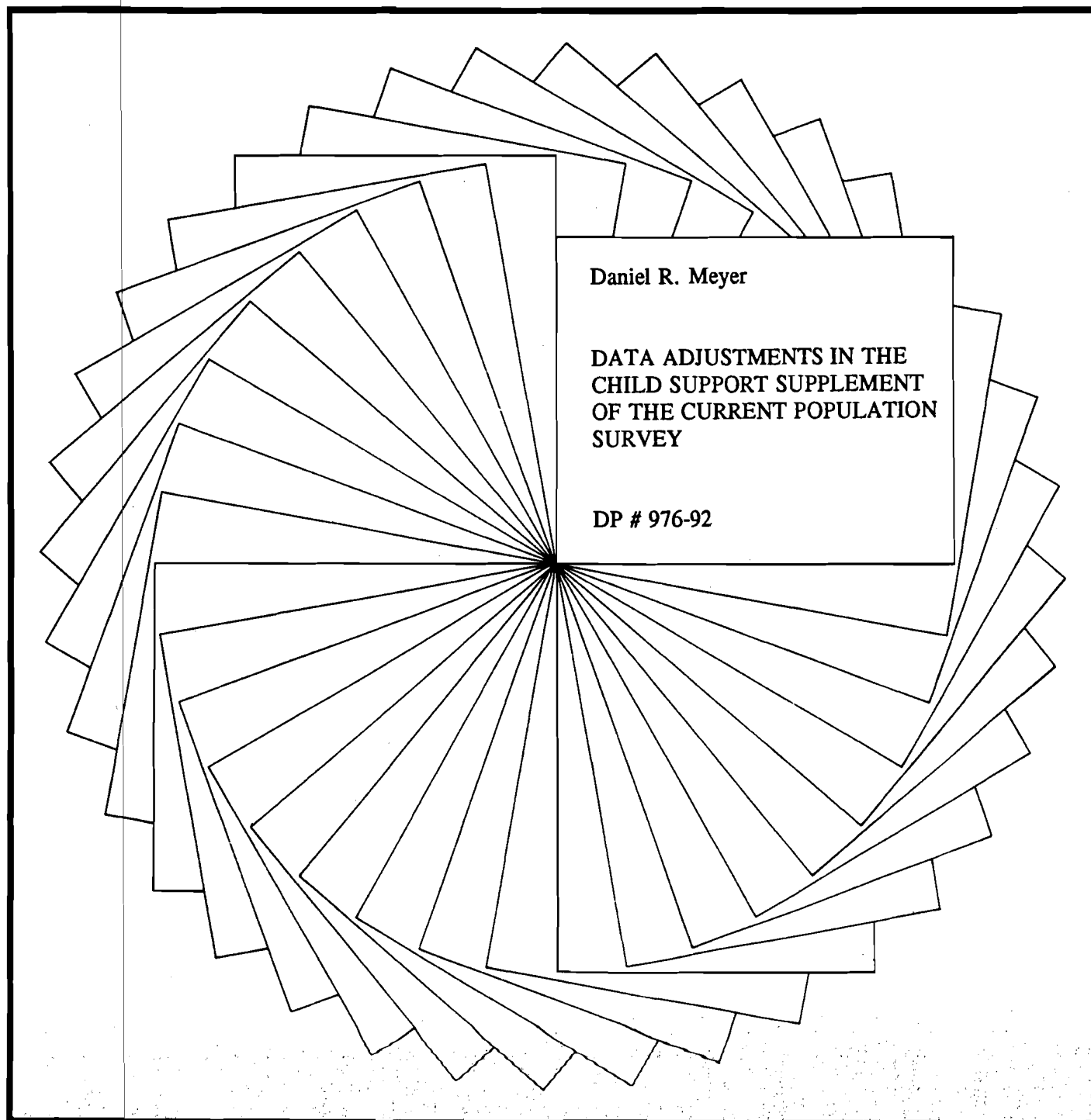


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Discussion Papers



**Data Adjustments in the Child Support Supplement
of the Current Population Survey**

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Abstract

Some adjustments were made in the 1988 Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS) in the amounts of child support that women reported they had received in 1987. This report describes the reasons for and the methods behind these adjustments. The author takes issue with the accuracy of the adjusted figures and cautions researchers, when comparing data from different years, to take into account the adjustments made in the CPS-CSS.

Data Adjustments in the Child Support Supplement of the Current Population Survey

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary national data source for examining child support has been the Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement (CPS-CSS).¹ It is unique for two reasons: first, it provides a much larger sample of child support-eligible women than other national surveys, and, second, data have been collected for six different years, 1978, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987, and 1989, allowing researchers and policymakers to identify trends over time.

Each time the survey is completed, the Census Bureau issues a report summarizing the findings (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981, 1985, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991). One of the important findings from the 1987 survey (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990) was that there was a very large increase in aggregate child support awards and payments.² This finding was potentially quite important because significant policy changes had occurred in 1984; if the policy changes were producing the increases in payments, this was significant. As some researchers tried to investigate this further through the CPS-CSS public-use tape, a problem was encountered trying to replicate the Bureau's published figures. The source of the discrepancy was identified through working with the Bureau: an adjustment the Bureau made to the amounts of child support received and due for about three hundred cases in the preparation of its report that was not made on the public-use data tape.

Because the conclusions drawn on the effects of a significant policy change may influence future policy, it is important to make sure that the effects seen are not merely an artifact of the adjustment. This report provides background information on the adjustment that was made, potential reasons for the adjustment, and the adjustment's effects. Section II describes the Current Population Survey; Section III lists a variety of reasons why an adjustment might be needed; detailed information on the adjustments made in the 1987 survey is presented in Section IV; limited information on the

adjustments made in prior years is in Section V; and Section VI concludes with some comments on research in the future.

II. THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY-CHILD SUPPORT SUPPLEMENT

The Current Population Survey asks a nationally representative sample a series of labor force questions every month. During March of each year, an extensive supplement gathers information about the income of everyone in the household. A variety of other supplements are asked in other months; a supplement focused on child support and alimony is now asked in April of even-numbered years. By matching the information on child support given in April to the income information provided in March, analysts can determine the economic situations of women eligible for child support and alimony.

The March supplement is quite lengthy and includes a series of questions about the income of everyone in the household, from a variety of sources. The questions can be answered by anyone in the household, although they are usually answered by the head or the head's spouse. All major sources of income are identified, including the amount of child support received. The March question about child support, supplement question number 70, follows questions about dividends, rental income, and educational assistance, and is worded, "During 1987 did anyone in this household receive any child support payments?" If the answer is "yes," the follow-up questions are "Who received these payments?" and "How much did __ receive in child support payments?" The question following asks about alimony, following the same structure ("During 1987 did anyone in this household receive any alimony payments?" "Who..." and "How much..."), and the next question asks about "other regular financial assistance from friends or relatives." A copy of the relevant pages from the March supplement is included as Appendix 1.

