
Mississippi Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration

Research Plan Summary

prepared for the

Mississippi Division of Family and Children's Services

L. Anthony Loman, Ph.D. and Gary L. Siegel, Ph.D.

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1047 S. Big Bend, Suite 201
St. Louis, Missouri 63117
(314) 645-7444
email: [**iar@iarstl.org**](mailto:iar@iarstl.org)
website: [**http://www.iarstl.org**](http://www.iarstl.org)

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Introduction

This document is a summary of the evaluation plan for the Mississippi Title IV-E waiver demonstration. It outlines the elements of the evaluation research that will make up the impact, process and cost-benefit evaluation studies. The three parts of the evaluation are conceptually distinct, although in practice the methods, research procedures and data sources will overlap. In addition, the impact and process studies must be brought together and integrated as analyses are conducted and within the presentation of findings.

Geographic Areas. The waiver program will operate in eight Mississippi counties within two of the agency's administrative regions (3 and 6-N). The counties, which are shown on the map on the following page, are:

Region 3

Holmes

Yazoo

Madison

Rankin

Region 6-N

Jones

Lamar

Forrest

Pearl River

The total population (1997 estimates) of the eight-county waiver area is 387,549 persons and 102,489 families. There are 110,739 children under 18 years of age or approximately 29 percent of the population. Of all children less than 18 years of age, 38,101 (34.4 percent) live in families with incomes below the poverty level.

Families with children less than 18 years of age number 23,958 or 23.4 percent of all families. About one-third (33.9 percent) of all families are headed by a single female, while another 5.2 percent are male-headed. Thus, about two in every five families with children less than 18 years old are headed by a single parent.

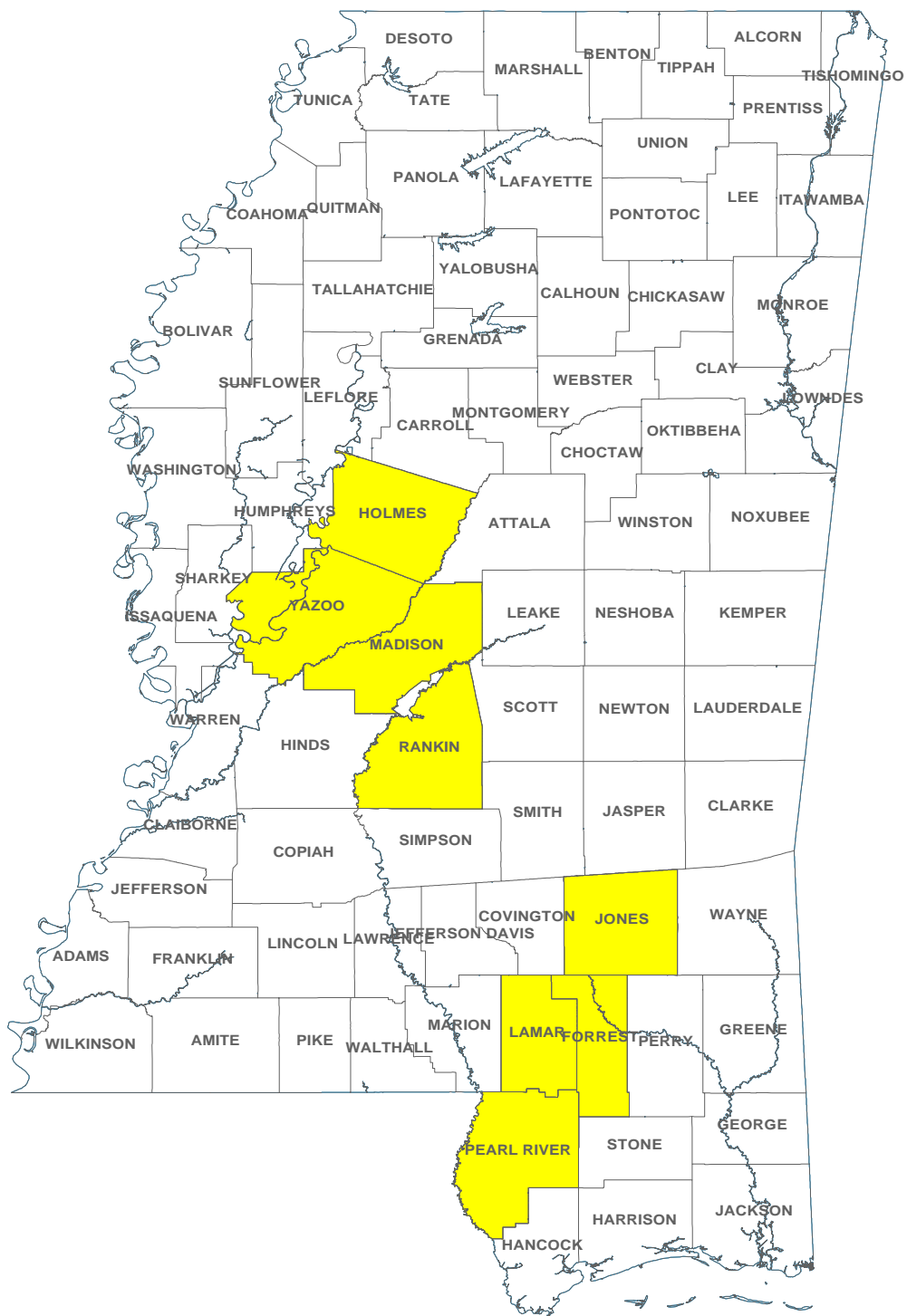
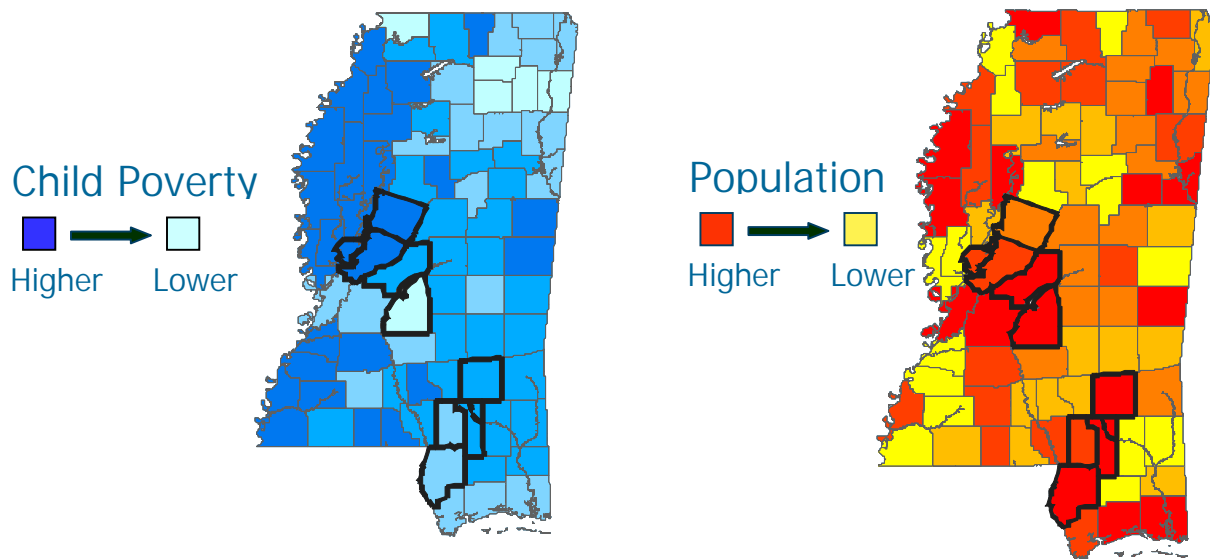


Figure 1. Mississippi Waiver Counties



The maps on this page show child poverty and population in all Mississippi counties. The demonstration area is composed of counties that are mid-sized to large in relation to other Mississippi counties. Child poverty rates, however, range from the very high (the darkest color represent 40 percent or more of children in poverty) to the lowest rates relative to other counties.

Impact Study

Impact evaluations are designed to determine whether a set of expected program outcomes in fact occurred and whether these same outcomes *would have* occurred if the demonstration had not been initiated. To do this, evaluators must measure demonstration outcomes and *compare them to* outcomes of traditional or ongoing programs. The methods for accomplishing this are referred to here as the impact research plan. The plan will involve the following elements:

1. **The impact design.** The essence of social impact research is consistent and systematic comparison, usually of observed changes in groups of people. The design defines the manner in which those groups are created or identified. This includes how cases will be screened as eligible for the waiver and how some will be assigned to the experimental group and others to the control group. Time frames for group membership are also defined along with potential problems and how these will be addressed in the research.
2. **Impact research questions and variables.** In impact studies of demonstration programs, the changes of interest are often referred to as outcomes. It is critical

that the same outcomes be observed or measured for the experimental and control groups. Thus, outcome variables must be defined, measurement procedures specified, data sources identified. Variables are only meaningful, however, within impact research questions (or hypotheses). Such questions in a waiver demonstration are a formal means of stating precisely what improvements are expected from the flexibility that the waiver permits as compared to the traditional service system.

