

Instrument 1: SAVES Qualitative Interviews with DV Survivors

DV Survivor Experiences with Child Support Services – Screening Survey Questions (Required Survey on Qualtrics)

I. What is your age group?

- a. Below 18 years → (If Below 18, end survey)
- b. 18-24 years
- c. 25-34 years
- d. 35-44 years
- e. 45-54 years
- f. 55-64 years
- g. 65 years and older

II. How many children do you have?

- a. 0 → (If 0, end survey)
- b. [Enter Number]

III. Have you experienced domestic violence (physical, emotional, psychological, financial, or sexual abuse) from a current or former partner?

- a. Yes, from a partner who is the parent of one or more of my children
- b. Yes, from a partner who is **not** the parent of any of my children → (End survey)
- c. No → (End survey)
- d. Prefer not to say → (End survey)

IV. Have you ever applied for child support with a state, county, or tribal child support agency?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Other (please specify): _____

The Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This collection of information is voluntary and will be used to better understand efforts to increase safe access to child support, parenting time, and establishment of parentage services for survivors of domestic violence. Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 60 minutes per response, including the time for consent and brief eligibility screening. 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 number and expiration date for this collection are OMB #: XXXX-XXXX, Exp: XX/XX/202X. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Center for Policy Research; 1570 Emerson Street Denver, Colorado 80218.

Would you be willing to participate in a 60-minute interview for a study about domestic violence and the child support program? Participants will receive a **\$50 gift card** as a thank-you for their participation. Your participation and your responses is kept private and will not be shared with child support or other government agencies.

- a. Yes → If you're interested, please provide your email address so we can follow up with more information: _____
- b. No → (If No, end survey)

Qualitative Interview Guide – Group 1: Survivors who pursue child support

Trigger/Content Warning

Before we begin, I want to remind you that this interview will include some questions that may touch on difficult experiences, including emotional or physical harm.

Please know that you are in control:

- *You can skip any question.*
- *You can stop or pause the interview at any time.*
- *You do not have to explain your reason.*
- *You will still receive compensation, regardless of whether you complete the interview*

If anything becomes distressing, I encourage you to take a break or let me know if you'd like to end the conversation. I also have a list of resources that I will [share verbally/link in the chat]

Introduction and Background

Hi, my name is [NAME], and I'm with [Role and Organization].

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

We are exploring the experiences of survivors of domestic violence who have engaged with a county, state, or tribal the child support program. Your input will help us understand the challenges survivors of domestic violence may face in the child support program and how to support them and ensure their safety.

This study is part of the Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) Center project, which is funded by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The project aims to improve safety and access within the child support program for domestic violence survivors.

I'll be asking you about your experiences and any concerns or difficulties you may have had with the child support program.

Everything you share will be kept private. *Your name and any identifying information will not be included in any reports or notes from this interview. Any quotes we use in reports will be anonymized and combined with other participants' responses so that you cannot be identified. You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. If you are currently receiving child support payments or other benefits through human services programs, your participation in this study will not be shared with the child support program or any other agency, and it will not affect your eligibility for or receipt of those benefits in any way.*

We would like to record this interview to ensure we accurately capture what you share.

The recording will be stored on a secure, password-protected server that meets federal data protection standards. Only the research team will have access to the recording, and it will be permanently deleted after it has been transcribed and de-identified. (De-identified data means

we remove information like your name, location, or anything else that could identify you, so no one can tell who shared the information.)

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes, and you will receive a \$50 gift card to thank you for your participation.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

- ☐ *I agree to participate → Thank you again for being part of this important work*
- ☐ *I do not agree to participate → Thank them and end call*

Do you agree to be audio recorded?

- ☐ *I agree to be audio recorded → Start recording*
- ☐ *I do not agree to be audio recorded → Do not proceed with recording the interview*

Do you agree to have de-identified quotes used from this interview?

- ☐ *I agree that my de-identified quotations may be used in reports or publications*
- ☐ *I do not agree that my de-identified quotations may be used in reports or publications*

Background Information:

Transition to Background Questions:

Thank you again for being part of this important work.

Before we talk about your experiences with the child support program, I'd like to start with a few questions to get to know a bit more about you and your family. These questions help us better understand the range of circumstances that survivors of domestic violence may be in when they are deciding whether or how to engage with the child support program. You are welcome to skip any question you're not comfortable answering.

The questions I'm going to ask are focused on people who have experienced domestic violence, have children, and have pursued child support. Can I confirm that this describes your experience?

1. Can you tell me a little about your children? What do they like to do?

Probe: How many children do you have? What are their ages?

Now I'd like to learn more about you...

