

Data Trends

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This News brief alerts you to the following recently released report: Lazear, K., & Worthington, J. (2002, February). *Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Family Impact Study*, and *Executive Summary*. Tampa: Research & Training Center for Children's Mental Health, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, University of South Florida.

In 1996, new federal law made significant changes to the process and criteria by which children with serious emotional disabilities and their families qualify for supplemental security income (SSI). Under these new criteria, more than 263,000 children were identified as being at risk of losing SSI benefits (including Medicaid). This study utilized qualitative research methodologies to study a sample of 40 families over time in an effort to understand the impact of this SSI policy change on families with children having serious emotional disabilities. Overall findings confirmed that the new policy had negative effects, including: the loss of SSI income and Medicaid benefits, and increased family stress and hardship due to the reapplication process and uncertainty surrounding the receipt of future benefits. In some cases parents made "heroic efforts" to keep their families intact. Nevertheless, "It is essential when changes are made to long-standing policies that there be clear communication about them, that there be ready access to knowledgeable people to assist the affected families, that procedures be easily understandable, and that decisions be made after thorough review and in an expedited manner" (p. 7, Executive Summary).

Copies of the SSI Report and/or Executive Summary may be obtained by contacting Katherine Lazear, Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health, Louis de la Parte Institute, 13301 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33612-3807. Phone: 813-974-6271, Fax: 813-974-7376.

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