3. **Methods of Analysis.** Finally, the ways in which experimental and control outcomes will be compared are discussed, including the analytic techniques and statistical methods that are anticipated.

1. Impact Design

The impact design will be experimental with random assignment of children (along with their entire families) to experimental or control group status. This is traditionally considered the best method of insuring high similarity between groups.

Screening

The waiver program will focus on children and families likely to benefit from waiver procedures and services. Accordingly, the Mississippi Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) has limited consideration for assignment to the waiver to four types of cases:

1. Cases involving children in state custody.
2. Non-custody cases in which one or more children have been removed from the physical custody of the original caretaker and temporarily placed outside the home, and in which the agency plan is family reunification.
3. Non-custody cases that are active at the time the demonstration starts and in which the most recent risk assessment completed on the family indicates a high level of risk to the child or children in the home.
4. New non-custody cases that enter the child welfare system during the course of the demonstration in which the risk assessment indicates a high or medium level of risk to the child or children in the home.

Cases that satisfy any of these four screening criteria will comprise a pool or list from which experimental and control group assignment will be made. Demonstration cases are defined as entire families including children in active cases with the agency, other siblings, and parents or other caretakers.

Currently there are 428 children in state custody in the eight demonstration counties (criterion 1). Assuming, conservatively, two children per family, this yields

214 demonstration-eligible cases. In addition, the agency has estimated that there are another 140 case families that meet one of the other three criteria. This provides an estimated total of 354 case families on active caseloads that are eligible for assignment to the waiver at the time the program begins. As new cases enter the child welfare system during the waiver period, they will be screened, and those which meet the criteria will be added to the demonstration pool.

Experimental and Control Group Assignment

The group assignment plan provides for one-third of screened cases in the demonstration pool to be assigned to the experimental group. Another third will be assigned to the control group and the remaining third will remain in a residual group. From a program perspective, the two-thirds of cases in the control and residual groups will be treated in an equivalent fashion, that is, they will receive the normal services that children and families have traditionally received within the Mississippi child welfare system. From the standpoint of the evaluation, however, the control group will be treated differently than the residual group in that all measures that are applied to the experimental group will be applied to them as well, and they will be tracked for the duration of the waiver just as the experimental group is tracked.

All existing cases will be assigned to one of the three demonstration groups at the beginning of the demonstration. New cases will be assigned as they enter the system for the duration of the waiver. The assignment process will be random, so that any case in the pool will have a probability of .33 of being assigned to the experimental group.¹ The goal of the assignment will be to assign entire families to appropriate study groups. Because family sizes differ, the total number of children in the experimental and control groups may be unequal at any point in time. However, the random assignment process is expected to minimize such differences over the course of the demonstration.

Each of the eight demonstration offices has an existing local area network linking several desktop computers. The most efficient method for assignment to the experimental or control groups will be through a customized windows-based program with an entry screen for input of simple information on cases that can automatically assign cases. The screen includes at a minimum the following information:

1. Family case number.
2. The name of the family case head.
3. The case head's social security number.
4. The date of the most recent case opening.
5. Screening indicators:
 - a. custody status of child(ren).

¹ The probability value used in assignment to the experimental and control groups will in practice be higher to maintain group size in the face of case attrition (see Section 3 below). Assuming a 20 percent case attrition rate, the probability value must be increased to .40 for the experimental and control groups respectively and .20 for the residual group. This is a conservative assumption, and in the event that actual attrition is lower, the selection probability will be adjusted.

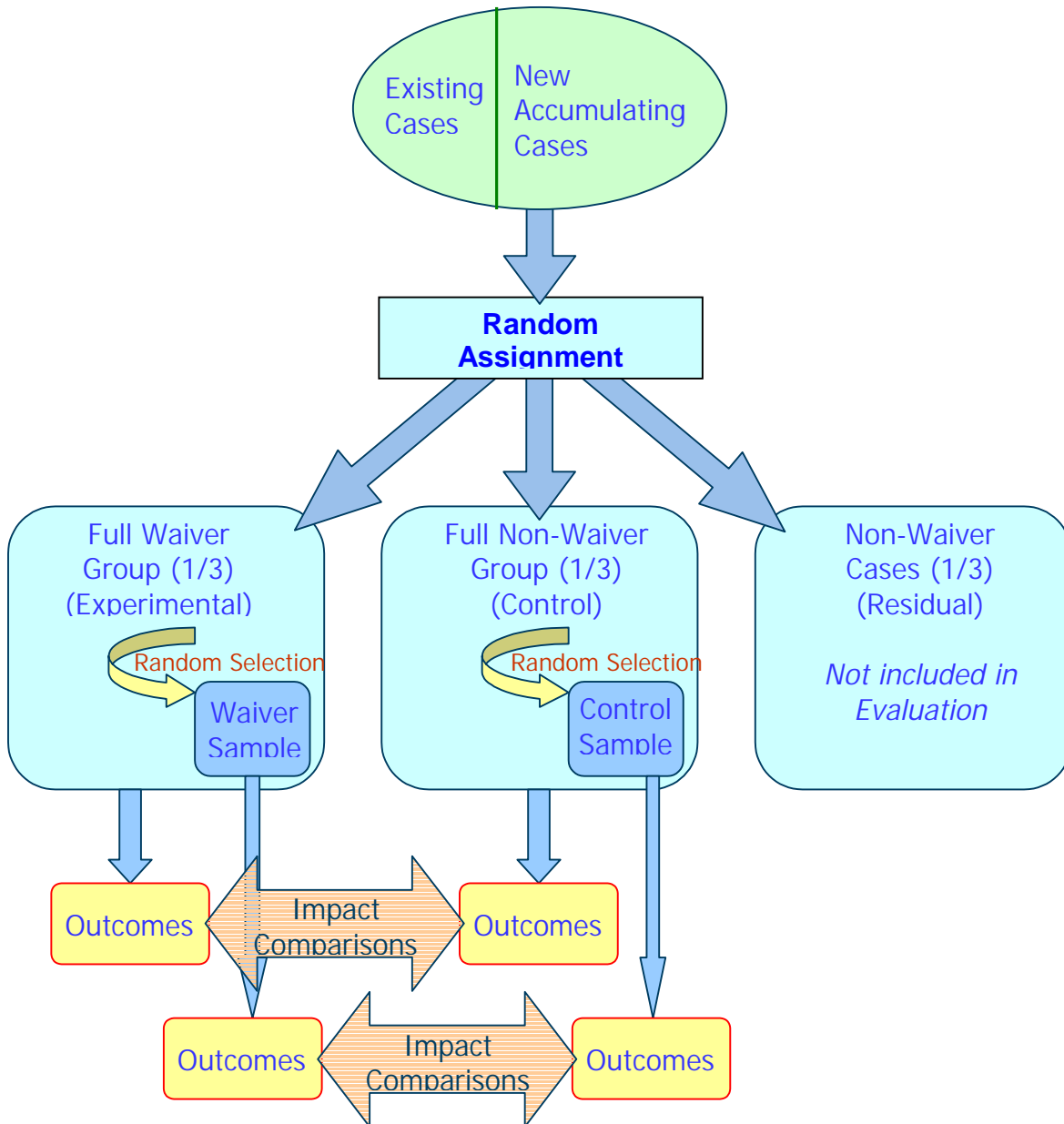
- b. placement status of child(ren) and family reunification plan.
- c. most recent risk level associated with the family.

After information on a case family has been entered into the assignment program, the user will click on the “Save” button. The following procedures are then executed.

- a) The program first checks that all necessary information has been entered. It will not proceed if data is missing and the user is prompted to complete all the information.
- b) The program checks IDs and Social Security Numbers and names against previously entered records.
 - If the case family is discovered in the database of entered cases and has already been assigned within the demonstration, the existing assignment status is shown on the screen. (A case family’s assignment status—experimental, control or residual—will not be changed for the duration of the demonstration.) The user is notified that this is already an assigned case.
 - If the case family is not identified in the existing database the program conducts a random assignment and this also appears on the screen. The new record is then added to the permanent database of assigned cases.
- c) Next, the user is prompted to print the record. Two copies are printed—one for local office files and one for the evaluators.
- d) The program allows the local office to view and modify cases, to correct misspellings and entry errors. The entire list of assigned cases can be viewed and printed Sub-sample.

The primary analyses for the impact study will be conducted upon data collected for the all experimental and control group cases. Additionally, however, sub-samples of experimental and control cases will be randomly selected for more in-depth study. Within the impact study, the sub-samples will be used primarily for the study of the well-being of children. Information will be collected that will provide greater detail about services provided, their consequences, barriers encountered in offering services, and the response of the family and child. (The size of the sub-sample is discussed in the next section.)

