

Legal financial obligation repayment interventions

Adult Criminal Justice

Literature review updated January 2017.

As part of WSIPP’s research approach to identifying evidence-based programs and policies, WSIPP determines “what works” (and what does not work) to improve outcomes using an approach called meta-analysis. For detail on our methods, see our [Technical Documentation](#). At this time, WSIPP has not yet calculated benefits and costs for this topic.

Program Description: Legal financial obligations are fines, fees, and restitution imposed by the court when a person is sentenced for a crime. Interventions to increase payment of legal financial obligations take various forms but generally include a reminder letter detailing the amounts owed and describing the consequences of nonpayment.

Programs of the studies in this meta-analysis include phone calls, letters that include information on fines owed, and letters that detail the consequences of nonpayment (which may include a violation of probation). One study examined the impact of Project MUSTER, in which probationers received a violation of probation, performed community service, and were placed on intensive supervision with employment training and job placement.

Meta-Analysis of Program Effects

Outcomes measured	No. of effect sizes	Treatment N	Adjusted effect size and standard error			Unadjusted effect size (random effects model)	
			ES	SE	Age	ES	p-value
Payments/fines/restitution	7	1116	0.158	0.110	30	0.158	0.151

Meta-analysis is a statistical method to combine the results from separate studies on a program, policy, or topic in order to estimate its effect on an outcome. WSIPP systematically evaluates all credible evaluations we can locate on each topic. The outcomes measured are the types of program impacts that were measured in the research literature (for example, crime or educational attainment). Treatment N represents the total number of individuals or units in the treatment group across the included studies.

An effect size (ES) is a standard metric that summarizes the degree to which a program or policy affects a measured outcome. If the effect size is positive, the outcome increases. If the effect size is negative, the outcome decreases.

Adjusted effect sizes are used to calculate the benefits from our benefit cost model. WSIPP may adjust effect sizes based on methodological characteristics of the study. For example, we may adjust effect sizes when a study has a weak research design or when the program developer is involved in the research. The magnitude of these adjustments varies depending on the topic area.

WSIPP may also adjust the second ES measurement. Research shows the magnitude of some effect sizes decrease over time. For those effect sizes, we estimate outcome-based adjustments which we apply between the first time ES is estimated and the second time ES is estimated. We also report the unadjusted effect size to show the effect sizes before any adjustments have been made. More details about these adjustments can be found in our [Technical Documentation](#).

Citations Used in the Meta-Analysis

- Davis, R.C., & Bannister, T.M. (1995). Improving collection of court-ordered restitution. *Judicature*, 79, 30.
- Lurigio, A.J., & Davis, R.C. (1990). Does a threatening letter increase compliance with restitution orders?: A field experiment. *Crime & Delinquency*, 36(4), 537–548.
- Ruback, R.B., Gladfelter, A.S., & Lantz, B. (2014). Paying restitution: Experimental analysis of the effects of information and rationale. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 13(3), 405-436.

Weisburd, D., Einat, T., & Kowalski, M. (2008). The miracle of the cells: An experimental study of interventions to increase payment of court-ordered financial obligations. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 7(1), 9–36.

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