. (2022).

⁷ Debt owed to the state accrues in two ways: (1) While custodial parents and their children receive public assistance (for example, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), the custodial parents must assign their right to receive support to the state. If child support payments are not received while the custodial parents are on public assistance, the unpaid support accrues as debt owed to the state. (2) Most noncustodial parents incur fees associated with child support actions, such as processing fees for child support payments. If those fees go unpaid, they become a debt owed to the state. Additionally, in 34 states—including the 5 states in the PJAC demonstration—child support debt is subject to interest, increasing debt amounts further. See National Conference of State Legislatures (2021).

⁸ This difference is statistically significant at the 10 percent level.

does not believe it meaningfully affects the overall findings. The first confirmatory outcome—the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid—can be used to illustrate this lack of sensitivity. This measure divides the amount paid by the amount owed, meaning the measure directly accounts for differences in payment requirements. The second confirmatory outcome assesses the proportion of months in which any payment was made; given that parents in both research groups owed a substantial amount each month (more than \$400), a difference in the monthly amount owed of \$8 seems unlikely to change whether any payment was made in a particular month.

Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt, by Site

As shown in Figure 3.1, there was substantial variation in payment and debt outcomes across the six PJAC sites. More detailed information is available in Appendix B.

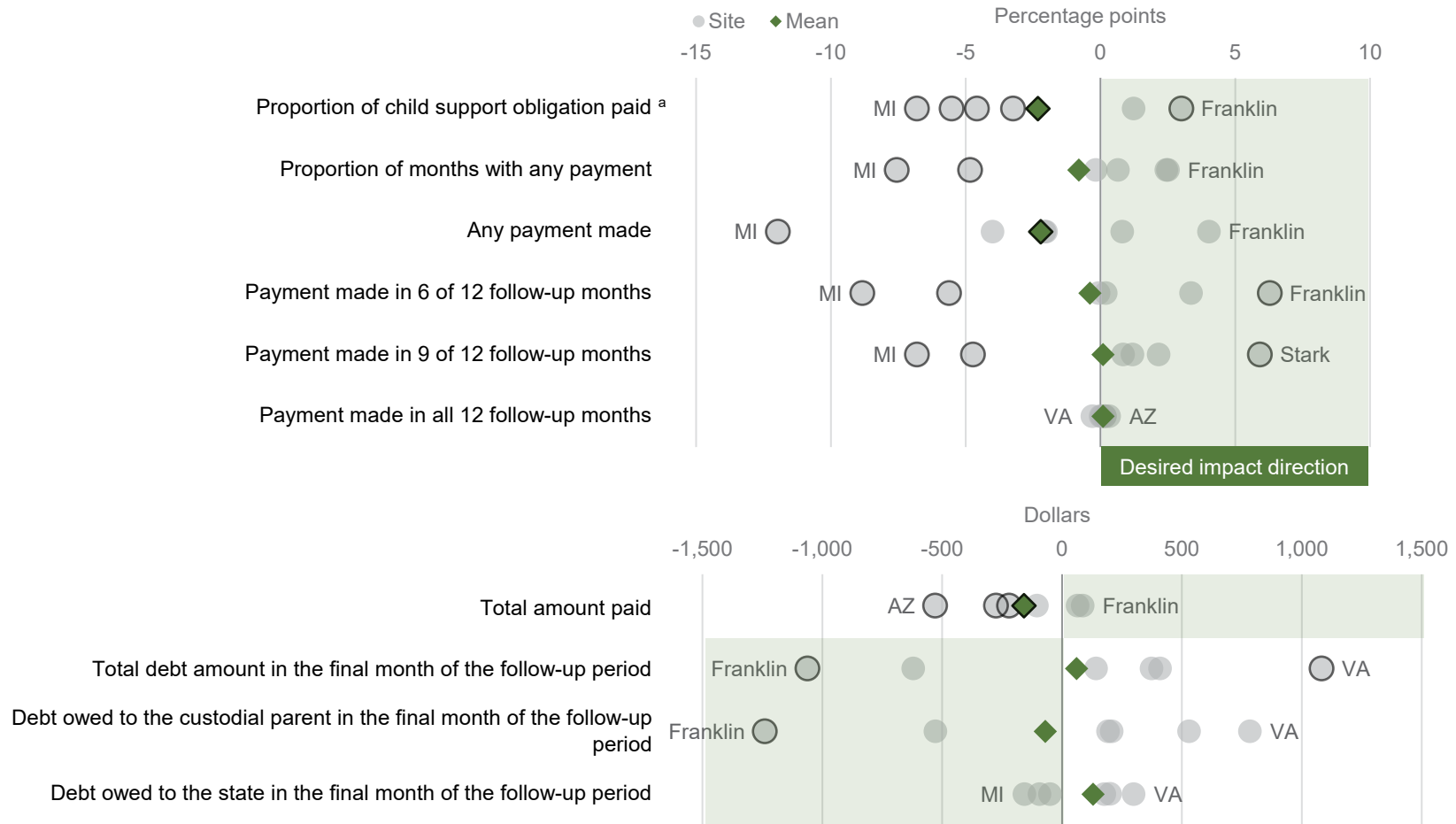
Overall, Michigan and Virginia showed the least successful outcomes; at both sites, PJAC services produced statistically significant decreases across most payment outcomes, along with increases in debt levels. These results may be partially explained by the characteristics of parents enrolled in the PJAC study at these sites. Across PJAC sites, the Michigan and Virginia study samples had the highest percentage of parents with previous contempt referrals and, along with Stark County, the oldest average cases (see Appendix Table A.3). As will be discussed in Chapter 6, these parent characteristics are associated with poorer payment outcomes. Both sites also had high proportions of debt-only cases, a characteristic that often goes hand-in-hand with older cases. PJAC case managers reported parents in such cases as being more challenging to engage since, in many instances, their children had reached adulthood and payments were not applied toward their ongoing support, but instead were used to repay custodial parents or the state.

Franklin County appeared to have the most successful results among the PJAC sites; there, PJAC services produced the largest increases in payment outcomes and the largest reductions in debt. Not all these effects were statistically significant. However, a few were: the proportion of monthly child support obligation paid, the percentage of parents who made a payment in 6 of 12 months, and debt level at the end of the follow-up period (largely reflecting reductions in debts owed to custodial parents). Two other impact estimates narrowly missed statistical significance: the proportion of months with any payment and the percentage of parents who made any payment during the follow-up period. Taken together, this pattern of effects suggests the Franklin County PJAC project had a true, positive effect on payments and debt.

Impact estimates in Stark County were less convincing than those in Franklin County, with only one statistically significant effect (a 6 percentage point increase in the percentage of parents who made payments in 9 of 12 follow-up months) and just one more that narrowly missed reaching statistical significance (a \$621 reduction in debt at the end of the follow-up period). However, these results,



FIGURE 3.1 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, by Site



(continued)

FIGURE 3.1 (Continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics. The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018 through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963, California = 1,278, Franklin County = 908, Michigan = 825, Stark County = 904, Virginia = 750.

A negative value indicates a lower level or amount among parents in the PJAC services group than parents in the business-as-usual group while a positive value indicates the opposite. Statistically significant differences between the PJAC services and business-as-usual groups are denoted by outlines around circles (for sites) and diamonds (for cross-site means). Sites with the largest positive and negative effects for each outcome are labeled.

^aTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debt. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

along with the fact that all effect estimates in Stark County are in the desired direction, place Stark County in the same positive-leaning category as Franklin County.

Both Arizona and California showed a downward effect on overall child support compliance, but few other statistically significant differences between research groups.



Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings

A civil contempt filing is a legal enforcement tool used by the child support program to compel nonpaying noncustodial parents to meet their child support obligations. If parents do not begin making child support payments following a contempt filing, they may face legal repercussions, including continued court action and jail time. A goal of the PJAC demonstration was to reduce the *ineffective* use of contempt, characterized by costly court hearings that, at best, result in one-time purge payments, and can lead to harmful consequences for noncustodial parents without yielding regular financial support for their children.

This chapter summarizes PJAC's effects on civil contempt filings—the first step in the contempt process—and on ensuing aspects of the contempt process during the 12 months after parents' enrollment into the study. These findings are presented in greater depth in a [previous report](#).¹ Additionally, the chapter presents a new measure of civil contempt filings that extends the follow-up time frame to 30 months for the sites where the necessary data were available (Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia).

¹ See Skemer et al. (2022).

Findings include:

- PJAC services led to a large, statistically significant reduction in civil contempt filings in the year following study enrollment. This reduction in filings resulted in declines in subsequent aspects of the contempt process, such as being served with notice to appear in court, having a bench warrant issued, and attending court hearings (since the reduction in filings meant fewer parents in the PJAC services group were required to attend hearings).
- While the sites varied in the size of their reductions in civil contempt filings and later aspects of the process, large decreases were observed at all six of the PJAC study sites.
- Despite PJAC's null or negative effects on payment outcomes, its considerable reduction in contempt filings persisted even when assessed over a longer, 30-month follow-up period at the three sites for which data were available.

Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings in the Year Following Study Enrollment

The shorter-term measure of civil contempt filings, based on a one-year follow-up period, serves as both a measure of service contrast and an impact outcome. It is a measure of contrast in that it reflects a difference in the service experiences of the two research groups that occurred as a direct result of the intervention and study design. It is simultaneously an impact outcome in that, for the PJAC services group, it measures how effective PJAC services were at engaging parents in activities aimed at increasing their payment compliance so that PJAC case managers did not resort to contempt filings. Thus, the contempt filing outcome measures the performance of the PJAC intervention at reducing the use of contempt, a central goal of the project. For this reason, it is discussed in this report that is focused on the overall effectiveness of PJAC services, but was also presented in a previous report that emphasized its role in service contrast.²

As shown in Table 4.1, across all six PJAC sites, civil contempt of court was filed for 80 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group in the year following study enrollment, compared with just 21 percent of parents in the PJAC services group. Thus, PJAC services resulted in a statistically significant reduction in civil contempt filings of 59 percentage points. The fact that noncooperation with PJAC services prompted PJAC case managers to proceed with contempt for only 21 percent of parents may be viewed as a program success.

Stemming from its downward effect on civil contempt filings, PJAC services reduced the percentage of parents served with a notice to appear in court (known as “process service”) by about 40 percentage points. It also lessened hearing attendance (since fewer parents were required to attend hearings) by 28 percentage points and decreased bench warrants (typically issued for failure to appear in court) by 16 percentage points.

² Skemer et al. (2022).



TABLE 4.1 Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings After One Year

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcome				
Civil contempt of court filing (%)	20.9	80.0	-59.0 ***	(-60.9, -57.2)
Secondary/exploratory outcomes				
Days to first contempt referral ^a	194	48		
Successful service of notice to appear in court (%)	12.1	52.2	-40.1 ***	(-41.8, -38.3)
Attendance at a civil contempt hearing ^b (%)	6.5	34.8	-28.3 ***	(-30.4, -26.2)
Issuance of a bench warrant (%)	4.9	20.9	-16.0 ***	(-17.3, -14.7)
Sample size (total = 5,628)	3,650	1,978		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,278; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aSignificance tests were not conducted for this measure, as it is only calculated among parents for whom contempt was filed in the 12-month period following random assignment, rather than all parents, and is therefore nonexperimental.

^bLimited to California, Franklin County, and Stark County.

In addition to lessening parents' exposure to the punitive-feeling court process and the threat of jail, there are several outcomes on which PJAC may have had positive effects given the large reduction in contempt filings it generated. For example, noncustodial parents may have experienced less material hardship and greater well-being, experienced less stress, not been subject to the cost of time in court and its interference with other responsibilities (costs that custodial parents may also bear), and had less strain put on their familial relationships, among other effects. However, data are not available to allow the research team to investigate these outcomes.

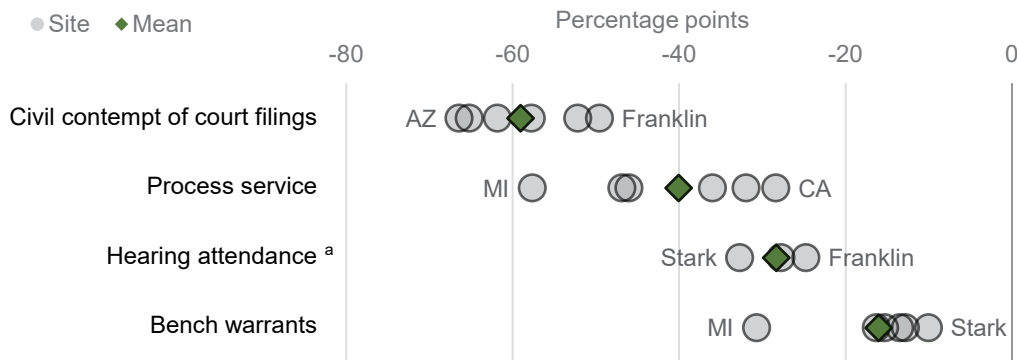
Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings in the Year Following Study Enrollment, by Site

Figure 4.1 presents effects on civil contempt proceedings by PJAC site. PJAC services led to a large, statistically significant reduction in contempt filings at each of the six sites, with the exact size of the effect ranging from 50 percentage points in Franklin County to 66 percentage points in Arizona. The size of this effect varied for several reasons, one of which is that different participating agencies had different practices for referring PJAC parents to contempt when they did not engage in PJAC services.

The proportion of the PJAC services group referred to contempt ranged from 8 percent in Stark County to 30 percent in Franklin County.³

Effects on later aspects of the contempt process also varied considerably by site, though the research team observed statistically significant reductions across the board.⁴

FIGURE 4.1 Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings After One Year, by Site



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative records.

NOTES: Results in this figure are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics. The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018 through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are as follows: Arizona = 963, California = 1,278, Franklin County = 908, Michigan = 825, Stark County = 904, Virginia = 750.

A negative value indicates that a lower percentage of the PJAC services group than the business-as-usual group experienced the contempt-related outcome, while a positive value indicates the opposite. Statistically significant differences between the PJAC services and business-as-usual groups are denoted by outlines around circles (for sites) and diamonds (for cross-site means). Sites with the largest and smallest differences for each outcome are labeled.

^aLimited to California, Franklin County and Stark County.

Effects on Civil Contempt Filings in the 30 Months Following Study Enrollment

A natural question is whether PJAC’s downward effect on civil contempt filings lasted beyond the first year, given the findings presented in Chapter 3 that showed PJAC did not improve parents’ compliance with their child support obligations. Is it possible that PJAC merely delayed parents’ experiences of the contempt process past the initial follow-up period for the study, with filings coming later as parents continued not to make their required payments despite receiving PJAC services?

³ Stark County’s low rate of contempt referrals for parents in the PJAC services group is probably partly explained by its use of “motions to compel seek work,” a unique enforcement tool applied only in Stark County and only by PJAC case managers during the study period. Motions to compel seek work were legal proceedings that required court appearances from the noncustodial parent but fell short of civil contempt filings in that there was no threat of being found in contempt or receiving jail time. Twenty-three percent of parents in the Stark County PJAC services group received a motion to compel seek work.

⁴ For additional discussion of these outcomes, see Skemer et al. (2022).



To address this question to the extent available study data allow, the research team extended the time frame for its analysis of PJAC’s effects on civil contempt filings from 12 months following study enrollment to 30 months following study enrollment. This 30-month measure includes three sites—Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia—as these were the sites where sufficient follow-up data were available. The effect on contempt filings at these three sites after one year is similar to that of the full, six-site sample.⁵

As shown in Table 4.2, PJAC sustained its impact on civil contempt filings over the longer, 30-month follow-up period. While the percentage of parents with a contempt filing increased slightly for both groups over time (to 87 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group and 31 percent of parents in the PJAC services group), the difference between the two groups remained high, at 56 percentage points. In interviews, PJAC case managers said that even in the longer term, they generally referred parents for contempt only if they were not responsive or if the custodial parent was pressing for a contempt filing. Payment was not necessarily a criterion as it was for business-as-usual parents, which explains the lower contempt filing rate for parents in the PJAC services group even in the absence of improved payments. Therefore, even at 30 months of follow-up data collection, it appears that the effect on contempt filings is largely a feature of the intervention and study design.

TABLE 4.2 Effects on Civil Contempt Filings After 30 Months

Outcome (%)	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Civil contempt of court filing	31.2	87.2	-56.0 ***	(-58.8, -53.2)
Sample size (total = 2,538)	1,649	889		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019, in Arizona, Michigan, and Virginia. Samples sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; Michigan = 825; Virginia = 750. Contempt data were not available for the 30-month follow-up period in California, Franklin County, or Stark County.

Notably, extending the follow-up time frame to 30 months means that all parents’ follow-up periods include months after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic disrupted child support and court operations (as described in Chapter 2) and made child support staff members more reluctant to

⁵ Among the three sites that contribute to the 30-month contempt filing measure, 22 percent of parents in the PJAC services group and 86 percent of parents in the business-as-usual group had received a contempt filing in the first 12 months of the follow-up period. This difference amounts to an effect of 63 percentage points; the discrepancy in the difference is due to rounding.

The research team measured the percentage of parents in each research group who had a contempt filing during a 30-month follow-up window. It is possible that, in addition to being more likely to have had any contempt filing during this time frame, parents in the business-as-usual group may have also been more likely to experience multiple contempt filings. Due to data limitations the research team cannot investigate this question empirically.

refer parents for contempt due to its economic fallout (as described in a [previous report](#)).⁶ The longer-term effect on contempt filings may have looked different in a more typical context. For example, in Virginia, new contempt filings were paused for two months at the start of the pandemic, and as of September 2020, parents were not sent to contempt if they stated that they were not paying due to the effects of the pandemic.

⁶ Skemer et al. (2022).



Effects on Jailing, Employment, and Earnings

The designers of PJAC hypothesized that through its anticipated reduction in the use of civil contempt, the demonstration might decrease the jailing of noncustodial parents that can result from the contempt process. This chapter assesses this hypothesis in a case study of the Arizona PJAC site. The chapter also describes the employment and earnings outcomes of parents in the PJAC study.

Findings include:

- In the case study of the Arizona PJAC site, there are no statistically significant differences between parents in the PJAC services group and parents in the business-as-usual group in jail admissions or days spent in jail.
- For the full sample, PJAC services did not result in any statistically significant differences between research groups in employment or earnings.