Illustration of the Impact Design



2. Number of Cases Assigned to the Experimental and Control Groups and Timelines for Data Collection.

An estimated 354 families in the existing caseload (see above) will be eligible for waiver services at the time the waiver demonstration begins. It is conservatively estimated that approximately 66 new families will enter the pool of eligibles each month in the eight demonstration counties, of which 22 will be assigned to the experimental group, 22 to the control group, and 22 to the residual group.

The waiver program will continue for a full five years, and cases will continue to be assigned to the three demonstration groups for the entire period. For the *evaluation analysis*, however, a cutoff will be necessary to permit meaningful development and change to occur. Most of the outcome measures that are to be employed in the research take some time to develop. For example, measures of abuse and neglect recidivism will be employed, and time is required after demonstration services have been put in place to determine whether new abuse and neglect occurs less frequently for experimental families. Applying such a measure to families that enter toward the end of the demonstration would not be meaningful because there would have been insufficient time for new abuse and neglect to have occurred. Therefore, while assignment to experimental and control groups will continue for the full term of the demonstration, follow-up data will be collected only for cases entering during the first four years.

Under these assumptions, the experimental and control groups would each total 1,174 cases—118 families in existing cases at the start of the demonstration (354/3) plus 1,056 new cases entering during the first 48 months of the demonstration (22*48). The actual numbers may be expected to vary, in part because some of the “new” cases entering the system will actually involve families re-entering the system (recidivism).

The sub-samples of cases will be randomly selected by the evaluator. They will consist of 17 percent of the unduplicated cases in the experimental and control groups. The maximum size, therefore, will be 200 experimental and 200 control cases (1,174*.17). Because most of the measures to be applied in the evaluation concern children, the sample requirements will be hinge on the number of children rather than the number of families. Under the two-child-per-family assumption, the number of children would be expected to be 400 in each group. The final number of unduplicated children will not be allowed to drop below 380 children in each study group.²

3. Study Procedures and Special Design Considerations

Several requirements of the evaluation research are addressed in this section. Some address general problems attendant to field experiments in general. Others concern issues specific to the Mississippi demonstration.

a. Service Providers in Contact with Experimental and Control Children

When the experimental and control groups in experimental evaluations of program demonstrations are located in the same office or geographical area, a common biasing factor arises. The same individuals are likely to be in contact with children and adults in the experimental as well as in the control group. In the Mississippi demonstration this will apply to foster parents, DFCS workers and supervisors and service providers. A result may be that changes in behavior and attitudes that arise from working with experimental subjects may carry over to work with control subjects. This

² The statistical analysis underlying this sample size is contained in the full research plan. Sample sizes may be increased after initial assignments to the waiver occur.

can have the effect of inappropriately diluting the experimental “treatment.” In effect the control subjects may be treated in ways they *would not have been treated* under the traditional child welfare system as it has existed in local offices.

This problem will be approached in two ways. First, as a part of impact data collection on experimental and control children, the following variables will be maintained and incorporated into analyses:

1. Control children placed in foster care of a provider who has also cared for an experimental child.
2. Control children whose social worker was also responsible for experimental children.
3. Control family members in contact with other professionals or service providers also responsible for experimental family members.

These will be introduced into multivariate analyses as indicator variables. The second variable (common workers) may not be usable, however, because it is possible that virtually all workers will have both experimental and control children on their caseloads. This problem will be addressed through specific questions as a part of process methods directed to workers, supervisors, substitute care providers, and service providers.

b. Other Differences between the Experimental and Control Groups

The proposed assignment method (random selection from a population pool) is designed to maximize the overall similarity of the experimental and control groups and to minimize differences. Nevertheless, differences sometimes emerge for reasons that cannot be controlled, particularly when small numbers of cases are being assigned in particular local county areas. These concerns will be addressed statistically. Possible variables include: age of children, family size, mode of entry to case opening (types of child abuse and neglect, delinquency or status offenses, dependency, etc.), and level of assessed risk at the time of investigations.

c. Confounding Effects of Other Demonstrations

If other demonstrations are begun that involve significant overlap with case families in the experimental and control group, it may be important to control the effects on the IV-E waiver demonstration. This may be done in the following fashion. The status of each experimental and control family in other demonstrations of interest will be recorded. This information will be entered into the research database as one or more indicator variables for use as statistical controls in the impact analyses.

d. Other Sources of Bias

It is impossible to control all sources of bias, but many others can at least be identified and described as part of the process study. Such may include differences in the approaches of local offices, differences in service orientation of particular types of workers or supervisors, high worker turnover in particular offices, and worker resistance

to policy changes, among many others. The relative influences of these will be assessed as part of the analysis of process data.

e. Training Local Staff

The evaluation contractor will provide on-site training for local staff in areas related to the evaluation. The training will at a minimum include 1) an orientation to evaluation research and its value for the demonstration, 2) an explanation of the evaluation design, 3) methods of group assignment, including all necessary instruments and programs, 4) an explanation of how to contact the evaluators (including mail, telephone, email, and Internet web site) if there are further questions. Because the process analysis will require periodic visits to local offices, the evaluation contractor will be able to check on the progress of group assignment and to offer further informal instruction, particularly in the face of staff turnover.

f. Individual Provisions of the Mississippi Waiver

The Mississippi waiver demonstration is made up of certain individual activities or program elements (individual provisions). Two of these can be subjected to impact study analyses: the utilization of service needs assessment instruments in waiver (experimental) cases and the provision of services identified as needed.

A general problem in experimental designs to evaluate new approaches to child welfare is the vast differences in problems, strengths and needs of the families entering the system. Approaches must be tailored to fit individual families and children. This is, in fact, a central element of Mississippi's approach to the IV-E waiver demonstration. A consequence is that there is not, in experimental terms, a standard "treatment." Differences may occur in assessment of needs in spite of standardization of the assessment process. In addition, differences may exist in services identified, in their availability and their utilization by the adults and children in the program. These differences will be tracked for the intensive sub-sample primarily through case-specific surveys and case record reviews.

A first question to be addressed is how extensive such differences were among experimental and control families. If differences are found in either assessment or provision of services a second question is whether the differences are implicated in outcomes. Variables will be created based on presence or absence of assessment/service activities and, when appropriate, the intensity of services provided. These variables cannot be predicted in advance because the service process will only emerge as the demonstration develops. These will be used as intervening variables in impact analyses of outcome measures.

g. Tracking Subjects

Some mobility must be assumed of families in the demonstration areas, who may move to adjacent counties or other parts of the state. Cases that are transferred before

significant service activities can be initiated will be dropped from the experimental and control groups. Usually this will apply to cases open less than 90 days, although the decision will be made on a case-by-case basis. Children and families that transfer after this period will be tracked for longitudinal outcome variables centering on placement and recidivism. Families that move out of the demonstration counties will presumably experience a termination of services that are being financed through the IV-E waiver. This may in turn have consequences for outcomes, and these families will be designated as such in the research database for possible segregation during analyses. Experimental or control cases in the intensive sub-sample that transfer outside the demonstration counties will be dropped from the study.

Information on each child and family will be stored in the research database (described below). The research contractor will add newly assigned experimental and control cases to the database upon notification by local offices. The state agency will provide monthly extractions from the Mississippi Social Services Information System (see next section) for the eight counties in the demonstration area. Statewide data will be available from the Eligibility Unit database (see next section). All information from these files on experimental and control cases and case members will be transferred to the research database. Evaluators will make regular visits to local offices to conduct case reviews of closed cases. Cases that have been transferred to other non-demonstration DFCS offices will be noted at that time—and all relevant information will be entered into the research database, including the location of the family. Prior to analysis of data on child abuse and neglect recidivism and new case openings, statewide follow-up will be conducted on state data files.

4. Impact Research Questions

The impact study will be guided by the research questions. Most can be regarded as hypotheses that predict a positive outcome for the demonstration, although they will be stated as questions. Each question assumes a basic comparison of outcomes for demonstration and control subjects. The questions are numbered consecutively for easy reference later. Variables and measures are specified for each question. Data will be collected in the same fashion for demonstration and control subjects. The data sources referenced in this section are described in the following section.

The overriding goal of the demonstration is that the changes in programming for DFCS clients, including assessment, planning, and appropriate services, will have positive consequences in the lives of children and their families. This then becomes the general hypothesis of the evaluation. The hypothesis can, in turn, be further specified in several areas.

1. Subsequent Abuse or Neglect

Because most DFCS cases involve child abuse or child neglect, a primary positive consequence will be a reduction of future incidents of abuse or neglect, sometimes

referred to as abuse and neglect recidivism. The services are designed to prevent future maltreatment of children. The unit of analysis is relevant. For cases involving children who are never removed from their families or who are reunited, any new abuse or neglect *in the family*, whether a particular child is a victim or not, should be counted. In addition new incidents of abuse or neglect to a individual children should be counted as well.

1a. Does the demonstration reduce any new CA/N recidivism?

It seems wise to break outcomes into types of abuse and neglect, since recidivism can vary greatly by type. The demonstration may be more successful in reducing certain types. The following three categories are specified, although these may be expanded in final analyses.

1b. Does the demonstration reduce neglect recidivism?

1c. Does the demonstration reduce physical abuse recidivism?

