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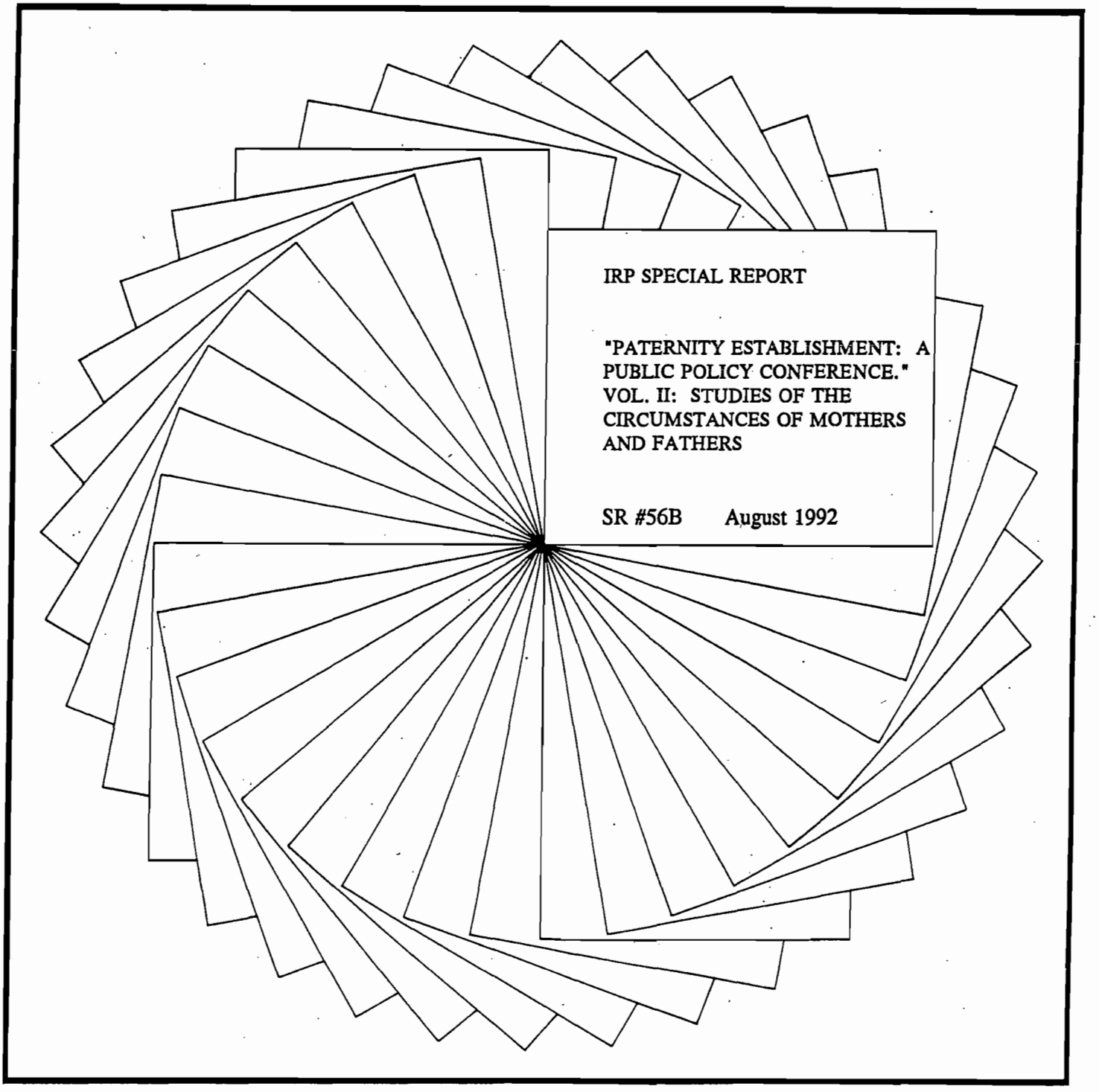
# Institute for Research on Poverty

## Special Report Series



Institute for Research on Poverty
Special Report no. 56B

# "Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference"

## Vol. II: Studies of the Circumstances of Mothers and Fathers

August 1992

CONTENTS

**IRP Special Report 56B**

**Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference**

**VOL. II: Studies of the Circumstances of Mothers and Fathers**

# Preface

This is the second volume of a two-volume IRP Special Report containing papers presented at a conference held in Washington, D.C., in February 1992, entitled "Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference." The conference was sponsored by the Institute for Research on Poverty and two divisions of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration on Children and Families. A summary overview of the conference is in Volume I. For more on the conference, see the Summer 1992 issue of Focus, the newsletter of the IRP. All opinions and conclusions expressed in the papers are those of the authors alone and not of the sponsoring institutions.

# Paternity Establishment among Never-Married Mothers: Estimates from the 1986 Current Population Survey Alimony and Child Support Supplement

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This paper was prepared for Institute for Research on Poverty-U.S. Department of Health and Human Services conference "Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference," Washington, D.C., February 26-27, 1992. It is based on a longer paper of the same title by Laudan Y. Aron, Burt S. Barnow, and William McNaught, prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in November 1989. Views and opinions expressed in the paper do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the sponsoring agencies.

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# PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT AMONG NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS: ESTIMATES FROM THE 1986 CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY ALIMONY AND CHILD SUPPORT SUPPLEMENT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

In recent decades there has been an unprecedented growth in the number of American children living in female-headed families. Since 1970, the number of female-headed families has increased by over 110 percent, while the number of two-parent families has declined by 4 percent. By 1986, almost one quarter of all families with children under the age of 18 were being maintained by one parent, usually the mother, compared to 11 percent in 1970.[1] As a result of these trends, there are now an estimated 15 million children living in a family in which the father is absent.

These social changes in family composition have not come without an economic cost. The high incidence of poverty among female-headed families, coupled with the growth in the number of such families, has generated much public concern over what has come to be termed "the feminization of poverty." In 1985, for example, the poverty rate among female-headed householders in families with no husband present was 34 percent. For children, the rate is even higher: 54 percent of children under the age of 18 living in a female-headed family were living below the poverty line in 1985, compared to 12 percent of children in all other family types.[2]

The striking differences in the economic well-being of single-parent and two-parent families are consistent with data which indicate that support levels for children by absent parents are very low.[3] In 1985, 39 percent of the 8.8 million women living with their own children under the age of 21 from an absent father had not been awarded child support. Among women who had been awarded child support and were supposed to receive payments that year, slightly less than one-half received the full

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[1] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1988. No. 68. (108th Edition) Washington, D.C., 1987.

[2] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P-60, No. 158, Poverty in the United States: 1985, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1987.

[3] In a recent article, Garfinkel and Oellerich estimate that noncustodial fathers are able to pay about two and one-half times current legal obligations and more than three times what they are actually paying. See Irwin Garfinkel and Donald Oellerich, "Noncustodial Fathers' Ability to Pay Child Support," Demography, Vol.26, No.2, May 1989.

amount due to them, and 26 percent received no payments at all. Support levels were even lower among poor mothers, 60 percent of whom had not been awarded child support.[4] Of the remaining poor women who had been awarded child support and were supposed to receive payments, over 34 percent received no payments at all.[5]

The growth in single-parent families has been in part due to an increase in the rate of out-of-wedlock births. In 1970, only 10.7 percent of all births were out of wedlock. By 1986, this figure had risen to 23.4 percent.[6] Although a far greater number of children living in single-parent families come from families in which the parents are divorced (42 percent) rather than never-married (27 percent), between 1970 and 1986, the number of children in the former group more than doubled while the number in the latter group increased by a factor greater than seven.[7] The distinction between these two groups of children is an important one. The husband is legally the father of children born during a marriage. Children who are born out of wedlock, however, must first have paternity legally established in order to be eligible for child support from the absent parent.

The high rates of poverty among families with children born out of wedlock highlight the importance of establishing paternity to obtain child support. Families headed by never-married female householders have the highest rates of poverty among all types of female-headed households. In 1985, for example, 58 percent of never-married women with their own children under the age of 21

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[4] These figures are based on a poverty index developed by the Social Security Administration in 1964 and revised in 1969 and 1981. The index which is based on money income only, varies by family size and composition and is adjusted annually to reflect changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The average poverty threshold for a family of four was $10,989 in 1985.

[5] U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Reports, Special Studies, Series P-23, No.154, Child Support and Alimony: 1985 (Supplemental Report), U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1989.

[6] National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final natality statistics, 1986. Monthly Vital Statistics Report. Vol. 37, No. 3, Supp. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 88-1120. Table 18. Public Health Service.

[7] U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No.418, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1986, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1987. Note that not all children born out of wedlock are from never-married parents. The problem of identifying mothers who have had children out of wedlock is discussed in Chapter 2.

from an absent father lived below the poverty level. For divorced mothers with the same aged children, the level was 26 percent, and for separated mothers the level was 47 percent.

Differences by marital status in the incidence of poverty among single-parent households are also evident from the profile of children whose families are eligible to participate in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program because one parent is absent. In 1987, the majority, 57 percent, of single-parent AFDC children came from parents who were never married, 40 percent came from parents who were divorced or separated, and another 3.5 percent were in a single parent family because of the death of a parent or some other reason.[8]

Poverty rates also vary considerably by child support award status. In 1985, for example, the poverty rate among women who were awarded child support was 21 percent, while the corresponding rate for women who were not awarded child support was 49 percent. The highest poverty rate by marital and child support award status was among never-married mothers who had not been awarded child support -- over 58 percent of mothers in this group were below the poverty level in 1985.[9] Although the high levels of poverty and welfare dependence characteristic of never-married mothers cannot be attributed exclusively to a lack of child support, increased success in establishing paternity, awarding child support orders, and collecting child support payments would clearly improve the economic well-being of these mothers and children.[10]

Policymakers have begun to acknowledge the problem of paternity establishment through a series of increasingly more rigorous legislative measures.[11] Among these were the establishment of

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[8] Aid to Families with Dependent Children (Title IV-A), Characteristics of AFDC Families, Section 7 of Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1989.

[9] U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Reports, Special Studies, Series P-23, No.154, Child Support and Alimony: 1985 (Supplemental Report), U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1989.

[10] Other benefits of paternity establishment include eligibility for social security, worker's compensation, armed service benefits, and health insurance, and sociopsychological benefits.

[11] For a detailed overview of Federal and state child support enforcement activities, see the "Child Support Enforcement Program," Section 8 of Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means, Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1989.

the Child Support Enforcement (CSE) program in 1975, and the enactment of the Child Support Enforcement Amendments of 1984 and the Family Support Act of 1988.

The establishment of the CSE program in 1975 was in part an attempt to stem the rising costs of the AFDC program.[12] The 1975 legislation, which added Part D to Title IV of the Social Security Act, authorized the use of federal matching funds to locate absent parents and establish paternity in addition to other child support activities. It made assisting the state Child Support Enforcement agencies (often called "IV-D" agencies) in establishing paternity and collecting child support explicit eligibility requirements for an individual mother's participation in the AFDC program. Although IV-D agencies were required to serve non-public assistance clients in addition to the AFDC population, many agencies either limited or denied CSE services to non-AFDC clients.

The 1984 amendments addressed a number of problems in the CSE program. Not only were IV-D agencies required to serve all individuals in need of assistance, they were also required to publicize their services regularly. Other amendments required states to adopt new enforcement techniques, such as mandatory wage withholding after one month of arrearages and state tax refund offsets, as a condition for continued state eligibility in the Federal AFDC program. More recently, the Family Support Act of 1988 required that states establish mandatory guidelines for child support awards and provide for immediate wage withholding. Finally, the Act introduced explicit state-level performance standards in the area of paternity establishment.[13]

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[12] In the short run, child support has little financial impact on AFDC recipients because only $50 per month is retained by the mother.

[13] As of October 1, 1991, states are required to maintain a paternity establishment percentage (the ratio of the total number of children in all IV-D cases who were born out of wedlock and for whom paternity has been established to the total number of children in all IV-D cases who were born out of wedlock) which exceeds: (a) 50 percent; (b) the state paternity establishment percentage for fiscal year 1988 increased by 3 percentage points per fiscal year; or (c) the paternity establishment percentage determined with respect to all states for such fiscal year. Children who are dependent because of the death of a parent or whose custodial parent is granted a statutory exemption are not included in these calculations.

Unfortunately, little research is available to inform policies designed to assist unwed mothers and their children.[14] Studies on the nonsupport of children by absent parents have focused largely on issues other than paternity establishment. While estimates of the number of orders awarded in a given year, levels of collection, and frequency of payment are readily available, relatively little is known about the paternity establishment needs of children born out of wedlock.[15] Although studies on child support awards and payments may appear to be of more immediate interest, since they are directly tied to financial support and involve a larger number of children, the importance of paternity establishment cannot be ignored. A large and growing number of children born out of wedlock are in need of both the non-pecuniary benefits of legally established paternity and the financial and economic benefits of child support.

### 1.2 Overview of the Report

This paper presents the findings of an initial analysis of the need for paternity establishment among children born out of wedlock. It describes the population of children, and their mothers, who have had paternity established, as well as those who are still in need of a paternity action. In doing so, it attempts to answer two basic questions. The first involves measuring the number of children who are in need of a paternity action -- in particular, What proportion of children born out of wedlock have had paternity established? The second key question is concerned with describing the population of interest, namely, What factors are associated with successfully establishing paternity, and alternatively, What factors are associated with being unable to establish paternity? The primary reason that such fundamental questions have yet to be answered is that very little data are collected on children, and their mothers, in need of paternity establishment.

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[14] One notable exception is Ann Nichols-Casebolt and Irwin Garfinkel, "Trends in Paternity Adjudications and Child Support Awards," Institute for Research on Poverty, DP #879-89, University of Wisconsin-Madison, May 1989.

[15] Statistical data on child support can be found in U.S. Department of Commerce, Current Population Reports, Special Studies, Series P-23, No.154, Child Support and Alimony: 1985 (Supplemental Report), U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1989, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Child Support Enforcement: Twelfth Annual Report to Congress, Volumes I and II, Fiscal Year 1987.

Chapter 2 describes why the Current Population Survey (CPS) March-April 1986 Match File was selected for this analysis. In this chapter we also examine a number of limitations of the CPS data. The most important of these limitations is that the CPS does not contain a direct question concerning paternity establishment. In many instances the child's paternity establishment status has to be inferred from responses to other questions. The chapter concludes with an estimate of the level of paternity establishment in the United States based on the CPS subsample used in this paper and compares this figure with the few estimates available from other sources.

Drawing on the classification of paternity establishment status outlined in Chapter 2, Chapters 3 and 4 address the question of how children who have had paternity established differ from those who have not on other important characteristics. Chapter 3 examines a number of key socioeconomic variables, such as the race, age, and employment status of the mother, which may be associated with the paternity establishment status of the child. For example, in Chapter 3 we examine the question of whether white mothers are more or less likely than black mothers to have paternity established for at least one of their children. Associations between paternity establishment status and participation in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program are considered in Chapter 4. In addition, for non-AFDC mothers, we examine the effect of contacting and receiving help from state Child Support Enforcement (or IV-D) agencies on paternity establishment. The major findings to emerge from this analysis of the CPS data are summarized in Chapter 5.

## 2. THE CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY DATA BASE

### 2.1 Data Source

After reviewing a number of potential data bases that could be used to analyze paternity establishment, the Current Population Survey (CPS) Alimony and Child Support Supplement was identified as the best source for our purposes.[16] The CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement was determined to be the most useful of the surveys available for several reasons. Its sample size is the largest of the surveys available, 42,000 households, and it is sufficiently large to analyze national levels of paternity establishment. In addition, the CPS contains some indirect information on paternity establishment. Finally, because the supplement is administered regularly, changes over time in the level of paternity establishment can be studied using data from the CPS.[17]

### 2.2 Limitations of the CPS Data

Although the CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement was identified as the most suitable source for studying paternity establishment at the national level, there remain a number of critical data limitations. These are reviewed in detail below. The first three limit our ability to analyze the true population of interest -- the population of children who are born out of wedlock and their mothers. The final and most important limitation concerns correctly identifying the paternity establishment status of children included in the sample.

- **Households with more than one child cannot be adequately treated in the analysis because the data only provide information on one child per mother.**

Questions asked of mothers in the child support portion of the CPS supplement only reference one child (the reference child) currently living in the household. As a result, the only unit of analysis that can be developed from the data is a mother-child combination. The total number of observations

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[16] A total of seven national surveys were considered for the analysis. See Laudan Y. Aron, Burt S. Barnow, and William McNaught, Paternity Establishment Among Never-Married Mothers: Estimates from the 1986 Current Population Survey Alimony and Child Support Supplement, Final Report submitted to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, 1989.

[17] This supplement has been administered in 1979, 1982, 1984, 1986, and 1988. The analysis in this report is based on the results of the March and April 1986 survey. Data from the 1988 survey were not available in time for use in this analysis.

in the data equals the total number of mothers in the sample, but understates the total number of children born to these women.

Because mothers answer questions in the supplement with respect to only one child, there is potential ambiguity in cases where the mother has been awarded child support for one child but not for another. In this analysis, we assume that mothers who have been awarded child support (and therefore have paternity established) for at least one of their children respond to the questionnaire with reference to one of these children.[18] Thus, if a mother reports that she has not been awarded child support, we assume that this is true of all of her children. If a mother reports that she has been awarded child support for one of the children, the paternity establishment and child support status of the other children in the household remains unknown.