The April supplement on child support and alimony is not asked of everyone in the CPS sample. The child support questions are asked only of those households who have at least one member less than twenty-one years old. Further, the questions are asked only of the following groups:

- a) never-married women who have children living with them;
- b) divorced or separated women who have children living with them who "were fathered or adopted by [the] (most recently) divorced/separated husband"; and
- c) currently married or widowed women who have been divorced who have children living with them who "were fathered or adopted by [the] (most recently) divorced/separated husband."

The questions about child support are only asked of the woman herself, so another member of the household cannot answer for her. After questions that establish whether she is eligible for child support and questions about the children's father, visitation, and custody, the woman is asked: "Were child support payments agreed to or awarded?" If they were not, the woman is not asked about child support received, even though it is possible that some child support was paid without an agreement. If there was an agreement, the woman is asked the year of the agreement, whether the award has been changed, whether the award includes health insurance, whether payments were due in 1987, how the payments were to be received (directly versus through a court), reasons for no award, and regularity of payments. If payments were supposed to be received in 1987, the woman is then asked question 55: "In total, how much in child support payments were you SUPPOSED to received in 1987?" and question 56: "How much in child support payments did you ACTUALLY receive in 1987?" On the questionnaire, it is noted that the award question should be answered only about children from the most recent divorce or separation. (Multiple awards are most likely for women who have had children from more than one father, or for never-married women, who may have an award for each child even if they have the same father).

The data from the April supplement have been released in a public-use tape that includes both March and April data. A copy of the relevant page from the April supplement is included as Appendix 2.

III. WHY MIGHT THE AMOUNTS OF CHILD SUPPORT REPORTED IN MARCH AND APRIL DIFFER?

Information on the amount of child support individuals received in 1987 was asked in both March and April, and many individuals reported different amounts. Inconsistent responses are not unusual in surveys, and most publicly released datasets have been adjusted through a series of decision rules to correct for inconsistencies. In this section, some of the reasons why the amounts reported in March and April could differ are presented, most of which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 has two sections. The first panel lists four clear reasons why the amounts could differ, reflecting the fact that the questions were not identical and that the questions were asked of different groups.

First, the April question was asked only of those women thought to be eligible for child support, whereas the March question was asked of every family. Unfortunately, the screener used in April missed some women who were eligible for child support. For example, currently married women who had a child out of wedlock were not asked the April questions, nor were women who were currently divorced but did not have children from their most recent divorce. These women would not be asked the April questions, whereas in March they may have reported an amount of child support received.³

A second universe difference is that the April question was asked only of those women who were supposed to receive something in 1987, whereas the March question was asked of everyone.

TABLE 1
Differences between March and April Child Support Reports
in the Current Population Survey Supplements

Category	March	April	Effect of Difference
<u>A. Clear Reasons Why Reported Child Support Amounts Could Differ</u>			
1. Universe Difference 1 (some child support-eligible women not questioned in April)	Asked of every household	Asked only of a subset of women (for example, women currently married who had had a child out of wedlock were not included)	More women may report child support in March than April
2. Universe Difference 2 (only women with child support awards were questioned in April)	Asked of every household	Asked only of women with child support awards	More women may report child support in March than April
3. Universe Difference 3 (household composition changes)	Child support received for a child in the family during any part of 1987 would be included	Child support received for a child no longer in the family during April 1988 would not be included	More women may report child support in March than April, or amounts in March may be higher
4. Multiple child support awards	Question about total amount of child support	Question about child support from one child support award	Amounts in March may be higher
<u>B. Conjectures on Why Reported Child Support Amounts Could Differ</u>			
5. Arrearages	Context of total income may mean women report current amount of child support plus arrearages	Context of "what was supposed to be paid" may mean only current amount of child support is reported	Amounts in March may be higher
6. Property settlements	Context of total income may mean women report current amount of child support plus property settlements	Context of "what was supposed to be paid" may mean property settlements not included in amount of child support reported	Amounts in March may be higher
7. Respondent	Question answered by anyone in household	Question answered only by woman herself	April may be more accurate; no prediction on which could be larger
8. Context	Total income context may mean more accurate reporting of child support	Child support context may mean more accurate reporting of child support	Unclear
9. Other	Respondent fatigue may decrease accuracy	Report being further from the event may decrease accuracy	Unclear

Women who received financial assistance from the father but who did not have a written child support agreement could have reported a positive amount in March but zero child support in April.

A third universe difference is that women whose children turned twenty-one before April 1988 or who moved out of the house before April 1988 may report in March that child support was received during 1987, but these women would not be asked the child support questions in April.

Fourth, there should be a difference in the way the question was answered for women who have multiple child support awards. If a woman has children by more than one father, she should have been instructed to answer the April questions only about the children from the most recent union, whereas the March answer would cover all child support received. In addition, some never-married women could have an award for each child, even if all the children had the same father. In April, these women may have reported only one award (presumably for the youngest child) and the amount received from that award, whereas in March she may have reported the total amount received.

Whereas the differences noted in the first panel could cause the two responses to differ but still be accurate, several conjectures could be made that would cause the two responses to differ in their accuracy as well as their amounts. There is a body of research, recently summarized and applied to child support reports by Schaeffer (1991), that identifies the following factors associated with errors in surveys: the complexity of the event in question, its distinctness from similar events, its salience, and the amount of time since the event occurred. The context in which questions are asked can also affect accuracy. In addition, random reporting errors, interviewer transcription errors, and coding errors may also occur.

The second panel of Table 1 lists five conjectures on why the amounts could differ.

First, women who received some child support in 1987 that was due in a prior year (arrearages) may have reported child support amounts differently in March and April. Because the

April question is in the context of what a woman was "supposed to receive," a woman may not have included arrearages in April but could have reported them in March, when the context was total income.⁴

Second, a woman who received a property settlement may have reported it differently. Because the April question is in the context of her child support award, she may have included only the amount of her regular award. In March, however, since the context is total income amounts, she may have added the amount of any property settlement received to the amount of regular child support received and reported them as a single amount. Furthermore, there may also be other periodic payments from the absent father (e.g., regular tuition payments or part of child care expenses) that are not included in the award; these may have been included in March but not in April.

Third, the two reports may have been provided by different people. The March questions could be answered by anyone in the household, whereas the April question was specifically directed to the woman herself, presumably leading to greater accuracy in April. (For convenience in this paper I will use terms like "the amount she reported in March" rather than the more accurate "the amount that was reported for her in March.") Fourth, the difference in context may affect accuracy. The April report may be more accurate because the respondent has been thinking about child support issues. On the other hand, the March report may be more accurate because it is asked in the context of income questions, so the respondent should have been thinking about income amounts in 1987 and may have even referred to annual income records. (Conversely, some respondents who file income taxes in April may have more accurate records in April than in March.) Finally, because March is closer to the time period in question (calendar year 1987), it may be more accurate. On the other hand, respondent fatigue at the end of the extensive March survey may make March less accurate.