Effects on Jailing (in Arizona)

As context for the analysis of PJAC's effects on jailing in Arizona, Appendix Table A.4 presents the differences PJAC generated in civil contempt filings at that site after one year. In summary, PJAC services produced a 66 percentage point reduction in contempt filings. This large decrease in filings led to reductions in ensuing aspects of the contempt process, including

service with notice to appear in court (a 46 percentage point reduction) and bench warrants (a 16 percentage point reduction). Based on these results, a PJAC-induced reduction in jailing could reasonably be expected.

The research team analyzed PJAC’s effects on two outcomes: the percentage of parents who were admitted to jail in the 12 months after their enrollment into the study and the number of days they spent in jail during that period. Since it is not possible to distinguish jail stays resulting from civil contempt for failure to comply with one’s child support order from jail stays for any other reason, the figures presented in Table 5.1 reflect all jailing. Due to the PJAC evaluation’s random assignment design, however, any differences between the parents in the PJAC services group and those in the business-as-usual group can be attributed to PJAC.

TABLE 5.1 Effects on Jailing After One Year (in Arizona)

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Admissions to jail (%)	13.4	14.3	-1.0	(-4.7, 2.7)
Days in jail	5.0	3.8	1.2	(-1.4, 3.8)
Sample size (total = 963)	624	339		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on jail data from the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

Thirteen percent of parents in the PJAC services group and 14 percent in the business-as-usual group were admitted to jail in the year following their enrollment into the PJAC study. This difference is not statistically significant. Similarly, there is no significant difference between the groups in parents’ average number of days in jail. Parents in the PJAC services group averaged five days in jail during the 12 months following their enrollment into the study, compared with four days for business-as-usual parents. One possible explanation for these null results is that the contempt process did not frequently lead to jailing. A relatively low percentage of parents in the business-as-usual group were admitted to jail in the year after their enrollment into the study and not all those admissions were contempt-related, even though 79 percent of parents in Arizona’s business-as-usual group were referred to contempt. This limited use of jailing may have meant there was little opportunity for PJAC services to produce further reductions.



Effects on Employment and Earnings

Since the PJAC service model did not focus directly on employment, neither its designers nor its evaluators necessarily expected it to have effects in this area. However, the research team opted to estimate effects in this domain in an exploratory analysis, since PJAC services could have affected employment through some peripheral routes. For example, PJAC could refer parents to employment services and reduce the use of enforcement actions such as license suspensions and contempt. These actions, in turn, could improve parents’ ability to obtain and maintain employment. In addition, if the evaluation found that PJAC services had a positive effect on child support payments, it would be helpful to understand whether increased employment played a role. Finally, employment and earnings data were readily available for the study sample.

Table 5.2 presents PJAC’s effects on two outcomes: formal employment and total earnings from formal employment during the one-year follow-up period. Forty-five percent of parents in the PJAC services group were formally employed during the one-year follow-up period, compared with 47 percent in the business-as-usual group. This amounts to a 1 percentage point difference, which is not statistically significant.¹ A similar finding of no significant difference emerged for earnings from formal employment: Parents in both research groups earned an average of over \$5,000 (\$5,058 for parents in the PJAC services group and \$5,204 for parents in the business-as-usual group).

TABLE 5.2 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	45.3	46.6	-1.3	(-3.3, 0.7)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	5,058	5,204	-146	(-521, 228)
Sample size (total = 5,580)	3,621	1,959		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 959; California = 1,236; Franklin County = 906; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

As noted elsewhere, the data source used to produce these estimates—the National Directory of New Hires—does not include self-employment and independent contract employment. Therefore, the earnings captured in Table 5.2 may understate parents’ total earnings. Still, the low levels of formal

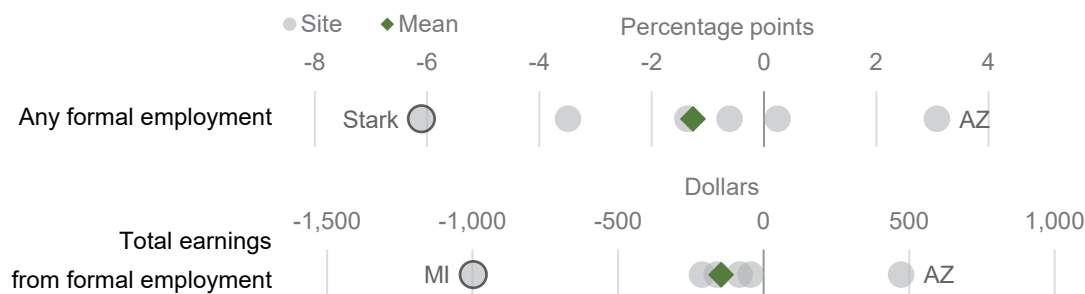
¹ Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

employment and earnings presented in Table 5.2 illustrate the challenges noncustodial parents in the PJAC sample experienced in both supporting themselves and making complete, regular child support payments, despite having been determined by their child support agencies to have the ability to pay.² Fewer than half of parents were formally employed and, among those who were, annual earnings from that employment hovered a bit over \$11,000, a figure that is below the federal poverty line for a one-person household.³ As discussed in Chapter 1, these earning levels may reflect the difficulties many Black and Hispanic men—the majority of parents in the PJAC sample—face in the labor market due to race-related discrimination.

Effects on Employment and Earnings, by Site

As shown in Figure 5.1, there was some variation by site in PJAC’s effects on employment and earnings. Effects on employment ranged from a 3 percentage point increase in Arizona (a result that is not statistically significant) to a statistically significant 6 percentage point decrease in Stark County. Earnings effects ranged from an increase of \$473 in Arizona (again, not statistically significant) to a statistically significant decrease of \$997 in Michigan.

FIGURE 5.1 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, by Site



SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on National Directory of New Hires data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics. The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018 through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are as follows: Arizona = 959, California = 1,236, Franklin County = 906, Michigan = 825, Stark County = 904, Virginia = 750.

A negative value indicates either that a lower percentage of the PJAC services group than the business-as-usual group was formally employed or that parents in the PJAC services group averaged lower earnings than those in the business-as-usual group, respectively. A positive value indicates the opposite. Statistically significant differences between the PJAC services and business-as-usual groups are denoted by outlines around circles (for sites) and diamonds (for cross-site means). Sites with the largest negative and positive effects for each outcome are labeled.

² To place these formal earnings levels in context, the research team compared them with those of noncustodial parents in other recent studies. Parents in the Child Support Noncustodial Parent Employment Demonstration (CSPED) earned substantially more, at around \$12,000 annually. However, CSPED targeted parents who were not regularly paying child support or were expected to have difficulty making payments due to a lack of regular employment rather than those who had already reached the point of a civil contempt referral, as in PJAC. Thus, CSPED parents were probably a somewhat less disadvantaged group. See Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019). Among the four Enhanced Transitional Job Demonstration (ETJD) sites that targeted noncustodial parents who were unable to pay because they lacked employment, formal earnings in the first year of the follow-up period for members of the control groups ranged from \$2,928 to \$6,709. These amounts are more in line with the earnings of parents in the PJAC study. (Only parents in the control groups are considered because ETJD provided short-term, subsidized employment to members of the program groups, bolstering their earnings.) See Redcross, Barden, and Bloom (2016).

³ Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Education (2018, 2019, 2020).

Variations in Effects Among Subgroups of Parents

While this report primarily focuses on effects among the full, pre-COVID-19 sample, this chapter explores six subgroups of interest to determine whether PJAC services may have had different effects for parents with certain characteristics at the time of study enrollment. The six subgroups are defined by:

- Noncustodial parents' racial/ethnic group (Black, Hispanic, or White)¹
- Time since the establishment of noncustodial parents' oldest case (less than six years versus six years or more)
- Noncustodial parents' payment status in the year before study enrollment (any payment versus no payments)
- Noncustodial parents' previous contempt referrals (any contempt referral before study enrollment versus no contempt referrals before study enrollment)
- Noncustodial parents' number of open cases (one versus multiple)
- Noncustodial parents whose follow-up periods predated and overlapped the COVID-19 pandemic (enrollment before May 2019 versus enrollment in May 2019 or after)

¹ In this chapter "Black" and "White" are used as shorthand for "Black, non-Hispanic" and "White, non-Hispanic." Parents that did not fall into the Black, Hispanic, or White racial/ethnic groups comprised only about 2 percent of the overall PJAC sample, so it was not possible to examine differential effects of PJAC services for other racial/ethnic groups.

To focus on the most important measures and limit the number of statistical significance tests conducted (thus lessening the likelihood of statistically significant results that arise purely by chance), the research team assessed differences in effects on only confirmatory and secondary outcomes for most subgroups.² The COVID-19 enrollment subgroup is an exception: Given the far-reaching repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team opted to assess effects on all outcomes for this subgroup. This chapter explains why these particular subgroups were chosen and, in an exploratory analysis, describes any statistically significant differences in effects between or among subgroups for the outcomes chosen. Despite the research team's efforts to limit the number of statistical significance tests conducted for this subgroup analysis, the overall number remains quite large. For this reason, the research team conducted additional analysis to adjust for multiple comparisons.³ Where this adjustment meant that specific subgroup effects or differences in effects were no longer statistically significant, that fact is noted in the text.