In general, because the analysis must be confined to units of mother-reference child combinations, our results measure the proportion of never-married mothers who have had paternity established for at least one child. This measure also reflects the proportion of reference children who have had paternity established, but it is not equivalent to the proportion of all children who have had paternity established. The proportion of all children who have had paternity established cannot be determined from the data because the paternity establishment status of non-reference children is unknown. As a result, the proportion of paternities established for all children born to never-married women may be higher or lower than the proportions estimated.

- **Not all mothers who have borne children out of wedlock can be identified in the sample.**

By definition, to identify all mothers who have borne children out of wedlock, information is needed on the marital status of the mother when each child was born. The CPS only collects information on the current marital status of mothers in the sample (i.e., the marital status of the mother at the time of the interview). Current marital status does not allow us to distinguish mothers who were

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[18] The first question in the supplement that implicitly involves selecting a reference child is: Were child support payments agreed to or awarded? We assume in this analysis that a mother who has a child support agreement for one of her children but not for another will answer yes to this question. It is important to note, however, that there are no explicit instructions in the CPS interviewer guide concerning the criteria to be used for selecting the reference child. In Aron, Barnow, and McNaught (1989) we suggest several changes to the CPS to deal with this and other issues to improve the CPS supplement.

divorced or legally separated prior to the birth of their child from those who were divorced or separated after the birth of their child. In addition, mothers who had an out-of-wedlock birth but later married cannot be identified in the CPS.

Unfortunately, neither the CPS nor any of the other available data sources provide the information needed to identify the relevant group of mothers. Thus, only currently never-married mothers can be identified as definitely having had an out-of-wedlock birth.[19] The results of this analysis are based on the paternity establishment experience of never-married women alone. As a result, they may not reflect the level of paternity establishment among all children in need of paternity establishment. If, for example, never-married mothers are less likely to establish paternity than divorced mothers, these results from the CPS will underestimate the proportion of children in need who have had paternity established.

- **Mothers under the age of 18 are not included in the 1986 CPS sample.**

Data for the 1986 CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement were only collected for mothers over the age of 18.[20] Although the majority of the out-of-wedlock births in this country are to women over the age of 18, the majority of children born to young teen mothers are born out of wedlock, and therefore in need of paternity establishment.[21]

In general, birth rates for women under 18 (and over 18 as well) have been declining steadily over the past several decades. Between 1970 and 1986, the birth rate among females aged 15 to 17

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[19] While not representative of all ever-married female-headed households, an analysis of ever-married women with own children receiving AFDC in 1986 and 1987 indicates that 19.6 percent and 20.7 percent, respectively, had at least one child eligible for AFDC benefits because the mother was not married to the father at the time of the child's birth. Of AFDC children living with their own ever-married mothers in 1986 and 1987, 12.5 percent and 13.3 percent, respectively, were eligible for AFDC benefits because their father was not married to their mother at the time of their birth. These results are based on unpublished tabulations of AFDC characteristics data from the Integrated Quality Control System review samples in 1986 and 1987 by the Family Support Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

[20] The 1988 CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement includes data on women aged 14 and older.

[21] Note that the CPS data only exclude mothers who are currently under the age of 18. The data do include those mothers who were under the age of 18 at the time of birth, but who were over 18 at the time of the interview.

decreased from 39 to 31 births per thousand females.[22] Despite these overall declines in teenage rates of childbearing, changes in the distribution of teen births within and outside marriage have resulted in significant increases in the rate of out-of-wedlock births among teens. The proportion of births to women under the age of 18 occurring outside marriage has almost doubled since 1970. In 1970, 45 percent of all births to women under the age of 18 were out of wedlock, but by 1986 this figure had risen to 83 percent. Currently, 90 percent of births to black teenage mothers are out of wedlock. Although the corresponding figure for white teens, 49 percent, is lower than that of blacks, black-white differences in all measures of out-of-wedlock childbearing (total number of births, the birth rate, and the percentage of all births that are to unmarried women) have been narrowing.

By excluding mothers under the age of 18, the CPS data are missing a very important group of children in need of paternity establishment. In 1986, over 178 thousand births were to mothers under the age of 18.[23] Young teen mothers are more likely to face economic and social disadvantage throughout their lives than mothers who postpone childbearing. Teenage mothers, for example, are less likely to finish high school, find employment, earn high wages, or be happily married. They are also more likely to become dependent on public assistance and to remain on public assistance for longer periods of time.[24]

The same caveat which applied to limiting the analysis to never-married mothers applies to limiting the analysis to mothers aged 18 and older. Since our data exclude young teenage mothers, our results may not reflect the true level of paternity establishment among all children in need. If, for example, young teen mothers are less likely than other mothers to have paternity legally established for their children, then our results will overestimate the rate at which paternities have been established.

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[22] National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final natality statistics, 1986. Monthly Vital Statistics Report. Vol. 37, No. 3, Supp. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 88-1120. Table 4. Public Health Service.

[23] National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final natality statistics, 1986. Monthly Vital Statistics Report. Vol. 37, No. 3, Supp. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 88-1120. Table 17. Public Health Service.

[24] For a review of these issues, see Cheryl D. Hayes (Ed.), Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Childbearing, Volumes I and II, National Academy Press: Washington, D.C., 1987.

- **The CPS 1986 Alimony and Child Support Supplement does not directly ask about the paternity establishment status of the child.**

As the title of the supplement suggests, the CPS supplement emphasizes child support and not paternity establishment. Mothers are not asked whether paternity has been established for their children. Since there are no direct questions on the paternity establishment status of the child, this information must be inferred from the responses to other questions in the supplement. The criteria used to ask mothers specific questions and the sequence of questions as they are organized in the supplement are illustrated in Exhibit 2.1. As noted above, women under age 18 are not surveyed for this supplement. Women who report being divorced, separated, or never married are asked if they have ever had any children, and if any of their children are under the age of 21 and living in the household. Women responding no to either of these two questions are not asked any further questions.

The remaining respondents are then asked whether child support payments have been agreed to or awarded, and if so whether it was a voluntary written agreement or a court-ordered award. Women reporting having either type of agreement are then asked a series of questions concerning the agreement, such as whether health insurance was included in the agreement, the method of payment, the amount of the award, and the frequency and level of payments. Mothers reporting that child support payments have not been agreed to or awarded are then asked why this is so. The paternity establishment classification scheme used in this paper is based on the responses given to these questions. The responses given to these questions and the number of women from the weighted sample in each response category are provided in Exhibit 2.2.

From the CPS data there are only two categories of mothers for whom the paternity establishment status of the child is precisely known. First, paternity is known to be established for children of never-married mothers who report that they have a child support award, or that the reason for not having an award or agreement is that a final agreement is pending or that joint custody has been granted.[25] Second, children of mothers who report that they do not have a child support

[25] Another reason for not having an award or agreement is that the mother accepted a property settlement in lieu of child support. The sample did not contain any never-married mothers who reported this reason.

Exhibit 2.1

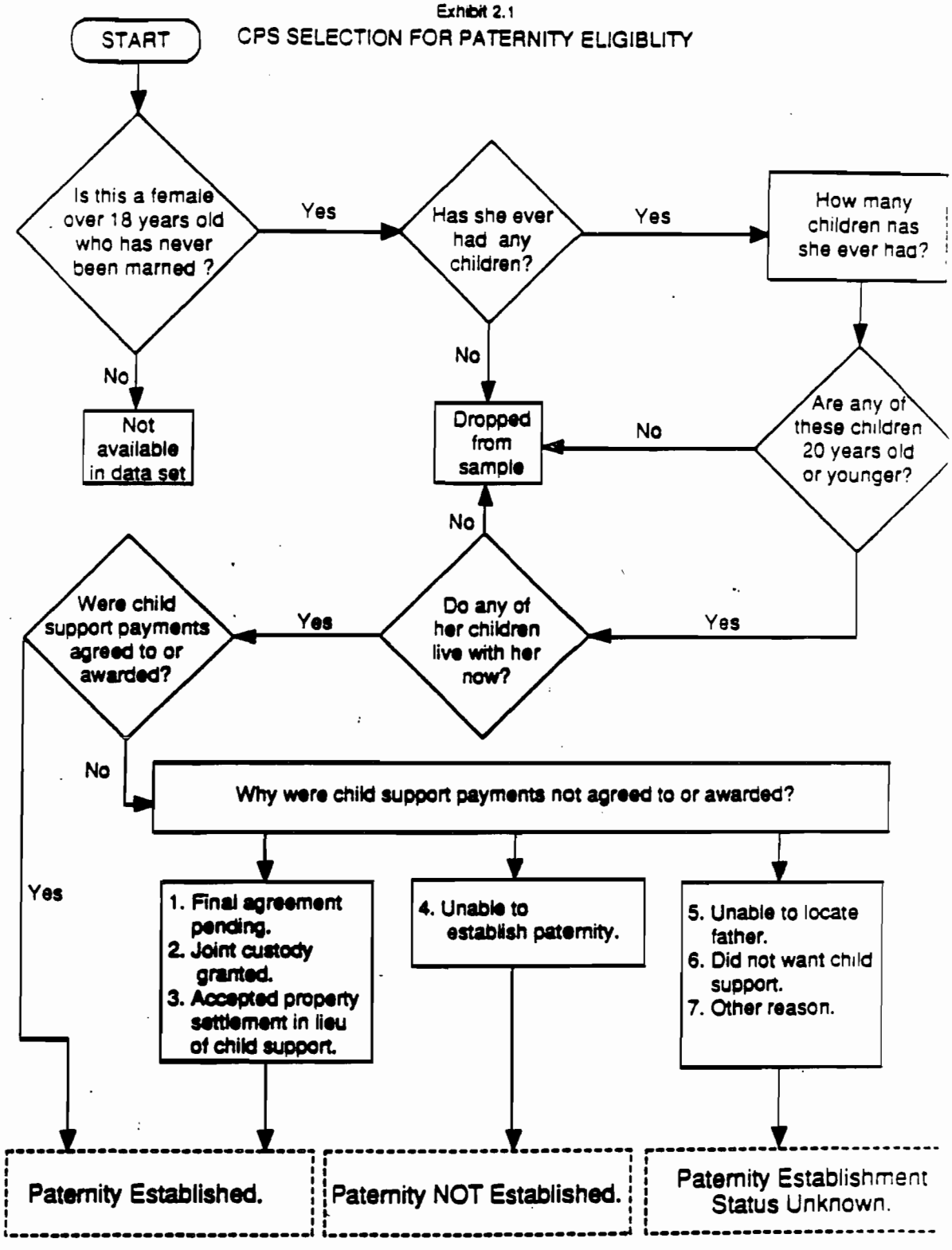
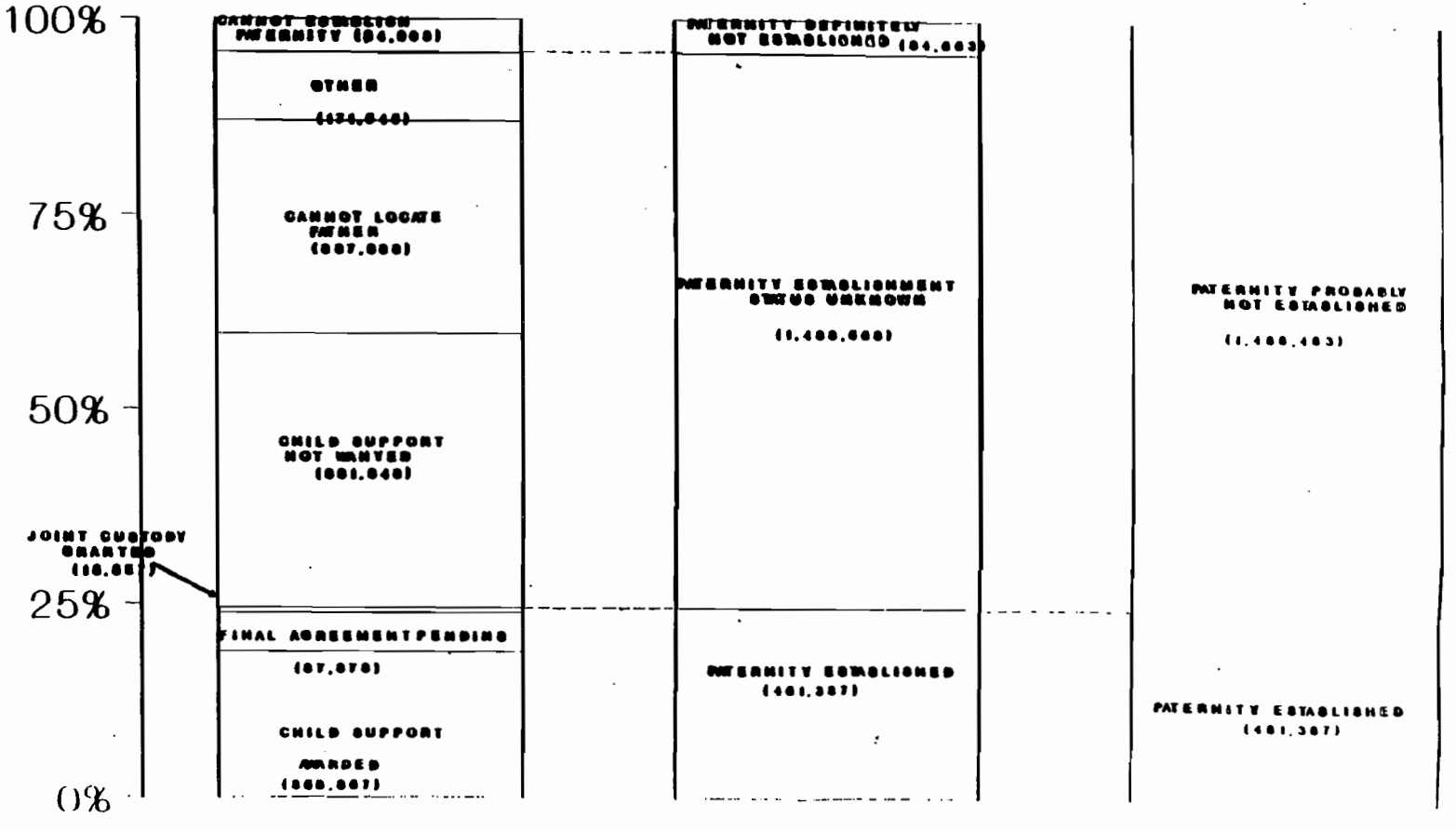

CPS SELECTION FOR PATERNITY ELIGIBILITY
START
Is this a female over 18 years old who has never been married ?
Yes
Has she ever had any children?
Yes
How many children has she ever had?
No
Not available in data set
No
Dropped from sample
No
Are any of these children 20 years old or younger?
No
Were child support payments agreed to or awarded?
Yes
Do any of her children live with her now?
Yes
No
Why were child support payments not agreed to or awarded?
Yes
1. Final agreement pending.
2. Joint custody granted.
3. Accepted property settlement in lieu of child support.
4. Unable to establish paternity.
5. Unable to locate father.
6. Did not want child support.
7. Other reason.
Paternity Established.
Paternity NOT Established.
Paternity Establishment Status Unknown.

Exhibit 2.2

# CLASSIFICATIONS OF PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS



award and that they cannot establish paternity are known not to have paternity established. The paternity establishment status of all remaining children is open to question. Respondents cannot give more than one response when asked why child support has not been awarded. Thus, mothers who have not had paternity established may cite some reason other than an inability to establish paternity.

## 2.3 Overall Level of Paternity Establishment As Estimated from the CPS

Exhibit 2.2 shows the population estimates of the number of never-married mothers who reported they had a child support award and, for those who reported that they did not have an award, the number who gave various responses to why they did not have such an award.[26] Based on the responses given by the CPS sample, of an estimated 1.97 million never-married mothers, 18.8 percent reported that child support had been agreed to or awarded, 5.0 percent reported that a final agreement was pending, and another 0.7 percent reported that joint custody had been granted. Over 35.1 percent reported that they did not want child support, and another 31.7 percent wanted child support but were unable either to locate the father (27.3 percent) or establish paternity (4.3 percent). The remaining 8.7 percent of never-married mothers reported some other reason for not having child support agreed to or awarded.[27]

The CPS results indicate that over 481 thousand never-married mothers have either been awarded child support, have a final agreement pending, or have been granted joint custody. Thus, at least 481 thousand, or 24.5 percent, of the never-married mothers aged 18 and over have had paternity established for at least one of their children. Throughout this report we assume that all remaining mothers probably have not had paternity established because we have no way of

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[26] Responses of mothers in the sample are weighted (based on the sampling design) to reflect the entire U.S. population. Nineteen observations in which the mother reported that the father was currently living in the same household were deleted from the sample.

[27] The category labelled "other" in the first stage classification consists of women who reported the following reasons (in order of frequency) for not having a child support award or agreement: Didn't want to go to court or otherwise try for child support/felt it was too much trouble/hassle [53,030]; Other reason [27,850]; Child(ren)'s father unemployed [26,912]; Child(ren)'s father couldn't pay/wouldn't agree voluntarily [20,468]; Believed child(ren)'s father couldn't pay (financially unable) [17,816]; Child(ren)'s father moved away [9,740]; Didn't believe she was eligible for child support for her child(ren) [8,007]; Believed child(ren)'s father couldn't pay (disabled, in prison, otherwise institutionalized) [7,755].

identifying additional mothers who have had paternity established. These mothers comprise 75.5 percent of the weighted CPS sample.[28]

The paternity establishment estimate developed from the CPS data, 24.5 percent of never-married mothers, is consistent with other available estimates. In a 1988 report, the staff of the House Committee on Ways and Means compared state-level performance in establishing paternity by calculating the ratio of the total number of paternities established in FY 1987 to the total number of out-of-wedlock births in CY 1985.[29] This ratio was found to be highest in Missouri (86.2 percent) and lowest in Texas (1.4 percent). For the country as a whole, the average was 31.3 percent.