Looking at Table 1, the first six reasons lead to clear predictions about the direction of the discrepancy. The first two reasons for a discrepancy both lead to more women reporting child

support in March than April. The next four could all lead to positive amounts in both months but higher reports in March than April. Reason seven predicts more accurate amounts in April, and reasons eight and nine offer unclear predictions.

IV. THE ADJUSTMENT TO THE 1987 DATA

Adjusting the Amount Received

The adjustment made in the 1987 data to the amount received is as follows:

Women who reported positive amounts in one interview but zero in the other did not have their reported amounts adjusted.

Women who reported positive amounts in both interviews and reported more in April than in March did not have their reported amounts adjusted.⁵

Women who reported positive amounts in both interviews and reported more in March than in April had the amount reported in April adjusted to equal the (larger) amount reported in March.

Adjusting the Amount Due

Changing the amount that was received has an obvious effect on the relationship between the amount received and the amount due. If no adjustments were made to the amount due, and if the amount received was increased, then some women could show much larger amounts received than were due. For this reason, the Census Bureau also adjusted the amount due in the following way:

Adjustments were made only to the reports of women who had adjustments to the amount received, that is, to women who reported higher amounts of child support in March than April.

The dollar adjustment to the amount due was the same as the dollar adjustment to the amount received.

A series of examples will show these adjustments:

Woman A reported receiving \$2000 in March and reported in April that she was due \$1000 and received \$1000. Because March was greater than April, the amount received in April was changed to be \$2000. Because the amount received was changed by \$1000, the amount due was also changed by \$1000, to equal \$2000.

Woman B reported receiving \$1000 in March and reported in April that she was due \$2000 and received \$2000. Because the April amount was greater than March's, no adjustment was made.

Woman C reported receiving \$6000 in March and reported in April that she was due \$3000 and received \$1500. Because the March amount was greater than April's, the April amount received was adjusted to be \$6000. Because an adjustment of \$4500 (from \$6000 - \$1500) was made to the amount received, the amount due was also increased by \$4500, to \$7500.

The level of compliance with child support awards could be affected by this adjustment, depending on the measure of compliance. Two measures of compliance are typically used, the gap between the amount received and the amount due, and the ratio of the amount received to the amount due.

Woman A illustrates that when the full amount is being received, the adjustment has no effect on either of the compliance measures: both the unadjusted and the adjusted figures show the same gap (\$0) and the same ratio (1.0).

However, when the full amount is not being received (illustrated by woman C) the adjustment mechanism could have a large effect on one of the compliance measures. The adjustment selected by the Bureau keeps the gap between what is received and owed constant: as reported, the gap between the amount due and the amount received was \$3000 - \$1500, or \$1500; after the adjustment, the gap is \$7500 - \$6000, still \$1500. However, this method changes the ratio of what is received to what is due: the ratio as reported was \$1500/\$3000, or 0.5; the ratio as adjusted was \$6000/\$7500, or 0.8. Thus the received/due ratios were systematically increased for any case in which the full amount was not received. The extent to which this is a problem depends on several things, such as whether the gap or the ratio is the more appropriate measure of compliance and the degree of the adjustment (which depends on the number of cases adjusted, the number of these that were not receiving the full amount, and the magnitude of the individual adjustments). Information on the magnitude of the adjustments is presented below.

The Cases that Were Adjusted

In the 1987 March-April matched data, the adjustment affected 298 cases out of the 1685 that reported a positive amount of child support received in the April interview.

If we examine only the 298 cases that were adjusted, the mean amount of child support received changes from an unadjusted amount of \$1909 to an adjusted amount of \$3200, an increase of \$1291. (In this report, all mean amounts are weighted using the person weights.) The median amount of increase is \$600, and the mode is \$100. About 30 percent of the cases have adjusted amounts that are more than double the unadjusted amounts. Because of the method for adjusting award amounts, the mean award amount also increases by \$1291, from \$2440 unadjusted to \$3731 adjusted, and the average percent received increases from .772 unadjusted to .831 adjusted.

Table 2 compares the level of the adjustment with the level of child support that was reported in April. The first row shows the number of cases adjusted for each of several categories of reported child support amounts. It shows that about one-fourth of the adjusted cases (78/298) reported no more than \$600 of child support in April, a little less than one-half reported between \$601 and \$2400, and about one-fourth reported more than \$2400. Those with small amounts were more likely to be adjusted, as shown in the third row. In a little more than half of the cases (155), the adjustment in the amount received was small (\$600 or less), and in only 5 percent of the cases (17) were the adjustments for more than \$3600. Larger adjustments, however, were not limited to cases that already reported a substantial amount of child support: 22 of the 38 cases with adjustments over \$2400 reported less or no more than \$2400 in April.

To gain a clearer picture of the types of cases in which large adjustments were made, the fifteen cases with the largest adjustments were examined. The largest adjustment was \$24,000 for a woman who reported receiving \$6000 in April and \$30,000 in March. Two other adjustments were

TABLE 2

Unweighted Number of Cases Adjusted in the April 1988 CPS-CSS

	Unadjusted Amount of Child Support Received in 1987 (as Reported in April 1988 CPS-CSS)						Total
	\$1-\$600	\$601-\$1200	\$1201-\$2400	\$2401-\$3600	\$3601-\$4800	\$4801+	
Number of adjusted cases	78	54	90	42	19	15	298
Number of total cases	348	293	470	284	113	177	1685
(Percentage adjusted)	(22)	(18)	(19)	(15)	(17)	(8)	(18)
Number of cases with adjustments in the amounts received of:							
\$1-\$600	55	29	41	17	10	3	155
\$601-\$1200	7	9	18	9	2	5	50
\$1201-\$2400	11	10	20	8	4	2	55
\$2401-\$3600	3	4	4	7	2	1	21
\$3601-\$4800	1	0	2	1	0	0	4
\$4801+	1	2	5	0	1	4	13

Source: 1988 Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement.

Note: Sample is all women who reported a positive amount of child support received in the April 1988 CPS-CSS. Cases are unweighted.

for more than \$10,000, and an additional ten were between \$5000 and \$10,000. The seven largest adjustments were to cases that reported 100 percent compliance, and thus their amount received/amount due ratio did not change as a result of the adjustment. The case that showed the largest increase in the percentage received reported in April that she received \$126 out of the \$505 that was due, or 25 percent. In March, she reported receiving \$5200, so the adjusted amount received is \$5200, the adjusted amount due is \$5579 (from 505 + (5200-126)), and the adjusted percentage received is 93.2 percent.