Findings include:

- PJAC's effects on payment and debt outcomes were consistent regardless of parents' racial/ethnic group, payment status in the year before study enrollment, and timing of study enrollment relative to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Meanwhile, PJAC services appeared to have a negative effect on payment outcomes for parents with older cases, previous contempt referrals, and multiple cases compared with its more neutral effects for parents with shorter histories, no previous contempt referrals, or fewer cases with the child support program. The differences in the effects of PJAC services for parents with and without previous contempt referrals are the most robust among these.

Effects Among Noncustodial Parents of Different Racial/Ethnic Groups

As described in Chapter 1, parents of color face racial discrimination across multiple systems that can impede their ability to obtain long-term employment that pays well enough to meet both their own living expenses and their child support obligations. This reality and negative past experiences with government systems may affect both how PJAC services are delivered to parents of color, and how parents of color respond to and interact with those services.⁴ However, as shown in Appendix Table C.1, there were no differences in effects on confirmatory or secondary payment and debt outcomes among noncustodial parents of different racial/ethnic groups.

² Increasing the number of effect estimates examined increases the likelihood that at least one estimate will be statistically significant by chance, even if there was no true difference in the program's effect for different subgroups. If 10 independent effect estimates are examined, there is a 65 percent chance that one of them will show a difference in effects that is statistically significant at the 10 percent level even if the program did not truly have different effects for different subgroups. Likewise, if 30 independent effect estimates are examined, there is a 96 percent chance that one will show a difference in effects that is statistically significant at the 10 percent level even if the program did not have different effects for different subgroups.

³ The method used was the Benjamini-Hochberg adjustment. See Benjamini and Hochberg (1995).

⁴ Previous research suggests that Black parents may have had particularly poor experiences with the child support system; see Meyer and Kim (2021).



Effects Among Noncustodial Parents with Older and Newer Cases

Parents who have had prolonged contact with the child support program may respond differently to PJAC services than parents with less exposure to it. For example, parents who have spent less time interacting with the child support program may be less discontented and therefore more responsive to caseworkers' outreach. Parents with older cases are likely to have accrued more child support debt and to have been subject to more previous enforcement actions. As a result, they may be less responsive to caseworkers and less motivated to engage in PJAC services. On the other hand, parents who have had prolonged contact with the child support program and potentially more negative experiences may have more room to benefit from PJAC services and its use of procedural justice.

As shown in Appendix Table C.2, PJAC services appear to have diminished the regularity of payments and the proportion of parents who made any payment among those with older cases compared with those with newer cases, among whom PJAC services had a neutral effect. Results also suggest that PJAC services differentially increased debt amounts for parents with older cases. The differences in these subgroup impacts are statistically significant, as indicated by the dagger symbols shown in the "Differential Significance" column. Reasons for this pattern may relate to parents who have long struggled to meet their child support obligations having established an approach wherein they make payments when they have no other choice, which is when the court tells them they must. With this impetus removed, some parents in this circumstance may not have pulled together payments as they otherwise would. Parents with older cases may also be a subset of the PJAC study sample who faced more challenges and were less likely to be able to pay from the outset of the study. For example, parents with longer involvement in the child support program may have accrued larger amounts of debt that can become overwhelming and discourage voluntary payment. (As shown in Appendix Table C.2, parents with older cases averaged over \$34,000 in debt, compared with around \$15,000 for parents with newer cases.)

However, the differences in effects for these subgroups were no longer statistically significant after the research team applied the adjustment for multiple comparisons, indicating that these results should be interpreted with less certainty.

Effects Among Noncustodial Parents Who Did and Did Not Make Payments in the Year Before Study Enrollment

Parents who have not made child support payments in over a year are likely to be more disconnected from the child support program. These parents are likely to have experienced more enforcement actions and to have less accurate contact information on file with the child support agency. They may also have less ability to pay than their counterparts who have made more recent payments. These

factors may make it more difficult for PJAC case managers to engage them, so parents with a more recent history of payments may receive more services. Conversely, there may be more room for PJAC services to make a difference in engagement relative to the business-as-usual group among the subgroup of parents who had not made recent payments.

As shown in Appendix Table C.3, there were no differences in effects on confirmatory or secondary payment and debt outcomes based on whether the noncustodial parent made child support payments in the year before study enrollment.

Effects Among Noncustodial Parents With and Without Previous Contempt Referrals

Previous contempt referrals indicate parents have had persistent challenges making their child support payments. These parents may also have poorer relationships with the child support program than parents with no previous contempt referrals. These conditions could cause parents to respond differently to PJAC services.

Appendix Table C.4 shows a strong, consistent pattern of differences in effects wherein PJAC services appeared to have negative effects on nearly all the confirmatory and secondary payment outcomes for parents who had already been referred to contempt before their enrollment into the PJAC study. PJAC's effect was far more neutral for parents with no previous contempt referrals. These subgroup differences in effects are statistically significant. The pattern of effects seems to be the result of relatively strong payment outcomes among parents in the business-as-usual group with previous contempt referrals, suggesting that parents with previous contempt experience may better understand the seriousness of the process and wish to avoid its known, ongoing negative consequences.

Notably, 84 percent of parents with previous contempt referrals also fall into the subgroup of parents with older cases, potentially leading to the differences in effects described earlier in this chapter. A future study publication focused on optimal targeting of child support services informed by procedural justice will disentangle these and other characteristics and will describe the extent to which previous contempt referrals rather than length of involvement with the child support program generated these results.

Effects Among Noncustodial Parents with One Child Support Case and Those with More than One

Noncustodial parents with more than one child support case typically have multiple children and owe support to more than one custodial parent. They also tend to have more involvement with the child support program and may struggle to balance the financial, familial, and emotional demands of having children in more than one household. Therefore, they may respond differently to PJAC



services than parents with only one case, who can focus on that case and may have lower amounts of total child support debt to pay.

Though the pattern is weaker than that observed for parents with older cases and, especially, parents with previous contempt referrals, there is some indication that PJAC services decreased payments among parents with more than one open case more than they did among parents with only one case. As shown in Appendix Table C.5, among parents with multiple cases, PJAC services were associated with a statistically significant reduction of 6 percentage points in the proportion who made any payment, while having virtually no effect on this percentage for parents with just one open case. However, after the research team adjusted for the large number of hypothesis tests conducted, this difference in effects on making any payments was no longer statistically significant. This fact, along with the fact that these subgroups only saw differences in effects for a single outcome, lessens the research team's confidence that PJAC services truly had different effects for parents with one child support case versus those with more than one.

Effects Among Parents Whose Follow-up Periods Predated and Overlapped the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically influenced most Americans' economic conditions, employment opportunities, childcare options, health, well-being, and stability. Further, child support agencies and courts changed their operations in response to COVID-19.⁵ The subgroup analysis presented in Appendix Table C.6 tests whether PJAC services had different effects for parents who enrolled at least a year before the COVID-19 pandemic than it did for those who had part or all of their follow-up period overlap with the COVID-19 pandemic. For this later subgroup, COVID-19 markedly altered the economic environment, service contrast, and many other contextual factors; therefore, the subgroup analyses assessed differences in effects on all outcomes. (As noted in Chapter 2, the cross-site, full-sample impacts described in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are for pre-COVID enrollees only, as are all other subgroup analyses presented in this chapter. To assess COVID-19's influence, this COVID-19 subgroup analysis extends the sample used in the rest of the report to include parents randomly assigned through the end of the enrollment period in September 2020.)

As shown in Appendix Table C.6, there were no differences in effects between these two subgroups. Unsurprisingly, given that the first round of economic impact payments and expanded unemployment insurance benefits granted during the pandemic were intercepted by child support agencies and applied toward child support obligations and debt, payment outcomes are higher and debt levels lower for parents whose follow-up periods overlapped the COVID-19 pandemic.

Interestingly, employment and earnings levels are comparable across COVID-19 subgroups. This result may at first seem unexpected given the economic fallout during the pandemic, which resulted in

⁵ Baird, Hayes, Henderson, and Johnson (2020); Vogel, Pilarz, Cuesta, and Caffrey ((2021).

widespread unemployment. However, formal employment rates were already quite low among parents in the PJAC study, so there may have been less room for them to descend. Additionally, parts of the follow-up periods of some parents in the COVID-19 group included months before the pandemic that would not have been subject to the effects of the economic downturn.



Discussion

The previous chapters of this report describe PJAC's effects on payment and debt outcomes, civil contempt filings, jailing (in Arizona), and employment and earnings. This chapter offers an overall summary of PJAC's effects, including variation in effects among the PJAC sites and different subgroups of parents; discusses the potential influences of the service and enforcement contrast on the intervention's overall effectiveness; describes some important limitations of the study; considers what impacts might look like in other contexts if the PJAC model were to be implemented in a broader spectrum of child support agencies; and suggests some policy implications of the impact findings. Finally, the chapter outlines next steps for the PJAC demonstration.