There are several problems, however, with using these figures to estimate the proportion of children born out of wedlock who have had paternity established. First, not all out-of-wedlock births are candidates for a paternity action. Infant death and adoption are events which eliminate the need for paternity establishment. Also, parents who have an out-of-wedlock birth and subsequently marry may sign forms acknowledging that the husband is the father of the child, although this will not be formally counted by the state as a paternity establishment. By assuming that all out-of-wedlock births are potential paternity establishment cases, the report underestimates the percentage of paternity establishments. Second, although the number may be relatively small, paternities established outside the state IV-D system are not included in the measure. The effect of this is to underestimate further paternity establishment. Finally, FY 1987 paternity establishments are not limited to children born out of wedlock in CY 1985, nor are they limited to children born in the same state. The group of children in need of paternity establishment, i.e. the baseline, consists of all children born out of wedlock in previous years who have not been eliminated from the pool of eligibles (through death, adoption,

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[28] In Aron, Barnow, and McNaught, we compare mothers who have had paternity established (a group identical to the one defined above) with mothers who definitely have not had paternity established. The latter group consists of the 85 thousand mothers who reported that they did not have a child support award because they were unable to establish paternity. These mothers comprise only 4 percent of the weighted CPS sample of never-married mothers.

[29] Child Support Enforcement: A Report Card, prepared by the Staff of the House Committee on Ways and Means, October 11, 1988. Data on the total number of paternities established are drawn from the CSE statistical reporting system and only reflect paternities established through the IV-D system.

marriage of the parents, or reaching the age of majority). On this count, the measure is likely to overestimate the level of paternity establishment.

The methodology used by Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt in an evaluation of the Wisconsin Child Support Demonstration Project is much less problematic.[30] The authors studied a random sample of babies born out of wedlock to teen mothers in 1981-1982. Using county court and payment records, they estimated that the paternity adjudication rates for their sample ranged from 0.9 percent in Milwaukee County to 57.9 percent in Sheboygan County. For the entire sample, paternity was established for 13.7 percent of the out-of-wedlock births. The state average was so low because over 60 percent of the out-of-wedlock births were in Milwaukee County. Unfortunately, these results cannot be generalized to older mothers or to the national level.

In short, the CPS data indicate that approximately 24.5 percent of never-married mothers aged 18 and older have had paternity established for at least one child. Although this figure is roughly consistent with those developed by the House Ways and Means staff and Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, it can only be considered a crude estimate of the proportion of all children of never-married mothers aged 18 and older who have had paternity established. This last proportion can vary widely depending on what assumptions are made about the paternity establishment status of the non-reference children of never-married mothers in the CPS sample. To illustrate, consider two alternative calculations.

Assume, for example, that all non-reference children have the same paternity establishment status as the reference child in the household. Data on the total number of children living with each mother and the paternity establishment status of the household reference child indicate that 819 thousand children (including the 481 thousand reference children) of the 3.48 million children living with never-married mothers age 18 and older live in households in which the reference child has had paternity established. The other 2.66 million children live in households in which the reference child

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[30] Sandra Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment," APPAM Conference Paper, 1985.

has not had paternity established.[31] If we assume children living in the same household all have the same paternity establishment status, then 23.5 percent (819 thousand of the 3.48 million children) have had paternity established, a figure only slightly lower than the proportion estimated for the reference children alone.[32]

If we make the alternative assumption that all non-reference children have not had paternity established, then only 13.8 percent (or 481 thousand) of the 3.48 million children born to never-married mothers in our sample have had paternity legally established.[33] These calculations illustrate how widely estimates based on the CPS vary depending upon the assumptions: although almost one-quarter of the never-married mothers have had paternity established for at least one of their children, the proportion of all children born to these women who have had paternity established may be as low as 14 percent. Although there is no way of determining whether the actual level of paternity establishment for these children is closer to 14 or to 24 percent, we suspect the 24 percent estimate is more reliable.[34] In the remainder of this report we analyze mother-reference child combinations and ignore all non-reference children. Thus, the paternity establishment figures reported are analogous to the original 24.5 percent estimate.

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[31] In calculating these numbers, mothers who reported having four or more children were assumed to have 4.5 children.

[32] The figure is lower because the average family size of mothers who have had paternity established for at least one child is slightly smaller than for mothers who have not established paternity for any of their children.

[33] Note that for reference children who have had paternity established, we assume in the first calculation that their siblings have also had paternity established while in the second calculation we assume that they do not. For reference children who have not had paternity established, we assume that all siblings have also not had paternity established.

[34] In Chapter 3 we examine levels of paternity establishment by the number of own children present from an absent father. Approximately 25 percent of never-married mothers with only one child (and therefore no non-reference children) have had paternity established for the child. Although this result is not generalizable to mothers with more than one child, it does suggest that the 24 percent estimate is more reliable.

## 3. ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND VARIOUS SOCIOECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

In this chapter we examine associations between paternity establishment and a number of socioeconomic variables. Conventional wisdom holds that mothers who have not had paternity established for their children tend to be from socially and economically disadvantaged groups, namely, non-white, inner-city mothers who have low incomes, probably have not completed high school and are not employed. Conversely, mothers who have had paternity established are believed to be from relatively advantaged backgrounds. The results presented in this chapter allow us to examine a number of these commonly held assumptions.[35] In interpreting these results, two caveats are in order. First, it should not be assumed that a given characteristic determines whether or not paternity is established. For example, if lower income groups are less likely to have paternity established compared to higher income groups, it does not necessarily follow that low-income mothers do not have paternity established <u>because</u> they are poor; rather it may be the case that mothers are poorer <u>because</u> they have not established paternity and therefore cannot collect child support. Second, the relationship between paternity establishment and a given socioeconomic characteristic may be indirect. This is especially true since many of the characteristics we examine are independently associated with one another. If, for example, income is an important causal determinant of paternity establishment and black mothers tend to have lower levels of income than white mothers, then we will observe lower rates of paternity establishment among black mothers. It would be misleading to conclude, however, that race is the key variable.

### 3.1 Factors Associated with Paternity Establishment Status

The results presented below are based on a comparison of never-married mothers who have established paternity for at least one child with all remaining never-married mothers. Recall that the latter group consists of mothers known to have definitely not established paternity for the reference child in addition to those mothers for whom the paternity establishment status of the reference child is

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[35] Note that because the CPS data do not include teenaged mothers under the age of 18, we cannot examine to what extent levels of paternity establishment differ between this group of never-married mothers and those who are aged 18 and older.

unknown. Mothers of children whose paternity establishment status is unknown comprise a large proportion (76 percent) of the entire sample. By categorizing these mothers as probably not having paternity established, we are able to take advantage of the entire sample.

The distribution of paternity establishment status by race and Hispanic origin of the mother is shown in Table 3.1.[36] The sample, when weighted to be nationally representative, consists of approximately 1.1 million (57 percent) black non-Hispanics, 580 thousand (29 percent) white non-Hispanics, 222 thousand (11 percent) Hispanics, and 42 thousand (2 percent) mothers of another race. Although 24 percent of the entire sample of mothers has had paternity established for at least one child, only among one group is the percentage significantly higher -- 29 percent of the white non-Hispanic never-married mothers have had paternity established for at least one child. The corresponding values are 23 percent for black non-Hispanic mothers, 19 percent for Hispanic mothers, and 25 percent for all other never-married mothers age 18 or older.

A comparison of the racial distribution of mothers who have had paternity established with that of mothers who probably have not had it established shows that 35 percent of mothers who have had paternity established are white, while only 28 percent of mothers who have not had it established are white. The reverse is true for black mothers. The proportion of mothers who have not had paternity established who are black (58 percent) exceeds the proportion who have had paternity established who are black (54 percent).

It is interesting to note that there are nearly twice as many blacks as whites in the weighted sample: almost 60 percent of all mothers in the sample are black while only 30 percent are white. Unlike many of the other variables examined in this chapter, the racial distribution of the weighted CPS sample can be compared with the racial distribution of <u>all</u> children born out of wedlock, because the race and marital status of unmarried mothers are available through vital statistics data. The racial composition of the CPS never-married mother sample differs significantly from the distribution by race of all children born out of wedlock in the United States in any given year. In 1986, for example, there were a total of 878,477 births to unmarried women; over one-half of these births (53.1 percent) were to

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[36] The CPS distinguishes ethnicity from race. Thus, Hispanic mothers may be white, black, or any other race.

Table 3.1

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| White non-Hispanic | 166,739 | 412,881 | 579,620 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 261,414 | 862,017 | 1,123,431 |
| Hispanic [2] | 42,901 | 179,223 | 222,124 |
| Other | 10,333 | 31,342 | 41,675 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| White non-Hispanic | 29 | 71 | 100 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| Hispanic [2] | 19 | 81 | 100 |
| Other | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Percent by race/ethnicity | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| White non-Hispanic | 35 | 28 | 29 |
| Black non-Hispanic | 54 | 58 | 57 |
| Hispanic [2] | 9 | 12 | 11 |
| Other | 2 | 2 | 2 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

[2] Hispanic women may be of any race.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

white unmarried women and just over 43 percent were to black unmarried women.[37]

This difference in the distribution by race suggests that the CPS data and the vital statistics data are reflecting different populations of mothers. There are several possible explanations for this. The most important is that vital statistics data provide us with the total number of out-of-wedlock births in a given year, while the CPS data reflect the number of children of all ages who were born out of wedlock and whose mothers are currently never-married and at least age 18. Thus, while the proportion of out-of-wedlock births that are to white mothers may be high in any given year, white mothers may exit the never-married population (i.e., marry out of the population) at a faster rate than black mothers.[38] This explanation may account for a significant share of the differences in racial composition. The CPS results shown in Table 3.2 indicate that the ratio of black to white mothers increases dramatically with age. In the youngest age group, 18 to 19 years, the number of black and white mothers is roughly equal. In the next two age groups, there are over one and one-half times as many black mothers as there are white mothers. Finally, in the 30 to 34 year old age group black never-married mothers outnumber white mothers by more than three to one. To the extent that age measures exposure time to marriage, an increase in the black to white ratio by age implies that white mothers are marrying at a faster rate than black mothers. This trend may, therefore, also help account for racial differences between the CPS and vital statistics data.

There are several factors that may explain the discrepancy in the ratio of blacks to white never-married mothers. First, vital statistics data reflect the total number of out-of-wedlock births while

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[37] National Center for Health Statistics: Advance report of final natality statistics, 1986. Monthly Vital Statistics Report. Vol. 37, No. 3, Supp. DHHS Pub. No. (PHS) 88-1120. Table 16. Public Health Service. Note that the distribution by race of all children born out of wedlock in the United States in any given year has also been changing over time. In 1970, for example, 44 percent of all out-of-wedlock births were to white mothers while 54 percent were to black mothers. By 1980, the proportion by race was roughly equal for whites and blacks (48 percent to white mothers and 49 percent to black mothers). See U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1988. No. 87. (108th Edition) Washington, D.C., 1987. The racial distribution of the CPS data will reflect these changes over time in the racial composition of out-of-wedlock births.

[38] Lerman's research on young unwed fathers provides some evidence of this. Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth, he found that unlike blacks, the majority of white and Hispanic young unwed fathers in 1979 had married the mother of their children and were living with all of their children by 1984. See Robert I. Lerman, "A National Profile of Young Unwed Fathers: Who Are They and How Are They Parenting?" Young Unwed Fathers: Research Review, Policy Dilemmas, and Options. Volume II: Commissioned Papers, Catholic University, 1987.

**Table 3.2**

**DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY RACE AND AGE GROUP**

**(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)**

| | White Non-Hispanic | Black Non-Hispanic | Hispanic | Other | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 579,620 | 1,123,431 | 222,124 | 41,657 | 1,966,850 |
| 18 to 19 years | 85,694 | 88,324 | 13,125 | 2,394 | 189,537 |
| 20 to 24 years | 221,627 | 363,908 | 57,356 | 14,305 | 657,196 |
| 25 to 29 years | 157,655 | 296,380 | 51,400 | 10,792 | 516,227 |
| 30 to 34 years | 53,104 | 177,206 | 44,947 | 7,579 | 282,836 |
| 35 to 39 years | 41,472 | 116,416 | 30,019 | 6,605 | 194,512 |
| 40 to 44 years | 13,698 | 24,615 | 17,160 | - | 55,473 |
| 45 years and older | 6,370 | 56,582 | 8,117 | - | 71,069 |
| Percent by race/ethnicity | 29 | 57 | 11 | 2 | 100 |
| 18 to 19 years | 45 | 47 | 7 | 1 | 100 |
| 20 to 24 years | 34 | 55 | 9 | 2 | 100 |
| 25 to 29 years | 31 | 57 | 10 | 2 | 100 |
| 30 to 34 years | 19 | 63 | 16 | 3 | 100 |
| 35 to 39 years | 21 | 60 | 15 | 3 | 100 |
| 40 to 44 years | 25 | 44 | 31 | - | 100 |
| 45 years and older | 9 | 80 | 11 | - | 100 |

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

the CPS data only reflect reference children in the sample. Another part of the discrepancy in the racial distribution would be accounted for if white reference children are more likely than black reference children to have siblings who were also born out of wedlock. Second, because the CPS sample does not include mothers under the age of 18, the racial distribution of out-of-wedlock births among young teen mothers may be sufficiently different from that of older mothers to account for part of the discrepancy. Third, the proportion of out-of-wedlock births that are to black never-married mothers may be higher than that to white never-married mothers because relatively more white out-of-wedlock births are to previously married rather than never-married women. Finally, marital status is self-reported in the CPS and, therefore, subject to social desirability bias. Any differences by race in reporting marital status will distort the race distribution of never-married mothers in the sample. Thus, if white mothers are less willing than black mothers to report that they are never-married, then this will artificially reduce the ratio of white to black never-married mothers in the CPS sample.[39]

The distribution of paternity establishment status by the current age of the mother is shown in Table 3.3. Recall that these figures refer to the age of the mother at the time of the survey, not at the birth of the child or the date paternity was established. Mothers in the youngest and oldest age groups in the sample are less likely than mothers in other age groups to have established paternity. Mothers between the ages of 20 and 29 are most likely to have had paternity legally established. In both the 20 to 24 year old and the 25 to 29 year old age groups, a higher proportion of mothers have had paternity established than for the sample as a whole. Thirty-two percent of mothers currently aged 20 to 24 and 26 percent of mothers aged 25 to 29 have had paternity established, compared to 17 percent for all other never-married mothers in the sample.

Compared to mothers who probably have not had paternity established, the age distribution of mothers who have had a paternity established is much more heavily concentrated in the 20 to 29 year

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[39] The results of a recent nationally representative survey of 13,000 high school students suggest that young black women may be more willing to consider nonmarital childbearing than white women. See Allan F. Abrahamse, Peter A. Morrison, and Linda J. Waite, "Teenagers Willing to Consider Single Parenthood: Who Is At Greatest Risk?" Family Planning Perspectives, Vol. 20, No. 1, January/February 1988.

Table 3.3

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND AGE GROUP

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| 18 to 19 years | 33,729 | 155,808 | 189,537 |
| 20 to 24 years | 209,790 | 447,406 | 657,196 |
| 25 to 29 years | 136,334 | 379,893 | 516,227 |
| 30 to 34 years | 55,651 | 227,185 | 282,836 |
| 35 to 39 years | 37,438 | 157,074 | 194,512 |
| 40 to 44 years | . | 55,473 | 55,473 |
| 45 years and older | 8,445 | 62,624 | 71,069 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| 18 to 19 years | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| 20 to 24 years | 32 | 68 | 100 |
| 25 to 29 years | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| 30 to 34 years | 20 | 80 | 100 |
| 35 to 39 years | 19 | 81 | 100 |
| 40 to 44 years | . | 100 | 100 |
| 45 years and older | 12 | 88 | 100 |
| Percent by age group | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| 18 to 19 years | 7 | 10 | 10 |
| 20 to 24 years | 44 | 30 | 33 |
| 25 to 29 years | 28 | 26 | 26 |
| 30 to 34 years | 12 | 15 | 14 |
| 35 to 39 years | 8 | 11 | 10 |
| 40 to 44 years | . | 4 | 3 |
| 45 years and older | 2 | 4 | 4 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

old age group. Over 70 percent of mothers who have had paternity established for at least one child are between the ages of 20 and 29 (44 percent are between the ages of 20 and 24, and 28 percent are between the ages of 25 and 29). Among mothers who probably have not had paternity established, only 56 percent fall between the ages of 20 and 29.

The distribution of paternity establishment status by the number of children living with the mother in the same household is shown in Table 3.4. Recall that these figures reflect the proportion of mothers who have had paternity established for at least one child. Thus, 44 thousand (or 23 percent) of the 192 thousand women who have three children from an absent father have had paternity established for at least one of their three children; it does not necessarily follow, however, that the other two children in the household have also had paternity established. In general, for mothers with more than one child, those with fewer children are more likely to have had paternity established for at least one child. Twenty-seven percent of mothers with two children have had paternity established, compared to 17 percent of mothers with four or more children. Mothers with one child are slightly more likely to have had paternity established, and mothers with three children are slightly less likely to have had paternity established than the sample as a whole.[40]

This inverse relationship between the likelihood of having paternity established and the number of children living in the household suggests that paternity establishment is not an independent event across children in a given household. If it were, then the proportion of mothers who have established paternity for at least one child would increase as the number of children in the household increased.[41]

The relationship between paternity establishment status and mother's education is shown in Table 3.5. High school completion appears to be particularly important for paternity establishment. For never-married mothers who report less than 12 years of completed schooling, only 20 percent

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[40] Interestingly, the proportion of mothers reporting that the reason child support payments have not been agreed to or awarded is that they are unable to locate the father increases as the number of children increases, while the proportion reporting that the reason is that they do not want child support decreases as the number of children increases.