Determining if the amounts reported in March and April are accurate or if only one or neither is accurate is of course impossible. In Section III, four reasons why positive March amounts might be higher than those reported in April were discussed. The first, household composition changes, is almost impossible to discover in these data. Some crude measures of the extent of the other three situations are possible. One possible reason for a discrepancy is that some women may have more than one child support award, a situation that may be more common for women who have never been married. In this group of 298 women, only 12 had never been married. Another possible reason for a discrepancy is that March may include arrears and April may not: this is impossible to detect in the data. If a woman went to court to get her child support amount changed in 1987, this may be an indication that arrearages had accumulated. In our sample of 298 women, 35 reported that the amount of their support orders were changed in 1987; whether these amounts were changed by the courts to account for arrearages we cannot know. A final idea for discrepancies is that March amounts may include property settlements but April amounts may not: 7 of the 298 cases received original awards in 1986 or 1987 and received a one-time cash property settlement. An additional 58 cases had original awards in 1986 or 1987 and, although they did not receive a one-time cash settlement, received some type of property settlement, which may have been periodic cash payments.

In all there were 109 women out of the 298 who met at least one criterion for a possibly valid discrepancy.

The Effects of the Adjustment

The adjustment has the following effects on the entire sample of women eligible for child support (n = 4280): the mean amount received increases by \$88, from \$952 unadjusted to \$1040 adjusted, and the mean amount due increases from \$1433 unadjusted to \$1521 adjusted.

For women who had a positive amount due in 1987, the increase is of course greater: the mean amount received increases by \$174, from \$1885 to \$2059; the mean amount due increases from \$2837 to \$3011; and the mean percentage received increases from .626 to .634.⁶

Table 3 shows the way the adjustment affected the mean amount received, the mean amount due, and the percentage received for a variety of subgroups.

The adjustment in the amount received is higher in percentage terms for divorced and separated women than remarried or never-married women, as shown in column 3. Adjustments are higher for whites than blacks, for those aged 30-39 than for other ages, and for those with 12 years of education.

The adjustment does not change the ordering of the various subgroups in terms of the amount received. It does, however, change the ordering of marital status by the amount due, shown in columns 4 and 5. Remarried women show slightly higher awards than separated women in the unadjusted figures, but the adjusted figures show that the average award of a separated woman is \$100 higher than that of a remarried woman.

Even though the adjustment systematically increases the percentage received, the mean percentage received increases by no more than one percentage point for any subgroup considered, shown in columns 6 and 7. This lack of a large adjustment is not surprising since 157 of the 298

TABLE 3
Effects of Adjustments in the April 1988 CPS-CSS on the Reported Amounts of Child Support
Received and Due in 1987

	Mean Amount Received			Mean Amount Due			Amount Received as a Percentage of Amount Due, Based on:		N
	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Percentage Change	Unadjusted	Adjusted	Percentage Change	Unadjusted Figures	Adjusted Figures	
Women due child support in 1987	\$1885	\$2059	9.2	\$2838	\$3011	6.1	62.6	63.4	2216
Marital status:									
Remarried	1740	1843	5.9	2818	2921	3.7	61.5	62.0	777
Divorced	2142	2395	11.8	3033	3286	8.3	65.6	66.6	981
Separated	1816	2027	11.6	2810	3021	7.5	58.5	58.8	274
Never married	1319	1334	1.1	2023	2038	0.7	59.2	59.7	184
Race:									
White	2058	2259	9.8	3018	3219	6.7	64.2	65.0	1826
Black	1048	1092	4.2	1931	1975	2.3	54.8	55.3	321
Other	1823	1957	7.4	2951	3085	4.5	63.8	64.5	69
Age:									
14-17	272	272	0.0	588	588	0.0	57.2	57.2	7
18-29	1379	1485	7.7	2382	2488	4.5	57.2	57.8	541
30-39	1828	2056	12.5	2741	2969	8.3	62.2	63.1	1085
40+	2480	2618	5.6	3465	3603	4.0	68.7	69.1	583
Education:									
Less than 12 years	1228	1292	5.2	2301	2365	2.8	53.6	54.2	378
12 years	1721	1904	10.6	2740	2922	6.6	61.2	61.9	1061
13-15 years	1950	2130	9.2	2757	2937	6.5	64.9	65.8	507
16+ years	3378	3666	8.5	4167	4456	6.9	77.2	77.9	270

Source: 1988 Current Population Survey-Child Support Supplement.

Note: Sample is all women due child support in 1987, according to the April 1988 CPS-CSS. Mean amounts are weighted.

cases adjusted were receiving all that they were due and thus did not have a change in the percentage received.

Evaluating the Reasons for the Adjustment

As discussed in Section III, there are four basic reasons why positive amounts may be reported in both March and April but the amount reported in March may be greater--some children leaving the household, multiple awards reported in March but not April, arrearages reported in March but not April, and property settlements reported in March but not April. Differences in the universe (see Table 1) may have caused some women to report positive amounts in March but zero child support (or not have been asked) in April. Reporting errors could lead to larger amounts in either interview: March may be more accurate than April because it is focused on income and because it is closer to the year in question. In contrast, April may be more accurate because it is focused on child support and because it is asked of the woman herself.

The rationale for adjusting the April amounts when they are lower than the March amounts could therefore rest on either a belief that April amounts are a valid underestimate of total amounts received for the reasons discussed above or that March is more accurate.

If both amounts are accurate, but the April amount only reflects part of the total, then the number of women for whom higher amounts were reported in March should be greater than the number reporting higher amounts in April. Table 4 compares the amount reported in March to the amount reported in April for the cases typically used in analyses of child support. It shows that the women who reported receiving child support in both March and April can be divided into three almost equal groups: those who reported more in March ($N=298$), those who reported more in April ($n=301$), and those who reported exactly the same amount ($n=307$). Although we have reasons to believe that amounts reported in March may be higher than amounts reported in April, the data in Table 4 do not show this. In fact, for women who reported positive amounts in both interviews, the

TABLE 4

Distribution of Women by Their Reports of Child Support in March and April 1988

	March > \$0 April > \$0 March > April (Adjustment Done)	March > \$0 April > \$0 March < April (Adjustment Not Done)	March > \$0 April > \$0 March = April (Adjustment Not Needed)	March > \$0 April = \$0 (Adjustment Not Done)	March = \$0 April > \$0 (Adjustment Not Done)	March = \$0 April = \$0 (Adjustment Not Needed)
Unweighted number of cases	298	301	307	185	779	2410
Mean amount in March	\$3200	\$1872	\$2774	\$1903	\$0	\$0
Mean amount in April	\$1909	\$3272	\$2774	\$0	\$2289	\$0
Mean difference between March and April	\$1291	\$1400	\$0	\$1903	\$2289	\$0
Median difference between March and April	\$600	\$500	\$0	\$1200	\$1500	\$0

Source: 1988 Current Population Survey, March and April supplements.

Note: Sample is all women asked the CPS-CSS April supplement questions in 1988. Mean amounts are weighted.

mean amount reported in March is slightly less than the mean amount reported in April (result not on table). In addition, of the women asked about child support in both interviews who report a positive amount in only one interview, there are many more women who report child support in April (n=779) than March (n=185), and those who reported only in April report more than those who reported only in March (a mean of \$2289 compared to \$1903). (Appendix Table 1 provides information on the mean differences between March and April reports by subgroups).