Summary of Findings

Results of the impact analysis show that the PJAC intervention did not meet its primary goals of improving payment compliance and regularity. It generated a small but statistically significant reduction in payment compliance and had no effect on payment regularity. The research

team's examination of secondary and exploratory outcomes confirmed these findings. The likelihood of making a payment and the amount paid—outcomes that relate to compliance—showed small but statistically significant negative effects. The outcomes of making payments in 6 of 12, 9 of 12, and 12 of 12 months—all outcomes relating to payment consistency—showed no effects. There was also no statistically significant difference in child support debt between research groups.

The small, negative effects on compliance-related outcomes are probably explained by purge payments. The research team is not able to isolate purge payments to confirm this likelihood due to data limitations (described further below). However, it is likely that, given their increased exposure to the contempt process, parents in the business-as-usual group were more commonly compelled to make purge payments to avoid continued court action or jail.

PJAC successfully achieved its goal of reducing reliance on civil contempt filings, both in the year after study enrollment and over a longer time frame of 30 months, showing that the large, statistically significant effect persisted.¹ However, this effect is a feature of the demonstration design in that parents assigned to the PJAC services group were diverted from contempt and, for the most part, only referred to the contempt process if they were not responsive to their PJAC case managers—even if they continued not to make payments.

Exploratory analyses of jailing (in a one-site case study in Arizona) and employment and earnings found that PJAC services had no effects in these domains.

The Site Story

PJAC's effects on payment and debt outcomes varied considerably by PJAC study site. The research team observed the least successful results in Michigan and Virginia. These results may in part be explained by the characteristics of the parents in the study samples at these sites; the samples there included high percentages of parents who had experienced contempt before their enrollment into the study and parents with debt-only cases, as well as parents who averaged longer involvement with the child support program, all characteristics associated with more negative outcomes.

On the other side of the spectrum, the pattern of effects in Franklin County suggests some success at improving payments and reducing debt. These more positive results can probably be explained at least in part by Franklin County's relatively strong service contrast: the site boosted order modifications, license reinstatements, and debt adjustment amounts while it decreased license suspensions.² Some of these positive contrast outcomes were made possible by the site's business-as-usual context. For example, license suspensions were used with some regularity in Franklin County and could therefore be

¹ As described in detail in a previous report (see Skemer et al. 2022) and noted in Chapter 4, PJAC also reduced parents' experiences of ensuing aspects of the contempt process during a 12-month follow-up period, including receiving notice to appear in court, having a bench warrant issued, and attending court hearings (since the reduction in filings meant fewer parents in the PJAC services group were required to attend hearings).

² Skemer et al. (2022).



avoided, or licenses could be reinstated. Many other sites very rarely suspended licenses, meaning they could not offer enhanced services related to licenses through PJAC as Franklin County could.

There were few statistically significant differences in payment and debt outcomes in Arizona, California, and Stark County, though Stark County's effect estimates leaned in the positive direction while Arizona and California's results appeared less promising.

Variations Among Subgroups of Parents

Effects were consistent among subgroups defined by parents' racial/ethnic background, payment status in the year before study enrollment, and enrollment timing relative to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, PJAC services had more negative effects on payment outcomes for parents with older cases, previous contempt referrals, and multiple cases, compared with neutral effects for parents with less fraught or complex histories with the child support program. There is some overlap in parents with these characteristics; in particular, parents with older cases were also a high proportion of those with previous contempt referrals. The pattern of differences in effects appeared most robust for the subgroup of parents with previous contempt referrals.

Reflections on the PJAC Service and Enforcement Contrast and Its Potential Effect on the Final Impact Results

As summarized in Chapter 1, PJAC generated a meaningful contrast in service and enforcement experiences between parents in the PJAC services group and those in the business-as-usual group. However, as in many random assignment studies of social service interventions, the service and enforcement contrast was imperfect. Not all parents assigned to the PJAC services group received core PJAC services within the one-year follow-up time frame of this study. More specifically, while virtually all noncustodial parents received a thorough review of all their cases, PJAC case managers only succeeded in making contact with 68 percent of them, 26 percent of them had a case conference, and 54 percent had a case action plan created. On average, it took 86 days—nearly three months—from the date of study enrollment to make contact with noncustodial parents. After those three months, PJAC case managers had only nine months remaining to attempt to address parents' underlying reasons for not making payments, and those reasons could be very difficult to disentangle. Additionally, aside from differences in contempt referrals, there were only modest differences between PJAC services parents and business-as-usual parents in the child support services and enforcement actions they received.

It is possible that if PJAC had engaged a higher percentage of parents in the PJAC services group and provided them with deeper support after they were engaged, the intervention would have been more effective at improving payment outcomes. However, it is also possible that increased services would have made little difference. In interviews, parents and PJAC staff members repeatedly cited struggles

with employment and earnings as the primary reason parents did not make payments, challenges the PJAC model was not designed to address (a point discussed in additional detail below). Additionally, there does not seem to be consistent alignment between the strength of individual sites' delivery of core PJAC services and their success at improving payment outcomes, further suggesting that there may not always be a direct relationship between the two. Finally, it is unclear whether, in a real-world setting, parents' service receipt could be substantially increased from what the original PJAC sites achieved. The demonstration has certainly garnered some lessons and insights that child support agencies could draw on in any future PJAC implementation. However, the major challenges that the original PJAC sites experienced in engaging parents with many barriers to payment and very complex lives, family relationships, and histories with the child support program would undoubtedly still exist in future settings, continuing to affect case managers' ability to deliver more complete services to a higher percentage of parents.

Limitations

The analysis and discussion of the context of PJAC's effects presented in this report are subject to a number of limitations:

- The research team does not have a reliable source of information about self-employment, informal employment, or contract employment. The National Directory of New Hires, the evaluation's data source for employment and earnings information, does not cover any of these types of employment. PJAC's intended target population was parents who were able to pay but unwilling to do so. Without a complete understanding of parents' income, the research team cannot fully assess the extent to which parents in the study sample were, in fact, able to pay. This lack of knowledge represents a significant gap in the research team's understanding.
- Due to data limitations, the measure of contempt filings over the longer follow-up period of 30 months only includes three of the six PJAC sites. Additionally, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced this outcome, as the extended follow-up period includes time during which pandemic-related upheaval affected child support and court operations.
- Due to data limitations, it is not possible to isolate purge payments—which are compelled by the court through the threat of continued court action and jail time—from other payments. While access to this information would not change the overall study findings, it would be informative to child support policymakers and practitioners to know whether PJAC had a positive effect on nonpurge payments and a negative effect on purge payments.
- Effects on jailing are only measured at one site; results might look different if jail data were available for all six participating PJAC sites.



- As discussed in Chapter 4, there are several outcomes for which PJAC may have had positive effects given the large reduction in contempt filings it generated, but the research team does not have access to data to investigate them.
- The research team conducted 121 interviews with noncustodial and custodial parents to gain insights into [parents' perspectives](#).³ However, there is no comprehensive, systematic measure of parents' perceptions of fairness available for the full sample with which the research team could conduct impact analyses and draw causal inferences. This lack of information is important given the centrality of perceptions of fairness to the overall PJAC theory of change. (The PJAC theory of change holds that incorporating procedural justice principles into child support case management would improve parents' perceptions of fairness in the child support system, thus increasing their willingness to comply with their child support obligations and, ultimately, improving child support payment compliance and regularity.)

How PJAC's Effects Might Look If the Intervention Were Implemented in Different Contexts

When considering what PJAC's effects might look like if the model were implemented across a broader spectrum of child support agencies, some cues can be taken from the variation in effects observed across the six participating PJAC sites. That variation reveals that new agencies' business-as-usual contexts (as evidenced by the Franklin County example) and perhaps cultures are likely to be important. The subgroup findings show that the characteristics of agencies' parents who are on the path toward a contempt filing is also likely to be an important factor.

Perhaps most important, however, would be PJAC-eligible parents' true ability to pay. As described in the next section, PJAC's use of procedural justice and intention of improving perceptions of fairness and willingness to engage with the child support process as a means of promoting compliance were probably stymied by parents' lack of consistent employment that paid family-sustaining wages. Whatever the benefits of PJAC services, parents cannot substantially improve their compliance without the means to do so. Child support agencies with larger populations of parents known to have a true ability to pay, perhaps through substantial informal employment—if such agencies exist—are likely to meet with more success if they adopt the PJAC model. (Parents with substantial formal employment are probably already subject to income withholding orders, resulting in automatic payments that mean they will not be eligible for contempt.)

³ Treskon and Groskaufmanis (2022).

Policy Implications

PJAC services significantly reduced contempt filings by nearly 60 percentage points in the year following study enrollment. The difference in contempt filings was a feature of the demonstration design (in that parents in the business-as-usual group proceeded to contempt following study enrollment, while parents in the PJAC services group were diverted from contempt), and it was effectively implemented. Parents in the PJAC services group could have been referred to contempt in large numbers if they refused to comply with PJAC services. Instead, only about one-fifth of PJAC parents were referred to contempt during the 12 months following study enrollment. This marked reduction in contempt persisted when extending the follow-up time frame to 30 months. Reducing reliance on contempt was a central aim of the PJAC model, one that was successfully met.

The overarching goal of PJAC, however, was to increase reliable child support payments and compliance with child support orders by improving noncustodial parents' perceptions of fairness in the child support process. Contrary to the goals of the intervention, PJAC services slightly decreased child support compliance and did not affect payment regularity. It is noteworthy, however, that only small decreases in payments accompanied PJAC's substantial downward effect on contempt filings.

