




# **Professional Knowledge of Child Support Staff:**

**Evidence from the New Jersey Child Support  
Training Program**

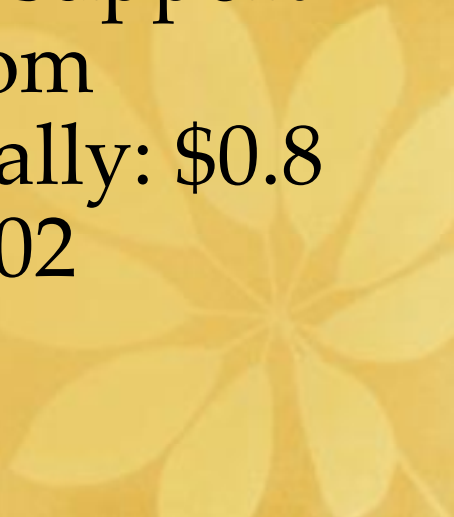
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# Introduction

- A significant rise in single-mother families: 12% in 1970, 25% since 1990
  - In 2002, 34% of single mothers were living in poverty, and another 30% were living below 200% of poverty line.
  - Government has strengthen child support enforcement to prevent fathers from abandoning their children financially: \$0.8 billion in 1978 to \$5.2 billion in 2002
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# Introduction

- Despite the efforts, many children eligible for child support still lack support from their fathers
  - About 2/3 of eligible mothers with an order; and less than half of them received child support payments
  - One factor relevant to poor child support outcomes is ineffective state child support enforcement.
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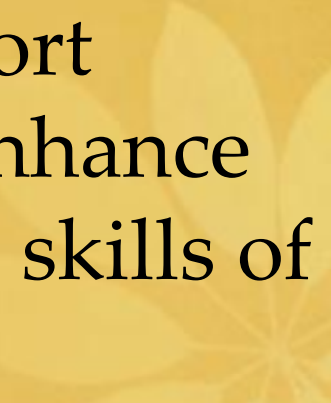


# Introduction

- With 1996 PRWORA and 1998 CSPIA, virtually all states have created strict child support legislation and effective systems to perform all requirements specified in federal regulations
  - However, the extent to which child support staff are fully aware of the dramatic changes in child support enforcement in recent years is unclear
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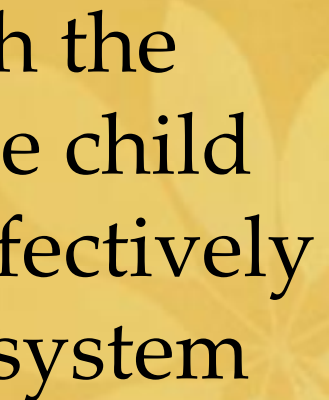


# Introduction

- If child support staff do not keep up with the changes, then they likely will not be able to maximize the benefits of the improved system
  - In 2005, in an attempt to address this issue, the New Jersey Child Support Institute (NJCSI) was created to enhance the knowledge base and technical skills of child support staff
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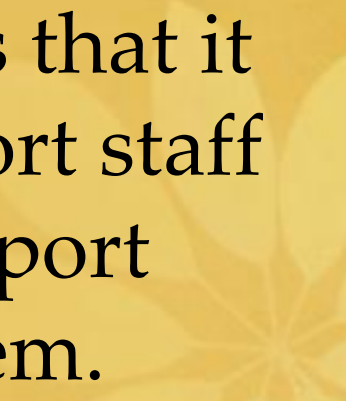


## Research Aims

- To evaluate the efficacy of NJCSI's training program, particularly on professional knowledge of child support enforcement before and after the training
  - Finding will provide important information on the extent to which the training program helps to improve child support staff's abilities to work effectively in the child support enforcement system
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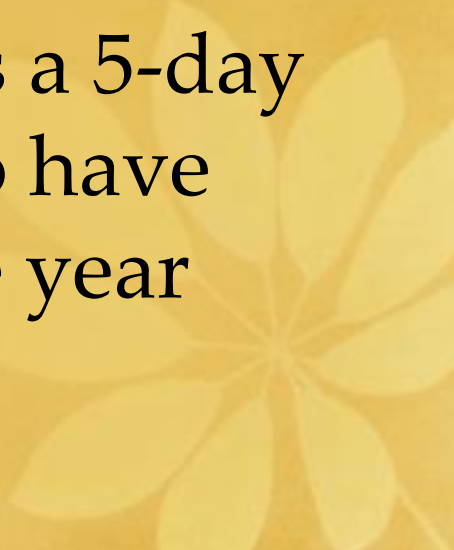