Section III also reports that there may be differences in the universe of the women who were asked the amount of child support received. Some women who may have received child support were not asked the April supplement questions, including currently married women who had previously had a child out of wedlock, women who have been divorced twice but who did not have children with the husband involved in the second divorce, and women with no more children under twenty-one in the home as of April 1988. There are 386 women who report child support in March but who are not asked the supplement questions, and these women report a mean child support amount of \$2894, with a range of \$20 to \$35,000. (Since these women were not asked about child support in April, they are not included in Table 4.)

Another type of universe difference is the universe for the specific question about payments. Women were asked about child support in April only when they had an agreement from the last divorce or separation. Because these women were asked most of the April supplement questions, they are included in the table. The types of women in this category include, for example, those who did not have a formal child support award but still received payments and those who had children from more than one father and who did not have an award from the last relationship. Of the 185 women that reported child support in March but not in April (even though they were asked the April supplement questions), 101 reported that they had never had a child support agreement from the last divorce or separation, 22 reported that they had had an agreement but they were not "supposed to

[have received] any child support payments" in 1987, and 62 reported that they had an agreement in 1987 but received nothing.

It is possible that differences in the amounts reported in March and April are due to one being accurate and the other being not. One crude proxy for the level of accuracy may be educational level.⁷ This proxy may be appropriate since Appendix Table 2 shows that a higher proportion of women with college degrees than of any other subgroup reported identical amounts in March and April. Among women with high educations who reported positive amounts in both March and April, the percentage reporting a higher amount in March was about the same as the percentage reporting a higher amount in April, suggesting that among those who report positive amounts, there is no systematic underreporting. But of those reporting child support in one interview only, more than five times as many reported the positive amount in April.

In short, the data do not seem to support a contention that March amounts are more accurate when they are higher. The data for higher-educated women, who may have the most accurate reports, suggests that, if anything, there is an underreporting of child support reciprocity in March. In addition, the fact that those who report positive amounts in both March and April can be divided into three almost-equal groups--those who report more in March, those who report more in April, and those who report the same amount--suggests that either the differences are random or the opposing effects offset each other. There seems to be no reason to accept March amounts as more accurate only when they are higher.

V. THE ADJUSTMENTS IN PRIOR YEARS

The reasons for discrepancies between the March and April reports that were summarized in Section III apply to each year the Child Support Supplement was conducted, not just data from 1987.

The Census Bureau has indicated that the two adjustments made to the 1987 data--increasing a nonzero amount of child support reported in April when it is less than the amount reported in March and changing the amount due accordingly--parallel the adjustments made in prior years.

Unfortunately, this is difficult for them or for other analysts to discern. Reconstructing what the Census Bureau did from the adjusted tapes before 1987 is also not possible, because:

- 1) the public-use March-April match tapes that were released do not contain a separate field for the amount of child support reported in March, only the amount of child support plus alimony;
- 2) if the adjustment in earlier years is the same as in 1987, the public-use March-April match tapes do not contain the original amount reported in April, but the maximum of the amounts reported in March and April, so there is no way to reconstruct the original April amount.⁸

A final type of adjustment that was made in the past was not made to the 1987 data. In prior years when the amount of child support (or alimony) reported in March was less than that reported in April, the March amount was changed, and total income was then adjusted upward to reflect this increase. Poverty status was based on this new, adjusted amount of income. This change was acknowledged in the Census report (1990).⁹

The public-use tape from the 1988 CPS-CSS (containing income information from 1987) contains the unadjusted data. Unfortunately, since the March response to the amount of child support received was combined with the amount of alimony received, reconstructing the adjusted numbers with the tape only is not possible. Therefore the Census Bureau has released supplemental data that contains the unadjusted March child support amount. When this variable is merged with the other data, mimicking the Census Bureau's adjustment is possible.

When the 1990 public-use tape (containing income information from 1989) is released, it will include both the adjusted and unadjusted amounts, so that users will be able to choose the variable they want. The report from the 1989 data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991) continues to report the adjusted totals and does not acknowledge the adjustment.

VI. RESEARCH IN THE FUTURE

Information on child support in the most recent year can continue to be reported and analyzed without difficulty. Analysts can choose between using unadjusted or adjusted amounts, although I believe this review offers clear grounds for questioning the accuracy of the adjusted figures and whether they should continue to be used at all. The decision, of course, depends on the research question being analyzed.

Time trends are more difficult. While it is critical for policy purposes to have accurate time trends, it may no longer be possible with these data. For example, the report on the 1987 data showed a 32 percent increase between 1985 and 1987 in the aggregate amount of child support due and a 25 percent increase in the amount received. If the adjustment that was done to the 1987 data was the same adjustment done to the 1985 data, a significant increase in child support occurred in these two years, a clear signal that recent child support reforms are having an effect. If, however, the adjustment was different, the two amounts may not be comparable, and the supplement provides no information on the effects of child support reforms.

Time trend data thus have substantial policy implications. If the adjustment done to the 1987 data was done consistently in the other years, an adjusted time trend is possible by continuing to do the adjustment. However, if the rationale for the adjustment is flawed, continuing to repeat the adjustment merely for the sake of consistency across years seems to be a mistake. There is ample precedent for adjustments to time series data (the CPS revises its sampling frame and weights after each decennial census, for example) as long as analysts understand and report the potential lack of comparability between the early years of the series and the later years. In addition, if the reasons for discrepancies between March and April have been changing over time (more women with multiple

awards, for example), then the number of cases adjusted may have been changing over time as well, and a consistent time trend may not be possible.

The potential lack of comparability across years also has implications for research. Pooling the information between various years, as has been done in some research, may be defensible only by pooling the years before 1987 and the years 1987 and later separately. Again, the feasibility of pooling depends in large part on the research question being asked.

The CPS-CSS is unique in providing a wealth of information on a large, nationally representative sample of women eligible for child support, and improvements planned for the 1992 supplement will make it even stronger. This data source can continue to provide rich information on child support and alimony, but users should be aware of prior adjustments and their effects.