All parents in the study had to be assessed as having an ability to pay before they could be referred for contempt or be eligible for the PJAC study. However, the research team learned both from parents and child support staff members that, in actuality, many parents struggled with obtaining and maintaining consistent employment that paid enough for them both to meet their own basic needs and to make child support payments in the amount they were ordered. This enhanced understanding of parents' true ability to pay probably contributed to PJAC case managers' continued deferral of contempt filings. Both staff members and parents cited employment struggles as the primary reason for child support nonpayment, as previous PJAC evaluation briefs and reports describe.⁴ Administrative data from the National Directory of New Hires corroborate these struggles: fewer than half of parents in both research groups had formal employment in the year after study enrollment, and among those who were employed, annual earnings from that employment were a bit over \$11,000, a figure that is below the federal poverty line for a one-person household.⁵ (As described above, information on informal work arrangements was not available, so the research team does not have complete information about parental earnings.)

Regardless, these findings suggest that a substantial portion of parents being sent to contempt do not have a current ability to pay, calling into question the validity of the screening tools and processes that child support agencies use when conducting ability-to-pay assessments. As described in Chapter 1, common approaches to such assessments include checking state and national employment databases for evidence of employment in recent quarters, reviewing social media accounts for evidence of having recently spent money, and confirming the absence of an inability to pay (that is, being

⁴ Cummings (2020); Treskon, Phillips, Groskaufmanis, and Skemer (2022); Treskon and Groskaufmanis (2022).

⁵ Office of the Assistance Secretary of Planning and Education (2018, 2019, 2020).



incarcerated, disabled, or otherwise unable to work).⁶ These methods can fail to account properly for an individual's actual ability to find and keep employment that would make complete child support payments possible. Child support agencies may benefit from more robust guidance regarding how to assess parents' ability to pay. This guidance should take into account local labor market conditions, racism in hiring and wages, and the effects of mental health and substance use disorders on job stability. At the same time, if the child support program wishes to avoid applying enforcement orders to parents without a true ability to meet the terms of their child support orders, obligation amounts should be set within parents' means from the point of establishment, in accordance with federal guidance, and be more responsive to fluctuations in parental income over time.⁷

[A previous PJAC report](#) focused on parents' perspectives found that parents in the PJAC services group reported improved interpersonal interactions with child support staff members and greater experiences of procedural justice principles relative to parents in the business-as-usual group. However, their overall perceptions of the child support program remained negative. Noncustodial parents may have felt that their case managers listened to them or tried to be helpful, but those perceptions did not seem to translate into them feeling that child support was taking their financial circumstances into account in setting their order amounts or using enforcement actions.⁸ In addition, as parents described in interviews and as other studies have corroborated, factors other than perceptions of fairness influence the regularity and completeness of child support payments.⁹ Noncustodial parents' difficulty meeting their child support obligations point to some of the limitations of the PJAC model: limited earnings may make it difficult for many parents to comply with their orders regardless of how fair they perceive the process to be. Procedural justice cannot address the structural barriers many noncustodial parents face in the labor market.

While the PJAC model was not designed to address parents' employment challenges, inadequate earnings seem to be at the heart of nonpayment for many parents in the PJAC study, indicating that many parents at the point of contempt referral are unlikely to be able to make the payments expected of them. Notably, other initiatives aimed at tackling employment issues for similar populations of parents have met with limited success.¹⁰ This lack of success is probably a reflection of the scale of the problem: the U.S. economy is one in which workers with limited skills and education or past involvement with the criminal legal system often struggle to earn a living wage. A different policy tool outside the typical child support toolbox will probably be needed to tackle this systemic issue.

⁶ The limitations of sites' screening approaches have been discussed in a previous PJAC publication. See Cummings (2020).

⁷ Office of Child Support Enforcement (2017).

⁸ While the PJAC model emphasized order modifications, only about 9 percent of parents in the PJAC services group received a modification during their one-year follow-up periods. State guidelines govern order setting and eligibility for modifications, and those guidelines meant that many parents probably could not receive modifications and continued to have orders that outstripped their ability to pay; the same may have been true even for parents who did receive modifications. See Skemer et al. (2022) for additional information about order modifications in the PJAC demonstration.

⁹ Vogel (2020).

¹⁰ Cummings and Bloom (2020); Cancian, Meyer, and Wood (2019); Wasserman, Freedman, Rodney, and Schultz (2022).

Ultimately, it seems the business-as-usual contempt process was slightly more successful at compelling child support payments from noncustodial parents than was PJAC. However, these payments were probably elicited through a costly court process that can come with other harmful effects, including impeding employment, alienating noncustodial parents from their children, and decreasing parents' future cooperation with the child support program. To avoid further court action or jail time, many noncustodial parents facing civil contempt may pay money they require for basic needs, such as rent, or borrow from friends and family out of desperation, straining these ties.¹¹ If PJAC can achieve payment outcomes that are nearly as good as those realized through the contempt process, PJAC may still be a better option overall. However, neither path provides families with the financial resources children need, which is why different policy solutions should be considered.

Regardless of the PJAC impact results, all people engaging with social service programs should be treated fairly and with respect. Procedural justice remains an important and useful framework to be applied by social service agencies. Additionally, PJAC is an example of applying procedural justice to child support at a late stage in that process, after parents have already had substantial, formative interactions with the system. It is possible that interventions that aim to incorporate procedural justice earlier in the process could prove more effective. At the same time, it is important to understand the limitations of the PJAC model in improving child support compliance for parents who have reached the point of a contempt referral, so that alternate solutions can be identified to assist families in need of additional financial resources.

Looking Forward

A future report will compare the costs and benefits of PJAC services with those of business-as-usual child support enforcement, allowing practitioners and policymakers to understand the economic costs or savings of adopting the PJAC service model.

¹¹ Rodriguez (2016).



Appendix A

Miscellaneous
Supplemental Exhibits

APPENDIX TABLE A.1 Baseline Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents in the PJAC Services and Business-as-Usual Groups

Characteristic	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Full PJAC Study Sample
Parent characteristics			
Male (%)	90.2	90.2	90.2
Age (years)	38.2	38.0	38.1
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Black, non-Hispanic	41.1	41.5	41.2
White, non-Hispanic	35.8	35.0	35.5
Hispanic	20.7	21.3	20.9
Other	2.5	2.2	2.4
Noncustodial parent is a custodial parent on another case (%)	8.6	8.0	8.4
Case characteristics			
Number of cases per noncustodial parent ^a	1.7	1.7	1.7
Years since the order on a parent's oldest case was established ^b	10.0	9.8	9.9*
Monthly amount due (\$)	412	434	420
Total debt due (\$)	26,340	25,786	26,146
Months since last payment, among those who made a payment in the year before study enrollment	5.1	5.3	5.2**
Ever referred to contempt before study enrollment (%)	34.5	35.7	34.9
Family violence indicated ^c (%)	17.6	18.1	17.8
Has a debt-only case (%)	31.2	29.6	30.7*
Custodial parent and child(ren) on the primary case receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ^d (%)	10.1	9.8	10.0
Employment and earnings			
Total formal earnings in the year before study enrollment (\$)	4,865	4,846	4,858
Ever formally employed in the year before study enrollment (%)	53.1	53.1	53.1
Sample size (total = 11,372)	7,381	3,991	11,372

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative records and quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values and gaps and delays in data. Statistical significance tests were conducted to assess differences in characteristics across research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThis measure includes cases in which the sample member was the noncustodial parent only (as opposed to cases in which the sample member is the custodial parent or child).

^bThis measure is calculated among cases open at the time of study enrollment only.

^cThis measure indicates family violence for either the noncustodial or the custodial parent on a noncustodial parent's cases except for in Arizona, where the measure only includes instances where the noncustodial parent is indicated as the victim of family violence.

^dA noncustodial parent's primary case is the case that made the parent eligible for contempt and the PJAC study.

APPENDIX TABLE A.2 Baseline Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents in the PJAC Services and Business-as-Usual Groups in the Pre-COVID-19 Sample

Characteristic	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Full Pre-COVID-19 Sample
Parent characteristics			
Male (%)	90.8	90.5	90.7
Age (years)	37.9	37.8	37.9
Race/ethnicity (%)			
Black, non-Hispanic	39.6	39.9	39.7
White, non-Hispanic	36.0	35.7	35.9
Hispanic	21.8	22.1	22.0
Other	2.5	2.3	2.5
Noncustodial parent is a custodial parent on another case (%)	9.1	8.0	8.7
Case characteristics			
Number of cases per noncustodial parent ^a	1.8	1.7	1.7
Years since the order on a parent's oldest case was established ^b	9.9	9.6	9.8
Monthly amount due (\$)	424	415	421
Total debt due (\$)	27,522	25,761	26,903*
Months since last payment, among those who made a payment in the year before study enrollment	5.0	5.2	5.1
Ever referred to contempt before study enrollment (%)	32.8	34.1	33.2
Family violence indicated ^c (%)	18.0	18.7	18.3
Has a debt-only case (%)	31.7	28.9	30.7*
Custodial parent and child(ren) on the primary case receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ^d (%)	11.0	10.9	11.0
Employment and earnings			
Total formal earnings in the year before study enrollment (\$)	4,655	4,337	4,543
Ever formally employed in the year before study enrollment (%)	51.7	51.2	51.5
Sample size (total = 5,628)	3,650	1,978	5,628

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative records and quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values and gaps and delays in data. Statistical significance tests were conducted to assess differences in characteristics across research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as follows: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aThis measure includes cases in which the sample member was the noncustodial parent only (as opposed to cases in which the sample member is the custodial parent or child).

