The adverse effects of poverty on child and adolescent development are well documented and have been of interest to policy makers for several decades. Childhood poverty has a number of lasting impacts, including negative educational and cognitive outcomes, social and emotional behavior problems, poor adult economic outcomes, and health problems. For some children, these challenges are coupled with other family stressors including child maltreatment: children in poor families are approximately five times more likely to experience maltreatment than children in non-poor families.

A number of public safety-net programs exist to help improve the economic well-being of vulnerable children, but little is known about the extent to which families with a child maltreatment report receive these services over time. In this brief, we examine the incidence of receiving four types of income support both immediately after the child maltreatment report and eighteen months following. Receipt of benefits immediately after the making of a report may suggest that families were connected to support services prior to their engagement with child protective services (CPS); receiving them only later may suggest the influence of the CPS engagement on support service use.

The income supports analyzed include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); housing assistance; and the Social Security disability support. We also examine whether there are differences in the use of these income supports across rural and urban settings.

The data for this analysis come from the second National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW II), a national sample of children who had a maltreatment report that resulted in an investigation by CPS within a 15-month period beginning in February 2008. The NSCAW II cohort includes 5,873 children, aged from birth to 17.5 years. Follow-up data were collected approximately eighteen months later (October 2009 to January 2011).

Making Ends Meet

Caregivers of children in the cohort were asked, “When it comes to money and making ends meet, how do you think things are going for you? Would you say you are able to save a little money each month, just getting by, or struggling to make it?”

The overwhelming majority of families in the sample subject to a child maltreatment report said they were struggling to make it (44 percent) or just getting by (40 percent, see Figure 1). The self-assessments were the same in urban and rural areas.
Income Supports Over Time

Most caregivers (78 percent) had received at least one of the four supports at either of the two time points (that is, immediately after the report and then eighteen months later), and 55 percent received at least one support at both time points. The most common income support received at both time points was SNAP (46 percent). Approximately one in ten children with a child maltreatment report lived in households that received disability support, TANF, or housing support at both time points. The only significant difference between use of these programs over time in rural and urban areas was that a larger percentage of rural (21 percent) than urban (13 percent) children lived in households that received disability at both time points.

In order to explore the impact of the family’s encounter with CPS and enrolling in income support services, we examined families who reported that they were struggling to make it and were not receiving income supports following the initial maltreatment report.

Of these families, more rural (51 percent) than urban (38 percent) families received income supports eighteen months later (see Figure 2).

Many of the families (31 percent of rural and 55 percent of urban) that said after the child maltreatment report that they were struggling and yet not receiving any safety net benefits said that they were still struggling to make it eighteen months later (see Figure 3). Many more rural (38 percent) than urban (7 percent) families reported they were saving a little each month.

Understanding Income Benefit Programs

Although most families (84 percent) in this sample subject to a child maltreatment report have difficulties making ends meet financially, a substantial share of caregivers (22 percent) had not received any of the four income supports at either of the two time points examined. The findings in this brief highlight the need to pay attention to how best to support vulnerable children and families. Poverty impacts parent-child interaction and is associated with reports of child maltreatment. Anti-poverty services directed toward families engaged with the child protective services can lead to reduced child maltreatment. This suggests that the time of a child
maltreatment report is a critical intervention point to link families to supports such as the provision of basic material services that can help ensure the safety and well-being of children.

Over time, CPS intervention may link individuals to needed services. Of caregivers who report they are struggling to make it and receiving no services at the time of the child maltreatment report, 40 percent report receiving services eighteen months later. And nearly half then report they are no longer struggling to make it.

There were some differences in receiving these income supports by place of residence. Of families who were struggling to make it without income support after the child maltreatment report, eighteen months later more rural than urban families were receiving support services and fewer rural than urban families reported struggling. Caregivers in rural households with a child maltreatment report were much more likely to report receiving disability at both time points. The extent to which caregivers rely on disability is important to further understand because disability could limit the family’s long-term income potential and in turn influence children’s social and emotional outcomes.

It is important to continue to monitor and assess policy to improve the lives of disadvantaged children and ensure in particular that children subject to maltreatment have access to adequate resources.

**Data**

This document includes data from the National Survey on Child and Adolescent Well-Being, which was developed under contract with the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ACYF/DHHS). The data have been provided by the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect. The information and opinions expressed herein reflect solely the position of the authors. Nothing herein should be construed to indicate the support or endorsement of its content by ACYF/DHHS.
Endnotes


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