

Educational Outcomes of Children in Families Receiving Assistance from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)

Translating research to practice may be difficult, yet a better understanding of current research is necessary to ensure child welfare workers engage in best practices when working with children and families. The Minn-Link Discussion Guide is designed to help facilitate thoughtful discussions about the information presented in the research brief in order to inform practice and enhance discussion surrounding meaningful issues.

In this issue, we explored the status of children whose families received varying levels of cash and food assistance from the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP). The study examined a set of educational outcomes that have been shown to be important indicators of child well-being. In particular, we analyzed whether children whose families received MFIP for varying lengths of time had differential educational outcomes than children who were not on assistance. Overall, findings did not demonstrate consistent, differential relationships between receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time and children's educational well-being. Associations between varying lengths of MFIP receipt and children's educational outcomes (i.e., attendance, school mobility, and dropout) were non-significant. However, receiving MFIP for varying lengths of time was significant in predicting young children's proficiency on math and reading tests.

Discussion on Practice Implications

1. One of the underlying assumptions behind this study was that families who receive MFIP assistance for long periods of time are likely facing different challenges and have different needs than families who receive MFIP assistance for shorter periods of time, and that these differences may influence children's educational outcomes. How can you best work with children and families who experience stressors related to income insufficiency? What aspects of practice might look different for families who receive MFIP for shorter periods of time as compared to those who receive MFIP for longer periods of time?
2. In this research brief, children's age and out-of-home placement experience as well as their caregiver's race/ethnicity and caregiver's prior educational experiences were predictive of children's educational well-being. What other factors may potentially have an effect on the educational outcomes of children whose families receive MFIP? Why do you think it is important to understand factors related to the educational well-being of children whose families receive MFIP?
3. Cross-systems collaboration is essential in order to provide the best possible outcomes for children and families needing services from multiple systems. What collaborative practice strategies could you utilize in order to provide the most effective services for children and families who receive MFIP assistance?

Discussion on Agency- & System-Level Changes

1. One central issue in this brief was that children whose families received MFIP, particularly younger children, received special education services at a higher rate than children whose families did not receive MFIP assistance. How can social service agencies collaborate with school providers to address potential areas of disproportionality? What are some ways to ensure students in special education receive appropriate services?
2. Some of the causes of disparities in the educational outcomes of children have been attributed to systemic issues, such as the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act {PRWORA} of 1996 which set forth time limits and state-wide regulations for the receipt of cash and food assistance. What are your thoughts about such policies? Do you feel like they can have an impact on children's educational outcomes?
3. Examining children's educational outcomes is a critical aspect in understanding MFIP's potential to ameliorate generational poverty so that children do not fall in the same income-gap as their parents. What are some ways to improve the educational outcomes of children whose families receive MFIP? What are some barriers or challenges to improving practice, and how can we overcome those?