^bThis measure is calculated among cases open at the time of study enrollment only.

^cThis measure indicates family violence for either the noncustodial or the custodial parent on a noncustodial parent's cases except for in Arizona, where the measure only includes instances where the noncustodial parent is indicated as the victim of family violence.

^dA noncustodial parent's primary case is the case that made the parent eligible for contempt and the PJAC study.



APPENDIX TABLE A.3 Baseline Characteristics of Noncustodial Parents in the PJAC Demonstration, by Site

Characteristic	Arizona	California	Michigan	Franklin County	Stark County	Virginia	All PJAC Sites
Parent characteristics							
Male (%)	93.5	92.9	88.7	92.6	86.6	87.7	90.2
Age (years)	39.7	37.2	35.7	37.3	39.0	39.0	38.1
Race/ethnicity (%)							
Black, non-Hispanic	16.6	16.4	44.8	61.1	33.8	84.8	41.2
White, non-Hispanic	32.6	19.7	50.2	36.3	64.6	13.6	35.5
Hispanic	46.3	60.0	1.8	1.4	0.9	1.3	20.9
Other	4.5	3.9	3.2	1.2	0.7	0.3	2.4
Noncustodial parent is a custodial parent on another case (%)	1.4	12.1	17.6	5.7	7.6	5.3	8.4
Case characteristics							
Number of cases per noncustodial parent ^a	1.3	1.3	2.1	1.8	2.1	1.8	1.7
Years since the order on a parent's oldest case was established ^b	9.7	8.8	10.2	8.4	10.7	11.4	9.9
Monthly amount due (\$)	427	522	259	528	340	455	420
Total debt due (\$)	44,742	33,943	15,362	21,431	16,747	21,311	26,146
Months since last payment, among those who made a payment in the year before study enrollment	4.8	5.2	5.0	4.7	6.0	5.4	5.2
Ever referred to contempt before study enrollment (%)	24.2	8.0	63.9	38.5	31.9	50.2	34.9
Family violence indicated ^c (%)	5.7	10.2	43.2	6.3	5.6	29.9	17.8
Has a debt-only case (%)	29.1	17.3	32.7	19.8	34.6	43.9	30.7
Custodial parent and child(ren) on the primary case receiving							
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families ^d (%)	1.3	21.5	4.5	4.4	11.3	14.9	10.0
Employment and earnings							
Total formal earnings in the year before study enrollment (\$)	5,949	4,324	5,680	4,779	3,459	5,041	4,858
Ever formally employed in the year before study enrollment (%)	52.0	45.8	63.6	54.5	48.2	55.5	53.1
Sample size	2,085	2,070	1,730	1,416	2,166	1,905	11,372

(continued)

APPENDIX TABLE A.3 (Continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative records and quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Sample sizes may vary because of missing values and gaps and delays in data.

^aThis measure includes cases in which the sample member was the noncustodial parent only (as opposed to cases in which the sample member is the custodial parent or child).

^bThis measure is calculated among cases open at the time of study enrollment only.

^cThis measure indicates family violence for either the noncustodial or the custodial parent on a noncustodial parent's cases except for in Arizona, where the measure only includes instances where the noncustodial parent is indicated as the victim of family violence.

^dA noncustodial parent's primary case is the case that made the parent eligible for contempt and the PJAC study.

APPENDIX TABLE A.4 Effects on Civil Contempt Proceedings After One Year, Arizona

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Civil contempt of court filing (%)	12.9	79.3	-66.4***	(-70.4, -62.4)
Days to first contempt referral ^a	204	35		
Successful service of notice to appear in court (%)	5.9	51.9	-46.0***	(-50.0, -42.1)
Issuance of a bench warrant (%)	1.7	18.0	-16.3***	(-19.1, -13.5)
Sample size (total = 963)	624	339		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

^aSignificance tests were not conducted for this measure, as it is only calculated among parents for whom contempt was filed in the 12-month period following random assignment, rather than all parents, and is therefore nonexperimental.



Appendix B

Site-Level Effects on Child
Support Payments and
Debt and Employment
and Earnings

APPENDIX TABLE B.1 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, Arizona

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^a (%)	25.9	31.4	-5.5**	(-9.0, -2.0)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	27.8	27.2	0.7	(-2.5, 3.8)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	65.0	67.1	-2.1	(-7.1, 3.0)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,564	2,093	-529***	(-862, -196)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	41,549	41,140	409	(-1,542, 2,360)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	26.3	26.1	0.2	(-4.5, 4.9)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	12.9	10.8	2.2	(-1.4, 5.7)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	2.4	2.1	0.3	(-1.3, 2.0)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	39,105	38,897	207	(-1,795, 2,210)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	2,444	2,242	202	(-466, 869)
Sample size (total = 963)	624	339		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

^aInformation on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants in Arizona. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligation in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE B.2 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, Arizona

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as- Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	46.4	43.4	3.1	(-1.8, 8.0)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	7,051	6,578	473	(-707, 1,654)
Sample size (total = 963)	624	339		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



APPENDIX TABLE B.3 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, California

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^a (%)	19.7	22.9	-3.2*	(-6.2, -0.3)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	19.4	19.6	-0.2	(-2.5, 2.2)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	54.0	56.0	-2.0	(-6.6, 2.6)
Total amount paid (\$)	992	1,096	-104	(-295, 87)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	39,094	38,951	143	(-1,196, 1,481)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	17.4	17.5	-0.1	(-3.7, 3.6)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	6.7	5.9	0.8	(-1.5, 3.2)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	0.7	0.7	0.0	(-0.8, 0.8)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	28,988	28,796	192	(-1,753, 2,138)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	10,106	10,155	-49	(-1,713, 1,614)
Sample size (total = 1,278)	824	454		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

^aThe research team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months for the California sample due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE B.4 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, California

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	38.0	41.5	-3.5	(-7.7, 0.8)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	4,904	5,115	-211	(-1,087, 665)
Sample size (total = 1,278)	824	454		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



APPENDIX TABLE B.5 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, Franklin County

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid (%)	21.5	18.5	3.0*	(0.2, 5.8)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	30.3	27.8	2.5	(-0.4, 5.5)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	71.2	67.2	4.0	(-0.8, 8.9)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,336	1,249	87	(-130, 303)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	22,431	23,493	-1,062*	(-1,980, -144)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	32.1	25.8	6.3**	(1.5, 11.1)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	13.6	12.4	1.2	(-2.5, 4.9)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	1.7	1.6	0.2	(-1.3, 1.6)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	18,780	20,019	-1,239**	(-2,225, -253)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	3,651	3,474	177	(-453, 807)
Sample size (total = 908)	590	318		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

APPENDIX TABLE B.6 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, Franklin County

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	48.8	50.1	-1.4	(-6.3, 3.5)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	5,015	5,098	-82	(-882, 717)
Sample size (total = 908)	590	318		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



APPENDIX TABLE B.7 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, Michigan

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid (%)	34.1	40.9	-6.8***	(-10.9, -2.7)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	21.8	29.3	-7.5***	(-10.7, -4.4)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	57.4	69.3	-12.0***	(-17.4, -6.6)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,090	1,365	-275*	(-529, -22)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	18,916	18,542	374	(-283, 1,032)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	19.6	28.4	-8.8***	(-13.7, -4.0)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	7.5	14.4	-6.8***	(-10.3, -3.4)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	1.9	1.7	0.2	(-1.4, 1.7)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	14,245	13,714	531	(-292, 1,353)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	4,673	4,829	-157	(-865, 552)
Sample size (total = 825)	534	291		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

APPENDIX TABLE B.8 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, Michigan

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	52.7	52.5	0.2	(-4.9, 5.4)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	4,990	5,988	-997*	(-1,863, -131)
Sample size (total = 825)	534	291		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



APPENDIX TABLE B.9 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, Stark County

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid (%)	26.1	24.8	1.2	(-2.1, 4.6)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	31.3	28.8	2.4	(-0.7, 5.6)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	69.4	68.6	0.8	(-4.2, 5.8)
Total amount paid (\$)	1,061	996	65	(-132, 262)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	17,956	18,577	-621	(-1,338, 97)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	31.9	28.5	3.4	(-1.6, 8.3)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	17.2	11.3	5.9**	(1.9, 9.9)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	2.0	1.9	0.1	(-1.5, 1.6)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	15,328	15,855	-528	(-1,348, 293)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	2,629	2,722	-93	(-529, 343)
Sample size (total = 904)	587	317		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

APPENDIX TABLE B.10 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, Stark County

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	39.9	46.0	-6.1**	(-11.2, -1.0)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	4,249	4,293	-43	(-899, 812)
Sample size (total = 904)	587	317		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



APPENDIX TABLE B.11 Effects on Child Support Payments and Debt After One Year, Virginia

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Confirmatory outcomes				
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^a (%)	23.6	28.2	-4.6**	(-8.4, -0.8)
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	21.0	25.9	-4.8***	(-7.8, -1.8)
Secondary outcomes				
Any payment made (%)	60.0	64.0	-4.0	(-9.7, 1.7)
Total amount paid (\$)	882	1,103	-221*	(-419, -23)
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	22,557	21,474	1,083*	(46, 2,120)
Exploratory outcomes				
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	20.4	26.0	-5.6*	(-10.7, -0.5)
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	6.1	10.8	-4.7**	(-8.0, -1.5)
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	0.2	0.5	-0.3	(-1.0, 0.4)
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	15,965	15,181	784	(-586, 2,154)
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	6,592	6,293	299	(-731, 1,329)
Sample size (total = 750)	491	259		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.

