

Colorado Model Office Project

INNOVATIVE INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

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INTRODUCTION

As part of the Model Office Demonstration and Evaluation, the three participating counties experimented with various interview formats with AFDC applicants. The goals of this intervention included:

Improving the recipient/applicant's (R/A) experience with the application process by reducing paperwork.

Improving the interviewer's experience by reducing time spent on no-show appointments and streamlining the application and location processes.

Speeding up the rate of determination of eligibility for AFDC.

Speeding up the non-cooperation process when it is initiated.

Increasing the involvement of applicants with the JOBS program.

Increasing the proportion of cases with significant child support actions.

This report describes the experimental interventions, documents client and staff reactions to the new approaches, and considers the degree to which the interventions were successful in meeting the goals outlined above.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTIONS

In Denver and Mesa Counties, the pool of interviewees was drawn from clients exposed to the regular AFDC orientation. Clients were randomly assigned to groups exposed to two different intake interview approaches. Clients in the "Same Day" group were separately interviewed by a specialist appointed by the IV-A agency and a specialist from the IV-D agency. Clients in the "Joint" interview group were interviewed by a single individual trained to conduct the interview and to collect the information needed for the IV-A, Food Stamps, IV-D and IV-F programs. In Archuleta County, all interviews were conducted using the "Same Day" format.

Figure 1 shows the average number of minutes the interviews lasted. In both Denver and Mesa Counties, the Joint interviews lasted an average of approximately 60 minutes. The Same Day interviews averaged 44 minutes in Denver, 42 minutes in Mesa County and 60 minutes in Archuleta.

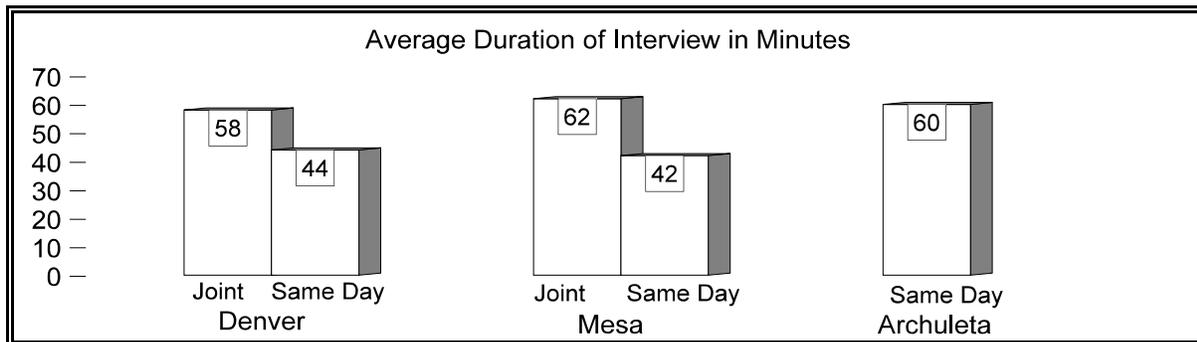


Figure 1

Following the interviews, interviewers and clients both completed a brief form (see Appendix A for a copy of the data collection forms completed by clients and workers). The instrument completed by workers indicated the information provided and missing for each case and the worker's assessment of the interview. Clients were asked a series of questions designed to measure their satisfaction with each interview approach. This survey was anonymous and was sealed and placed in a collection box following the interview. IV-A and IV-D workers and supervisors also participated in in-depth personal interviews to allow us better assess their opinions of each intervention.

Finally, approximately six months following the interview, we reviewed the computerized systems for child support and AFDC, ACSES and COIN respectively, for all cases and extracted information on the status of each case and the progress made with respect to child support (see Appendix B for the form used to extract ACSES information).

This report is based on information provided by 1,038 applicants for public assistance, forms completed by IV-A and/or IV-D workers regarding 878 applications for public assistance, and an identical number of cases (878) reviewed on COIN and ACSES six

months following the Same Day or Joint interview. The data collected for each intervention and site is summarized in Table 1.