2. Could you tell me your age?

3. What is the highest level of education you've completed?

4. Are you currently working?

Probe:

- What kind of work do you do?
- Would you say your current income is enough to meet your family's needs, or do you feel financially stretched right now?

5. What is your current relationship status?

Probe: Are you currently single, married, divorced, remarried, or in another kind of relationship?

6. Have you ever received ANY public benefits like TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid etc.?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your children's other parent?

Probe:

- Do you have no contact, some contact, or regular contact with them?
- Does the other parent have contact with the children? If so, how often?
- Does the other parent know where you live?

Perceptions of the Child Support Program and Experiences with it:

Tell me about your experience with the child support program.

Probe:

- How did you first learn about the child support program? (e.g., personal experiences, stories from friends or family, media coverage, interactions with child support staff etc.)
- —Did a child support case get opened because you applied for TANF or other benefits?
- —Or did you apply for child support services on your own?

8. What parts of the child support process have you experienced? Did any of them make you feel unsafe? If so, what about it made you feel unsafe? Have you...

- Opened a child support case,
- Located the other parent and got him/her involved with child support,
- Established paternity,
- Established a child support order,
- Attended a court hearing or agency meeting with the other parent,
- Received payments (e.g., regularly/sometimes/never),
- Enforcement actions taken (e.g., other parent sanctioned for nonpayment - tax refund seized, license suspended, contempt filed),
- Order modified or changed for new income or expenses,
- Case closed,
- Other?

9. Overall, what has been your impression of the child support process? What kinds of positive or negative experiences have you had throughout the process?

Probe:

- Experience with child support staff?
- Experience with courts?
- Rules and requirements around providing information to the agency/courts?
- Getting child support payments?

10. Have you ever received child support informally — for example, through direct payments or in-kind support from the other parent without going through the child support agency? If so, can you tell me what kind of informal support the other parent provided? (*Informal child support is financial or non-financial help a noncustodial parent gives directly to the other parent or caregiver – without going through the child support agency or court – such as giving cash, buying groceries, or paying for school supplies.*)

Probe:

- Paid the rent, bought diapers and formula, paid for transportation and food?
- How was that experience?
- Could you count on it, did it cause issues?

Safety in Child Support Services:

I'm going to ask you some questions about whether and how child support case workers addressed the issue of safety with you.

11. Did a child support worker ever ask you or talk with you about whether you had experienced domestic violence (DV) or were worried about your personal safety while starting child support?

If so, what were you told and did it help? If not, was this something you would have wanted?

12. Did you ever get a brochure or flier about safety in the child support program or see something about it on the child support website?

If so, what type of information did you get, where did you get it and did it help? If not, was this something you would have wanted?

13. Did a child support worker ever explain what happens in a child support case?

Was the process explained to you in terms of:

- How the other parent would be involved, like getting legal papers asking about their job and earnings?
- How they might be ordered to pay child support and/or needing to go to a court hearing together?
- How enforcement actions could be taken if they didn't pay, like tax refund seizure or license suspension?
 - o If so, was it helpful? If not, was this something you would have wanted?

14. Did a child support worker ever tell you about things that could be done to make the child support process safer? Things like hiding your address on all forms or doing agency meetings and court hearings online and not in-person?

If so, was this helpful? If not, was this something you would have wanted?

15. There are some specific things that child support may be able to do to make it safer for survivors of DV, but we aren't sure if people are told about them. Do you remember being told about any of the following? Did you want any of these things? Would any of them have made you feel safer?

- Applying for good cause to get an exemption from the cooperation requirements?
 - o Do you remember being told you could apply to get a good cause exemption
 - o Did anyone offer to help you understand or apply for "good cause"?
 - o Were you able to complete an application for "good cause"? If not, what challenges prevented you from doing so?
 - o Were you asked to provide documentation related to abuse? If so, were you able/prepared to provide that documentation?
- Getting a Family Violence Indicator flag placed on your case record to keep your address confidential
- Getting a substitute address or another type of address confidentiality on all your court records or other agency paperwork
- Getting your case closed without a sanction or loss of benefits
- Not using some enforcement actions that might make the other parent angry
- Not having to go to meetings or court hearings with the other parent
- Other: anything else?

16. Did the safety options provided to you by the child support program feel adequate in protecting you and your family? Why or why not?

Parenting Time:

Sometimes starting the child support process can change the amount of parenting time or visitation that the other parent wants or gets. I'm going to ask some questions about parenting time or visitation with the other parent. Sometimes the court will order parenting time or visitation with the other parent. This may be spelled out in a visitation plan.

17. Does the other parent have visitation or parenting time? How much time does the other parent have? Is it supervised? Does the other parent follow the visitation plan?

18. Is the visitation plan written down somewhere? Did the court order visitation for the other parent? Did you want a written plan?

