

Civil legal aid Adult Criminal Justice

Literature review updated March 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: Civil legal aid services provide legal representation to defendants who cannot afford legal representation in non-criminal matters such as access to healthcare, housing, government benefits, employment, and educational services. Civil legal aid services are typically provided by legal aid attorneys, law students, and pro bono volunteers who identify and address legal issues. These services may be provided in a range of intensities including online chat tools, classrooms and clinics, “unbundled” legal services, and full legal representation from a lawyer.

Studies included in this meta-analysis examine the impact of receiving an offer of civil legal aid in the context of several different types of civil cases, including juvenile delinquency hearings and eviction cases. These studies compare the impact of an offer of full legal representation from a lawyer to receiving no offer or receiving unbundled legal services (in which legal advice is provided but the lawyer is not retained for full representation). We considered several specific outcomes as indicators of “litigation success” for the represented individual. These outcomes include attending scheduled court appearances, receiving a judgment in their favor, retaining possession of a housing unit, receiving an order for repairs to their housing unit, or receiving rent abatement. Several studies also measure the burden on court processes (including the case length, number of court appearances, motions, and instances where a judge interacted with a case).

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
Litigation success	5	860	0.278	0.142	40	0.278	0.051
Court burden	3	248	0.027	0.102	40	0.027	0.789

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

- Courtney, M.E., & Hook, J.L. (2012). Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes for children in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(7), 1337-1343.
- Greiner, D.J., Pattanayak, C.W., & Hennessy, J.P. (2012). *How effective are limited legal assistance programs? A randomized experiment in a Massachusetts housing court.*
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- Seron, C., Van, R.G., Frankel, M., & Kovath, J. (2001). The impact of legal counsel on outcomes for poor tenants in New York City's Housing Court: Results of a randomized experiment. *Law and Society Review, 35*, 419-434.
- Stapleton, W.V., & Teitelbaum, L.E. (1972). *In defense of youth: A study of the role of counsel in American juvenile courts.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

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