[41] Note that the inverse relationship does not hold for mothers with one or two children only.

Table 3.4

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND NUMBER OF OWN CHILDREN PRESENT FROM ABSENT FATHER

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| One child | 262,104 | 806,881 | 1,068,985 |
| Two children | 145,163 | 390,897 | 536,060 |
| Three children | 44,494 | 147,118 | 191,612 |
| Four children or more | 29,626 | 140,567 | 170,193 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| One child | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Two children | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| Three children | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| Four children or more | 17 | 83 | 100 |
| Percent by number of children | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| One child | 54 | 54 | 54 |
| Two children | 30 | 26 | 27 |
| Three children | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| Four children or more | 6 | 9 | 9 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

Table 3.5

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND EDUCATION

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Years of Schooling Completed** | | | |
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| Less than 12 years | 116,634 | 456,249 | 572,883 |
| High School: 4 years | 254,237 | 728,784 | 983,021 |
| College: 1 to 3 years | 89,198 | 244,108 | 333,306 |
| 4 years or more | 21,318 | 56,322 | 77,640 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Less than 12 years | 20 | 80 | 100 |
| High School: 4 years | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| College: 1 to 3 years | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| 4 years or more | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| Percent by years of schooling | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Less than 12 years | 24 | 31 | 29 |
| High School: 4 years | 53 | 49 | 50 |
| College: 1 to 3 years | 19 | 16 | 17 |
| 4 years or more | 4 | 4 | 4 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

have established paternity for the reference child.[42] Among high school graduates, the level increases to 26 percent, and among mothers who have some college, the level of paternity establishment is 27 percent.[43] The association between high school completion and paternity establishment is also evident if we compare the group of mothers who have had paternity established with those who probably have not had it established. Mothers with less than 12 years of schooling comprise 24 percent of the former group, but they comprise over 30 percent of mothers who probably have not had paternity established.[44]

The distribution of paternity establishment status by the mother's labor force status at the time of the survey is shown in Table 3.6.[45] Nearly one-half of the mothers, over 900 thousand, were not in the labor force, while almost 775 thousand were employed. Approximately 290 thousand never-married mothers aged 18 and older were unemployed. Unemployed mothers were the most likely to have had paternity established, with 31 percent of them having paternity established for at least one child. Mothers who were not in the labor force were the least likely of all three labor force groups to

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[42] Recall that all women in the sample are aged 18 or older. As a result, the proportion of mothers in this group who are still in school is very small. Less than 3 percent of mothers who have not completed high school report that they are students.

[43] The distribution of never-married mothers by detailed paternity establishment status and education shows that the proportion of mothers reporting they do not want child support increases with level of education, and the proportion reporting they are unable to locate the father decreases with level of education. See Aron, Barnow, and McNaught (1989), Appendix Table A.4.

[44] The causal relationship between high school graduation and paternity establishment is unclear. High school graduates may be more likely to pursue paternity establishment or establishing paternity may make mothers more likely to return to and finish high school. Finally, some unknown third factor may be linked to an increased likelihood of establishing paternity and completing high school.

[45] Respondents are classified as employed if, during the survey week they work as paid employees or are self-employed in their own business or profession or on their own farm. Individuals classified as unemployed are those respondents who are not employed but are available for work. They must be actively seeking work, waiting to be called back to a job from which they have been laid off, or waiting to start a new job within 30 days. All remaining individuals are classified as not in the labor force.

Table 3.6

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| Employed | 200,498 | 574,048 | 774,546 |
| Unemployed | 90,633 | 198,908 | 289,541 |
| Not in labor force | 190,256 | 712,507 | 902,763 |
| **Percent by paternity estab. status** | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Employed | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| Unemployed | 31 | 69 | 100 |
| Not in labor force | 21 | 79 | 100 |
| **Percent by employment status** | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Employed | 42 | 39 | 39 |
| Unemployed | 19 | 13 | 15 |
| Not in labor force | 40 | 48 | 46 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

**Source:** Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

have had paternity established: only 21 percent of these mothers have paternity established.[46] Among mothers who have had paternity established, 42 percent were employed, 40 percent were not in the labor force, and 19 percent were unemployed. Unlike those who have had paternity established, however, the largest group of mothers who probably have not had paternity established are those who were not in the labor force (48 percent); this is followed by employed mothers (39 percent) and unemployed mothers (13 percent).

Paternity establishment status by the annual family income of the mother is shown in Table 3.7.[47] Among women whose family incomes are below $15 thousand (85 percent of the entire sample), the likelihood of having paternity established appears to rise with income. Only 23 percent of women with incomes below $5 thousand have had paternity established, while 32 percent of women with family incomes between $10 and $15 thousand have had paternity established. The latter group has the highest level of paternity establishment among all income groups. For income levels above $15 thousand, the relationship between paternity establishment and income is unclear. This may reflect the small number of mothers in our sample whose incomes fall within this range.

In general, the income distribution of mothers who have had paternity established is similar to that of mothers who probably have not had paternity established. For both groups, roughly one-half have incomes below $5 thousand, and over 25 percent have incomes between $5 and $10 thousand. Mothers who have established paternity for at least one child have slightly higher incomes than those

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[46] Because this classification is based on the labor force participation of never-married mothers during a single week (the survey week), we also examined levels of paternity establishment using a more robust measure of labor force participation -- number of weeks worked during 1985. Mothers who reported that they did not work at all in 1985 (46 percent of the weighted sample) had a paternity establishment level of 23 percent. Approximately 26.5 percent of mothers who reported working 1 to 26 weeks in 1985 (17 percent of the sample) and 26.2 percent of mothers who reported working between 27 and 51 weeks in 1985 (12 percent of the sample) had established paternity for one of their children. Finally, the remaining never-married mothers who reported working all 52 weeks of 1985 (25 percent of the sample) had a paternity establishment level of 23.6 percent. Note that these figures are not directly comparable with those reported in Table 3.6 because weeks unemployed and weeks not in the labor force cannot be distinguished using this alternative measure.

[47] Income figures provided in the text reflect total annual family income less child support. Income includes money income only, prior to deductions for taxes. Sources include wages or salaries, net income from self-employment, Social Security, dividends, interest, public assistance and welfare, unemployment compensation, government pensions, and veterans payments. Alimony, regular contributions from persons not living in the household, and other periodic income are also included.

Table 3.7

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND FAMILY INCOME LESS CHILD SUPPORT

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| $ 0 - 4,999 | 223,064 | 738,145 | 961,209 |
| $ 5,000 - 9,999 | 139,133 | 393,098 | 532,231 |
| $ 10,000 - 14,999 | 55,937 | 117,459 | 173,396 |
| $ 15,000 - 19,999 | 30,407 | 113,479 | 143,886 |
| $ 20,000 - 24,999 | 10,786 | 61,135 | 71,921 |
| $ 25,000 or greater | 22,060 | 62,147 | 84,207 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| $ 0 - 4,999 | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| $ 5,000 - 9,999 | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| $ 10,000 - 14,999 | 32 | 68 | 100 |
| $ 15,000 - 19,999 | 21 | 79 | 100 |
| $ 20,000 - 24,999 | 15 | 85 | 100 |
| $ 25,000 or greater | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| Percent by family income | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| $ 0 - 4,999 | 46 | 50 | 49 |
| $ 5,000 - 9,999 | 29 | 26 | 27 |
| $ 10,000 - 14,999 | 12 | 8 | 9 |
| $ 15,000 - 19,999 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| $ 20,000 - 24,999 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| $ 25,000 or greater | 5 | 4 | 4 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

who have not: 4 percent fewer have annual family incomes below $5 thousand while 3 percent more have incomes between $5 and $10 thousand.[48]

Table 3.8 shows the paternity establishment status of never-married mothers aged 18 and older by urban-rural status.[49] Mothers who live in a central city and those who live outside metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) are less likely than those who live just outside central city locations (balance MSA) to have paternity established.[50] Twenty-two percent of never-married mothers living in a central city or in a non-MSA area have had paternity established for at least one of their children, compared to 27 percent of mothers living in a non-central city MSA area.[51] A comparison of the urban-rural distribution of mothers who have had paternity established with those who probably have not had paternity established indicates that over one-half (55 percent) of all mothers who have not had paternity established live in a central city, compared to 48 percent of never-married mothers who have had paternity established.

Regional differences in the level of paternity establishment are shown in Table 3.9.[52] Note that the regional distribution of all never-married mothers aged 18 and older ranges from a high of 33

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[48] It is important to note that as with most household surveys, CPS data reflect lower total personal incomes than are reported by independent sources (e.g. tax returns, W-2 forms, and Social Security benefit records). As a result of income underreporting, therefore, the income distribution of never-married mothers in this sample may be biased downwards.

[49] The CPS uses metropolitan statistical area (MSA) definitions designated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Each MSA must include at least: (a) one city with 50,000 or more inhabitants, or (b) a Census Bureau-defined urbanized area of at least 50,000 and a total MSA population of at least 100,000 (75,000 in New England). The largest city in each MSA is designated a "central city." Observations classified as "not identifiable" refer to individual metropolitan areas of populations with less than 100,000. Census Bureau confidentiality rules only allow metropolitan areas with populations of 100,000 or more to be identified.

[50] Note that these results are based on the urban-rural status of mothers at the time of the survey. Mothers' urban-rural status at the time paternity was established cannot be determined from the CPS data.

[51] Tabulations not reported here suggest that the closer a never-married mother lives to a central city, the less likely she is to not want child support and the more likely she is to be unable to locate the father.

[52] As with urban-rural status, these results are based on the region in which the mother resides at the time of the survey. Mothers' region of residence at the time paternity was established cannot be determined from the CPS data.

Table 3.8

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND URBAN/RURAL STATUS

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| Central City | 233,063 | 821,757 | 1,054,820 |
| Balance MSA | 89,619 | 237,793 | 327,412 |
| Non MSA | 70,866 | 247,502 | 318,368 |
| Not Identifiable | 87,839 | 178,411 | 266,250 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Central City | 22 | 78 | 100 |
| Balance MSA | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| Non MSA | 22 | 78 | 100 |
| Not Identifiable | 33 | 67 | 100 |
| Percent by rural/urban status | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Central City | 48 | 55 | 54 |
| Balance MSA | 19 | 16 | 17 |
| Non MSA | 15 | 17 | 16 |
| Not Identifiable | 18 | 12 | 14 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

**Source:** Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

Table 3.9

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND REGION

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established [1] | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 481,387 | 1,485,463 | 1,966,850 |
| Northeast | 139,549 | 341,728 | 481,277 |
| Midwest | 136,539 | 413,001 | 549,540 |
| South | 156,982 | 497,304 | 654,286 |
| West | 48,317 | 233,430 | 281,747 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Northeast | 29 | 71 | 100 |
| Midwest | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| South | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| West | 17 | 83 | 100 |
| Percent by region | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Northeast | 29 | 23 | 24 |
| Midwest | 28 | 28 | 28 |
| South | 33 | 33 | 33 |
| West | 10 | 16 | 14 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

percent in the south to a low of 14 percent in the west. The highest proportion of never-married mothers with paternity established for at least one child is found in the northeast (29 percent) while the lowest is in the west (17 percent).[53] The proportion of mothers in the midwest and south who have had paternity established is very close to the proportion for the sample as a whole, with 25 percent of mothers in the midwest and 24 percent of mothers in the south having paternity established. The regional distribution of mothers who have had paternity established is very similar to those who probably have not had paternity established. For both groups of mothers, 33 percent live in the south and 28 percent live in the midwest. Among mothers who have had paternity established, an estimated 29 percent live in the northeast and 10 percent live in the west. For mothers who have not had paternity established, relatively fewer live in the northeast (23 percent) and relatively more live in the west (16 percent).

Recall that the classification used to classify mother-reference child units by paternity establishment status was based on a comparison of those mothers who had definitely established paternity for at least one child (mothers who reported that they had been awarded child support, had a final agreement pending, or had been granted joint custody) with all remaining mothers, who were classified as probably not having paternity established. In order to verify some of the relationships we have found, we have also compared mothers who have had paternity established with the smaller set of mothers who have definitely not had paternity established (i.e., those who reported that they did not have a child support award because they were unable to establish paternity).[54]

Under this classification the total number of mother-reference child units is much smaller since it only includes those mothers who have established paternity for at least one child (481 thousand) and those who reported that they were unable to establish paternity for any of their children (85 thousand). Many of the associations between paternity establishment status and various

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[53] It is interesting to note that among never-married mothers living in the northeast the proportion reporting that child support is not wanted and the proportion reporting that child support payments have been agreed to or awarded are equal (29 percent). In the west, however, the proportion of mothers who report that they do not want child support is much larger than the proportion who report that child support payments have been agreed to or awarded (45 percent compared to 17 percent). See Appendix Table A.8.

[54] See Aron, Barnow, and McNaught (1989) for a fuller discussion of this analysis.

socioeconomic characteristics which were found using the earlier classification appear to be even stronger in this analysis.

### 3.2 Summary

The likelihood of having paternity established varies by a number of socioeconomic characteristics. Data from the 1986 CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement indicate that family characteristics, such as the number of children living in the household and high school completion of the mother, economic characteristics, such as family income level and the mother's labor force participation, and locational variables, such as region and urban-rural status, are all correlated with paternity establishment status.

In general, compared to mothers who have had paternity established for at least one child, mothers who have not established paternity are more likely to be black, have not completed high school, have three or more children, and have annual family incomes below $5 thousand. In addition, these mothers are more likely to not be in the labor force, live in a central city, and live in the south.

## 4. ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT STATUS AND AFDC PARTICIPATION

Since 1975, the Social Security Act has required mothers applying for public assistance to cooperate with state child support enforcement (CSE) programs or lose the parental portion of their benefits. In order to participate in the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, mothers must identify the father of each dependent child, agree to cooperate in locating the father and securing support from him, and sign over to the state CSE agency her interest in child support payments.[55]

The legislative link between efforts to establish paternity and participation in the AFDC program suggests that the paternity establishment status of mothers who have received AFDC benefits may differ from those who have not. This chapter compares the paternity establishment status of those mothers who received AFDC benefits at any time during 1985 with those who did not.[56] In addition to examining the overall difference in the paternity establishment rate by AFDC participation, we look at the distribution of paternity establishment and AFDC status by a number of socioeconomic variables which may be associated with both paternity establishment and AFDC participation.

Almost one-half (47.7 percent) of the never-married mothers in our sample reported receiving AFDC benefits at some point in 1985. The proportion of mothers who have established paternity for at least one child is roughly equal among AFDC and non-AFDC mothers.[57] Twenty-four percent of the

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[55] Statutory exceptions apply to those mothers who decline to cooperate because of fear of retaliation or harm from the putative father and in cases when a paternity determination is found not to be in the best interests of the child (e.g., rape or incest). The former exception is also known as the good cause exception. AFDC families retain the first $50 of the monthly child support collected by state CSE (or IV-D) agencies.

[56] This classification is drawn from question number 49 of the 1986 CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement and not question number 50 which asks the respondent whether or not she received AFDC payments every month in 1985. A comparison of mothers who did not receive AFDC in 1985 and mothers who received AFDC every month in 1985 is provided Aron, Barnow, and McNaught (1989).

[57] Note that mothers who received AFDC (and assistance from a IV-D agency) prior to 1985 but who did not receive such assistance in 1985 will be classified as non-AFDC mothers. It should not be assumed, therefore, that all non-AFDC mothers who have had paternity established did so outside the AFDC-IV-D system. Similarly, AFDC mothers who have had paternity established for the reference child may not have had it established while they were on AFDC.

AFDC mothers have had paternity established, compared to 25 percent of the non-AFDC mothers. Differences do arise, however, if we compare different races within each AFDC group. The distribution of paternity establishment status by race is shown in Table 4.1 for never-married mothers who received AFDC benefits in 1985 and for those who did not. The highest level of paternity establishment is found among white mothers who received AFDC benefits in 1985: 33 percent have had paternity established for at least one of their children. Relatively fewer, 26 percent, white non-AFDC mothers have had paternity established. For black mothers, AFDC participation has virtually no relationship to having paternity established. Twenty-three percent of black AFDC mothers have had paternity established compared to 24 percent of black non-AFDC mothers. Hispanic non-AFDC mothers have a very low rate of paternity establishment, 18 percent, while their AFDC counterparts have a paternity establishment rate of 21 percent.

The relationship between paternity establishment and AFDC status and age of the mother is shown in Table 4.2. Mothers under the age of 20 are much more likely to have paternity established if they received AFDC benefits in 1985 (24 percent have paternity established) than if they did not (15 percent have had paternity established). The reverse is true for mothers between the ages of 20 and 24. Twenty-seven percent of AFDC mothers aged 20 to 24 have had paternity established for at least one child, while 37 percent of non-AFDC mothers in the same age group have paternity established. Levels of paternity establishment for all other age groups do not vary greatly by AFDC status.