1d. Does the demonstration reduce sexual abuse recidivism?

Outcome Variables: a. number of new findings
b. number of new neglect findings
c. number of new physical abuse findings
d. number of new sexual abuse findings

Data source: MSSIS³

Measures: counts of substantiated investigations per family by type
counts of substantiated investigations per child by type

Applies to: all experimental and control families and children

Comments: Available fields in the data system include: abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and exploitation. The latter two types typically occur substantially less often and will not be considered as separate types. A result will be that substantiated cases may be counted for 1a that are not counted in 1b, 1c, or 1d.

2. Remaining with the Parental Family

As a general rule, it is assumed that keeping families intact is more beneficial than removal and placement of children. There are various negative consequences of out-of-home placement, particularly those that are long-term, that make preservation of the family a more desirable outcome. This is only true if the safety of children can be assured and their long-term welfare assured, and for these reasons, out-of-home placement is unavoidable in some cases. Keeping children with their parental families is a goal of the waiver demonstration.

³ Mississippi Social Services Information System. See comments in the next section on this system and its later replacement with the state's new Child Welfare Information System, MACWIS.

There are two different ways to approach this issue. First, the demonstration will attempt to avoid removing children initially from their families by utilizing services that might permit the children to remain safely in their homes. Second, for children who have been removed and later reunited with their families, better services may insure that they remain with their families and are not removed a second time. These are reflected in two separate research questions

2a. Do proportionately more children from the experimental group than the control group avoid being placed outside their parental home during the duration of the demonstration?

Outcome Variable: entry into placement

Data source: MSSIS and EUD⁴

Measure: designation and counts of placement entries

Applies to: all experimental and control children.

Special Issues: This can only be applicable to *new* cases assigned after the waiver begins. As noted above, some existing cases will be assigned, and the random nature of the assignment process will insure that no experimental-control differences emerge or could emerge for this particular issue. Thus all existing cases assigned to the waiver must be excluded from the analysis of this question.

2b. Do children in the experimental group who have been reunited with their families experience fewer later placements than similar control children?

Outcome Variable: reentry into placement after reunification with family

Data source: MSSIS and EUD

Measure: designation and counts of placement entries

Applies to: only experimental and control children who are placed and reunited with their families.

Special Issues: If Research Question 8 (below) is answered positively, experimental children will be reunited more quickly and in greater numbers than control children. The consequence will be an imbalance in numbers of children in each group. More

⁴ Eligibility Unit Database. This is a desktop computer database in MS FoxPro, described in the next section.

importantly, it is likely to lead to an imbalance in the characteristics of the groups.

3. Placement with Relatives

If children must be removed and placed, the project assumes that it is generally more beneficial for them to be placed with relatives than non-relatives. Children are more likely to be familiar with relatives. Indeed, they may have lived with relatives with whom they are placed. At a minimum they usually will have visited the relatives and may have some degree of “family feelings” toward these relatives. The demonstration has the goal of placing children who have been removed with relatives as often as this is viable.

Placement with relatives refers primarily to the initial placement of the child (after any short-term emergency placements). However, a stay with relatives is sometimes just one out of several different placements during an entire placement episode. Thus, there are two possible measures of relative placement and two corresponding research questions.

3a. Among children removed from their parental homes, are more experimental than control children placed initially with relatives?

Outcome Variables: proportion placed with relatives

Data source: Case Reviews

Measures: ratio of (experimental or control) children placed with relatives in their first permanent placement after removal to by the total number of (experimental or control) children removed versus the similar ratio of children not so placed

Applies to: all experimental and control children who are removed from their homes.

3b. Among children removed from their parental homes, do children in the experimental group spend a greater proportion of their time in placement with relatives than children in the control group?

Outcome Variables: time in relative placement

Data source: Case Reviews

Measure: days in relative placement as a ratio of total days in placement. These calculations will require that the beginning and end dates of all relative placements be recorded as well as the start and end dates of each placement episode.

Applies to: all experimental and control children who are placed

4. Placement of Siblings Together in the Same Placement Setting

If two or more children must be removed from the same family, a part of promoting future family stability involves keeping the children together. Ideally they should be placed together with the same provider. Being placed together increases the chance that siblings will remain in contact and will be able to maintain the emotional bonds of sisters and brothers. It is a goal of the demonstration to place siblings together in the same placement setting.

4a. For cases where two or more siblings are removed from their parental home, are there more cases in the experimental group than the control group in which all siblings are placed together in the same placement setting?

Outcome Variables: cases with all siblings placed with the same provider versus cases where siblings are separated

Data source: Case Reviews

Measure: counts of cases in which all siblings were placed with the same provider versus cases in which at least one sibling was placed separately

Applies to: cases or families in which several siblings are placed

Comments: The proposed measure will be a dichotomy. The case will be the unit of measure. Because children are sometimes moved from one placement to another, the measure will indicate families in which all siblings are maintained in placement together for the entire time that they are in substitute care.

5. Placement of Children in the Same Communities as their Parental Families

There is an advantage to placement within the community of the parental family of any child that has been removed. Placement outside the community inhibits regular contacts between parents and children. Placement within the same community as the family is a goal of the demonstration.

5a. Among all children removed from their parental homes, is a larger proportion of the experimental group than the control group in placements in the community of the parental family?

Outcome Variables: placements of children within the community

of the parental family

Data source: Case Reviews

Measures: counts of children placed within same county or within 30 minutes travel of parental home versus children who are not so placed

Applies to: all placed children

6. Reduced Placements in Foster Care

If an effort is made to keep children at home (see 2 above) and, when they must be placed, to place them with relatives (see 3 above), foster placements will decline. A demonstration goal is to reduce the proportion of children entering foster care.

6a. Is a smaller proportion of children in the experimental group than in the control group placed in foster care?

Outcome Variables: removal and placement in foster care

Data source: Case Reviews

Measures: counts of children who remain in their homes or are placed with relatives versus children placed in foster care

Applies to: all experimental and control children

Comments: Foster care will include only formal foster arrangements with no relatives.

7. Movement of the Same Child among Different Foster Providers

When children must be placed outside the home, it is often difficult to find stable living arrangements. Consequently, they are moved from one placement setting to another. A goal of the demonstration is to reduce the number of separate placement settings that children experience during the entire period of removal.

7a. Is the average number of foster providers less for experimental group children than control group children?

Outcome Variables: changes in foster providers

Data source: Case Reviews

Measures: count of foster providers during the initial placement episode for child

Applies to: all experimental and control children who are placed

8. Time in Foster Care

Increased efforts at reunification with parental families or relatives may have the effect of reducing the amount of time in foster placement, and this is also a goal of the demonstration.

8a. Among all children removed from their parental homes, do children in the experimental group spend less time in foster care than children in the control group?

Outcome Variables: time in foster care

Data source: Case-specific Survey/Case Reviews

Measures: total days in foster placement for each child

Applies to: all experimental and control children who are placed

Comments: Because a special effort will be made to keep demonstration children in their parental homes or in the homes of relatives, it will be possible that the experimental children in placement will be more difficult cases. It will be necessary, therefore, to collect information in a variety of areas, such as parental flight, severe drug problems of parents, continuing homelessness, child health problems that are beyond parental capacity to cope, mental retardation of parents, mental retardation of children, and mental health problems in the family. These will be used as control variables in the analysis to insure comparability of the groups.

9. Child Well-Being

The previous research questions refer directly or indirectly to the well-being of children, as represented by contacts with and experiences in child protection services. In a more general sense, child well-being can be approached in two ways. First, because children are dependent on their parents for most of their needs, indicators of the well-being of the parents or of the entire family are indicators of child well-being as well. These include such things as family earnings, parental employment, lack of dependence on public assistance, and so on. Many measures of this type are necessary for the cost benefit study and can be used in the impact analysis as well and are reflected in questions 9a through 9c. Second, there are various direct measures of child well-being, such as changes in the health of the child, advancing in school and remaining in school, the child's relationship with his or her parents or other legal caregivers, the child's relationship with peers, the child's self-esteem, and so on.

9a. Do the wages of experimental families show a greater increase on average than control families?

Outcome Variables: wages of earners in family

Data source: quarterly wage files of the Employment Security agency

Measures: quarterly wage totals per family

Applies to: all experimental and control families

Comments: The quarterly wages of all individuals in the family over 16 years of age will be summed and used as a measure of family wages. The logic of the question flows from certain optional services that are available under the Menu of Services attached to the RFP: transportation, homemaking, temporary financial assistance for various needs, job training, educational services, medical services, and dental and orthodontic services. All of these concern barriers that affect employment and wages.

9b. Are the numbers of yearly quarters that experimental wage earners are employed greater than the corresponding totals for control wage earners?

Outcome Variables: quarters employed

Data source: quarterly wage files of the Employment Security agency

Measures: quarters with any earnings in family

Applies to: all experimental and control families

9c. Do experimental parents participate in TANF and in food stamps less than control parents?