	Denver		Mesa		Archuleta
	Joint	Same Day	Joint	Same Day	Same Day
Number of client surveys	453	230	162	178	15
Number of forms completed by workers	200	212	212	234	20
Six-month file reviews	200	212	212	234	20

IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES

Table 2 indicates that in Denver there were few differences in the backgrounds of those clients interviewed through each approach. In Denver, most clients in both groups had previously applied for AFDC, were in the ACSES system at the interview, and about 20-30 percent in each group had child support orders for all minor children at the time of the interview.

In Mesa County there were some differences between clients in the “Same Day” interview group and those in the “Joint” interview group. Most notably clients in the “Same Day” group generally had previously applied for AFDC, while most of those in the “Joint” interview group had not. Similarly, most clients in the “Same Day” group already had an ACSES case in effect while most of those in the “Joint” interview group did not.

	Denver		Mesa		Archuleta
	Joint	Same Day	Joint	Same Day	Same Day
Client had previously applied for AFDC	77%	69%	49%	76%	28%
Client was in ACSES at interview	73%	67%	27%	61%	54%
Client had child support order for all children	20%	28%	30%	35%	15%
N=	200	212	212	234	20

Table 3 summarizes the information that was available on the case following the completion of the interview. The patterns remain essentially the same when we control for the site as well as the type of interview. Generally, there were no significant differences between Joint and Same Day interviews with respect to the amount of data generated. At the close of each type of intake interview the same basic data was provided (supplied either by the client or computerized system), was unavailable, or was forthcoming from the client. The exception to this is the greater likelihood that court documents were available following the Joint interview.

Absent Parent's...	Joint Interview (N=412)			Same Day Interview (N=465)		
	Available	Not Available	Client will provide	Available	Not Available	Client will provide
Name	98%	1%	1%	96%	3%	1%
Social Security Number	67%	32%	2%	59%	40%	1%
Address	56%	40%	4%	54%	44%	2%
Employer	41%	56%	3%	34%	65%	1%
Docket number or court orders	75%	16%	9%	52%	45%	3%

Figure 2 presents a slightly different way of looking at the information available following each interview. In Denver, the Joint interview was somewhat less likely to result in the case being held up while additional information was gathered to allow a determination about

AFDC eligibility to be made. In Mesa there are no differences between the Joint interview and Same Day interview approach. The small percentage of cases needing additional information in Archuleta County may reflect the ability of the technicians to gather more complete data when they only handle a small number of cases.

OUTCOMES AT SIX MONTHS

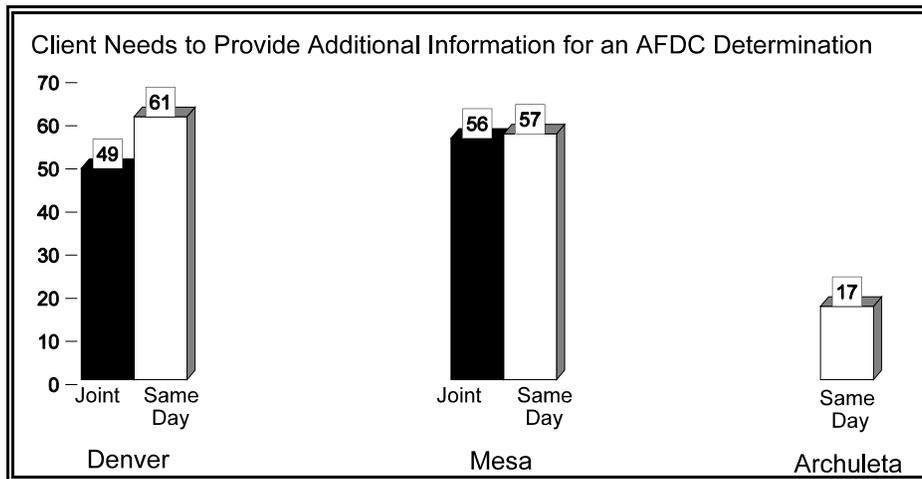


Figure 2

Six months after the interview there were some significant differences in child support actions for cases handled in a Joint interview format, principally in the areas of paternity and child support order establishment. For other outcomes, however, there was no evidence of differences by interview format. For example, we saw no consistent evidence that clients interviewed jointly were more likely to be in the JOBS program, although workers felt as though staff conducting the Joint interviews were more aggressive in promoting JOBS and making referrals. Nor were there differences in the percentage of clients interviewed through the Joint and Same Day approaches who were sanctioned when we conducted the six-month file review, although the slightly higher sanction rate in Denver for Joint interview participants may reflect more aggressive JOBS referrals and the selection of inappropriate participants.