^aData on monthly obligations for child support debt were unavailable in Virginia. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE B.12 Effects on Employment and Earnings After One Year, Virginia

Outcome	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	90 Percent Confidence Interval
Exploratory outcomes				
Any formal employment (%)	49.4	50.0	-0.6	(-6.2, 5.0)
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	3,839	4,000	-161	(-906, 585)
Sample size (total = 750)	491	259		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires

NOTES: Results in this table are regression-adjusted, controlling for pre-random assignment characteristics.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019.



Appendix C

Effects for Subgroups
of Parents

APPENDIX TABLE C.1 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents of Different Racial/Ethnic Groups

Outcome	White, non-Hispanic			Black, non-Hispanic			Hispanic			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes										
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	26.9	27.5	-0.6	23.7	26.9	-3.2**	21.9	26.0	-4.1**	
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	25.1	25.8	-0.6	25.3	28.0	-2.7**	22.7	21.5	1.2	
Secondary outcomes										
Any payment made (%)	61.9	64.5	-2.6	64.1	66.8	-2.7	58.1	60.0	-1.9	
Total amount paid (\$)	1,149	1,341	-193*	1,029	1,175	-146*	1,251	1,346	-94	
Total debt in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	24,108	23,721	387	27,176	27,050	126	37,593	37,732	-139	
Sample size (total = 5,221)	1,250	670		1,377	749		759	416		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019 for whom race/ethnicity information was available and who were identified as White, non-Hispanic; Black, non-Hispanic; or Hispanic. Only about 2.5 percent of the pre-COVID-19 sample fell outside of these groups, so it was not possible to examine differential effects of PJAC services for other racial/ethnic groups. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 894; California = 1,181; Franklin County = 850; Michigan = 789; Stark County = 767; Virginia = 740.

^aWhen comparing effects among subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects among the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences among subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE C.2 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents with Older and Newer Cases

Outcome	Oldest Case Six Years Old or More			Oldest Case Five Years Old or Less			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes							
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	24.5	27.8	-3.4***	25.5	25.9	-0.4	
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	24.6	26.5	-1.9**	26.1	25.0	1.1	††
Secondary outcomes							
Any payment made (%)	60.7	64.6	-4.0***	66.1	65.5	0.6	†
Total amount paid (\$)	1,080	1,288	-209***	1,312	1,389	-77	
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	34,778	34,323	455	14,971	15,612	-641*	†
Sample size (total = 5,620)	2,476	1,308		1,169	667		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,271; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 903; Virginia = 750.

^aWhen comparing effects between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects between the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences between subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.



APPENDIX TABLE C.3 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents Who Did and Did Not Make Payments in the Year Before Study Enrollment

Outcome	Made a Payment in the Last Year			Did Not Make a Payment in the Last Year			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes							
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	32.0	34.3	-2.2*	15.6	18.7	-3.1***	
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	33.5	33.6	-0.1	14.5	16.2	-1.7*	
Secondary outcomes							
Any payment made (%)	77.3	77.8	-0.5	43.8	48.3	-4.5**	
Total amount paid (\$)	1,634	1,827	-194**	550	689	-139**	
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	26,636	26,390	246	30,376	30,523	-146	
Sample size (total = 5,625)	2,043	1,087		1,606	889		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,275; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aWhen comparing effects between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects between the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences between subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE C.4 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents With and Without Previous Contempt Referrals

Outcome	Previous Contempt Referral			No Previous Contempt Referral			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes							
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	25.6	30.3	-4.7***	24.4	25.6	-1.2	†
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	25.0	28.8	-3.8***	25.1	24.4	0.7	†††
Secondary outcomes							
Any payment made (%)	62.7	70.2	-7.5***	62.4	61.8	0.5	†††
Total amount paid (\$)	1,073	1,389	-316***	1,201	1,270	-69	††
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	31,005	30,875	130	26,948	26,896	52	
Sample size (total = 5,628)	1,196	675		2,454	1,303		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,278; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aWhen comparing effects between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects between the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences between subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for an administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.



APPENDIX TABLE C.5 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents with One Child Support Case and Those with More Than One

Outcome	More than One Open Case			One Open Case			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes							
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	21.2	24.1	-2.8**	27.2	29.4	-2.2*	
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	24.4	26.6	-2.2**	25.6	25.5	0.0	
Secondary outcomes							
Any payment made (%)	60.6	66.4	-5.9***	63.7	63.7	0.0	††
Total amount paid (\$)	1,161	1,365	-204**	1,150	1,289	-139*	
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	37,584	37,105	479	22,006	22,171	-165	
Sample size (total = 5,628)	1,495	773		2,155	1,205		

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 963; California = 1,278; Franklin County = 908; Michigan = 825; Stark County = 904; Virginia = 750.

^aWhen comparing effects between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects between the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences between subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

APPENDIX TABLE C.6 Effects Among Noncustodial Parents Whose Follow-Up Periods Predated and Overlapped the COVID-19 Pandemic

Outcome	Pre-COVID-19 Sample			COVID-19 Sample			Differential Significance ^a
	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	PJAC Services Group	Business-as-Usual Group	Difference	
Confirmatory outcomes							
Proportion of monthly child support obligation paid ^b (%)	24.8	27.1	-2.3***	39.0	40.8	-1.8*	
Proportion of months with any payment (%)	25.1	25.9	-0.8	30.6	30.4	0.3	
Secondary outcomes							
Any payment made (%)	62.5	64.7	-2.2*	73.6	74.0	-0.4	
Total amount paid (\$)	1,157	1,315	-158***	1,819	2,008	-190**	
Total debt amount in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	28,293	28,226	67	26,609	26,833	-224	
Exploratory outcomes							
Payment made in 6 of 12 follow-up months (%)	24.4	24.8	-0.4	30.3	30.2	0.1	
Payment made in 9 of 12 follow-up months (%)	10.6	10.5	0.1	14.3	13.6	0.7	
Payment made in all 12 follow-up months (%)	1.5	1.4	0.1	1.8	1.4	0.4	
Debt owed to the custodial parent in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	22,978	23,037	-59	22,400	22,561	-160	
Debt owed to the state in the final month of the follow-up period (\$)	5,315	5,189	126	4,210	4,273	-63	
Any formal employment (%)	45.3	46.6	-1.3	46.0	45.8	0.3	
Total earnings from formal employment (\$)	5,058	5,205	-147	5,153	5,279	-126	
Sample size (total = 11,366)	3,650	1,978		3,730	2,008		

(continued)



APPENDIX TABLE C.6 (Continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations based on child support administrative data and quarterly employment and earnings data from the National Directory of New Hires.

NOTES: Differences were calculated separately for each subgroup, using an ordinary least squares model and adjusting for pre-random assignment characteristics. Estimates were then examined for statistically significant differences across subgroups.

Rounding may cause slight discrepancies in sums and differences.

Statistical significance levels of effects within subgroups are indicated as: *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

The pre-COVID-19 sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from February 1, 2018, through April 30, 2019, and the COVID-19 sample includes noncustodial parents enrolled from May 1, 2019, through October 31, 2020. Sample sizes by site are: Arizona = 2,085; California = 2,070; Franklin County = 1,416; Michigan = 1,730; Stark County = 2,166; Virginia = 1,899.

^aWhen comparing effects between two subgroups, an H-statistic is generated. The H-statistic is used to assess whether the difference in effects between the subgroups is statistically significant. Statistically significant differences between subgroups are indicated as: ††† = 1 percent; †† = 5 percent; † = 10 percent.

^bTo construct this measure, the research team had to address data gaps at a few sites. In Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable for almost all participants. Where data were available, the median order on debt was \$50, so \$50 was added to the calculation of monthly obligations in all months during which a case had a positive debt balance. In California, the team did not receive monthly obligation information in all months due to delays in initial file delivery and minor data issues. Where there were gaps, the research team filled them using information provided at study enrollment via the PJAC management information system and obligation amounts from adjacent months in child support administrative records. In Virginia, like Arizona, information on monthly obligations for child support debt was unavailable. According to the Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement, the regulatory minimum order on debt is \$65 for administrative child support order; this regulatory minimum also applies to judicial orders, though a court may deviate from this amount. In lieu of a better proxy, \$65 was added to the monthly calculation of orders for all cases with debts. Various sensitivity checks were conducted to see whether different assumptions would have affected the final results; there is little evidence to suggest they would have.

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