

INFORMATION COLLECTION ACTIVITY 9

PROCEDURAL JUSTICE INFORMED ALTERNATIVES TO CONTEMPT (PJAC)

TOPIC GUIDE FOR BIAS INTERVIEWS WITH NONCUSTODIAL PARENTS

ABOUT THIS INSTRUMENT

These interviews will be fielded in 2023. A selection of noncustodial parents who were enrolled in the PJAC study control group will be interviewed. Interviews with parents will take place individually. Each semi-structured interview is expected to take no more than 60 minutes. *Interviews will focus on the topics most salient to each respondent; not all topics will be asked of all respondents.*

The goal of the study is to provide information about disparities and bias in the use of child support enforcement measures. The purpose is to inform the quantitative analysis and provide information to practitioners and policymakers within multiple levels of government as well as in other sectors.

The information provided during these interviews will be used for research purposes only. It will only be discussed in combination with other people's responses and reported together as a group. No information that identifies the individual will be disseminated outside the evaluation team, except as required by law.

Providing information for the purposes described is voluntary. Informed consent will be obtained verbally.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PJAC EVALUATION INTERVIEW FOR PARENTS

Hello, may I please speak to [PARENT NAME]? This is [INTERVIEWER NAME]. I'm calling from MDRC, a nonprofit research organization, as part of a study about child support. We would like to interview you to learn more about your experiences with the child support program in [PJAC County]. This conversation will take about one hour of your time, and we will mail you a \$50 gift card as a thank you when you finish the interview. The information you share with us will be kept private if you choose to participate.

The reason for these interviews is to learn how to improve parents' experiences with the child support program, especially their experiences with enforcement. The study is called Procedural Justice-Informed Alternatives to Contempt, or PJAC for short. The organization I work for, MDRC, leads the study with funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

(HHS). This interview is not in any way related to custody or child support disagreements. Your participation in the interview will not affect your child support case or your chance of receiving public benefits or services in any way.

If you choose to participate, the information you provide will help child support programs in the future. When we are finished, I will send you the \$50 gift card as a thank you. Do you wish to complete this interview? *[If yes, inquire whether now is a good time for the interview. If it's not, try to schedule an appointment for a later date.]*

I want you to know that what you say will be kept private. The research staff has been trained in protecting private information and neither your name nor your child's name will appear in any written reports from the study. Information from the interview will be used for research only. Your participation is completely voluntary. It is up to you whether you participate; you may choose not to answer any questions you do not wish to, or you may stop the interview at any time. Your responses to questions will not be shared with the child support agency, and the agency will not know if you participated in this interview or not.

The study team may have to report information about you to the authorities if you tell us that you or someone else may be in danger of harm.

An agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. The OMB control number for this collection is 0970-0505, and it expires on **xx/xx/xxxx**.

Do you have any questions? *[Pause, and respond to questions if needed]* Do I have your consent to continue?

If any questions come up during the interview, please feel free to ask them. You can also always call Melanie Skemer, Evaluation Project Director at MDRC at 212-340-8614 or melanie.skemer@mdrc.org if you think of questions later.

Finally, we would like to record this interview. Do I have your okay to record the interview? If so, if there is ever a time you would like the recorder turned off, please let me know.

[Turn on recorder, if participant is willing. Record consent and leave recorder on for the remainder of the interview. If participant is unwilling, ask if interview can be scheduled for a later time when a research assistant can join to take detailed notes. Request recording of consent only, for Institutional Review Board (IRB) purposes.]

TOPIC GUIDE FOR INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS

INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE-PARENTS

Respondent characteristics (RQ5)

- Respondent demographic characteristics, including self-identification of age, race/ethnicity, and gender
- Living arrangements of respondent, such as own place, with friends/family, in shelter or other facility
- Household composition, including number of adults and children reside with
- Marital status, current and historic

Respondent education, employment history, and financial wellbeing (RQ5)

