

## Neighborhood Legal Service Program (LSP) FAQ

### 1) What did LSP lawyers do?

For the most part, LSP lawyers provided free representation in civil legal matters. The majority of the time, cases did not go beyond the initial consultation. This is in part due to the nature of problems the indigent faced. Often, the poor seek legal advice too late, when little can be done. In addition to individual representation, LSP lawyers worked on reform (“test”) cases which challenged laws that disproportionately negatively affected the poor. According to a survey of LSPs in the 1970s, lawyers typically spent 50 percent of their time on individual representation, 20 percent on law reform, and 30 percent on community outreach and other activities (Champagne 1974).

### 2) Who was eligible for free legal aid?

Individuals who were unable to afford a private attorney. Eligibility criteria varied by the grantee but typically reflected local cost of living, average fees of local private attorneys, and the scope of the local LSP. LSPs referred any revenue-generating civil case to a private attorney. For example, a divorce where assets are split would be referred to a private attorney.

### 3) Why do we focus on the LSP from 1965 to 1975?

Congress passed the Legal Service Corporation Act of 1974, and the LSP was replaced by the newly created Legal Service Corporation (LSC) in 1975.. We include grants associated with the LSP from 1965 to 1975 since the last grants from the old program were distributed in 1974 and 1975. In addition, the LSC Act of 1974 placed many restrictions on Legal Services Programs. The act restricted lawyers’ involvement in picketing, boycotting, striking, and rioting as well as time spent in public interest work (including class actions).

### 4) Are we saying LSP changed reproductive behavior?

No, the results are consistent with individuals changing their decision to enter into a marriage. We show that 1) marriage rates fell 2) general fertility rates fell and 3) the size of the family per AFDC caseload was unaffected.

### 5) Are we saying LSP made families worse off?

The assumption that families are worse off is typically based on limited resource allocation and time constraints. However, this does not account for the actual environment in which the family lives and/or the realization of the quality of the partner relative to the outside option. Therefore, the impact of LSP on well-being remains an ambiguous and open question for future work.

### 6) Will increasing funding to current legal services programs increase the number of single-parent households?

The research focuses on the introduction of legal services that reduced the price of divorce (for those eligible for services) and remove barriers for access to AFDC and other public goods (for everyone). It is hard to say what changes in the structure or funding of current legal service programs would do to family structure, in part due to the different policies and cultural norms of today.

**Champagne, Anthony.** (1974) “An Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the OEO Legal Service Program.” *Urban Affairs Review*, 9(4)