CPS-665—CONTINUED

NAME (Optional)					
LINE NUMBER (Item 78A)	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6	
80A. During 1987 did anyone in this household attend school beyond the high school level including a college, university or other schools (including vocational, business, or trade schools)? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> (Go to next page)					
80B. Did anyone receive any educational assistance for tuition, fees, books, or living expenses during 1987? (Exclude loans or assistance from household members or VA educational benefits.) Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/> (Go to next page)					
80C. Which member received assistance? (Anyone else?) Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>					
(Complete 69D to 69H for each person with "Yes" in 69C)					
80D. What type of assistance did ... receive? (Any other assistance?)					
1. Pell Grant	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	
2. Some other government assistance	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input checked="" type="radio"/>	
3. Scholarships, grants, etc.	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	
4. Other assistance (employers, friends, etc.) (Exclude assistance from household members)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	
80E. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM Pell Grant marked "YES" in 69D? Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69F) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 69H) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69F) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 69H) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69F) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 69H) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69F) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 69H)					
80F. How much did ... receive in Pell Grants during 1987?					
\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9	\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9	\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9
80G. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM Sources other than Pell Grant marked "YES" in 69D? Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69H) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to next person marked "Yes" in 69C or Go to next page) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69H) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to next person marked "Yes" in 69C or Go to next page) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69H) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to next person marked "Yes" in 69C or Go to next page) Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 69H) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to next person marked "Yes" in 69C or Go to next page)					
80H. How much did ... receive in (other) educational assistance during 1987? (Go to 69D for next person marked "Yes" in 69C or Go to next page)					
\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9	\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9	\$ <input type="text"/>	0 0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9 9
NOTES:					

CPS-665—CONTINUED

NAME (Optional)	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6
70. DURING 1987 DID ANYONE IN THIS HOUSEHOLD RECEIVE: 70A. Any child support payments? Yes <input type="radio"/> 7 <input checked="" type="radio"/> 8 No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 71A)				
70B. Who received these payments? (Anyone else?) (Complete 70C for each person with a "Yes" in 70B) 70C. How much did ... receive in child support payments? (Ask 70C for next person with "Yes" in 70B or ask 71)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999
71. DURING 1987 DID ANYONE IN THIS HOUSEHOLD RECEIVE: 71A. Any alimony payments? Yes <input type="radio"/> 7 <input checked="" type="radio"/> 8 No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 72A)				
71B. Who received these payments during 1987? (Anyone else?) (Complete 71C for each person with a "Yes" in 71B) 71C. How much did ... receive in alimony payments during 1987? (Ask 71C for next person with "Yes" in 71B or ask 72)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999
72. DURING 1987 DID ANYONE IN THIS HOUSEHOLD RECEIVE: 72A. Any (other) regular financial assistance from friends or relatives not living in this household? (Do not include loans) Yes <input type="radio"/> 7 <input checked="" type="radio"/> 8 No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 73)				
72B. Who received this assistance? (Anyone else?) (Ask 72C for each person with a "Yes" in 72B) 72C. How much assistance did ... receive during 1987?	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999
73. Sometimes people forget about small amounts of income, or income received for only part of the year. Did anyone in this household receive income from: 73A. Hobbies, home businesses, farms, or business interests not already covered? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> (If "Yes" marked in any, ask 73B, otherwise go to next page) Any unemployment compensation, welfare, or any other money income not already covered? Yes <input type="radio"/> <input checked="" type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999
73B. Who received this income? (Anyone else?) (Complete 73C & 73D for each person with a "Yes" in 73B) 73C. What was the source of this income? (Specify) 73D. How much did ... receive (Altogether) in 1987? (Go to 73C for next person with "Yes" in 73B or go to next page)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> \$ <input type="text"/> 00000 11111 22222 33333 44444 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 55555 66666 77777 88888 99999

CPS-665—CONTINUED

NAME (Optional)	Page 3	Page 4	Page 5	Page 6
LINE NUMBER (Item 18A)				
74. There are several government programs which provide medical care or help pay medical bills. During 1987 was anyone in this household covered by:				
74A. Medicare (for the disabled and elderly)? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 74C)				
74B. Who was that? (Anyone else?)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
74C. Medicaid (for the needy)? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 74E)				
74D. Who was that? (Anyone else?)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
74E. CHAMPUS, VA, or military health care? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 75A)				
74F. Who was that? (Anyone else?)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
75A. (Other than Medicare, Medicaid, or military health insurance) during 1987, was anyone in this household covered by a health insurance plan? Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 76)				
75B. Who was that? (Anyone else?)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
(Complete 75C-F for each person with a "Yes" in 75B) 75C. Was ...'s health insurance coverage from a plan in ...'s own name?	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75D) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with a "Yes" in 75B or Skip to 76)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75D) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with a "Yes" in 75B or Skip to 76)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75D) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with a "Yes" in 75B or Skip to 76)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75D) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with a "Yes" in 75B or Skip to 76)
75D. Was this health insurance plan offered through ...'s current or former employer or union?	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75E) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 75F)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75E) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 75F)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75E) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 75F)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 75E) No <input type="radio"/> (Skip to 75F)
75E. Did ...'s employer or union pay for all, part, or none of the cost of this plan?	All <input type="radio"/> Part <input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/>	All <input type="radio"/> Part <input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/>	All <input type="radio"/> Part <input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/>	All <input type="radio"/> Part <input type="radio"/> None <input type="radio"/>
75F. What other persons were covered by this health insurance plan? (Mark all that apply) (Go to 75C for next person with "Yes" in 75B or go to 76)	Spouse <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) in household <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) not in the household <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/>	Spouse <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) in household <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) not in the household <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/>	Spouse <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) in household <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) not in the household <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/>	Spouse <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) in household <input type="radio"/> Child(ren) not in the household <input type="radio"/> Other <input type="radio"/> No one <input type="radio"/>
76. Interviewer Check Item Who worked last year? (Yes in 29A or 29B)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
(Complete 76A-76B for each person with "Yes" in 76) 76A. Other than Social Security did the (any) employer or union that ... worked for in 1987 have a pension or other type of retirement plan for any of its employees?	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 76B) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with "Yes" in 76 or Skip to 77 on page 1)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 76B) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with "Yes" in 76 or Skip to 77 on page 1)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 76B) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with "Yes" in 76 or Skip to 77 on page 1)	Yes <input type="radio"/> (Ask 76B) No <input type="radio"/> (Go to next person with a "Yes" in 76 or Skip to 77 on page 1)
76B. Was ... included in that plan? (Go to 76A for next person with "Yes" in item 76 or Skip to item 77 on Page 1)	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>	Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/>
NOTES:				

18A. LINE NO.	18B. RELATIONSHIP TO REFERENCE PERSON	18C. PAR'S LINE NO.	18D. AGE	18E. MARITAL STATUS	18F. SPOUSE'S LINE NUMBER	18G1. SEX	18G2. VETERAN STATUS	18H. HIGHEST GRADE ATTENDED	18I. GRADE COMPLETED	18J. RACE	18K. ORIGIN
	Ref. Person WITH rel. in H'ld. 01					Male 1				White. I	
	Ref. person with NO rel. in H'ld. 02			Married - spouse present		Female 2				Black. 2	
	Husband 03									Amer. Indian, Alut. Eskimo	
	Wife 04			Married - spouse absent (Exclude separated)			Veteran 7			Asian or Pacific Isl. 3	
	Natural/Adopted Child 05			Widowed			Vietnam Era			Other. 5	
	Step Child 06			Divorced			Korean War				
	Grandchild 07			Separated			World War II				
	Parent 08			Never married			World War I				
	Brother/Sister 09						Other Service				
	Other Rel. of Ref. Person 10						Nonveteran				
	Foster Child 11										
	Non-rel. of Ref. Person WITH OWN rel. in H'ld. 12										
	Partner/Roommate Non-rel. of Ref. Person (other than partner/roommate) with NO OWN rel. in H'ld. 14										