The results presented in Table 4.3 suggest that AFDC status does not affect the likelihood of having paternity established among women who have one or two children. The paternity establishment rate for non-AFDC mothers with one child is slightly higher than for their AFDC counterparts, while the non-AFDC rate is slightly lower than the AFDC rate for mothers with two children. For women with three or more children, however, receiving AFDC benefits in 1985 is associated with much higher levels of paternity establishment. Twenty-six percent of AFDC mothers with three children living with them in the same household have had paternity established for at least one child, while only 12 percent of non-AFDC mothers with three children have had paternity established. Although the difference is not as great, women with four or more children are also more likely to have paternity established if they received AFDC benefits in 1985.

**Table 4.1**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY AFDC STATUS, ESTABLISHMENT STATUS, AND RACE AND HISPANIC ORIGIN

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| White non-hispanic | 66,851 | 135,337 | 202,188 | 99,888 | 277,544 | 377,432 |
| Black non-hispanic | 136,016 | 466,761 | 602,777 | 125,398 | 395,256 | 520,654 |
| Hispanic | 25,086 | 97,117 | 122,203 | 17,815 | 82,106 | 99,921 |
| Other | 1,578 | 10,350 | 11,928 | 8,755 | 20,992 | 29,747 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| White non-hispanic | 33 | 67 | 100 | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| Black non-hispanic | 23 | 77 | 100 | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Hispanic | 21 | 79 | 100 | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| Other | 13 | 87 | 100 | 29 | 71 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

**Table 4.2**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
BY AFDC STATUS AND AGE GROUP

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| 18 to 19 years | 13,250 | 42,730 | 55,980 | 20,479 | 133,078 | 133,557 |
| 20 to 24 years | 94,809 | 254,811 | 349,620 | 114,981 | 192,595 | 307,576 |
| 25 to 29 years | 69,894 | 197,603 | 267,497 | 66,440 | 182,290 | 248,730 |
| 30 to 34 years | 31,394 | 113,394 | 144,788 | 24,257 | 113,791 | 138,048 |
| 35 to 39 years | 13,195 | 48,705 | 61,900 | 24,243 | 108,369 | 132,612 |
| 40 to 44 years | - | 28,887 | 28,887 | - | 26,586 | 26,586 |
| 45 years and older | 6,989 | 23,435 | 30,424 | 1,456 | 39,189 | 40,645 |
| Percent by paternity esteb. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| 18 to 19 years | 24 | 76 | 100 | 15 | 85 | 100 |
| 20 to 24 years | 27 | 73 | 100 | 37 | 63 | 100 |
| 25 to 29 years | 26 | 74 | 100 | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| 30 to 34 years | 22 | 78 | 100 | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| 35 to 39 years | 21 | 79 | 100 | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| 40 to 44 years | - | 100 | 100 | - | 100 | 100 |
| 45 years and older | 23 | 77 | 100 | 4 | 96 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

**Table 4.3**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS BY AFDC STATUS
AND NUMBER OF OWN CHILDREN PRESENT FROM ABSENT FATHER

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| One child | 85,679 | 290,063 | 375,742 | 176,425 | 516,818 | 693,243 |
| Two children | 80,179 | 204,170 | 284,349 | 64,984 | 186,727 | 251,711 |
| Three children | 39,425 | 111,323 | 150,748 | 5,069 | 35,795 | 40,864 |
| Four children or more | 24,248 | 104,009 | 128,257 | 5,378 | 36,558 | 41,936 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| One child | 23 | 77 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Two children | 28 | 72 | 100 | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| Three children | 26 | 74 | 100 | 12 | 88 | 100 |
| Four children or more | 19 | 81 | 100 | 13 | 87 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

Table 4.4 presents the paternity establishment distribution of never-married mothers by AFDC status and educational attainment. For mothers who have not completed high school, AFDC participation is associated with a slightly higher likelihood of having paternity established. Twenty-two percent of AFDC mothers who have not completed high school have had paternity established, compared to 18 percent of non-AFDC mothers in this group. The same is true of mothers who have attended college: the receipt of AFDC is associated with a higher rate of paternity establishment. Among high school graduates with no college, the paternity establishment rate does not seem to have been affected by the receipt of AFDC in 1985.

The distribution of paternity establishment status by the AFDC and labor force status of the mother is shown in Table 4.5.[58] Mothers who were employed at the time of the survey and who received AFDC benefits in 1985 are more likely to have paternity established than employed mothers who were not on AFDC. Thirty-two percent of employed mothers on AFDC in 1985 have had paternity established compared to 25 percent of employed mothers who were not on AFDC. For currently unemployed mothers the reverse is true -- participation in the AFDC program is associated with a slightly lower level of paternity establishment. Thirty percent of unemployed mothers who received AFDC benefits in 1985 have had paternity established, and 33 percent of unemployed mothers who did not receive AFDC in 1985 have had paternity established.

Associations between paternity establishment, AFDC participation, and annual family income are shown in Table 4.6.[59] Never-married mothers with family incomes below $5 thousand are more likely to have paternity established for at least one child if they did not receive AFDC benefits in 1985. Twenty-seven percent of mothers with annual family incomes below $5 thousand who reported that they did not receive AFDC benefits in 1985 have had paternity established for at least one child, compared to 21 percent of mothers who did receive AFDC benefits in 1985. For income groups

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[58] Note that unlike AFDC status which reflects the receipt of AFDC at any time in 1985, the labor force status of the mother reflects her labor force during the week of the survey in April of 1986.

[59] As in Chapter 3, income figures are net of child support. Recall that AFDC mothers are those who received AFDC payments at any time during 1985. As a result, annual income for AFDC mothers reflects both one or more months of AFDC benefits and, when applicable, months with non-AFDC income.

**Table 4.4**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
BY AFDC STATUS AND EDUCATION

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| **Years of Schooling Completed** | | | | | | |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| Less than 12 years | 77,398 | 282,133 | 359,531 | 35,721 | 161,985 | 197,706 |
| High School: 4 years | 110,550 | 321,623 | 432,173 | 143,687 | 407,161 | 550,848 |
| College: 1 to 3 years | 39,311 | 92,709 | 132,020 | 49,887 | 151,399 | 201,286 |
| 4 years or more | 875 | 8,141 | 9,016 | 20,443 | 48,181 | 68,624 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Less than 12 years | 22 | 78 | 100 | 18 | 82 | 100 |
| High School: 4 years | 26 | 74 | 100 | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| College: 1 to 3 years | 30 | 70 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| 4 years or more | 10 | 90 | 100 | 30 | 70 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

**Source:** Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

**Table 4.5**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
BY AFDC STATUS AND EMPLOYMENT STATUS

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| Employed | 41,648 | 88,383 | 130,031 | 158,850 | 485,665 | 644,515 |
| Unemployed | 54,736 | 127,363 | 182,099 | 35,897 | 71,545 | 107,442 |
| Not in labor force | 133,147 | 493,819 | 626,966 | 57,109 | 218,688 | 275,797 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Employed | 32 | 68 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Unemployed | 30 | 70 | 100 | 33 | 67 | 100 |
| Not in labor force | 21 | 79 | 100 | 21 | 79 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

**Table 4.6**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
**BY AFDC STATUS AND FAMILY INCOME LESS CHILD SUPPORT**

**(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)**

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| $ 0 - 4,999 | 132,992 | 491,853 | 624,845 | 90,072 | 246,292 | 336,364 |
| $ 5,000 - 9,999 | 84,850 | 193,215 | 278,065 | 54,283 | 199,883 | 254,166 |
| $ 10,000 - 14,999 | 11,689 | 10,063 | 21,752 | 44,248 | 107,396 | 151,644 |
| $ 15,000 - 19,999 | - | 7,947 | 7,947 | 30,407 | 105,532 | 135,939 |
| $ 20,000 - 24,999 | - | 5,295 | 5,295 | 10,786 | 55,840 | 66,626 |
| $ 25,000 or greater | - | 1,192 | 1,192 | 22,060 | 60,955 | 83,015 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| $ 0 - 4,999 | 21 | 79 | 100 | 27 | 73 | 100 |
| $ 5,000 - 9,999 | 31 | 69 | 100 | 21 | 79 | 100 |
| $ 10,000 - 14,999 | 54 | 46 | 100 | 29 | 71 | 100 |
| $ 15,000 - 19,999 | - | 100 | 100 | 22 | 78 | 100 |
| $ 20,000 - 24,999 | - | 100 | 100 | 16 | 84 | 100 |
| $ 25,000 or greater | - | 100 | 100 | 27 | 73 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

**Source:** Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

between $5 and $15 thousand, however, the reverse is true. For example, 31 percent of AFDC mothers with incomes between $5 and $10 thousand have had paternity established, compared to 21 percent of non-AFDC mothers in the same income group. As expected, at higher income levels no mothers reported receiving AFDC benefits in 1985.

As Table 4.7 indicates, for mothers who live in central city and non-MSA areas, AFDC participation does not appear to affect the likelihood of having paternity established. Approximately 22 percent of women in these areas have had paternity established for at least one child. For women who live outside the central city in an MSA area, however, mothers who receive AFDC benefits are more likely to have had paternity established. Thirty-five percent of AFDC mothers living in non-central city MSA (balance MSA) areas have had paternity established, compared to 24 percent of non-AFDC mothers.

Associations between paternity establishment, AFDC status, and the region in which the mother resides are shown in Table 4.8. In the northeast and south, AFDC mothers are less likely to have had paternity established, while in the midwest and west AFDC mothers are more likely to have had paternity established. In the south, for example, 21 percent of AFDC mothers have had paternity established compared to 26 percent of non-AFDC mothers. In the west, however, 21 percent of AFDC mothers have had paternity established while only 14 percent of non-AFDC mothers have.

These results show that the relationship between paternity establishment and participation in the AFDC program is a very mixed one. In some instances mothers who participated in AFDC during 1985 have higher levels of paternity establishment than their non-AFDC counterparts, while in others cases they have lower levels of paternity establishment. Participation in AFDC is associated with relatively higher levels of paternity establishment among mothers under the age of 20, mothers who have three or more children living with them, employed mothers, mothers with annual family incomes between $5 and $10 thousand, and among mothers living in non-central city MSA areas and in the midwest or west. AFDC participation is associated with lower levels of paternity establishment among mothers between the ages of 20 and 24, unemployed mothers, mothers with incomes below $5 thousand, and mothers who live in the northeast or south.

Table 4.7

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
BY AFDC STATUS AND URBAN/RURAL STATUS

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| Central city | 124,862 | 464,508 | 589,370 | 108,201 | 357,249 | 465,450 |
| Balance MSA | 35,509 | 67,262 | 102,771 | 54,110 | 170,531 | 224,641 |
| Non MSA | 27,104 | 98,059 | 125,163 | 43,762 | 149,443 | 193,205 |
| Not Identifiable | 42,056 | 79,736 | 121,792 | 45,783 | 98,675 | 144,458 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Central city | 21 | 79 | 100 | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| Balance MSA | 35 | 65 | 100 | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Non MSA | 22 | 78 | 100 | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| Not Identifiable | 35 | 65 | 100 | 32 | 68 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

**Table 4.8**

DISTRIBUTION OF NEVER-MARRIED MOTHERS
BY AFDC STATUS AND REGION

(Never married women with own children under 21 years of age present as of spring 1986)

| | Received AFDC | | | Did Not Receive AFDC | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established[1] | Total | Paternity Established | Paternity Probably Not Established | Total |
| Total | 229,531 | 709,565 | 939,096 | 251,856 | 775,898 | 1,027,754 |
| Northeast | 63,160 | 159,811 | 222,971 | 76,389 | 181,917 | 258,306 |
| Midwest | 86,524 | 249,047 | 335,571 | 50,015 | 163,954 | 213,969 |
| South | 53,688 | 199,738 | 253,426 | 103,294 | 297,566 | 400,860 |
| West | 26,159 | 100,969 | 127,128 | 22,158 | 132,461 | 154,619 |
| Percent by paternity estab. status. | 24 | 76 | 100 | 25 | 75 | 100 |
| Northeast | 28 | 72 | 100 | 30 | 70 | 100 |
| Midwest | 26 | 74 | 100 | 23 | 77 | 100 |
| South | 21 | 79 | 100 | 26 | 74 | 100 |
| West | 21 | 79 | 100 | 14 | 86 | 100 |

[1] See Chapter 2 for discussion of classification.

Source: Lewin/ICF analysis of Current Population Survey, March/April 1986 Match File: Alimony and Child Support, Bureau of the Census.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This paper set out to answer two basic questions that quantify and characterize the population of children potentially in need of paternity establishment. First, What proportion of children born out of wedlock have had paternity established? Second, What factors differentiate children who have had paternity established from those who have not? In this concluding section, we summarize the findings of our analyses.

Our review of previous research on paternity establishment indicated that very little is known about either of these questions. A primary reason for this dearth of knowledge is that children born out of wedlock often cannot be identified in the nationally representative data bases and questions on the paternity establishment status of children born out of wedlock are almost never asked. After reviewing available data bases, we determined that the CPS Alimony and Child Support Supplement was the most suitable data source for the analysis of paternity establishment.

Even the CPS supplement, however, lacks many pieces of information critical to the analysis of the paternity establishment process. For example, because the marital status of the woman at the time of birth is not available, paternity establishment can only be analyzed for children of never-married mothers. Because specific questions on paternity establishment are not asked, the paternity establishment status of the child has to be inferred from answers given to questions concerning child support. Finally, because mothers answered child support questions for only one child, the paternity establishment status of other children in the household cannot be determined.

On the proportion of children born out of wedlock who have had paternity established, we conclude that the overall paternity establishment level among never-married mothers aged 18 and older is relatively low. Only 24.5 percent (481 thousand of an estimated 1.97 million) of the never-married mothers had established paternity for at least one of their children. Given the problems in the CPS mentioned above, the estimated proportion of <u>all</u> children born to these mothers who had paternity established could range between 13.8 and 23.5 percent.[60]

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[60] Recall that the upper end of this range is based on the assumption that non-reference children have the same paternity establishment status as the reference child in the household. This figure is slightly lower than the level calculated for reference children alone (24.5 percent) because the average family size of mothers who have had paternity established for the reference child is smaller than for

The proportion of never-married mothers who had established paternity for at least one child varies greatly when we examine different subgroups of mothers. We find the following characteristics to be associated with relatively higher levels of paternity establishment:

- being white non-Hispanic,
- being between the ages of 20 and 29 years,
- having one or two children,
- having graduated from high school,
- being unemployed,
- having a family income between $5 and $15 thousand,
- living in a suburban area, and
- living in the northeast.

In general, mothers without these characteristics are found to have relatively lower levels of paternity establishment.

We have also examined factors associated with paternity establishment separately for AFDC and non-AFDC mothers because mothers applying for AFDC are required to try to establish paternity and collect child support with the assistance of state Child Support Enforcement agencies. Although almost 48 percent (939 thousand) of the sample mothers had received AFDC benefits at some point in 1985, the year preceding the survey year, there is little difference in the level of paternity establishment between those mothers who had received AFDC benefits and those who had not. Twenty-four percent of the mothers who had received AFDC benefits had paternity established for at least one child. Of mothers who did not receive AFDC benefits at any point in 1985, 25 percent had paternity established.

AFDC participation is associated with differing levels of paternity establishment, however, when the analysis is done by various socioeconomic characteristics. Receiving AFDC benefits is related to higher levels of paternity establishment for:

- white non-Hispanic and Hispanic mothers,
- mothers between the ages of 18 and 19 years,
- mothers with three or more children,
- mothers with less than 12 years of completed schooling or with 1 to 3 years of college,
- employed mothers,
- mothers with annual family incomes between $5 and $10 thousand, and
- mothers who lived in suburban areas and in the midwest or west.

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mothers who probably do not have paternity established for the reference child.

One should not attribute a specific causal relationship to associations between paternity establishment and a given characteristic, particularly since many of the characteristics we have examined are themselves interrelated. Also, some of the associations observed could have occurred due to random chance inherent in the sample selection. In order to test the strength of these associations while holding other factors constant, several multiple regressions (not reported here) were run.[61] In these regression analyses, only three socioeconomic characteristics were found to have statistically significant correlations with paternity establishment:

- the mother's age (women in their twenties are more likely to have paternity established than other mothers),
- age of the youngest child (mothers with younger children are more likely to have had paternity established for the reference child than mothers with older children), and
- region (mothers who live in the west are less likely than mothers living elsewhere in the country to have paternity established).

In addition to these three variables, participation in AFDC and contact with a state child support enforcement office among mothers who did not collect AFDC are also found to be statistically significant programmatic factors associated with having paternity established.

The finding that AFDC participation significantly increases the probability of paternity establishment at first glance appears to contradict the earlier finding that AFDC mothers and non-AFDC mothers have similar levels of paternity establishment. In general, however, AFDC mothers have characteristics which are associated with a lower probability of establishing paternity for their children. Thus, the multivariate analyses indicate that AFDC participation compensates for these characteristics and results in similar levels of paternity establishment between the two populations.

The finding that contact with a child support enforcement office is associated with higher probabilities of paternity establishment should be interpreted with caution. Using CPS data, we cannot determine whether CSE services were sought to establish paternity or whether, having already established paternity for her child, a never-married mother was seeking other assistance, such as collecting child support due her.

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[61] The multivariate results are reported in Chapter 5 of Aron, Barnow, and McNaught (1989).