# Methods

- NJCSI provides coordinated and comprehensive training on all aspects of the child support process from case initiation to case closure to staff who work in New Jersey's Child Support Program
  - A unique aspect of the program is that it extends its training to child support staff outside of the Office of Child Support Services, including the court system.
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# Methods

- Two foundation courses based on work experience
  - New Hire Training is a 10-day course required for new employees within their first year of employment
  - Experienced Refresher Training is a 5-day course for child support staff who have been employed for more than one year
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# Methods

- 14 New Hire and 15 Experienced Refresher sessions were conducted between May 2007 and July 2008
  - A total of 537 staff members were trained
  - Final sample includes 530 individuals responded both pre- and post-assessments
  - Response rate: 98.6%
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# Methods

- 8 learning modules: case initiation, location service, order establishment, financial management, obligation enforcement, modification and transfer, interstate support, and case closure
  - 50 multiple-choice questions used in both pre- and post-assessments
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# Results

- New hire, 46%; experienced worker, 54%
  - Sending agencies: court system, 64%; Department of Human Services, 36%
  - Pre-Training: answered 55% of the questions correctly, varied by work experience and agency type
  - New hire, 50%; Experienced worker, 58%
  - Court system, 56%; DHS, 52%
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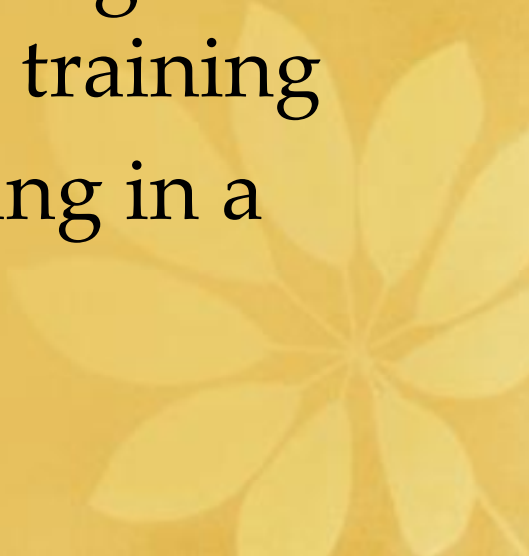


# Results

- Post-Training: 77% correctly, increased from 55%
  - New hire, 76%; Experienced worker, 77% ( $p > .05$ )
  - Court system, 78%; DHS, 75% ( $p < .01$ )
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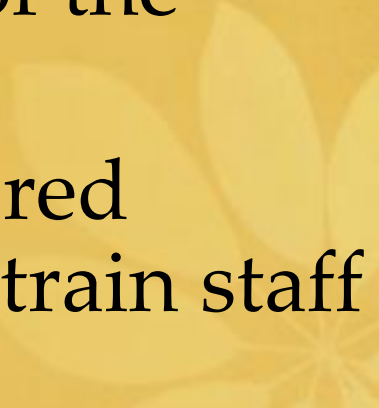


# Discussion

- Given the rapid changes in child support system in recent years, it is important to understand child support staff's knowledge of these changes
  - Findings suggest most of the participants did not have a good understanding of the child support system before the training
  - Reveal an urgent need for training in a rapidly changing profession
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# Discussion

- Results from post-training indicate the training effectively improved the participants' knowledge
  - Difference between new and experienced staff disappeared after the training, highlights the beneficial effects of the training for new staff
  - Still, 25% of the questions answered incorrectly indicates a need to retrain staff on a constant basis
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# Discussion

- If the frontline staff are not aware of changes in the child support enforcement, the benefits of the changes are unlikely to be realized
  - This issue is especially important given that New Jersey's child support enforcement performance is above the national mean
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# Discussion

- Raises concerns about the knowledge of child support staff in states with below-average enforcement performance, reveal an urgent need to train child support staff in a rapidly changing profession
  - Ensure child support staff has a solid understanding of the recent changes so that they can better serve the custodial parents and the children in the system
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