<p>26. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM (Transcribe from control card item 18)</p> <p>This person is 16-24 years of age <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 26A)</p> <p>All others <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 26C)</p>	<p>33. When did ...'s (most recent) divorce/separation take place? (Month)</p> <p>J F M A M J J A S O N D</p> <p>(Year 19 -)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	<p>43. During 1987, how many days did the child(ren)'s father have custody of or visit the child(ren)? (Days)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p> <p>None <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>51. Were these payments to be received -- (Read categories)</p> <p>Directly from the child(ren)'s father? <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 53)</p> <p>Through a court or public agency? <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 53)</p> <p>By some other method? <input type="checkbox"/> (Specify in notes)</p>	<p>58. Have you ever contacted any government agency for aid in obtaining child support (for child(ren) of last divorce or separation)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 59) No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 61)</p>	
<p>26A. (If 'School' in 19, Verify) LAST WEEK was ... attending or enrolled in a high school, college, or university? (Mark 'Yes' if currently on holiday or seasonal vacation. Mark 'No' for summer vacation.)</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Verify) No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 26C)</p> <p>High School ... <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 26B)</p> <p>College or Univ. <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 26B)</p>	<p>34. What was the date of that marriage? (Month)</p> <p>J F M A M J J A S O N D</p> <p>(Year 19 -)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	<p>44. Were child support payments agreed to or awarded (Last divorce or separation)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> Was it a 7</p> <p>Voluntary written agreement? <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 46)</p> <p>Court ordered? <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 46)</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 46)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 45)</p>	<p>52. Why were you or your child(ren) not supposed to receive payments in 1987?</p> <p>Child(ren) too old <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Payments not awarded or agreed to until calendar year 1988 <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 57)</p> <p>Child(ren)'s father died before 1987 <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 57)</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> (Specify in notes)</p>	<p>58. In what year did you last contact such an agency? (Year 19 -)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	
<p>26B. Is ... enrolled in school as a full-time or part-time student?</p> <p>Full time <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 26C)</p> <p>Part time <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 26C)</p>	<p>35. Has ... ever had or adopted any children?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 36)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 61 - Ask questions of woman here!)</p>	<p>45. Why were child support payments not agreed to or awarded?</p> <p>Final agreement pending <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other financial agreement made <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Father lives in household <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Wanted child support but: Did not pursue an award <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 57)</p> <p>Father financially unable to pay <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Unable to locate father <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Unable to establish paternity <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> (Specify in notes)</p> <p>Did not want child support <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>53. Did you receive these child support payments (Read Categories)</p> <p>Regularly <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 55)</p> <p>Occasionally <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Seldom or <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 54)</p> <p>Never <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>59. What type of help did this office provide? (Mark all that apply)</p> <p>Locate the father <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Establish paternity <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Establish support obligation <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Enforce support order <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Obtain collection <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No help provided <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other (Specify in notes) <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>26C. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>Who responded to the labor force items for this person?</p> <p>Self <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 7</p> <p>Self/Other <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>36. How many children has ... ever had (or adopted)?</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 + (Fill 37)</p>	<p>46. In what year were these payments first agreed to or awarded? (Year 19 -)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	<p>54. What was the main reason you did not receive these payments regularly, was it because (Read categories)</p> <p>The father refused to pay? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>You were unable to locate father? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Or was there some other reason? <input type="checkbox"/> (Specify in notes)</p>	<p>60. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>This person is currently:</p> <p>Never married <input type="checkbox"/> (Go to next person)</p> <p>All others <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 62)</p>	
<p>REMEMBER: ASK THE L.F. ITEMS FOR ALL H.H. MEMBERS BEFORE ASKING THE SUPPLEMENT</p>					
<p>29. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>A. This unit is in</p> <p>Rotation 1 or 5 <input type="checkbox"/> (End questions)</p> <p>Rotations 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 or 8 <input type="checkbox"/> (Fill 29B)</p> <p>B. Sex, Age, Presence of Children</p> <p>This person is:</p> <p>Male <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Female 14-17 with No own or adopted children in household <input type="checkbox"/> (Go To Next Person)</p> <p>Female 14-17 WITH own or adopted children in household <input type="checkbox"/> (Fill 29C)</p> <p>Female 18+ <input type="checkbox"/> (Fill 29C)</p> <p>C. Marital Status</p> <p>Married <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 31)</p> <p>Widowed <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Divorced <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 33)</p> <p>Separated <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Never married <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 30)</p>	<p>37. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM (See c.c. items 14 and 18)</p> <p>Any (other) H.H. member 20 years old or under? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Fill 38)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 61)</p>	<p>47. Has the amount ever been changed?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 48)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 49)</p>	<p>55. In total, how much in child support payments were you SUPPOSED to receive in 1987?</p> <p>\$.00</p>	<p>61. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>This person is currently:</p> <p>Separated <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 66)</p> <p>All others <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 65)</p>	
<p>30. Has ... ever had any children?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 36)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Go to next person)</p>	<p>38. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>This person is currently:</p> <p>Never married <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 39)</p> <p>All other <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 40)</p>	<p>48. In what year was the most recent change? (Year 19 -)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</p>	<p>56. How much in child support payments did you ACTUALLY receive in 1987?</p> <p>\$.00</p>	<p>62. After your (last) divorce, did you receive a property settlement such as: (Read categories and mark all that apply)</p> <p>A one time cash settlement <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Some other type of settlement <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Or was there no settlement reached <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>31. Has ... been married more than once?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 32)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Go to next person)</p>	<p>39. Are any of your children living here now?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> (Go to next person)</p> <p>How many?</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 + (Ship to 41)</p>	<p>49. Is health insurance now included as part of the child support agreement?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>57. Did the child(ren)'s father actually provide health insurance in 1987 for the child(ren)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>63. During 1987 were you SUPPOSED to receive alimony or maintenance payments?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>32. Has ... ever been divorced?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 33)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Go to next person)</p>	<p>40. How many of the children living here now were fathered or adopted by your (most recently) divorced/separated husband?</p> <p>None <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 61)</p> <p>0 1 2 3 4 + (Ask 41)</p>	<p>50. During calendar year 1987 were you or your child(ren) SUPPOSED to receive any child support payments (Last divorce or separation)?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 51)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 52)</p>	<p>64. At the time of your (last) separation, were you working?</p> <p>Yes <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 67)</p> <p>No <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 68)</p>	<p>64. INTERVIEWER CHECK ITEM</p> <p>This person is currently:</p> <p>Separated <input type="checkbox"/> (Ship to 66)</p> <p>All others <input type="checkbox"/> (Ask 65)</p>	