# Paternity Establishment in Arizona: A Case Study of the Process and Its Outcomes

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# PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT IN ARIZONA: A CASE STUDY OF THE PROCESS AND ITS OUTCOMES

## INTRODUCTION

Recognition that paternity establishment is critical to the reduction of welfare dependency and poverty for single-mother families prompted the federal government in its 1988 Family Support Act to mandate paternity establishment quotas that must be met by state child support agencies by 1991.[1] While child support programs for numerous years have been mandated by federal legislation to provide paternity related services, establishing paternity has generally been treated as a low priority in the child support enforcement system. Substantial attention has been given the important tasks of setting support obligations and collecting those obligations when paternity isn't at issue. However, until quite recently, the same attention has not been afforded the equally vital task of establishing the nonmarital child's right to child support. Unlike the child born within a marital relationship, the nonmarital child is considered to be without a father unless his or her paternity has been established by law. Without a legally identified father, these children are not eligible for child support. As welfare caseloads have become increasingly made up of families of children born out of wedlock -- now over half of the children on AFDC[2] -- it is not unexpected that the issue of paternity establishment is receiving considerable interest.

There are no national data available on the numbers of nonmarital children who have paternity established. Very rough estimates have been determined by comparing the number of paternities established each year to the number of children born out of wedlock each year. While there has been some improvement in the ratio of paternities to nonmarital births over time, in 1988 the national average was still

just over .30 (i.e. 30 paternities established for every 100 nonmarital births).[3]

Recent federal mandates have made it imperative that jurisdictions improve their performance in this area. However, little is known about why so few children born out of wedlock have paternity established. The number of persons involved in the process is significant -- the mother, the alleged father(s), welfare case workers, child support workers, attorneys and court personnel. The attitudes and interactions among these actors can impede or facilitate the adjudication of paternity. In addition, there are numerous decision points in the process that require a high degree of coordination if the process is going to proceed smoothly. Understanding this process, identifying where problems currently exist, who is involved in those problems and what those problems are is a necessary first step if jurisdictions are going to improve their paternity establishment rates. Unfortunately, state and local child support agencies are also being faced with limited resources. Programs are often being asked to do more without additional dollars. Thus, even when problems are identified programs will need to determine which of those problems they have the resources to address. What kinds of choices will have to be made and what will be the implications of these choices? This paper begins to explore these issues by examining the process of paternity establishment and the barriers and dilemmas encountered in the process. The paper also outlines several recommendations for improving paternity establishment outcomes. It presents findings from an exploratory study of child support programs in two counties in Arizona A case-study design was utilized to provide indepth information on the paternity establishment

process. Although the case study approach allows for an indepth description of the establishment process and outcomes its limitation is that the findings cannot be generalized to other jurisdictions. However, while the particulars for handling paternity cases will vary from one jurisdiction to another, it is likely that there are considerable similarities in the steps of the process.[4] Thus, the issues and recommendations identified by this study can be used by others to examine their paternity establishment process and aid them in designing effective strategies for improving outcomes. In addition, throughout the paper the issues and insights generated by this study will be compared to findings from similar paternity projects conducted in Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin[5].

The paper begins with a discussion of the public policy interest in paternity establishment. It then presents the stages in the paternity establishment process, the problems and issues confronted at each stage, and the outcomes at each stage. It concludes with a discussion of the most common barriers in the process and policy dilemmas that need to be resolved if strategies for improving performance are going to be successful.

## PUBLIC POLICY INTEREST IN PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT

Determination of paternity establishes the legal basis for claiming a variety of rights for the nonmarital child, but it has been used almost exclusively as an action to obtain economic support from the father. Lack of paternal support often means that the child and his/her mother have to rely on the public sector for support. Thus, since 1967 the federal government has required that state welfare

agencies initiate the establishment of paternity for AFDC children who were born out of wedlock. Paternity responsibilities were also incorporated when, in 1975, Congress added Part D to Title IV of the Social Security Act to establish the Child Support Enforcement (or IV-D) program. States are responsible for running this program, but financing is done through a cost share between the state and federal government. When the program first began in 1975 the federal government reimbursed states for 75 percent of the costs of establishing paternity, locating absent parents, and obtaining and enforcing support obligations owed by noncustodial parents to their children. Subsequent legislation reduced that percentage, so that currently the federal government is only reimbursing states for 66 percent of their costs.[6] The 1975 legislation also recognized the potential of child support to prevent welfare dependency by requiring that program services be provided to both welfare and nonwelfare families.

The 1984 amendments to Title IV-D further reinforced federal involvement in the rights of nonmarital children by requiring states to extend restrictive statutes of limitations on paternity adjudications. The strongest paternity related federal action to date, however, resides in the 1988 Family Support Act. The Act encourages states to implement a simple civil process for voluntarily acknowledging paternity, mandates paternity establishment quotas that must be met by states by 1991; and increases the federal cost-sharing rate for blood-testing costs incurred in the determination of paternity.

It is not surprising that concern about the establishment of paternity has become a major focus within the child support system. While fertility rates remain low, the proportion of live births to unmarried women continues to climb. By 1987, the over 2.5 million never-married mothers made up almost 28 percent of all child-support-eligible families.[7] Certain fiscal realities also contributed to concern. Researchers using the Michigan Panel Study of Income Dynamics found that never-married mothers were significantly more likely to experience long-term welfare dependence than ever-married mothers. It was estimated that the average spell of AFDC for a single mother was 9.3 years, and that 39 percent of single mothers, compared to 14 percent of divorced mothers and 24 percent of separated mothers, would experience AFDC spells of 10 years or more.[8] Given that less than 20 percent of never-married mothers even had a child support award in 1987,[9] it is likely that the failure to secure economic support from the fathers in these cases contributed to the economic disadvantages faced by these mothers as well as the fiscal burden borne by the public.

Current federal mandates have increased interest in identifying and implementing more effective practices for establishing paternity at the state and local level. To do this means that jurisdictions will have to clearly understand the establishment process and the factors that encourage and discourage the successful adjudication of paternity.

**THE STUDY**

This paper examines the process of paternity establishment and the barriers and dilemmas encountered in the process through a case study

of two local Arizona child support programs. Arizona represents a state with a traditionally low rate of paternity establishment and a significant minority population.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative data to obtain information on the establishment process, its problems and its outcomes. The two Arizona counties selected for the study were Maricopa and Pima. These counties were selected because they are the two largest counties in the state, accounting for over 70 percent of Arizona's nonmarital births, and because they use two different models of administration. The child support program for Maricopa county is state administered and operated, and is co-located with the state Child Support Enforcement Administration office in Phoenix. Many of the child support program tasks carried out in this office are not county specific or paternity case specific but they do affect the processing of paternity cases for this county (e.g. opening case files and entering information in the state computer system). Other tasks have been assigned to staff in "paternity units" designated to handle only paternity cases for this county and still others are performed by staff in another agency (i.e. the Attorney General's Office). To capture the full extent of the process, individuals responsible for each of these tasks were interviewed.

At the time of the study the Pima County child support program was jointly operated by a "branch" office of the state Child Support Enforcement Administration and the Pima County Attorney's Office both of which were located in Tucson.[10] Under contract to the state, the County Attorney's Office handles all tasks for non-AFDC cases and

necessary legal work (e.g. issuing summons, filing judgments with the court, etc.) for AFDC cases. The state office is primarily responsible for AFDC cases. The state and county staff are housed on different floors in the same building.

Qualitative Data Collection:

To gain a clear understanding of the paternity establishment process, semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted during the Summer of 1990 with individuals responsible for the range of paternity related tasks. The interviews began in Maricopa County with the Administrator of the state Child Support Enforcement Administration and his top managers. These individuals then identified other key staff involved with the paternity process in both Maricopa and Pima counties. Interviews in each county were subsequently conducted with supervisory staff responsible for workers performing intake, case processing and locate tasks, and staff from the Attorney General's Office in Maricopa County and the County Attorney's Office in Pima County. In several cases, follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify points, raise additional issues or to obtain further information about the paternity establishment process. All interviews were conducted by the author. In addition, a brief information form asking for comments on the major problems and barriers confronted in the intake process was completed by Maricopa County child support intake workers at a regularly scheduled staff meeting.

To supplement the information obtained from staff members, agency documents and statistical reports were obtained. These materials included an organizational chart, flow charts of the case processing

system, policy statements on the prioritization of cases, monthly activity reports from the field intake and paternity units, and the forms used in paternity cases (e.g. absent father questionnaire, affidavit of paternity, etc.) These documents were used to provide clarification and detail to the information obtained in the interviews.

The final source of information was non-participant observation of interviews with mothers and alleged fathers. The purpose for observing these interviews was to obtain a better understanding of the "human" flows through the system. Field notes on the process were recorded immediately after the visit.

Quantitative Data Collection:

The interviews with staff and observations of the process provide information for identifying problems in the paternity establishment process. However, the "severity and prevalence" of these problems are based on the perceptions of staff, not on the analysis of data. To determine the actual percentage of cases that proceed through each of the steps of the paternity establishment process (i.e. have a successful outcome at each stage), and the average time from one step to another, an analysis of a random sample of child support agency paternity case records was conducted. This information, along with that from the interviews, provides data to identify where the major problems in the process occur. Caution must be exercised in concluding that these results reflect the current situation in either county however. As both Pima and Maricopa counties respond to the new federal mandates they continue to modify and adjust their process to improve paternity establishment performance.

The MIS currently in use by the Arizona Child Support Enforcement Administration (CSEA) provides only minimal information on the child support cases in the state, thus to obtain the needed data for this research it was necessary to collect data from the physical paternity records. The first step in the case record data collection effort was to design a collection instrument that would capture the kinds of information necessary and available in these case records. Preliminary instruments were drafted and pretested using randomly selected paternity cases.

The sample selection criteria required that cases be initially opened for child support services in either 1988 or 1989. It was decided to focus on relatively recent cases because they would be more reflective of the current status of the paternity establishment process. However, we also wanted to be sure that cases would have been in the system long enough to have a reasonable "chance" of making it through the establishment process. Given the potential legal complexities of the paternity process, it was determined that an appropriate time period would be a minimum of 12 months. Thus, because we began collecting data in late December 1990, our case selection criteria stipulated that cases had to be opened no later than December 1989. Given that this was an exploratory case study it was determined that a sample of 350 paternity cases in Maricopa County and 250 cases in Pima county opened during this time period would be an adequate sample size.

To select the sample, a data tape which listed all child support cases opened since 1988 for Maricopa and Pima counties was provided by

CSEA. (Note: Child support cases in Arizona are opened and filed under the (alleged) father's name.) Unfortunately, there was no way to identify which of these child support cases included children who were born outside of marriage. Under the current MIS, child support cases are coded according to the next action potentially needed. That is, if a case needs paternity to be established it will be coded as such; but if paternity has already been established the case will be recoded to reflect that the case now needs a child support order; once an order is established it will be recoded as a potential enforcement case. Therefore, we had to generate a large enough random sample of child support cases from which we could obtain the appropriate number of paternity cases that fit our timeframe (i.e. opened in 1988 or 1989) and would include nonmarital children. According to CSEA estimates, somewhere between 40 and 50 percent of all child support cases in the state include children who were born outside of marriage.

The total population of child support cases opened since January 1, 1988 in Maricopa county was 45,763. In Pima county the comparable number was 21,302. Assuming that 1/3 of the cases will fall outside of our timeframe and another 55 percent will not be paternity cases, we needed to draw a random sample of approximately 1200 cases in Maricopa County to obtain 350 cases that fit our sample selection criteria. In Pima county we drew a random sample of 900 cases.

Of the 1200 cases sampled in Maricopa County, 387 cases (alleged fathers) with a total of 441 children fit our sample criteria. There are more children than cases because there were 40 alleged fathers with 2 children each and 7 with 3 children. 785 cases were located and

eliminated from the sample for several reasons: paternity was not at issue at the time of the case opening; they were not opened in 1988 or 1989; there was an error in the county code and some of the cases were not Maricopa County cases; the parent being sought was the mother, not the father and we could not determine if paternity had been established; and/or the case was a responding URESA (i.e. the mother lived in another state) with very little case information and Maricopa county was only involved in a part of the process. After numerous searches, we were unable to locate an additional 28 cases. It is likely that these cases have been misfiled or are "lost" on someone's desk.

In Pima County we located and read 219 cases with 250 children. 18 cases had 2 children, 3 cases had 3 children, 1 case had 4 children, and 1 case had 5 children. Of the 681 cases not included in the sample, 628 were excluded because paternity was not at issue, they were out of the time frame, the parent being sought was the mother, the case was not from Pima county or the case was a responding URESA. We were unable to locate the remaining 53 cases in this county.[11]

Data were collected by two research assistants. The majority of information being collected from the case records is obtained from various forms completed by the custodian of the child (usually the mother), child support staff and legal staff. Unfortunately, gathering data from these forms is not always straightforward. Information within and between forms is sometimes contradictory (e.g. one form indicates that the mother was on AFDC, whereas another form completed at the same time indicates that she was not on AFDC); and ambiguity of

information often requires reasoned judgements on the part of the data collectors (e.g. which of the three dates on the form indicates the date the form was completed?). To assure that there was consistency in the judgements being made by the data collectors, they were involved in the pretesting and final revisions of the research instrument. This increased both their familiarity with the instrument and the case records, and allowed them to assist in the establishment of decision rules for resolving discrepancies encountered in the case record information. In addition, once data collection began, reliability tests were conducted until acceptable rates between the two readers were established.

**THE PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS**

While the details of the paternity establishment process differed somewhat between Maricopa and Pima counties (see Table 1), it is most typically structured into five major stages.[12] Each stage includes various steps and each has an identified "successful" outcome. A successful outcome in one stage is necessary for a paternity case to proceed to subsequent stages. The five stages are: (1)initiate: the process for establishing paternity cannot begin unless a formal request for child support services has been initiated by either the mother or the welfare agency. A successful outcome at this stage is the completion of the appropriate request forms by the mother.; (2)intake: At the intake stage information about the alleged father is obtained from the mother. A successful outcome for this stage is the name and location information on the alleged father; (3)locate: In the locate stage location information is updated and verified. A successful

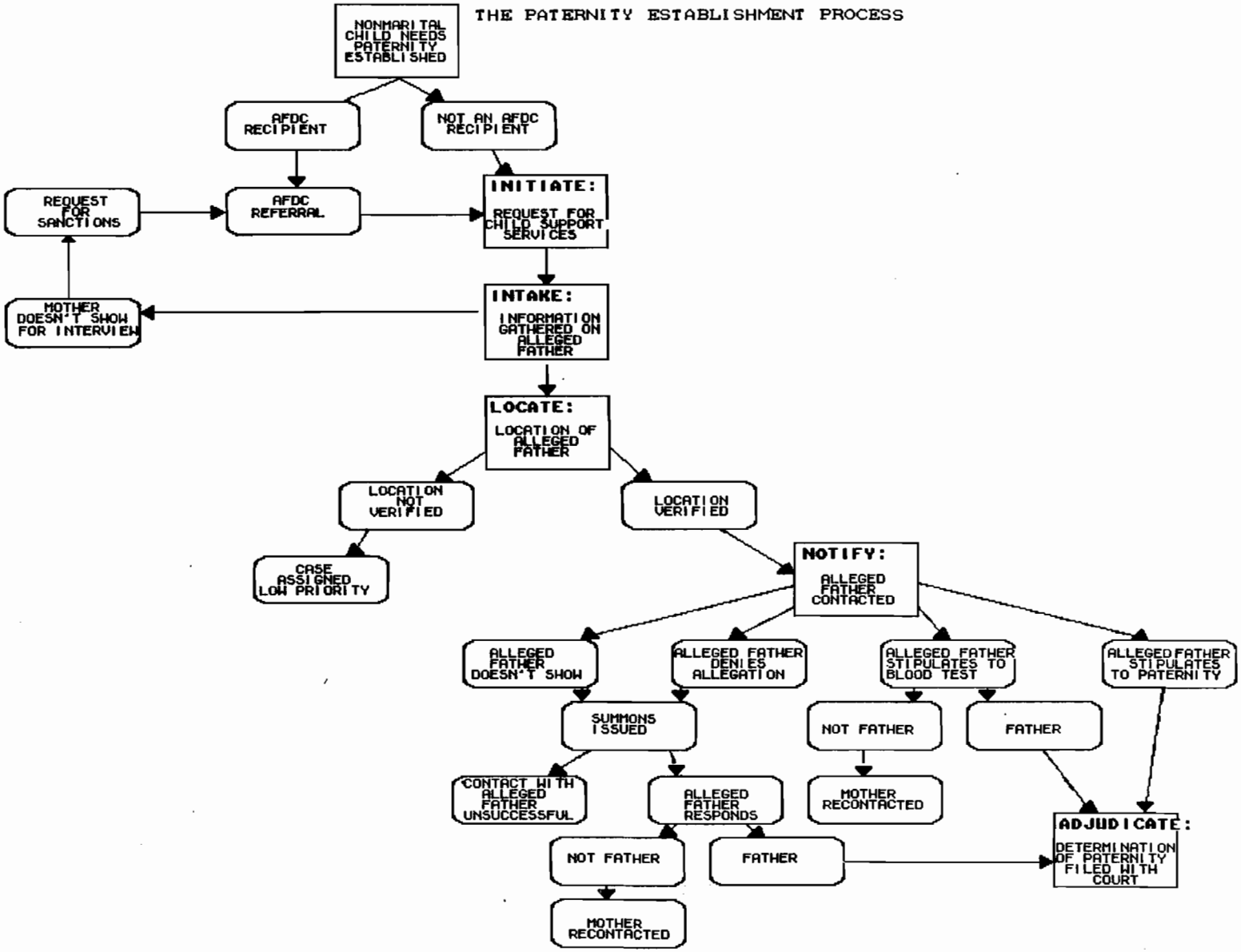
Table 1

Stages and Responsibilities in the IV-D Establishment Process, Maricopa and Pima Counties, Summer 1990

| STAGES IN THE PATERNITY PROCESS | RESPONSIBILITY FOR FUNCTIONS IN THE STAGE | |
|---|---|---|
| | MARICOPA COUNTY | PIMA COUNTY |
| **INITIATE** | AFDC cases: Referred by AFDC worker<br><br>Non-AFDC cases: Self-referral by mother to IV-D Office | AFDC cases: Referred by AFDC worker<br><br>Non-AFDC cases: Self-referral by mother to County Attorney's Office |
| **INTAKE** | AFDC cases: Tasks performed by IV-D staff in IV-A offices and forms forwarded to IV-D office; paternity unit staff does follow-up if additional information needed<br><br>Non-AFDC cases: Completed by mother and forwarded to IV-D Office; paternity unit staff follows-up | AFDC cases: Tasks performed by IV-A worker and forms forwarded to IV-D office; IV-D staff does follow-up if additional information needed<br><br>Non-AFDC cases: Mother completes forms; Co. Attorney does follow-up |
| **LOCATE** | AFDC and Non-AFDC cases: Locate tasks performed by locate workers in paternity unit | AFDC: Locate tasks performed by IV-D locate staff<br><br>Non-AFDC: Locate functions performed by County Attorney staff |
| **NOTIFY** | All cases: Paralegals in paternity unit responsible for 'Dear Dad' letters and conferences, and preparation of Summons & Complaints if needed; AGs Office responsible for pursuit of legal Complaint | All cases: County Attorney responsible for all notification tasks |
| **ADJUDICATE** | All cases: Attorneys General responsible for filing of paternity establishment with court | All cases: County Attorney responsible for filing of paternity establishment cases with court |