	Denver		Mesa		Archuleta
	Joint	Same Day	Joint	Same Day	Same Day
Not selected for JOBS	21%	18%	12%	11%	25%
In job training/readiness/search	48%	46%	46%	51%	25%
In education program	11%	21%	24%	14%	0%
CWEP	1%	4%	1%	1%	0%
Other	19%	11%	17%	25%	50%
Evidence of JOBS sanction at 6 months	6%	1%	3%	2%	5%
Evidence of COIN sanction at 6 months	3%	1%	4%	2%	0%

Six months after the interview, we also saw little intra-site difference in the type of information available when we compared the two types of interview approaches. Regardless of the type of interview conducted, the ACSES system was likely to show the absent parent's name, date of birth and address, but less likely to show an employer's address (especially a verified employer address).

	Denver		Mesa		Archuleta
	Joint	Same Day	Joint	Same Day	Same Day
Absent Parent's...					
Name	96%	96%	99%	99%	100%
Date of birth	84%	83%	91%	90%	100%
Social Security Number	68%	67%	84%	80%	72%
Address	78%	70%	74%	71%	94%
Phone number	25%	27%	31%	34%	76%
Employer	39%	43%	42%	34%	46%
Employer, verified only	23%	29%	23%	21%	17%

Although the type of information generated in each interview format was identical, cases handled in the Joint interview approach were more apt to have paternity and child support establishment six months after the interview. In Denver, the percentage of cases with paternity established during the six months following the intake interview was 14 percent for Joint interview cases and 3 percent for Same Day interview cases. In Mesa County, paternity establishment patterns were virtually identical for the two groups of cases. However, child support order establishment was higher among cases processed with Joint interviews in both Denver and Mesa Counties. In Denver, the incidence of order establishment was 24 percent versus 7 percent. In Mesa, the incidence of child support orders was 38 percent versus 20 percent. Not surprisingly, FSR transitions, wage withholding, and other enforcement actions were also higher for cases handled using a Joint interview format. Table 6 summarizes these patterns.

It should be noted that Table 6 does *not* reflect the total percentage of cases in which various child support activities have occurred — it reflects only those actions taken in the six months immediately following the interview. Presumably these are the actions that are most attributable to the interview process. For example, paternity had been established in over half of all cases, but this typically occurred before the intake interview and could not be attributed to any leads or information gained through the interview process.

Table 6 also indicates the average number of days elapsing between the date of interview and the date on which AFDC was approved, if this occurred within six months of the intake interview. The table also indicates the average number of months elapsing between the interview and establishment of a child support order, if this fell within the six month time frame.

Contrary to the impressions of workers who conducted the Joint interviews and believe that they lead to faster AFDC approval processes and child support order establishments, the data do not support either expectations. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that while Joint interviewers may have completed AFDC applications on-line which then became active overnight, many cases may have been re-edited at a much slower pace to

reconcile any conflicting information given by the applicant and/or to close any active AFDC case the client had in another state or county. Still other cases may have been opened and closed several times over a six-month period of time to account for late filing of a monthly status report. Finally, some AFDC approvals may have been granted quickly on a provisional basis and then closed pending provision of further information. For these reasons, we are not totally confident of the results pertaining to the speed of actions under various interview formats. However, it does appear that within a six-month time frame AFDC approvals and child support orders were obtained at approximately the same pace regardless of interview format.

	Denver		Mesa		Archuleta
	Joint	Same Day	Joint	Same Day	Same Day
AFDC application approved	98%	90%	95%	97%	88%
Avg days from interview to AFDC approval	37.1	45.2	49.8	49.1	21.9
Exempted for good cause	14%	13%	10%	16%	0%
Paternity established	14%	3%	8%	5%	0%
Child support order established	24%	7%	38%	20%	44%
Avg days from interview to order	111	91.3	121.1	91.8	113.7
FSR transition	25%	7%	38%	21%	42%
Child support order modification	2%	2%	4%	2%	10%
Wage withholding initiated	13%	8%	20%	13%	25%
IRS intercept	6%	1%	1%	3%	0%
Other child support action	22%	8%	31%	21%	26%

* Excludes cases if this item has already occurred in the case prior to the interview

The final set of outcome measures has to do with the child support category six months post-interview. We compared Joint interview and Same Day interview cases that were new to the ACSES system at the interview, and then compared Joint and Same Day cases that were on the ACSES system at the interview. The results are summarized in Table 7.