Outcome Variables: TANF participation, food stamp participation

Data source: TANF and food stamp data

Measures: number of months receiving TANF check, months receiving food stamp vouchers

Applies to: all experimental and control families

Comments: Participation in welfare represents the obverse of wages and employment, and the comments about barriers under 9a apply here as well.

9d. Do experimental children receive health care services at greater rates than control children?

Outcome Variables: medical and dental services received

Data source: Case Informant Survey and Family Survey

Measures: rate of well child visits for children under 12 years of age
rate of dental checkups
rate of vision checkups

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

Comments: The measures employed will be rates per year. It may be necessary to set aside very short-term cases in this analysis because there may be no opportunity for such services. In addition analysis will segregate children by age.

9e. Do more experimental children perform better in school than control children and/or drop out of school less frequently?

Outcome Variables: ratings of performance in school
enrollment in school

Data source: Case-Specific Survey/Case Reviews/Case-Informant Surveys

Measures: remained in school or dropped out

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

Comments: This measure will apply to youths 16 years of age and older who can drop out without being treated as truants.

9f. Is the emotional well-being of experimental children improved in comparison to control children?

Outcome Variables: quality of parental, sibling, and peer relationships
child's expression of trust confidence
level of anxiety/depression
level of anger and manifestation of aggression
suicidal episodes
reduction in risk to welfare/improvement in safety
family rating of child well-being

Data source: Case-Specific Survey/Case-Informant Survey/Family Survey

Measures: scaled evaluations by workers, people surrounding family

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

9g. Does the demonstration lead to improved services relevant to child development?

Outcome Variable: services relevant to child development

Data source: Case-specific Survey/Case Reviews/Family Survey

Measures: counts of initiation of services, including:
of special educational services
tutoring services for children
mentoring (e.g. big brother/sister)
child care
respite care
parent instruction/training regarding child development
mental health services

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

Comments: This outcome is related to child development in the sense that each of these services may lead to improvements where needs for them exist among the targeted⁵ children. The list of measures provided are not exhaustive and may be supplemented as specific instruments are developed.

10. Provision of Services: Intervening Variables

This issue was alluded to above in the section on individual provisions of the waiver. The questions follow the logic laid out in that section regarding experimental-control differences in: 1) assessment activities; 2) services provided; and 3) the effects of these on other outcomes. Questions 10a and 10b concern differences that will be examined more fully in the process analysis portion of the evaluation.

10a. Are formal assessments conducted more often for experimental than for control families?

Outcome Variables: completed assessments

Data source: Case-specific Survey/Case Reviews

Measures: completed child assessments

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

⁵ The term “target” here and later refers to the combined population of experimental and control cases that account for two-thirds of the eligible demonstration pool of cases.

Comments: A goal of the demonstration will be to conduct formal assessments on each child assigned to the waiver. Beyond recording that the formal assessment has been completed, other measures will be explored, including: linkage of needs of children and parents to services, presence of specific plans for service or other response to needs, and linkage of assessed needs to goals for child or family.

10b. Are more services afforded to experimental than to control children and their families?

Outcome Variables: provided services and utilized services

Data source: Case-specific Survey/Case Reviews

Measures: counts of referral to services
counts of services delivered
counts of utilized services
counts of types of service providers utilized

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

Comments: The distinction between referred, delivered, and utilized is based on a recognition that all child welfare cases, even those in which children are removed from the home, are fundamentally voluntary. Referral means informing the family of the service availability and/or scheduling visits or appointments. Delivery refers to sessions, appointments, home visits, and the like that are set up for the family. Utilization refers to the extent to which the service recipients (individuals or families) participate in the services. Service utilization is the critical intervening variable, however. Increased referral of services and delivery will show improved efforts of the local agency, but only utilized services could be expected to produce changes in families. Finally, the counts of types of service providers utilized will enable an analysis to be conducted of increases in the involvement of a broader array of resources in experimental cases.

10c. Are better outcomes within the experimental group in comparison to the control group related to increased utilization of assessments and optional services?

Outcome Variables: variables in outcomes 1 to 9

Data source: All data sources listed to this point.

Measures: measures under 1 to 9, 10a, and 10b

Applies to: experimental and control sub-sample children

Comments: In this analysis, changes in assessments and services would be utilized as an intervening variable: experimental-control membership → utilization of assessments and services → outcome measures.

5. Data Sources

The data sources described here will provide all data necessary for conducting the impact study analyses. The same sources will also provide data for the cost-benefit study. Certain other data collection methods will apply only to the process analysis. These are discussed in that section of the present plan.

Data Sources Maintained by the State

The *Mississippi Social Services Information System (MSSIS)* is maintained by the state and contains the following elements that are of relevance to the present evaluation:

- Demographic information on open cases.
- Child abuse and neglect data on substantiated reports, including types of abuse and neglect, victim and perpetrator identity, family data, and reporter type.
- Service plan.
- Adoption information.
- Foster care information.

The state also maintains the *Eligibility Unit Database (EUD)*. The EUD contains information on each child in out-of-home placement in the state, including the type of arrangement and the IV-E eligibility status. A single record is maintained on each child and is replaced as the status of the child changes.

The state will implement the *Mississippi Automated Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS)* during the first year of the waiver. Two of the waiver demonstration counties will be among the early test counties in August 2000 and all counties are scheduled to begin implementation of MACWIS in Fall 2000. After MACWIS is implemented, is operating smoothly, and agency officials confirm the accuracy of data files, it will be possible to switch certain data collection through case reviews to reviews of MACWIS files. It is anticipated that data collection for research questions 1a through 8a will be addressed through data obtained via MACWIS extractions at that time.

TANF and Food Stamp for Cost-Benefit Analysis

Because data on cash and non-cash welfare participation of families of target children will be necessary for the cost-benefit study, reduction in utilization of welfare is added as an impact question as well. At a minimum, this should include data on food stamp and TANF reception by families. The need for this data is explained below in the section on the cost-benefit analysis. TANF and food stamp data will be collected on an annual basis, and should include: months of TANF and food stamp reception and monthly financial benefits.

Medicaid Data for Cost-Benefit Analysis

Extracts of Medicaid eligibility and provider payments will be requested for all target family members as well. This data will be important for the cost-benefit analysis. Medicaid data will also be sought annually.

Quarterly Wage Data for Cost-Benefit Analysis

Quarterly wage data will be collected for the cost-benefit analysis from the Employment Services. Updates of wage data will be sought on all individuals over 16 years of age in the target families. Like information on welfare, the addition of this data will permit a corresponding impact question about changes in family wages and quarterly employment attributable to the demonstration. Quarterly wage data will be sought annually.

Other Expenditures for Cost-Benefit Analysis

Costs from state and federal funding sources for titles IV-A, IV-B, IV-E and XIX of the Social Security Act will be collected for each experimental and control family (or individual child). In discussions with state representatives, other state sources of information will be considered that might be relevant to cost-benefit determination.

Case Reviews and Case-Specific Surveys

Case reviews will be conducted by the evaluator during semi-annual visits to county offices. The reviews will be conducted at two levels of intensity. For the entire sample, until the introduction of MACWIS in each of the demonstration counties, a simplified case review will be conducted that will collect data needed to address research questions 3a through 8a. A more intensive version of the case review will be utilized for sub-sample cases enabling information to be collected for research questions 9e through 10b, questions that concern the well-being of children. The case-review protocol will be formatted to guide recording of information from individual case files or from other local office data sources about specific children and families.

A case-specific survey instrument will be constructed to supplement the case review for sub-sample cases only. The case-specific survey will be an instrument given to social workers to report information about a specific experimental or control child (and siblings) and the child's family. Questions will be asked concerning child well-being, for example, that cannot be answered adequately through a review of case files. The instrument will be completed by the worker closest to the case at the time the case closes. Both the case reviews and the case-specific surveys will also be used to collect data relevant to questions that are addressed below in the Process Study section of this work plan.

Family/Caregiver Surveys

Survey data collected directly from families or other appropriate caregivers of children will be used primarily as part of the process analysis. Items specific to the process study are discussed below in that section. However, when surveys can be consistently collected on experimental and control families and/or caregivers, they can yield information relevant to impact analysis of child well-being.

The survey procedure will involve a three-part process to maximize feedback from families: First, social workers will be asked, when feasible, to hand a survey packet to caregivers in all experimental and control cases at or near case closure. The survey packet will include a short questionnaire, a letter of explanation and a postage-paid return envelope addressed to the evaluator. Second, each respondent will be offered a \$5 incentive for returning a fully completed survey. Third, a direct mailing from the evaluator will be conducted for those who do not return the survey instrument.

Case-Informant Survey

For cases selected in the sub-sample, a survey will be conducted of professionals who can be expected to have special knowledge of the well-being of the child and the progress he or she has made from the beginning of DFCS intervention. These professionals will be identified through the case review process and the case-specific questionnaires completed by social workers. They may include individuals who participated in inter-disciplinary or wrap-around team planning at the beginning of the case. They will frequently be school teachers or counselors, ministers, juvenile probation officers, health or mental health professionals, and other providers of services. They will always be individuals who have been involved in the case in some professional capacity or have knowledge of the family and child through a professional or institutional relationship and who, as a result, can be expected to provide a professional assessment.