- Educational attainment and certifications/training
- If employed:
 - Current job title(s), hours worked per week, wages
 - Job tenure
 - Satisfaction with job and wages
- If unemployed or recently unemployed:
 - Receipt of Unemployment Insurance (UI) or Social Security Insurance (SSI)/ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
 - Duration unemployed/time since last worked
 - Description of last job worked and reason for leaving or why job ended, including job title, pay, and satisfaction
- Experience searching for work and discussion of barriers to finding employment including bias in hiring, criminal record, labor market, lack of experience, training, or degree, etc.
- Discussion of employment stability and factors that affect stability, such as temporary employment, child care responsibilities, job dissatisfaction, mental health, physical health, and substance use disorder
- Discussion of financial wellbeing, including whether respondent has trouble making ends meet at the end of the month (e.g., paying rent, utilities, phone bill; buying food; purchasing medication; or seeing a doctor) and how child support payment factors into their finances

Background on children and child support cases (RQ5)

- Number and age of children total
- Number and age of children for whom have child support case
- Living arrangements of children, such as with respondent, with the other parent, another relative, or foster care
- Description of relationship with children, including how often sees children, current status, and desired status
- Description of relationship with other parent, including frequency and nature of communication

- Year first case was established and duration of involvement with the child support system
- Why cases were established and whether parent sought out a child support case or if it was a requirement of benefits access

Experiences with order establishment and modification (RQ6)

- Parent recollection of order establishment process, including description of the process, clarity of process, communication with staff person/agency, and actions required
- Parent perception of whether the initial order amount was fair and whether their circumstances were considered, why or why not
- Parent experiences with order modification, including whether Noncustodial Parents (NCP) or Custodial Parents (CP) has pursued modification, communication with staff person during the process, ease and clarity of process, and the outcome
- Description of why parent believes the order was or wasn't modified and whether parent thinks this was a fair outcome
- Discussion of factors they believe contributed to the outcome, including who made the decision and why
- Discussion of factors parent believes should be considered in setting and modifying order amounts

Experiences with child support payment and/or receipt (RQ5)

- Self-attestation of total amount of child support owed monthly and frequency with which pay/receive all, some, or none of the order, overall and for youngest child
- Parent beliefs about the primary reasons parents do or do not make child support payments, including willingness to pay, ability to pay, and child support system impediments to paying
- Discussion about whether there have been times that the NCP struggled to make child support payments and what was going on with NCP at the time
- Description of barriers to paying child support experienced by NCP
- Self-attestation of arrears balance on cases (state and custodial parent-owed), how debt affects the parent, and whether and why parent thinks the arrears are payable
- Experiences with arrears forgiveness (state and custodial parent owed), including pursuit and outcome

NCP experiences with enforcement (RQ5)

- Experience of any of enforcement activities such as
 - Asset seizure
 - License suspension and reinstatement: drivers, occupational, recreational
 - Civil contempt and court hearings
 - Warning letters/notices
 - Other
- For all activities experienced, how parent was informed about that the action would be taken or was taken
 - Extent and nature of communication prior to point of enforcement, including use of automated notices

- For all activities experienced, discussion about what was happening with the parent at the time of the action was taken; how parent felt when learned about the enforcement action
- For all activities experienced, discussion about any actions parent took when learned about enforcement action/potential action and why
- For all activities experienced, discussion about any communication parent had with staff person about the circumstances of their nonpayment or how enforcement would affect them; mode and ease of communication; result of communication
- For all activities experienced, current status of action (e.g., whether license has been reinstated)
- For all activities experienced, discussion about how the enforcement action affected parent personally (employment, financial stability, mobility), their relationship with the other parent or their child
- For all activities experienced, whether the enforcement action resulted in payment
- If attended court hearings related to case, parent experience of attending hearings, perceptions whether they were treated with dignity and respect

Parent perceptions of enforcement, staff persons and legal staff, and child support system (RQ7,8)

- Discussion about parent beliefs about how decisions are made about whether to take enforcement actions
 - Whether staff made these decisions independently vs. whether the child support system makes these decisions and staff enact the policy
 - Factors that influence decisions about enforcement action, such as payment history, fairness of order, complaints from CP, staff willingness to listen to parents' perspective, or ability to reach staff person
 - Factors that parents believe should be taken into account when considering enforcement action
- Discussion of parent perspectives on whether enforcement actions are effective at compelling payments; whether some actions are more effective than others and reasons why
- Discussion of general beliefs about the goals and function of the child support system
 - Whether the child support system is beneficial for parent and/or their children
 - Whether the child support system has the best interest of children and families in mind
 - Whether the child support system is adept at helping parents make/receive child support payments
- Discussion about what a more ideal child support system would look like to parents; suggestions for how child support system or staff could improve