The primary difference appears to be the fact that cases new to the ACSES system at intake were more likely to have been entered on the system if they were interviewed under the Joint format. This is probably due to the fact that data was entered directly on the computer during the Joint interview, leading to the more rapid initiation of an ACSES case. In most other respects Joint and Same Day interview clients look quite comparable on their ACSES category six months post-interview. It is unclear why 13 and 24 percent of new cases handled using Joint and Same Day interview formats, respectively, are shown as not being in ACSES. Presumably, clients in at least some of these cases were denied AFDC.

Table 7 Category Six Months After Interview by Interview Type				
	Not in ACSES at Intake		In ACSES at Intake	
	Joint Interview	Same Day	Joint Interview	Same Day
Not yet in ACSES	13%	24%		
Category 1	10%	6%	10%	10%
Category 2	3%	5%	9%	12%
Category 3	8%	7%	25%	26%
Category 4	13%	12%	3%	7%
Category 5	20%	16%	8%	5%
Category 6	8%	8%	16%	12%
Category 7	17%	19%	20%	18%
Category 9	11%	4%	10%	10%

WORKER REACTIONS

Table 8 indicates that workers at all sites and across all interview approaches generally were satisfied with the interview, felt the client was open and honest, and felt treated with courtesy and respect.

Percent who agree. . .	Denver			Mesa			Archuleta	
	Joint	Same Day IV-A	Same Day IV-D	Joint	Same Day IV-A	Same Day IV-D	Same Day IV-A	Same Day IV-D
Client was honest	82%	81%	90%	85%	96%	92%	95%	95%
Information was complete	78%	92%	79%	86%	76%	87%	80%	90%
I was treated with respect	93%	99%	95%	97%	98%	96%	100%	100%
I established a good rapport	84%	97%	92%	94%	93%	95%	100%	100%
I was satisfied with the interview	83%	97%	91%	85%	91%	93%	80%	90%

Personal interviews with workers generally confirm this finding. However, workers did have some ideas about the relative advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Some workers favored the more holistic feel of the Joint interview. One IV-D worker describes the change:

Before the Joint interview the process was not cohesive. Everyone just did their own work and recorded it into the client's case record and then forgot the client after that.

Many workers seemed to feel that the main advantage in conducting a Joint interview was in raising client's comfort level. Several worker comments from Denver and Mesa Counties demonstrate this viewpoint:

I think the clients might have been more comfortable with the Joint interview. They liked seeing just one person.

When clients come to us after a long interview with the IV-A Family Assessment worker they're tired, and still have to see the Medicaid worker after us. They're exhausted when they get to us.

Another thing I liked about the Joint interview is that a client could call and talk directly about both IV-A and IV-D issues. IV-D techs are not allowed to talk directly to clients. The clients just get a recorded message saying that

they have to submit their questions in writing to the agency. Clients get angry because they can't get access to their technicians.

I think that the Joint interview is good to the client since they only see one person. They might go away with a better understanding of what social services does for them than if they get passed from person to person.

However, workers were more divided about whether the client's comfort level influenced the quality or quantity of information she provided the agency. Some workers felt the Joint interview did aid the worker-client relationship and probably increased the amount of information given voluntarily and the client's commitment to the process. These workers noted that the Joint interview allowed them to move from topic to topic — leaving and coming back to issues when the client was better able to discuss them. One worker explains it this way:

With the Joint interview, if we thought the clients were “clamming up” about the AP, we could talk about something else and then come back to child support when they didn't expect it.

Other workers felt that the Joint interviewers were inevitably less expert in the policies and requirements of the full range of programs, and felt that the Joint interviews were therefore less comprehensive and complete. One IV-D worker said:

For my part, I can get more information from a client than someone who doesn't know about IV-D. They don't know what information is important to me and may not ask the right questions.

A IV-D administrator noted similar concerns:

...I discovered that when a person spends all their time interviewing, especially when there are so many areas to cover, they start interviewing on automatic pilot...The interviewer has to know the in's and out's of multiple programs that are very complicated and constantly changing.