Information obtained through this survey will be utilized in both the impact and process studies. For the impact study the research questions addressed will be 9e through 10b (see above) that primarily concern child well-being and provision of services.

6. Matrix of Research Questions and Data Sources

The matrix on the following page summarizes the data sources that will be utilized for each specific research question for the impact study. The matrix shows whether the data source will collect information from all target cases (1) or only on sub-sample cases (2).

Impact Research Questions and Data Sources

Impact Research Questions	Macwis	Case Reviews	Case Surveys	State Systems	Case Informant Survey	Family /Caregiver surveys
Lower CA/N recidivism	All Cases					
Lower neglect recidivism	All Cases					
Lower abuse recidivism	All Cases					
Lower sexual abuse recidivism	All Cases					
Avoid placement outside home	All Cases					
Fewer re-entries to placement	All Cases					
More placements with relatives	All Cases	All Cases				
More time in relative placement	All Cases	All Cases				
Siblings placed in community of fam.	All Cases	All Cases				
More placed in community of fam.	All Cases	All Cases				
Fewer children in foster care	All Cases	All Cases				
Less time in foster care	All Cases	All Cases				
Increased employment, wages				All Cases		
Less TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid				All Cases		
Improved Health Care Services		Samples	Samples		Samples	Samples
Impr.school Perform. /reduc. Dropouts		Samples	Samples		Samples	Samples
Impr. emotional well-being of children		Samples	Samples		Samples	Samples
Impr. services re child development		Samples	Samples		Samples	Samples
More formal assessments/improved services		Samples	Samples		Samples	Samples
Better outcomes contingent on services						

7. Research Database

The evaluator will construct a research database that will include all information on families and children. The database will link together all data from state sources and that collected directly on children and families in a relational database that will serve as the source of all variables for analyses.

At the conclusion of the evaluation, the evaluator will make available to the state data tapes containing all information collected during the course of the research.

8. Impact Analysis

The primary analysis for each of the evaluation impact questions will be comparisons of children or families within the experimental and control groups. As indicated on some questions, the analysis will be restricted to applicable subsets of these two groups. Although random (or systematic) assignment will produce the best level of comparability between the two groups, it will be prudent to utilize further statistical controls, as indicated above. This will be accomplished through the development of multiple regression models for the separate analyses.

The first variable will be experimental-control group membership. In each research question, the primary concern was whether membership in one of these two groups makes a difference in the outcome variables. In its simplest form, this is:



In the multiple regression analyses we are proposing, a set of other variables will be utilized to introduce adjustments within the analysis for group differences that were not controlled through random assignment. These variables then have the status of covariates. In analytic terms, we sometimes refer to this as "removing the effects" of these variables from the analysis. For example, family size and wages might affect neglect recidivism and might be important to control in the analysis before drawing conclusions about this outcome variable.



The specific variables chosen may include:

- participation in other demonstrations (see above)
- TANF and food stamp reception
- Medicaid utilization
- average family wages during first year of waiver
- family size
- number of children in placement
- marital status

The list is not exhaustive, and in any event, the final variables selected for inclusion in models will be dependent on testing.

The models that must be developed for the analyses required under question 10 will introduce the requisite variables described under Question 10a and 10b between the two boxes on the right side of the diagram.

Because the outcomes variables in each research question differ, different kinds of multiple regression analysis will be necessary. In general, we will utilize two different kinds: linear multiple regression and logistic multiple regression.

Linear multiple regression will be utilized for continuous outcome variables. For example, the days in foster care (Question 8a) is a continuous measure. It can be thought of as yielding averages: mean days for demonstration children and mean days for control children. Outcome variables such as these are candidates for linear multiple regression analysis. This may include (depending on distributions) research questions: 1a to 1d, 2b, 3b, 7a, 8a, and 9a to 9c.

Logistic multiple regression can be used in the same conceptual fashion as linear regression, but it is quite different internally. In this form of analysis, the outcome variables will be categorical (usually dichotomous, i.e., in two categories). For example, the count of children placed with relatives (Question 3a) is of this type. Children will fall into one of two categories—placed with relatives or not. This type of analysis will be applied to research questions 2a, 3a, 4a, 5a, 6a, 9d to 9g, 10a, and 10b.

Process Study

The process study will describe and assess how the demonstration was implemented in the eight participating counties and how the parts of the demonstration operated for both the treatment and control groups. The study will assess similarities and differences in the administration and operation of the demonstration from county to county, and it will document the range and variation of contextual factors that may affect program outcomes. The study will include both qualitative and quantitative analyses and include on-site observation, interviews, and case analyses.

Central Process Dimensions

The study will focus on but not be limited to four central process dimensions:

1. **The organizational aspects of the program**—the organizational attributes or components of the program that are critical to its effectiveness. (The effect of the demonstration on county casework and caseload will also be assessed.)
2. **The service aspects of the program**—the types of services, or differences in the way services are delivered or in the persons delivering the services that influence the achievement of program goals.
3. **The situational context within which the program takes place**—the social, economic, and political factors that may mitigate or enhance the program's impact.
4. **The community dimension**—differences in the resource base across the communities participating in the demonstration and the relative willingness of other agencies and institutions in local communities to become involved in providing services that affect program outcomes and the results of the impact study. (Strategies that prove most successful in obtaining the active collaboration of other community resources will be identified.)

Beyond examining these dimensions, the ways in which they are experienced by experimental and control groups will be assessed, as will any program changes that may be applied unequally to the two groups or in ways that would otherwise substantially

affect the impact evaluation. Factors that either impede or facilitate the establishment of expanded services to families and children will be identified.

Methods and Research Activities

The process study will be conducted using a multi-method approach that will include ongoing contact with DFCS administrators, review of planning and other documentary material, participation in community forums, semi-annual site visits to demonstration counties, interviews of Area Social Work Supervisors and social workers, reviews of case files, case-specific surveys of social workers, surveys of planning team participants, surveys of caregivers, surveys of key informants and community representatives, and analysis of secondary data on county characteristics. Specific research methods are detailed below.

Initial and Regular Meetings with State-Level DCFS Administrators

Throughout the course of this evaluation, the researchers will remain in close contact with administrators of the Mississippi Division of Family and Children's Services and meet on a regular schedule (in most cases quarterly) to discuss the progress of the demonstration and the evaluation. This will include meetings with administrators in the central office of DFCS in Jackson as well as with the two Regional Directors in whose regions (III and VI-N) the demonstration will be implemented and who were instrumental in the planning and design of the Mississippi waiver. Initial meetings were held in November, 1999 to confer on a range of issues relevant to the development of this plan. This included a thorough review of the child welfare system in the state, its policies, structure and operation. The focus and plans for the demonstration were discussed in detail, including criteria for selecting waiver participants. Available data sources were reviewed and plans for data collection discussed. In addition, the evaluators accompanied Regional Directors and visited each of the eight county offices that will be involved in the demonstration in preparation for developing this Work Plan. These visits were useful not only in providing evaluators with an understanding of agency operations at the local level but also afforded county staffs an opportunity to learn, at least in general terms, how the research would impact their offices.

If requested, the evaluators will accompany DCFS administrators in meeting with U.S. Department of Health and Human Services staff to finalize the evaluation design and reporting schedule and to make any needed changes to the work plan.

Compilation and Review of Background Materials

In preparation for the development of the evaluation plan, the evaluators have reviewed relevant background materials related to the planning, funding and design of the waiver demonstration, including the waiver application and written communication between the Mississippi Department of Human Services/DFCS and the U.S. Administration on Children, Youth and Families related to the demonstration.

Researchers have also been provided and have reviewed written administrative and operational guidelines on the Mississippi child welfare system contained in the comprehensive department manual. Evaluators have also requested and reviewed sample copies of case files. Other documentary material that is needed for the conduct of the evaluation and is produced in the course of the demonstration will be made available to the researchers.

Community Forums

The evaluators will participate in a series of community forums held in demonstration counties. These forums will be an occasion for the waiver and its evaluation to be presented to and discussed with key community leaders. Forum participants will vary by county and may include judges, probation officers, law enforcement personnel, school administrators and counselors, health and mental health professionals, service providers, child advocates, and other key community representatives. These forums will provide researchers with an initial list of key informants who will be included in surveys conducted as part of the process study.

Semi-Annual Site Visits to Local Offices

Each of the eight county DCFS offices will be visited at least twice a year by the evaluators throughout the demonstration. During these visits interviews will be conducted with county staff and case files will be reviewed. The visits will be conducted semi-annually so that case files can be reviewed in a timely manner and more detailed information can be collected on sub-sample cases.

Interviews within county DCFS offices. Formal interviews will be conducted on a yearly basis with the Area Social Work Supervisors in each of the demonstration counties as well as with the social workers and family preservation workers in these counties.