19. Did anyone help you and the other parent figure out visitation - like a lawyer or your child support case worker? Did you want help getting a visitation order?

20. Did visitation change after child support got involved? More time? Less time?

21. Does the visitation that the other parent has make it unsafe for you?

Impact on Safety and Well-being:

22. The main purpose of the child support program is to help parents with financial support to take care of their children. How well did the program do that for you?

Probe:

- I got all the support that the other parent was supposed to pay
- I got most of the support
- I got some of the support
- I got none of the support

23. If the child support program did not get you financial support from the other parent, what do you think was the main reason?

Probe:

- The other parent did not have the money to pay child support
- The child support worker didn't seem to follow through to enforce
- It was too confusing and too many things to do and so it wasn't worth the effort.
- It didn't feel safe to get support so I closed my case.

24. Any suggestions for how the child support program could do a better job serving survivors of DV?

Probe:

- Changes in child support procedure or policy or rules
- Changes in worker training and behavior
- Something else?

Thank you!

We appreciate your time and insights. Your responses will help us better understand how to improve safety, support, and access for survivors of DV navigating the child support program.

As a thank you for participating in this interview, we'd like to send you a \$50 e-gift card. Could you please confirm whether the email address we used to schedule this interview is the best one to send your gift card to?

This interview has been approved under IRB Protocol #XX-XXXX and has been reviewed to ensure it meets all ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. All study procedures have been designed to prioritize participant safety, respect, and privacy, in alignment with federal regulations and best practices for conducting trauma-informed research.

If you have any questions or would like more information about this project, please feel free to contact **Betty Tegegne** at betty@centerforpolicyresearch.org.

Qualitative Interview Guide – Group 2: Survivors who did not pursue child support

Trigger/Content Warning

Before we begin, I want to remind you that this interview will include some questions that may touch on difficult experiences, including emotional or physical harm.

Please know that you are in control:

- You can skip any question.
- You can stop or pause the interview at any time.
- You do not have to explain your reason.
- You will still receive compensation, regardless of whether you complete the interview

If anything becomes distressing, I encourage you to take a break or let me know if you'd like to end the conversation. I also have a list of resources that I will [share verbally/link in the chat]

Introduction and Background

Hi, my name is [NAME], and I'm with [Role and Organization].

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

*We're doing a study to better **understand the experiences of survivors of domestic violence (DV) who decided not to use/not engage with the child support program.** Your input will help us understand the challenges survivors of DV may face in the child support program and how to support them and ensure their safety.*

This study is part of the Safe Access for Victims' Economic Security (SAVES) Center project, which is funded by the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The project aims to improve safety and access within the child support program for domestic violence survivors.

I'll be asking you about your experiences and any concerns or difficulties you may have had with the child support program.

Everything you share will be kept private. Your name and any identifying information will not be included in any reports or notes from this interview. Any quotes we use in reports will be anonymized and combined with other participants' responses so that you cannot be identified. You can skip any question or stop the interview at any time. If you are currently receiving any benefits through human services programs, your participation in this study will not be shared with any agency, and it will not affect your eligibility for or receipt of those benefits in any way

We would like to record this interview to ensure we accurately capture what you share. The recording will be stored on a secure, password-protected server that meets federal data

protection standards. Only the research team will have access to the recording, and it will be permanently deleted after it has been transcribed and de-identified.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes, and you will receive a \$50 gift card to thank you for your participation.

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

- ☐ *I agree to participate → Thank you again for being part of this important work*
- ☐ *I do not agree to participate → Thank them and end call*

Do you agree to be audio recorded?

- ☐ *I agree to be audio recorded → Start recording*
- ☐ *I do not agree to be audio recorded → Do not proceed with recording the interview*

Do you agree to have de-identified quotes used from this interview?

- ☐ *I agree that my de-identified quotations may be used in reports or publications*
- ☐ *I do not agree that my de-identified quotations may be used in reports or publications*

Background Information:**Transition to Background Questions:**

Thank you again for being part of this important work.

Before we talk about your experiences with the child support program, I'd like to start with a few questions to get to know a bit more about you and your family. These questions help us better understand the range of circumstances that survivors of domestic violence may be in when they are deciding whether or how to engage with the child support program.

You are welcome to skip any question you're not comfortable answering.

The questions I'm going to ask are focused on people who have experienced domestic violence, have children, and have not pursued formal child support. Can I confirm that this describes your experience?

1. Can you tell me a little about your children? What do they like to do?

Probe: How many children do you have? What are their ages?

2. Now I'd like to learn more about you...Could you tell me your age?**3. What is the highest level of education you've completed?****4. Are you currently working?**

Probe:

- What kind of work do you do?
- Would you say your current income is enough to meet your family's needs, or do you feel financially stretched right now?