APPENDIX TABLE 1
Mean Differences between the Amounts of Child Support
Reported in March and April,
by Subgroups

	March > \$0 April > \$0 <u>March > April</u>		March > \$0 April > \$0 <u>March < April</u>		March > \$0 April = \$0		March = \$0 April > \$0	
	Difference	N	Difference	N	Difference	N	Difference	N
Marital status:								
Remarried	\$810	92	\$892	92	\$1757	35	\$2397	284
Divorced	1575	157	1654	153	2340	80	2381	263
Separated	1685	37	1557	33	1930	35	2425	128
Never married	280	12	1480	23	1076	35	1634	104
Race:								
White	1379	259	1499	268	2136	137	2551	586
Black	565	29	718	31	1303	42	1441	159
Other	979	10	377	2	951	6	2252	34
Age:								
14-17	0	0	0	0	0	0	342	5
18-29	871	70	1338	80	1449	60	1724	195
30-39	1447	169	1296	138	1968	92	2063	347
40+	1312	59	1649	83	2614	33	3138	232
Education:								
Less than 12 years	756	30	775	43	1805	40	1803	169
12 years	1269	155	1561	145	1603	99	2096	349
13-15 years	1175	76	921	74	2430	30	2368	170
16+ years	2119	37	2366	39	3014	16	3730	91
Mean amount in								
March	3200	298	1872	301	1903	185	0	779
Mean amount in April 1909								
		298	3272	301	0	185	2289	779
Mean difference								
between March and								
April	1291	298	1400	301	1903	185	2289	779

Source: 1988 Current Population Survey, March and April supplements.

Notes: Sample is all women asked the CPS-CSS April supplement questions in 1988 who reported a positive amount of child support in either March or April. Mean amounts are weighted.

APPENDIX TABLE 2
Distribution of Women Reporting Child Support in March and April,
All Women Reporting Positive Amounts

	March > \$0 April > \$0 March > April (Adjustment Done)	March > \$0 April > \$0 March < April (Adjustment Not Done)	March > \$0 April > \$0 March = April (Adjustment Not Needed)	March > \$0 April = \$0 (Adjustment Not Done)	March = \$0 April > \$0 (Adjustment Not Done)	N
All women	15.9%	16.1%	16.4%	9.9%	41.7%	1870
Marital status:						
Remarried	15.4	15.4	15.9	5.9	47.5	598
Divorced	18.8	18.3	21.9	9.6	31.5	836
Separated	15.0	13.4	5.7	14.2	51.8	247
Never married	6.3	12.2	7.9	18.5	55.0	189
Race:						
White	16.9	17.5	18.6	8.9	38.2	1535
Black	10.3	11.0	7.1	14.9	56.6	281
Other	18.5	3.7	3.7	11.1	63.0	54
Age:						
14-17	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	5
18-29	14.8	16.9	14.2	12.7	41.3	472
30-39	18.7	15.3	17.5	10.2	38.4	904
40+	12.1	17.0	16.8	6.7	47.4	489
Education:						
Less than 12 years	9.6	13.8	9.6	12.8	54.2	312
12 years	17.3	16.2	16.6	11.0	38.9	897
13-15 years	18.0	17.5	17.1	7.1	40.3	422
16+ years	15.5	16.3	23.4	6.7	38.1	239

Source: 1988 Current Population Survey, March and April supplements.

Notes: Sample is all women asked the CPS-CSS April supplement questions in 1988 who reported a positive amount of child support in either March or April. Percentages are based on unweighted numbers.

Notes

¹Administrative records from the state Offices of Child Support Enforcement provide an alternative source of national data. However, these data are only for people who have used the services of the offices and do not provide any information on the total population eligible for child support.

²The magnitude of this increase (a 19 percent increase in the amount received) seemed improbably large for at least three reasons. (1) A problem in the past has been that awards and payments did not keep pace with inflation over time. Thus if most women who had received a child support award prior to 1985 did not see a significant increase in payments between 1985 and 1987, then the bulk of the increase would have to come from those who first received child support awards between 1985 and 1987, a relatively small proportion of the women with awards. (2) The aggregate amount of child support awards and child support received had been relatively level from 1978 to 1985, making a huge increase from 1985 to 1987 somewhat doubtful. (3) The percentage of those with awards who were never-married increased from 1985 to 1987, and these women typically have lower awards and payments, making aggregate increases unlikely.

³In addition to these child support-eligible women left out of the April supplement, some women may have been included inappropriately. Consider a household consisting of a never-married woman aged fifty-five, with her daughter in the home, aged twenty-five and also never-married, and her daughter's child, aged five. The twenty-five-year-old would have been asked the supplement questions, which is appropriate, since her five-year-old is presumably child support-eligible. However, the fifty-five-year-old may also have been asked about her own child support receipt, even though she no longer has a child under age twenty-one in the home. The Census Bureau acknowledges that the structure of the questions could lead to this problem, but believes that the interviewer instructions make it clear that the fifty-five-year-old should not be interviewed about child

support (memorandum from Ruth Sanders to Gordon Green, February 21, 1986). Through using the household relationship codes, I developed a definition of the sample of women eligible for child support. This more stringent screener deletes about 100 of the 4280 cases.

⁴The 1986 CPS-CSS report (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1989) states that "The aggregate payments due refer only to the total due for the income year 1985 based on the information reported by the women in the survey; arrearages are not included in the aggregate figure" (page 13, footnote 8). The basis for this statement is not clear because the survey does not specifically mention arrearages. The interviewer instructions for the 1988 supplement do not mention how to handle questions about arrearages.

⁵In years prior to the 1987 data, if both March and April were positive and if the April amount was greater than the March amount, the April amount was assumed to be correct, and the March amount was changed on the March-April match public-use tape. This change then affected total family income and poverty status, which were recalculated based on the larger April amount.

⁶There are slight differences between the adjusted numbers I calculated and the numbers in the 1988 report. My figures for those who were due child support payments in 1987 on the mean amount due, the mean amount received, and the deficit are as follows: \$3011, \$2059, \$952. The report lists: \$3017, \$206, and \$954 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990, p. 7, Table E).

⁷The March amounts of child support that were answered by another person in the household should probably be deleted before examining the effect of educational status on "accuracy." However, the information needed to do this accurately is not available.

⁸The Bureau (but not outside analysts) may be able to use the April CPS tape (not the March-April match) and the March CPS tape, rematch them, and determine if the adjustment was the same. Unfortunately, the processing system at the Bureau has been changed, so this is difficult.

⁹The 1988 report states: "Under the old processing system, child support and alimony payments reported in April were compared with those reported in March. If either of the amounts reported in

April were greater than those reported in March, the April amount was substituted, and the total income and poverty status determinations were recomputed. This practice has been discontinued. Total income and poverty status are now based solely on the March income supplement" (p. 12). Note that this does not make any comment about when March amounts were greater than April's.

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