Interviews of Area Social Work Supervisors. The structured interview schedule developed for interviews with area supervisors will be organized around the four process dimensions:

- Organizational dimension, including:
 - Implementation plans for the demonstration.
 - Background on the organization of the office.
 - History of staff turnover/stability
 - Functional responsibilities of staff and staffing structure.
 - Impact of waiver activities on caseload size, worker caseload and workload.
 - Impact of particular staffing factors on waiver implementation and/or outcomes.
 - Organizational and staffing changes necessitated by waiver.
 - Effect on the waiver of other funding streams.
 - Effect of the waiver on other funding streams.
 - Level of staff acceptance of the waiver.

- Effect of staff attitudes on waiver implementation and outcomes.
 - Plans/activities for monitoring the progress of the demonstration and for addressing problems that might arise.
 - Other organizational factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.
- Service dimension, including:
 - Sufficiency of training provided to county administrators and social workers related to the waiver and ongoing training needs.
 - The traditional approach to services to children and families in the county and how it has been affected by the waiver.
 - Involvement of family and children in decision making related to services.
 - Unique priorities for the waiver in this county.
 - Service-related factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.
- Contextual dimension, including:
 - Local social, economic, and political factors that may have an impact on the manner in which the demonstration is implemented or conducted or on its effectiveness in achieving its goals.
 - Any local factor seen as having facilitated or hindered implementation of the waiver or the outcomes of the demonstration.
- Community dimension, including:
 - The role of wrap-around teams in decision making.
 - The relationship between the county DFCS office and other key institutions in the community, including the juvenile court, police department, schools, medical and health institutions.
 - Policies of any key institutions that may affect the demonstration.
 - The attitudes of representatives of key institutions to the demonstration and its goals and procedures and their willingness to become involved in waiver-related activities.
 - Outreach efforts toward these institutions to ensure understanding of and, as necessary, collaboration with demonstration-related activities.
 - Specific collaborative arrangements reached with these entities.
 - The supply and quality of different types of placement providers.
 - The willingness of placement providers to become involved in waiver-related activities.
 - The availability and quality of other services and service providers.
 - Other community-related factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.

In addition, Area Social Work Supervisors will be asked for their views on the response of families and children to the waiver and on the program outcomes they anticipate in their county and/or outcomes that have been realized.

- Perceived response of families and children to waiver activities, including:
 - Differences in levels of cooperation.
 - Differences in satisfaction with services.
 - Program elements or waiver activities that parents view as most beneficial to them and their children.

- Anticipated/realized outcomes from the waiver, including:
 - Increased use of community-based services.
 - Increased use of home-based services.
 - An increase in the appropriateness of services provided to children.
 - Improved services to families with children in substitute care.
 - Improved services to children in substitute care.
 - Increased foster placements nearer the family's home.
 - Increased use of relative care.
 - Decreased use of placements outside the community of parental family.
 - Decreased use of foster placements.
 - Improved services to families with children at risk of placement.
 - Improved working relationship with the juvenile court.
 - Improved working relationship with the schools.
 - Improved working relationship with community agencies.
 - Reduction of length of time in foster placement.
 - The type(s) of cases with which the waiver has been most and least successful.
 - Other outcomes that are anticipated from the waiver.

During the first visit to these offices, the focus of the interviews will be on planning and initial implementation issues. Evaluators will also seek input on other specific key informants in the county who should be interviewed. In addition, researchers will provide an overview of the evaluation design and how it will affect local offices and staff. Subsequently, annual visits will focus on changes in operations, inter-institutional relationships, staffing, relations with community and courts, and the manner in which the county dealt with unexpected problems that arose and/or took advantage of new opportunities that may have emerged to improve service provision and child well-being. Finally, during these visits, relevant documentary material that will need to be reviewed, including inter-agency agreements and protocols, will be collected.

County social workers. During site visits, interviews will also be conducted with county social workers, family preservation workers and possibly other workers (such as homemakers and aides) depending on the county. The perspectives and experiences of these field staff will be sought with respect to each of the four process dimensions, their acceptance of the demonstration and perception of its effectiveness, and their perspective on the response of families and children to the new approach. More specifically:

- Organizational dimension, including:
 - Their own acceptance of the changes introduced through the demonstration.
 - Perception of acceptance by other workers.
 - Their level of understanding of the goals and philosophy of the waiver demonstration.
 - Their need for additional training.
 - Impact of the waiver on worker activities, including the extent to which workers perceive that the waiver has meant a difference in the manner and substance of their interventions with families and children.
 - Effects of caseload size on the waiver and of the waiver on caseload size.
 - How and when they record case-related information.
 - Organizational factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.

- Service dimension, including:
 - Their understanding of the waiver and the elements of the demonstration.
 - Sufficiency of training provided to social workers and ongoing training needs.
 - Differences between the traditional approach (represented by the control cases) and the waiver approach (represented by experimental cases) with respect to:
 - assessment, case planning, and approach to service delivery;
 - effectiveness of wrap-around teams in service decisions;
 - the kinds of services that can be offered and have been offered under the demonstration vs. traditional approach;
 - direct assistance provided to families by social workers;
 - involvement of community institutions including juvenile court, probation office, schools, health and mental health, and churches; and
 - involvement of extended families for support and placement.
 - Timeliness, type and duration of service intervention.
 - Involvement of families and children in decision making related to services.
 - Other service-related factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.

- Contextual dimension, including:
 - Any local or county-specific factor seen as facilitating or hindering implementation of the waiver or the outcomes of the demonstration.

- Community dimension, including:
 - The role of wrap-around teams in decision making.
 - The response of representatives from key community institutions (court, probation office, schools, health, mental health, churches, etc.) to the demonstration and its goals and procedures.

- Willingness of key representatives from these institutions to become involved in waiver-related activities.
 - The supply and quality of different types of placement providers.
 - The willingness of placement providers to become involved in waiver-related activities.
 - The availability and quality of other services and service providers.
 - The relative availability of key vendor and non-vendor services.
 - Other community-related factors that are seen as facilitating or impeding the implementation of the demonstration and/or as positively or negatively impacting its outcomes.
- Perceived response of families and children to waiver vs. traditional approach to intervention and services, including:
 - Differences in levels of cooperation.
 - Differences in satisfaction with services.
 - Whether families see themselves and their children better off as a result of the intervention.
 - Program elements or waiver activities that parents view as most beneficial to them and their children.
 - Specific waiver outcomes that may have been realized in cases on their own caseload.
 - Specific case examples illustrating actions that only became possible because the waiver was implemented and successes or failures that resulted.
 - Case examples of children not admitted to waiver slots that could have benefited if greater flexibility of services and funding were available.

Case reviews. The review of case files was discussed above under the impact analysis. As indicated, these reviews are seen as a companion method to the case-specific worker surveys described in the next section. As discussed in the impact section, two levels of case reviews will be conducted.

1. For the entire experimental and control sample, a simplified case review instrument will be constructed that will collect information that cannot be obtained in other ways (case-specific worker survey and MIS data sources) in order to address the variables within the impact questions.
2. More relevant to the process analysis, more intensive reviews of sub-sample cases will be conducted. For this purpose a case review protocol will be developed following the examination of a small sample of cases from each demonstration county. The reliability of information extracted and coded utilizing the protocol across reviewers will be verified prior to its use. These intensive case reviews will obtain information on:
 - the case planning process,

- the role of inter-disciplinary teams,
- services needed and provided and the source of services,
- the timeliness and appropriateness of services provided,
- the provision of Medicaid services to children,
- barriers encountered in working with the family,
- the involvement of the family and child in decision making,
- involvement of extended families for support and placement.
- involvement of community institutions including juvenile court, probation office, schools, health and mental health, and churches,
- community and systemic factors that facilitate or impede desired case outcomes.

The case review process will provide information on differences in service delivery and service emphasis across the eight demonstration counties in approaching experimental and control cases. And it will show how offices operating in different resource environments and in varying social, economic and political contexts respond to the conditions they find in attempting to make the demonstration work. Additionally, the reviews will facilitate the identification of specific case examples to illustrate exemplary aspects of the waiver that may be found.

Case-Specific Surveys

The companion piece to the case reviews for cases selected in the sub-sample will be the case-specific questionnaire completed by the social worker who had the case on his/her caseload. It will be used primarily as a method of collecting information from workers that cannot be conveniently or reliably collected through case reviews or MIS data sources. While much of the data obtained through these surveys will be used for the impact analysis, some will be useful for understanding process issues, particularly with respect to issues related to child well-being and factors that may facilitate or impede positive outcomes. Accordingly, workers will be asked to provide their views on:

- The efficacy of the wrap-around planning team process and the subsequent follow-through on the families and children in their caseload.
- Problems encountered and opportunities discovered in following through on the results the planning process.
- The level of the family's cooperation and the effect of this on case outcomes.
- Factors that have contributed to enhanced child well-being (such as specific services, collaborative arrangements, involvement of certain types of professionals, role of extended families, etc.) across the spectrum of life areas including inter-family relations, school, health, and mental health.
- Factors that have contributed most to the progress of the case—changes that have occurred as a result of DFCS intervention.