Some of these workers noted other advantages to having specialized workers interview the clients:

Clients always give IV-A screeners more information than they give IV-D. They get money from IV-A but child support takes it. It also is more abstract. Child support may happen down the road, but AFDC is definite.

However, even those workers who generally preferred the Same Day approach to client interviewing did like the fact that Joint interviewers were able to enter information directly on-line. Some workers credited the on-line entry with reducing the error rate and speeding the eligibility determination. This may also help to explain why clients processed using the Joint interview format provided identical information as their Same Day counterparts, but experienced more child support order establishments, and in Denver, more paternity establishments.

CLIENT REACTIONS

Surveys completed by clients immediately following the interview reveal that regardless of the interview approach used, most clients were highly satisfied. Clients rarely reported the interview was too long, feeling mistreated, or expressing confusion about what would happen next. Most clients indicated that the application was easy to complete, felt the interviewer provided them with useful information, and felt the interviewer and agency wanted to help.

The patterns presented in Table 8 are virtually identical if we control for whether the client had previously applied for AFDC. In other words, both new and reapplying clients were satisfied with the interview process in which they took part. In designing the interview, it was anticipated that clients exposed to a Joint interview would be more interested in the JOBS program. In actual fact, we saw only modest evidence that this was the case. Approximately 60 percent of clients interviewed separately said they would like to be in JOBS, compared to 70 percent of the clients participating in Joint interviews.

	Denver			Mesa			Archuleta	
	Joint	Same Day AFDC Interview	Same Day Child Support Interview	Joint	Same Day AFDC Interview	Same Day Child Support Interview	Same Day AFDC Interview	Same Day Child Support Interview
I spent a long time waiting for someone to talk to me	5%	4%	2%	15%	17%	20%	3%	0%
My interview was too long	5%	3%	2%	6%	2%	3%	0%	0%
It was easy to complete the application	86%	77%	83%	88%	83%	87%	79%	87%
I was treated with respect	95%	93%	91%	94%	95%	95%	100%	100%
My interviewer provided helpful information	96%	95%	91%	96%	95%	94%	100%	100%
I know what to do or who to call	97%	91%	89%	97%	94%	91%	100%	100%
I feel social services wants to help me	96%	70%		98%	98%		100%	
I would like to be in JOBS	70%	62%		72%	58%		45%	
I was satisfied with the interview	97%	94%	93%	97%	95%	92%	100%	100%
	453	230	230	162	178	178	15	15

In the course of personal interviews, IV-A and IV-D workers were asked what type of feedback they had from clients about the two interview approaches. The only problem mentioned by clients with any frequency seemed to be the wait they sometimes encountered between the IV-A and IV-D interviews under the Same Day interview approach. As noted above, many workers also felt that clients liked having a single point of contact and would prefer the Joint interview approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Supervisors and technicians in the IV-A and IV-D agencies trying both Joint and Same Day approaches to client interviews had mixed reactions to the two processes. There was no clear consensus that the Joint interview did a better job of collecting the information needed to process the application. Clients were perceived to be pleased by having only a single interview, but workers did not agree about whether this translated into benefits for the agency with respect speed of case processing or quality of information gathered.

The one aspect of the Joint interview process that was uniformly preferred was the on-line entry of information during the interview. It was credited with reducing repetitive input and the possibility of errors and has been incorporated into the interview procedures at all three sites. It was also credited with speeding up certain child support actions like paternity and order establishment.

The case level data generated immediately following the interview and six-months later indicates no consistent benefits associated with one interview approach. Generally speaking, the cases with Joint interviews and Same Day but separate interviews look quite comparable with respect to the information provided, the actions taken, and the overall status of cases within a six-month time frame. The exception to this is the higher rate of child support order establishment among cases processed using the Joint interview format in both Denver and Mesa Counties. In Denver County, paternity establishment is also higher for Joint interview cases.

While interview formats are far from irrelevant, interviews with workers suggest that a number of other factors have had a far greater impact on the number of applicants for public assistance and their willingness to cooperate with social services agencies. Among the factors they cite are computer access to the state's birth certificate records on COVIS and welfare reform, which has vastly altered public expectations about benefits, work, and federal guarantees.