5. What is your current relationship status?

Probe: Are you currently single, married, divorced, remarried, or in another kind of relationship?

6. Have you ever received ANY public benefits like TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), Medicaid etc.?

Probe:

- Were you receiving or applying for TANF when you made the decision about child support?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your children's other parent?

Probe:

- Do you have no contact, some contact, or regular contact with them?
- Does the other parent have contact with the children? If so, how often?
- Does the other parent know where you live?

Perceptions of the Child Support Program and Decision Not to Engage:

8. How did you first learn about the child support program? (e.g., through family, friends, social services, media)

- Who have you talked with about the child support program and what have they said about it? Family and friends? Advocates? Attorneys? Others?

9. What are your overall impressions or understanding of the child support program?

10. Have you ever considered participating in the child support program? Why or why not?

11. Can you describe the factors that led you to decide not to apply for child support?

Probe:

- Could not locate the other parent?
- Prefer an informal arrangement for child support or in-kind support? (in-kind support means things like buying groceries, paying rent or utility bills, purchasing clothing or school supplies, or providing transportation for the children)
- Other parent can't afford to pay child support?
- Do not need/want money from the other parent?
- Do not want the other parent in your life?
- Not wanting government in your life?
- Do not want other parent visiting the children
- Concerned about your safety?
- Other people advised me not to

12. Have you ever received child support informally — for example, through direct payments or in-kind support from the other parent without going through the child support agency? *By in-kind support, we mean things like buying groceries, paying rent or utility bills, purchasing clothing or school supplies, or providing transportation for the children.* If so, can you tell me what kind of informal support the other parent provided?

Probe:

- Paid the rent, bought diapers and formula, paid for transportation and food?
- How was that experience?
- Could you count on it, did it cause issues?

Safety and the Child Support Program:

13. Did safety concerns (related to the abusive parent) influence your decision not to engage with the child support program?

- Were you afraid of the other parent or feel you were at risk of harm? Was the DV in the distant past?

14. Did you have conversations with any domestic violence (DV) or child support professionals (e.g., DV advocates, public benefit caseworkers) about the safety implications of child support?

15. Were you worried that you might get reported to child welfare if you applied for child support?

16. If safety were not a concern, would you have wanted/want to pursue child support from the other parent? Why? Why not?

Probe:

- What would need to be in place for you to feel safe pursuing child support?

Awareness of Safety Options (e.g., Good Cause, Address Confidentiality):

**17. If you receive any public benefits (e.g. TANF, Medicaid etc.) were you ever informed that you could be excused from cooperating with child support (sometimes called 'good cause') if it wasn't safe to do so?
Did you feel like any public benefits were hard to access or not available to you because you are not engaged with a child support program?**

18. Were you ever told about safety options like address confidentiality or the "Family Violence Indicator"?

- *If yes:* What did you learn about them, and how was the information shared?
- *If no:* Would that information have been helpful in making your decision? Did the other parent know where you live already so address confidentiality didn't matter?

19. What risk factors did you consider before deciding not to participate in child support?

Probe:

- Address confidentiality, enforcement action concerns, court involvement, parenting time, associated costs, other safety considerations

Well-Being and Impact of Non-Engagement:

20. How has your decision not to engage with child support affected your well-being?

Probe:

- Physical safety? Mental/emotional health? Financial stability?

21. Have there been economic consequences related to not pursuing child support?

22. Have you had to find other ways to support your family financially?

Probe:

- Support from family/friends, public assistance, legal support, relocation, etc.

**23. Looking back, do you feel like this was the best decision for you and your family?
Why or why not?**

Wrap-Up:

**24. Are there changes that might have made you more willing or able to engage with
child support?**

Probe:

- More information about child support and its benefits?
- More encouragement from DV advocates, lawyers, my family and friends?
- Clearer safety measures in the child support process?
- Financial factors?
- The other parent being better able to pay child support?
- The child support agency doing a better job of collecting money for parents?

**25. Is there anything else you want to share about your experiences or decisions
related to child support?**

Thank you!

We appreciate your time and insights. Your responses will help us better understand how to improve safety, support, and access for survivors of DV navigating the child support program.

As a thank you for participating in this interview, we'd like to send you a \$50 e-gift card. Could you please confirm whether the email address we used to schedule this interview is the best one to send your gift card to?

This interview has been approved under IRB Protocol #XX-XXXX and has been reviewed to ensure it meets all ethical standards for the protection of human subjects. All study procedures have been designed to prioritize participant safety, respect, and privacy, in alignment with federal regulations and best practices for conducting trauma-informed research.

If you have any questions or would like more information about this project, please feel free to contact **Betty Tegegne** at betty@centerforpolicyresearch.org.