# FICURE 1

THE PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS



outcome would be verified location of the alleged father; (4)notify: In the notify stage the man named as the father of the child is contacted, informed about the allegation, and asked to respond to the allegation. A successful outcome would be a response by the alleged father to the allegation of paternity. and (5)adjudicate: In the final stage legal procedures for establishment are instituted. A successful outcome is the establishment of paternity. These stages are utilized in analyzing the process for establishing paternity. Information from the interviews with staff as well as data from the case records are presented for each stage. Potential issues and barriers that must be addressed in each stage are discussed and placed in the context of achieving the ultimate outcome of paternity establishment. The data from the case records are used to determine the actual percentage of cases that proceed through each stage (Table 2) and the time lags from one stage to the other. Figure 2 indicates the average time lags through the early stages of the process in our two study counties. Unfortunately, small sample sizes, exacerbated by missing data on dates of locate checks, preclude estimating time lags for the later stages in the process.

Initiate

The official child support intake process cannot commence until there has been a request for services to the child support agency. However, because the services are voluntary for mothers who are not on AFDC (hereafter these women will be referred to as non-AFDC mothers) and mandatory for AFDC mothers, the initiation of the intake process differs between the two groups. Entrance into the system for non-AFDC

Table 2
OUTCOME OF STAGES IN THE PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS
For Cases Opened in 1988 or 1989

| Stages in the Paternity Establishment Process | Maricopa County | | | | Pima County | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | AFDC | | Non-AFDC | | AFDC | | Non-AFDC | |
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| **Initiate**[1] | 388 | 100% | 19 | 100% | 239 | 100% | 8 | 100% |
| **Intake** Father named | 353 | 90.7% | 19 | 100% | 211 | 88.3% | 8 | 100% |
| Address given[2] | 159 | 45.0% | 17 | 89.5% | 84 | 39.8% | 7 | 87.5% |
| SS number given[2] | 109 | 30.9% | 15 | 78.9% | 41 | 19.4% | 6 | 75.0% |
| **Locate** | 140 | 36.1% | 17 | 89.5% | 72 | 33.6% | 7 | 87.5% |
| **Notify:** Attempted contact | 18 | 4.6% | 16 | 84.2% | 32 | 13.4% | 6 | 75.0% |
| Dear Dad Only[3] | 15 | 83.3% | 9 | 56.2% | 22 | 68.8% | 1 | 16.7% |
| Summons Only[3] | 1 | 5.6% | 1 | 6.3% | 4 | 12.5% | 2 | 33.3% |
| Both Dear Dad and Summons[3] | 2 | 11.2% | 6 | 37.5% | 3 | 9.4% | 2 | 16.7% |
| Other[4] | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 12.5% | 1 | 75.0% |
| Successful Contact | 14 | 3.6% | 14 | 7.4% | 30 | 12.6% | 6 | 75.0% |
| **Adjudicate:** Paternity Estab. | 10 | 2.6% | 9 | 47.4% | 19 | 7.9% | 6 | 75.0% |
| Stipulation[5] without blood test | 4 | 40.0% | 4 | 44.4% | 13 | 68.4% | 3 | 50.0% |
| Stipulation with blood test[5] | 4 | 40.0% | 4 | 44.4% | 4 | 21.0% | 3 | 50.0% |
| Default Judgement[5] | 2 | 20.0% | 1 | 11.1% | 2 | 10.6% | 0 | 0.0% |

[1] We were unable to determine the AFDC status at the time of case opening for 35 cases in Maricopa County and for 3 cases in Pima County

[2]For cases in which a father is named

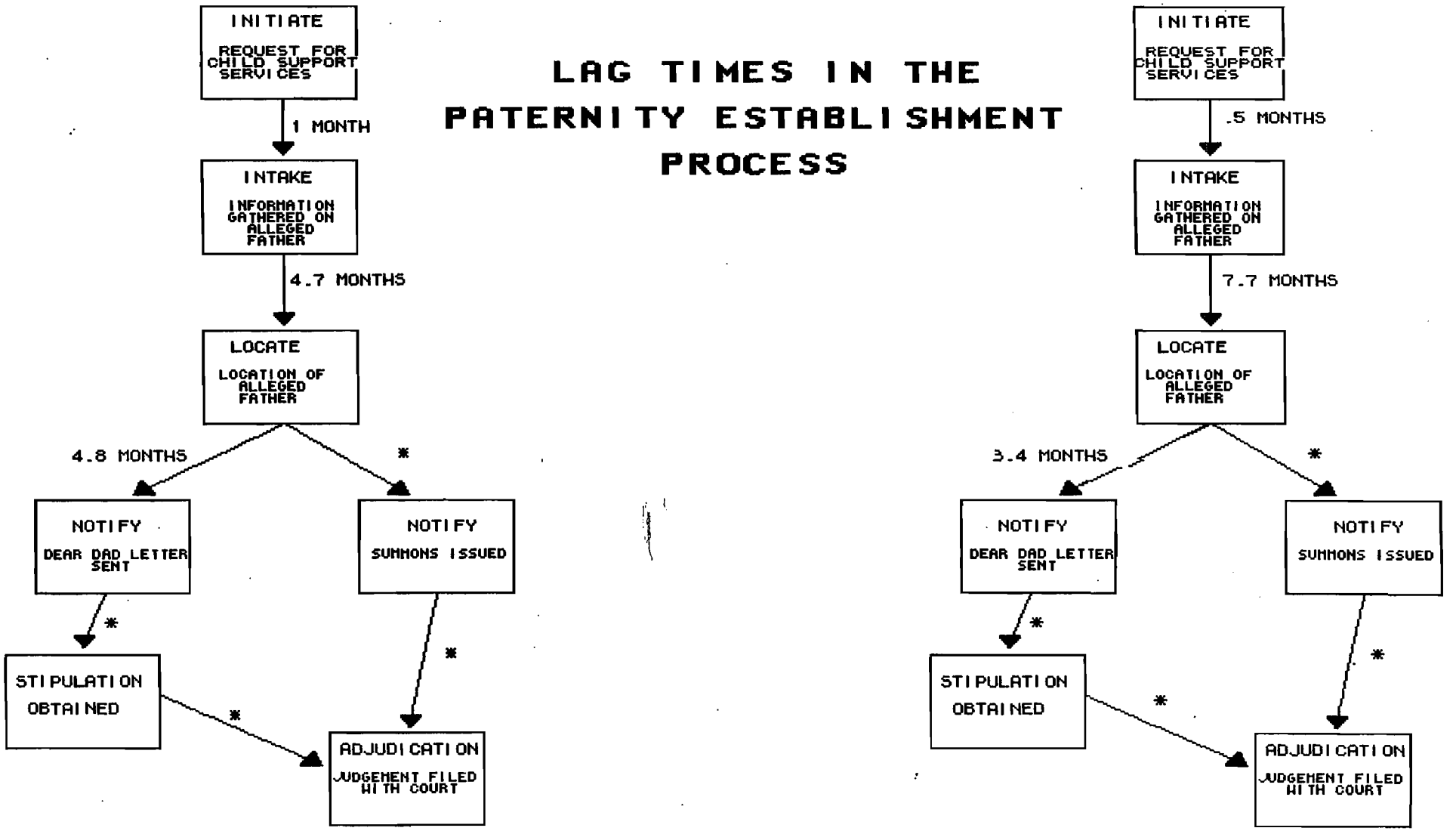
[3]For cases with attempted contact

[4]In these cases paternity was established, however there was no evidence of either a summons or letter in the file

[5]For cases with paternity established

FIGURE 2

# LAG TIMES IN THE PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT PROCESS




* Sample size less than 10

children begins with a request for services by the mother, whereas for AFDC children, the request comes from the welfare agency. Given these differing procedures, at this stage the issues associated with non-AFDC cases are generally referred to as problems of "non-participation", while problems associated with AFDC mothers are referred to as "non-cooperation".

**Nonparticipation:** There is very little research on the reasons why non-AFDC mothers choose not to establish paternity for their children. However, most observers seem to agree that a major factor is a lack of knowledge about the necessity and benefits of establishing paternity and about the availability of services from the child support agency.[13] In addition, there is some indication that many individuals do not know that there is a process for establishing paternity that must be completed before a child born outside of marriage is considered to have a legal relationship with their father. For example, a common misperception is that putting the alleged father's name on the birth certificate suffices as a legal acknowledgement of paternity. Given the inadequate understanding of the paternity process most strategies proposed for increasing the numbers of establishments among this group focus on intensive outreach to communities and providing more public information.

In this study respondents concurred that public education is a major factor in non-participation. However, in Maricopa County they also identified another, and what may be a more important barrier to participation of non-AFDC mothers for many jurisdictions. This barrier is the image of the child support system in the community. Most

believe that it is common knowledge to the residents in Maricopa county that the child support system has not done a very good job in meeting the demand for its services. The inability of the current system in Maricopa County to keep up with the caseload creates a negative view of the child support agency within the community and discourages participation by others.

Unfortunately, solving the first problem may exacerbate the second. Strategies to bring more non-AFDC paternity cases into the system may well be undermined unless there are enough resources to adequately serve the caseload. Establishing paternity is costly, and encouraging increased participation without a concomitant increase in resources is likely to discourage participation in the longterm. Thus, at the initiation stage programs are faced with the dilemma of implementing strategies for increasing participation of Non-AFDC clients while at the same time recognizing that their current resources may not be adequate to deliver the services.

The Pima County Attorney's Office, on the other hand, prides itself on the staff's ability to respond quickly to requests for service from Non-AFDC clients. They recognize, however, that their efficiency is largely attributable to the characteristics and size of their caseload. They serve only non-AFDC cases and the highest priority AFDC cases (i.e. cases that have good information on locating the alleged father). The active caseload of the attorney assigned to handle paternity cases is approximately 400 cases, compared to Maricopa County's average caseload size of 2,500 per paternity worker.

We don't know the numbers of nonmarital children needing to have paternity established in each of these counties, thus we cannot determine the rate of success at the initiate stage. We do know that the greatest percentage of cases requesting child support services were AFDC recipients at the time of the initial application.

- In the study counties fewer than 5 percent of the cases sampled were non-AFDC. In 95.1 percent of the cases in Maricopa County the mother was on AFDC at the time of the case opening. In Pima County 96.7 percent of the mothers were on AFDC.

Interestingly, although the perception is that Pima County "does better" with its non-AFDC cases, they do not seem to be serving a greater percentage of non-AFDC cases than Maricopa County (Table 2).[14] Suggesting that a more timely response to non-AFDC cases does not necessarily translate into a higher percentage of non-AFDC cases in the system.

**Non-cooperation:** State welfare agencies are required by federal law to initiate the establishment of paternity for all AFDC children who are born out of wedlock, and to assure that AFDC recipients cooperate in this process. If the recipient does not cooperate, the welfare agency has the right to impose a sanction. This sanction is the removal of the mother's share of the benefit from the monthly AFDC grant. At the initiate stage, non-cooperation generally means the failure of the mother to keep appointments for scheduled child support intake interviews. The greatest percentage of paternity establishment cases are those initiated by the state or county welfare agency on behalf of AFDC children.

Strategies for dealing with the issues of non-cooperation are complicated by the interface between the welfare and child support

programs. This study, as well as the ones conducted in Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin all identified the interface between the AFDC and child support programs as a major obstacle in the paternity establishment process. Since its inception in 1975, it has been the responsibility of the Child Support Enforcement Program to locate fathers and establish paternity for nonmarital children on AFDC.[15] Thus, while the child support program is responsible for establishing the paternity of nonmarital AFDC children, it must depend on the welfare program to initiate the intake process through a referral for child support services. In addition, only the welfare program has the right to enforce penalties for non-cooperation with the child support program.

A major problem most often cited by child support personnel in this study with this distribution of responsibilities is that AFDC program staff do not view their child support functions as an important part of their job. Because AFDC workers are the referral source, it is their responsibility to complete a request for child support services, however, it is also expected by the child support staff that AFDC workers will explain the child support program and communicate to recipients the importance of cooperating with the program and the sanctions that may be imposed if they do not cooperate. Yet comments from child support workers in this study suggest that this is not always done. "Moms think that the child support interview is going to be another long, complicated interview asking the same things as the welfare interview. They just don't understand what the process is all about." "They (the mothers) do not realize the importance of

cooperating as far as their AFDC grant." "Some figure they will continue receiving benefits whether they show up or not."

Typical solutions at this stage are to improve the relationship with the welfare agency and to educate the welfare workers about the importance of this function. However, increasing the participation of AFDC mothers again raises the issue of resource availability. If more cases are brought into the system (i.e. more mothers cooperate) but there are not adequate resources to carry through the process, it is likely to reinforce the view among AFDC recipients -- and AFDC intake workers -- that cooperating with the child support agency is a waste of time. As workers in this study stated, "Some [mothers] think it's a waste of time, they say we don't do anything anyways." "Many mothers have a negative view of the system -- 'I've filled these forms out before and nothing ever happens'. The inability of the child support program to respond to cases that enter the system may, in fact, be a critical factor in the AFDC intake workers' lack of interest in emphasizing the importance of the child support program.

Intake

This stage focuses on obtaining adequate information on the alleged father so that the case can be pursued. In some instances the Initiation and Intake stages commence simultaneously, that is the request for services and gathering of information on the alleged father are done at the same time. However, in other situations they are separate activities. For example, as Table 1 indicates, in Maricopa County the AFDC worker forwards a request for services to the IV-D worker who then schedules a separate child support intake interview.

In addition, even when the AFDC worker performs the intake task as in Pima County, the child support worker must do follow-up with the mother to gather further data on the alleged father. We can see in Figure 1 that the average time from the date the application was initiated and when the first intake information was gathered is relatively short. In Maricopa County it is 1 month and in Pima it is .5 months.

Non-AFDC cases that enter the system generally have positive outcomes in this stage. That is, they are able to provide relatively complete information on the alleged father. This is not surprising, of course when one considers that a mother is unlikely to pursue paternity voluntarily unless she knows who the father is and where he can be found.

Problems of non-cooperation among AFDC mothers, however, continue into the intake stage. Even if the mother arrives for the intake interview she may not name a father or provide adequate information on the alleged father. Several research studies, most often focused on adolescent unwed parents, concur that the majority of mothers know the father of their child and most continue to have a relationship with him after the birth of the baby.[16] This indicates that the failure to identify the father is a function of something other than knowing who parented the child. One small study of young unwed mothers in Minnesota found that when these young mothers were educated about the benefits of establishing paternity, they expressed more willingness to pursue the establishment process.[17]

As with the initiation stage, many child support programs must depend upon the AFDC worker to obtain the necessary intake information

from the mother. Given the previously mentioned concern about the commitment of the AFDC worker to completion of the child support tasks, the most typical response to this problem is for child support agencies to assume greater responsibility for the process by placing child support staff in each welfare office. It is assumed that when the child support staff conduct the child support intake interview they are better able to explain the benefits of the program, to press for more information from the mother, and thus to obtain more complete information from the mother. Data from our study counties provides some support for the perception that the placement of child support intake workers in the welfare field offices would improve the amount of information obtained on the alleged father. Maricopa County, which uses child support intake workers, is somewhat more successful in obtaining information on the father.[18]

- For AFDC cases in Maricopa County, the mother named a father in approximately 91 percent of the sample cases (353 out of 388 cases) In Pima County the father was named in just over 88 percent of the AFDC sample (211 out of 239 cases).

- Of the Maricopa County cases with AFDC information and a father named (353 AFDC cases), the mother provided an address for the alleged father in 45 percent of the cases and a social security number in approximately 31 percent. In Pima County the comparable numbers were 40 percent with an address and 19 percent with a social security number.