Case-Informant Surveys

This was described above under the impact analysis discussion. It is also equally relevant to the process study. These individuals will be contacted to provide detailed information on the planning and provision of services to families and children. Their judgments will be sought on progress achieved in ensuring child safety, reducing risk, and enhancing child well being. These surveys will be important for the process study in order to:

- Verify that case-specific wrap-around planning occurred and to document the level of participant involvement.
- Obtain the views of participants on whether the planning process was well facilitated (including the extent to which the team's input was sought and utilized), worth the time and energy expended by participants, and how the process might be improved.
- Obtain the judgments of key professionals with specific knowledge about individual cases about whether the process led to important differences in the way a case was handled, took advantage of service opportunities that were present, involved a broader resource spectrum, and contributed, in ways they had knowledge of, to improvements in the well-being of the child.

An important outcome of the study will be to determine whether there are certain types of cases in which wrap-around planning is more helpful and even necessary in order to achieve desired outcomes.

Family/Caregiver Surveys

These surveys will provide the views of parents and other caregivers about demonstration-related services and activities.

Respondents will be asked to indicate:

- The type(s) of services they received.
- Whether there was any assistance or services adults or children wanted or needed that they did not receive.
- Whether they were referred to other community resources.

Respondents will be asked for their perceptions and judgments about:

- The level of help they received.
- The match between family and child needs and the services provided.
- Family and child participation in case-related decision making.
- Their own cooperation with DFCS and its workers.
- Changes in the well-being of their children and the extent to which their children and their families are better off because of the involvement of the child welfare agency.

Surveys of Key Informants in Each County

Key informant surveys will be conducted to determine the perspectives of community representatives on the success of the waiver in improving child welfare services in the eight demonstration counties. The surveys will be conducted in a before-and-after format carried out in the first and last years of the demonstration.

The community forums held at the start of the demonstration will provide an initial list of informants from each county. In addition, the names of knowledgeable individuals will be collected during office visits. These will be individuals who have ongoing contact with or special knowledge of the local DFCS office, including interdisciplinary team members. The objective of the surveys will be to obtain comprehensive and quantifiable information on community attitudes and perceptions about child welfare services in each county at the start of the demonstration and again as it is nearing its conclusion. The survey will contain both structured response options and open-ended questions. A stamped return envelope addressed to IAR will be provided. For analysis purposes, the survey instruments will include a county code and a code indicating the position of the respondent.

Analysis of Secondary Data Sources of County Characteristics

Secondary data of demographic, labor market, and CA/N characteristics of counties will be introduced into the analysis. These will include demographic indirect indicators of social need, such as the presence of single-parent households, the percentage of children in poverty, and median household income. They will also include unemployment rates and labor market participation rates. And they will include CA/N caseload characteristics, such as the number of hotline reports and substantiated reports per 1,000 persons. These kinds of data will provide information on the social and economic context within which county child welfare programs operate, and may usefully be used to further assess the relative effects of the demonstration across different geographic environments.

Reports

Information obtained through these methods will be integrated and synthesized and presented in project reports. Findings that are deemed relevant to the success of the demonstration and the achievement of desired outcomes will be presented during meetings with agency administrators and summarized in semi-annual project updates.

Cost-Benefit Analysis

The cost-benefit analysis will answer these basic research questions:

- How do measurable benefits of the Mississippi Child Welfare Waiver compare to its costs? Specifically, what is the net benefit-cost value for the waiver?
- What are the gains and losses for the clients themselves, for society as a whole, and for specific governmental levels?

The analysis will involve three fundamental steps:

1. Identifying the major tangible and measurable effects of the waiver and valuing them monetarily.
2. Summing waiver project costs (and projecting them to the future).
3. Comparing benefits and costs.

Measures of Costs and Benefits

The primary measures of costs and benefits are defined in the following table (3.1). The analysis may be extended further if other kinds of cost data become known or if state representatives believe that certain short-term or long-term outcomes can be economically valued and included in the analysis. Within Table 3.1, the categories of costs and benefits are shown along with the data sources and/or the method used to obtain the measure.

Federal expenditures and receipts will be distinguished from state and local in the calculations when possible. For example, out-of-home placement costs may be reimbursed under Title IV-E. In these cases a portion of the costs is reimbursed from federal sources and the remaining from state or local sources. Distinguishing the sources of funding in this way will permit the governmental perspective (defined below) to be divided into federal and state/local.

Table 3.1. Primary Cost-Benefit Categories

Cost-Benefit Categories	Data Source or Method
Costs Associated with Child Welfare	
Vendor <u>costs of out-of-home placement</u> per child. Payment records to vendors for relative, foster, residential, out-of-state residential, and other care for each child in the experimental and control group will be used.	Local county bookkeeping records, journal of expenditures, and case files (Form SS-425, Request for Expenditures).
Costs of <u>vendor services</u> per person or family.	
Costs of <u>adoption</u> per child.	
<u>Average daily administrative costs and case management costs per case.</u>	The product of average cost and days open will be applied to each case.
<u>IV-E administrative costs</u> per child.	<u>The produce of average IV-E administrative cost and days child was eligible for IV-E will be applied to each case.</u>
Costs and Benefits Associated with Transfers and Wages	
<u>Family earnings</u>	Quarterly wage records for each individual in the family over 16 years of age.
<u>Fringe benefits</u> will be	To be determined through application of a standard percentage to individual earnings.
Federal, state, and local income <u>tax</u> payments	Calculated based on earnings, marital status, and number of children. State and local sales taxes will be included, based on zip code of family and the portion of income devoted to taxable goods at various income levels. The EITC will also be calculated for each family.
FICA	Calculated based on a percentage of earnings.
Cumulative <u>transfer amounts</u> for TANF, food stamp and Medicaid (medical payments).	State records corresponding to social security number of child welfare case head. If available TANF child care payments will be included. Child support payments will also be included if available at the state level.
Administrative costs of transfer programs	Product of the average monthly administrative cost (TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid) and months case is active applied to each family.

Cost-Benefit Perspectives

Costs and benefits are not absolute categories. What is a cost to one person may be a benefit to another. Similarly, benefits to individuals in a particular social group may be costs from the perspectives of individuals in another group. In the case of social programs operated by the government and financed through taxes, two social groupings are particularly relevant. **Program participants** who benefit in various ways from the social program by receiving cash, goods, or services will have a different perspective on such program outcomes than non-participants. For example, a TANF payment to a program participant is clearly a benefit to the recipient, whereas non-participants are more likely to regard the same payment as a cost to them.

The combination of the perspectives of participants and non-participants constitutes the **society as a whole**. From the societal perspective, elements that are a cost to one group but a benefit to another group are balanced and are neutral. Costs and benefits not balanced in this way between the constituent groups in the analysis (participants and non-participants) remain real costs and benefits for society as a whole.

In addition, the perspective of **governmental entities** may be considered. For purposes of this analysis we propose two such levels of government: **state/local and federal**.

Cost-Benefit Accounting Table

The cost-benefit accounting table on the following page presents the general component categories to be considered in the analysis. These are shown as an expected benefit (+), cost (-), or as neither (0) from each of the three perspectives. As the table shows, specific components may be viewed quite differently from alternate perspectives.

The particular sign attached to the category is dependent on the way in which an item is stated. For example, *increased* earnings are obviously benefits. The method for determining the monetary values that will be substituted in the accounting table is dependent on the difference in values calculated for the experimental and control groups. This difference represents the net value *due to the introduction of the waiver*. It is represented as follows:

Experimental	-	Control	=	Mississippi Waiver
Mean Benefit	-	Mean Benefit	=	Benefit Difference
Mean Cost	-	Mean Cost	=	Cost Difference
				<hr/>
				Benefit Difference less Cost Difference equals Net Value

Cost-Benefit Accounting Table

Benefit or Cost Item	Participant and Society			Government	
	1. Participant	Non-Participant	2. Societal	3. State and Local	4. Federal
Increased costs associated with child welfare	0	-	-	-	-
Increased costs to other agencies	0	-	-	-	-
Increased family earnings and fringe benefits	+	0	+	0	0
Increased taxes	-	+	0	+	+
Reduced transfers	-	+	0	+	+
Reduced transfers administration	0	+	+	+	+

The benefit and cost differences are substituted in each cell in the accounting table. For example, if the average earnings of the experimental subjects was \$15,000 per year and was \$12,000 per year for control subjects, the difference of \$3,000 would be substituted in the table and multiplied by +1, yielding a difference of +\$3,000. Then the values would be summed for each cost-benefit perspective (each **bold** column of the table) to yield the net value from each perspective.

Sensitivity Analysis

In sensitivity analyses, benefit-cost calculations are adjusted to test whether assumptions about the *relative* values of various costs and benefits significantly affect the analysis. This is generally done by developing a weighting for each category, then calculating the net (present) value for both weighted and unweighted categories. As part of the final cost-benefit analysis, such weightings will be developed and applied.