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By 2010 in the United States, approximately 11.3 million cases owed over \$110 billion in back child support. Among those, Washington State had 313,463 that owed over \$1.8 billion¹. The level at which a child support obligation is set often relies on information regarding the ability of the non-custodial parent to pay, but may not account for the uncertainties of low wages and workforce participation that can occur for lowest paid workers. One of my current projects is the investigation of whether the implementation of laws to increase the minimum wage within Washington State resulted in an increase in child support payments among families with such obligations. I anticipate this work will lead to policy implications that could help improve the financial situation of low-income families.

Research Experience

Broadly described, a major direction of my work has been to study poverty and its effects on families. Reflecting my research interests in law and human rights, I obtained a certificate in Law, Societies and Justice. Reflecting this interest, I lead colleagues in the study of the historical underpinnings of housing restrictions at the local level, including the federal legislation that encouraged practices such as restricted housing covenants and red-lining, as well as outcomes such as gentrification, particularly as they apply to the jurisdictions covered by a local housing authority.

As a quantitative analyst with a Master's Degree in statistics, I also have a broad range of experiences working collaboratively with researchers who examine the effects of poverty and related forms of adversity. For example, I helped examine food scarcity and healthy food access among low-income families under several Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) demonstration projects. In addition, I helped investigate school lunch programs and access to a variety of foods including vegetables and fruits. In other school contexts, I teamed up with researchers to investigate multiple disadvantages burdening students which result in downward pressure on health and academic outcomes.

Future Directions

To gain a better understanding of the implementation and effects of minimum wage increases, I plan to research the connection between organized labor and community coalitions. With an historic decline in unions, a new model to improve working conditions has emerged. It is

¹ Office of Child Support Enforcement, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010

imperative to understand the mechanism for such movements, as well as outcomes. In parallel, I have ready access to data to conduct quantitative analyses on the outcomes from one such implementation at the small-city level. Finally, I am also interested in a theoretical examination of social work professional ethics and their connection to activism and reform movement, particularly in the advancement wage justice.

A number of funding mechanisms are available to support these research lines to fund my research, including NIH, NSF Faculty Early Career Development Program, and the Russell Sage Foundation grants.