



A Systematic Review of Economic & Concrete Support to Prevent Child Maltreatment

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Economic & concrete supports (ECS)

are resources to help families meet basic needs. ECS may be particularly effective when implemented by a community-based organization, state or local public agency, or partner agency with intentional flexibility in the type, amount, frequency and disbursement mechanism of the support and in how families are able to use the support.

WHAT WE DID

We conducted a [systematic review](#) of the literature to assess the impact of a broad array of economic and concrete supports (ECS) on:

- **Child maltreatment & child welfare outcomes**
- **Child & adult well-being**

HOW WE DID IT

Our review included **24 studies** that met the following **eligibility criteria**,¹ consistent with standards of the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#):

Population	Children/youth or families/caregivers with child(ren) under age 18
Intervention	Economic or concrete support that is specifically examined
Study design	Main effects of ECS tested using randomized controlled trial or quasi-experimental design with either a matched comparison group or a natural experimental approach
Outcome(s)	Impact of ECS assessed on primary outcomes of child maltreatment, child welfare involvement, or child welfare-focused priorities or on secondary outcomes of child well-being or adult well-being ²
Setting	Implemented in U.S. or in non-U.S. countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development (OECD)
Publication date	Between 1990 and 2023

WHAT WE FOUND

Regardless of delivery mechanism, **we found consistent, favorable evidence of the impact of ECS as a prevention strategy** to reduce child maltreatment & child welfare entry.

Our systematic review found that providing ECS has a **causal effect** on child maltreatment and child welfare outcomes, and to a lesser extent on child and adult well-being outcomes. Overall, **20 of the 24 studies include at least one finding of a statistically significant causal relationship between ECS and improvements in the targeted outcomes.**³ None of the studies we examined found ECS had unfavorable effects on outcomes.

¹ We excluded from our review: (a) studies of conditional cash transfer programs (due to requirements placed on participants to receive the support), (b) studies of home visiting and family preservation programs (unless the provision of ECS included in these programs was clearly detailed and tested), (c) studies of early education programs including Head Start (due to potential confounding bias), and (d) studies with methodological issues that made interpretation of causal findings difficult.

² We did not include length of sustained effect as a criterion because (a) some ECS are continuously received and (b) even short-term impacts of ECS may be notable.

³ Using a 5% threshold as the criteria for assessing statistical significance; two additional studies found at least one statistically significant finding at a 10% threshold.

ECS is an evidence-based service that can be provided independently or within broader programs. The evidence of the effectiveness of ECS synthesized through our systematic review points toward **policy and practice that encourages preventive strategies and interventions focused on resourcing families to alleviate economic and material hardship in addition to addressing safety**. Both must be addressed through a coordinated and integrated response, built upon **collective responsibility and accountability**, to maximize the positive impact of public resources for families.

Summary of Significant Causal Relationships Found between Different Types of ECS & Targeted Outcomes

Economic & Concrete Support Type		Primary Outcomes			Secondary Outcomes	
		Child Safety & Maltreatment <small>(for example, maltreatment report, investigation rate, abusive head trauma)</small>	Removal from Home <small>(foster care entry)</small>	Child Welfare-Focused Priority Outcomes <small>(for example, permanency, reunification, stability or maltreatment recurrence)</small>	Child Well-Being <small>(for example, cognitive functioning, behavioral/emotional functioning, physical development & health, substance misuse)</small>	Adult Well-Being <small>(for example, parenting practices, mental health, physical health, substance misuse, family functioning, economic & housing stability)</small>
Economic Supports	Earned Income Tax Credit	●	●		●	
	Child Tax Credit				●	●
	Child support income	●				
	Direct cash transfers				●	●
	Child development accounts					
Concrete Supports	Healthcare support (Medicaid)	●				●
	Housing support		●	●		●
	Food & nutrition support (SNAP, WIC)				●	●
	Other concrete support			●	●	●

ABOUT CHAPIN HALL

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For more information about our ECS work, visit <https://www.chapinhall.org/project/a-key-connection-economic-stability-and-family-well-being/>

SUGGESTED CITATION

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