Pima County staff would like to use the child support worker model of intake but have not had sufficient resources. Maricopa County, on the other hand, currently utilizes this model of intake, but administrators are beginning to raise questions about who should be responsible for the intake process. Given limited resources, is it more cost effective to place child support workers in welfare agencies

or to determine strategies for assisting welfare workers to do a better job of child support intake?

It was also observed during the course of this study that when the initiate and intake tasks are split between the two programs there can be confusion over case responsibility. In Maricopa county AFDC intake workers route referrals to the child support staff after the mother is determined eligible for AFDC. The child support worker then notifies the mother of her appointment time for the child support interview. Under these procedures, the AFDC worker's obligation to the child support intake process ends when the referral form is sent to the child support worker. However, a case is not considered to be a child support case until the mother arrives for her interview and completes the child support intake form. If the mother does not keep her appointment or contact the child support worker to reschedule, a request for sanction is sent to the AFDC worker. At this point the child support worker ends her or his responsibility for the case unless she or he is recontacted by the mother or receives another referral. Intake interview data collected by the child support staff indicate that an average of 40 percent of the mothers do not show for their first child support interview, and they estimate that an average of 20 percent never show for an interview.[19] This suggests that there are potentially a significant number of AFDC nonmarital children who need to have paternity established but they are not considered part of the child support system.[20] This data is very similar to the findings from the Wisconsin study of AFDC nonmarital children. In Milwaukee county

the researchers were unable to locate child support records for 15 percent of the nonmarital AFDC children in their sample.

Locate

In this stage, information on the location of the alleged father is updated and/or secured, and verified. Agencies use such information sources as the department of motor vehicles, department of revenue, post office locate services, prison records, credit bureau checks, and federal and state parent locator services. A location is considered successful if they are able to verify the alleged father's address or employer from two data sources.

A major problem in the locate stage is the lack of identifying information (e.g. date of birth, social security number, etc.) on the alleged father. "Many of our clients have a lack of information on the alleged father making location difficult." "The mother will not or can not give enough information to locate the alleged father." Without adequate information workers are often unable to access and verify address information from the usual data sources. At this point the skill and experience of locate workers becomes a critical issue. Locate staff in the study counties have argued that even with very few initial facts on the alleged father, if you are tenacious and have experience in "finding people", (such as having worked for a private collection agency), you can often obtain good locate information. Unfortunately, most people come to the child support program with no background in "finding people" and there is very little training provided in this area.

While improving the skills of workers may increase the ability to locate fathers in the more difficult cases, it does raise the question of cost-effectiveness. The more difficult cases take more resources. If the desired outcome at this stage is to increase the numbers of fathers located, unless a jurisdiction is already able to provide services to all of its easy-to-locate cases, it may not increase the numbers of paternities established to focus on hard-to-locate cases. In addition, it appears that the easy-to-locate cases may also be the ones with the most potential to pay child support and thus add to the program's incentive payment from the federal government.[21] Most jurisdictions don't have the resources to give detailed attention to every case and must establish case priorities during the locate stage. In the study counties the highest priorities are given to cases in which the mother has provided a home address and/or employer for the alleged father. If these are provided the locate worker then verifies the information before moving the case to the next stage. In the study counties there was evidence that at least one locate check was done for most cases in which there was an address. Additional cases may have received location services, however, there was no documentation of such in the case records.

- In Maricopa County locate checks were conducted on 36.1 percent of AFDC cases and 89.5 percent of Non-AFDC cases. Location checks were done on 33.6% of AFDC cases and 87.5 percent of Non-AFDC cases in Pima County.

It is often assumed that the child support system assigns paternity cases low priority because they don't think the fathers will be able to pay child support.[22] However, in these counties there was no evidence that perception of payment likelihood was a criterion in

prioritization decisions. The priority of a case is based on the amount of information available to locate the father, and the best assurance of location came when there was a work address on the father. What this does indirectly, however, is to focus attention on the cases in which the father has greater ability to pay child support. While, again this may be the most cost-effective practice, it does pose a dilemma for programs that are committed to serving all children requiring paternity without regard to ease of father location or his ability to pay child support. The current reality stated by one study participant, however, is that, "With limited resources the system will have to work the "easy" cases -- that is, those cases where locating the father is easy. There will need to be more incentives and resources to work the more difficult cases".

Even with substantial information from the mother there is no guarantee that the father will be located. In the study counties it was difficult to determine from the case records if the locate checks were successful. A lower bound estimate of successful location is the percentage of alleged fathers for which contact was attempted.

- In Maricopa County less than 22 percent of all those in which locate checks were completed (34 out of 157) had any contact with the alleged father been attempted. The comparable percentage in Pima County was almost 48 percent (38 out of 79). This suggests that either fewer fathers as a proportion of fathers referred were able to be located by Maricopa county or that fewer contacts were attempted even if location was successful.

Notify

In the notify stage the man named as the father of the child is contacted, informed about the allegation, and asked to respond to the allegation. In an effort to facilitate the notification process most jurisdictions have instituted a relatively simple process that provides

the alleged father an opportunity to admit paternity without issuing a formal Summons and Complaint to appear for a court hearing. This process allows voluntary acknowledgment of paternity, in lieu of a formal court proceeding, as a legal basis for establishing paternity.[23] This procedure is often handled by paralegals within the child support system rather than more costly attorneys.

The study counties send the alleged father what they call a 'Dear Dad' or 'Come In' letter. In the letter he is informed of the allegation and given an appointment to discuss the matter with a staff person. The specific procedures may vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, but typically there are four possible outcomes in this type of process: (1) the alleged father does not keep the appointment; (2) he keeps the appointment and denies being the father; (3) he keeps the appointment but is not certain if he is the father, and (4) he admits he is the father and signs a stipulation to that effect. Although the first situation is fairly straightforward, in the second situation, the father may actually deny paternity or be uncertain he is the father. He may refuse to take a blood test or to be bound by the results of a blood test. In the third instance, he signs an agreement (stipulates) to take a blood test and to abide by the results. In situation four, the father signs admitting his paternity.

- In Maricopa County 94 percent of the attempted contacts with the alleged father were initially done via a "Dear Dad" letter (32 out of the 34 attempted contacts received a letter), although 8 of 32 (25 percent) subsequently received a Summons as well. In Pima County 74 percent of the contacts were done via a letter (28 out of 38 contacts), with 5 out of the 28 (17.5%) also receiving a Summons.

It is evident that the more informal process of notification (the dear dad letter) is being used extensively by both counties. When the father doesn't respond to the letter, a Summons is generally issued. The difference between the counties in the percent of cases using the informal process is because Maricopa County gives most men the opportunity to respond informally before issuing a Summons. Pima County on the other hand generally tries to ascertain from the mother the likelihood of the father cooperating with the informal process. If she indicates that he is not likely to be cooperative, a Summons is immediately issued. Given that both counties ultimately issue about the same percentage of Summons (29 percent), the Pima county model may be the most efficient.

Major barriers at this stage are actually making contact with the alleged father, and if contact is made, having him respond. The first problem is that the time lag between the initial verification of the father's address and when notification is actually attempted is often so great that the alleged father has moved and contact is unsuccessful. Common statements were, "So much time lapses after locating the alleged father that the man moved on before paternity could be established." "There are so many cases that we cannot move fast enough after the absent parent is located." Figure 2 shows the extent of the problem.

- The average lag between intake (when the mother completed an absent parent questionnaire) and locate (the first date there was an indication in the record that a locate check was done) of almost 5 months in Maricopa County and almost 8 months in Pima County, supports the notion that the information from the mother on the location of the alleged father may not be accurate at the time the case gets processed through the system. And, even if location is initially verified, there is another lag of 3 to 4 months before notification is attempted.

One worker in Maricopa County estimated that at least 25 percent of their paternity cases need to have re-locate work done. Not only does this require additional resources, but it adds further delays to the processing of a case through the system. Interviews with staff in each county indicate that a large part of the problem of notification in Maricopa County is the sheer volume of the caseload and the lack of staff to make contact with the alleged fathers. In this stage the "best" prospects for paternity establishment are the ones waiting for attention. Yet, there are often not the staff to carry out the process. Once contact is attempted, however, is seems that it is successful (i.e. the dear dad letter is delivered or a Summons is served) in a large percentage of cases.[24]

- Of the 18 Maricopa County AFDC cases in which a contact was attempted, 14 contacts were successful (78 percent). Of the 16 Non-AFDC cases 14, or 87.5 percent, were successful. In Pima County almost 94 percent of AFDC cases and 100 percent of the Non-AFDC cases were successfully contacted.

Of course, successful notification does not mean the individual will show for his appointment. Both information from this study and the Nebraska project indicate that no-shows of alleged fathers is a major problem when using the informal procedure in the paternity establishment process. While there was not information in the case records to determine whether or not an individual actually kept their appointment, recent caseload activity reports compiled by paralegal staff in Maricopa County indicate that over 40 percent of the alleged fathers do not keep their initial appointments.[25]

On the other hand, it appears that jurisdictions can be quite successful using the more informal procedure. Maricopa County reports

indicate that among the alleged fathers who do show for their appointments over 90 percent either agree to take a blood test and to be bound by the results or they admit paternity without a blood test.

For cases in which the informal process has not been successful, the formal procedure needs to be initiated through the issuance of a Summons and Complaint. Because this is a more complicated and time consuming process, jurisdictions using the informal process must again face the issue of where to concentrate their greatest efforts. For example, in Maricopa County they are having to make trade-offs between scheduling 'Dear Dad' conferences, and preparing no-show and non-stipulated cases from previous conferences for court. With pressure for increasing the paternity establishment rate, the solution often has to be driven by what is going to result in the greatest number of establishments for the least amount of resources. Thus, those that are more complicated to work are likely to receive less attention.

Adjudicate

The final stage in the establishment process is the official determination of paternity.[26] Here again, Pima County has more success than Maricopa County. (Sample sizes are quite small at this stage, however, thus caution must be exercised in interpreting these results.) Of those who are successfully contacted, approximately 68 percent of Maricopa cases (19 out of 28) and 69 percent of Pima cases (25 out of 36) end up with paternity established. Of more interest, however, may be the percent of the total sample in which paternity was established by the end of the sampling period.

- In Maricopa County only 2.6 percent of the 388 AFDC children and 73.7 percent of the 19 non-AFDC children had paternity established by the end of the sampling period. In Pima County approximately 8 percent of the 239 AFDC children and 75 percent of the 8 non-AFDC children in the sample had paternity established.

Pima County does significantly better than Maricopa County, but their establishment rate (25 establishments out of 247 children) is still not very impressive. Again, these numbers may not reflect current performance rates, nor do they indicate how many of these children may eventually have paternity established.

In general, the father's challenge of a paternity action poses less difficulty than locating and informing him of the paternity suit. When the alleged father denies paternity, the case may eventually go to a trial by jury. However, the vast majority of disputed cases are settled once blood test results are available.[27] With recent technological developments in this area, blood tests can usually, with better than a 99 percent probability, include or exclude, a putative father. Although all states allow blood results as evidence, as of 1990, eleven states actually specify that such results can create a presumption of parentage.[28] The majority of establishments in the study counties were accomplished through stipulations of paternity signed by the father.

- In Maricopa county 84 percent of the establishments were accomplished through stipulations of paternity signed by the father. Of those, 50 percent were stipulations signed after blood test results were obtained and another 50 percent were signed without the need for blood tests. In Pima County 92 percent of the establishments were accomplished with signed stipulations. Of these stipulations, only 30 percent were signed after blood tests were conducted, the other 70 percent of the fathers signed without blood tests.

Sample sizes are too small to estimate time lags between notification and establishment of paternity because cases "fall out" at each stage of the process (e.g. the average time between intake and locate is only for those cases in which locate verification is sought, the time between locate and notify is only for cases in which notification is attempted, etc.). However, we can estimate the average time from initiation to judgment for cases in which paternity is established.

- For those cases with a successful final outcome, the average time from initiation to judgment of paternity in Maricopa County is 16.2 months (13.8 months to a stipulation), whereas in Pima County it is 9.4 months (7 months to a stipulation).

Thus, not only is Pima more successful in establishing paternity but they do it more quickly. Interviews with staff suggest that the time difference is likely to be attributable to the smaller caseload to staff ratio in the Pima County Attorney's Office for carrying out the final steps in the process.

Aside from the potential problem of contacting the alleged father, the major barrier at this stage is the interface between the child support and court systems. As with the beginning of the process (initiate), the end of the process often requires dependence on another system whose priority is not necessarily the timely processing of child support cases. Common problems with the court system include insufficient court time for hearing paternity cases and lack of an understanding of the paternity process by the judiciary.[29]

The study counties illustrate, however, that these barriers can be overcome. First, the informal process has reduced the numbers of cases needing to be scheduled for court hearings. Secondly, they have

established a regular schedule for the hearing of paternity cases and have developed a court structure in which one court officer hears all child support related cases. Interestingly, there were no complaints from child support or court personnel about the court process.

**DISCUSSION**

The establishment of paternity is best conceptualized as a sequence of decisions and events, not a single, summary action. It is comprised of a flow of people and information through various steps in a process whose ultimate outcome is the successful establishment of paternity. There are, however, many problems and barriers that often impede the smooth functioning of the process. While there are some unique problems that occur in each of the steps, it is also evident that many barriers occur across the stages of the process. One such barrier is the lack of cooperation on the part of both mothers and alleged fathers. This includes individuals not showing for interviews and/or not providing accurate and complete information for the process to succeed.

We know very little about how mothers and fathers perceive the costs and benefits of establishing paternity. One might assume, of course, that fathers would most often see the costs outweighing the benefits because of the financial liability that goes along with the legal establishment of paternity. They therefore have an incentive to avoid the process. However, it is generally believed that mothers would find the benefits to be greater than the costs if they were better informed about the advantages of paternity establishment. That belief, unfortunately, may not be well founded. Findings from the

Nebraska study indicate that mothers who received "education" about the paternity establishment process were not more likely to provide better information on the alleged father than those not receiving educational services. In addition, in Maricopa County, several of the intake workers interviewed stated that they thought the reason AFDC mothers did not cooperate in the process was because the father was already providing some support and they did not want that to be jeopardized. In many cases "moms are living with dads and don't want to tell welfare [the AFDC system]. They are willing to risk losing the few dollars a month from the grant because he brings in more than that." "The majority of times the alleged father could be in the household .... so the mother is scared to say anything because she might lose her boyfriend who is willing to support the child voluntarily." If the amount of support the father is providing is greater than the $50.00 pass through and any penalty imposed (i.e. the loss of the mother's portion of the AFDC grant), the financial costs of pursuing the establishment process would clearly outweigh the benefits. In the study counties, the father would only need to be providing $110.00 a month for the financial costs to be greater than the benefits because the average mother's portion of the grant in Arizona is only $60.00.

In addition, the benefits to the mother may not be forthcoming. The data from Table 1 indicate that while close to 40 percent of the mothers provide a name and address on the alleged father, far fewer get paternity established for their children. Child support workers in this study pointed out that the more they stressed to the mothers the benefits of cooperating with the child support program, the more the

mothers expect something to happen. As one worker commented, "they call me up after a couple of months and want to know what's happening with their child support case and why they haven't received their extra $50.00 [out of the child support supposedly being collected by the welfare agency]."[30] Unless the child support agency can come through with the benefits promised to the mother, both the mother and worker are likely to become discouraged with the process.

Another common barrier is the time lag across the process. Time lags generally mean duplication of effort. The longer the time between stages, the more likely that the information about the father is no longer accurate and the locate tasks have to be redone. As we have seen in Figure 2, there is a substantial lag time between the intake and locate stages in both our study counties. Not only does this require additional resources, but it adds further delays to the processing of a case through the system. There is also a greater likelihood that the father may not be able to be located. The mother may have initially been able to provide accurate information on the father, but if the delays are too long she may no longer know where he can be located. Some research has suggested that the majority of the mothers have contact with the fathers after the birth of their baby, but that contact diminishes as time goes on.[31] And other research has shown that the likelihood of paternity adjudication drops dramatically as the child ages.[32] Outcomes from the Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin studies all found that establishment rates were significantly higher for younger children. Delays across the establishment process may

therefore be a significant barrier to the successful resolution of a paternity suit.

A third barrier, directly related to the time lags across the process is the general disbelief in the effectiveness of the system. This has implications for the cooperation of parents as well as the ability to garner more public dollars. Mothers who do not see the program delivering effective and timely services will have less incentive to pursue the establishment of paternity. Fathers who do not see penalties for noncooperation will continue to avoid responding when they are notified of an allegation of paternity. And, the public who does not see success may be less willing to put more dollars into the program. As one respondent commented, "We need to show people the system can make a difference."

A final problem that was identified in this case study is more often discussed as an "effective" practice rather than a barrier. This is the specialization of tasks. In an effort to increase efficiency more and more jurisdictions are specializing staff functions (e.g. special intake workers and locate workers) within the paternity establishment process. While this may improve efficiency within stages of the process, it does not necessarily lead to efficiency across the process. Ultimately, success is going to be contingent on how well the process flows, not just the successful completion of discrete tasks. As one study participant indicated, "Each unit does its specific task and then just passes the case along. There is considerable duplication of effort because either the next worker in the process doesn't read what the previous worker has done or by the time the next unit gets to

the cases the previous information is old." In addition, the more times a case has to change hands the greater the likelihood that cases become lost, or the information on the case is misplaced. It is evident, that unless there is adequate coordination this "assembly-line" approach may undermine the process. One may end up with a backlog of cases at the next step, overlapping tasks, and frustrated workers and clients, all of which may actually reduce program performance.

One part of the frustration of many of the workers also comes with having no part in the final outcome of the process. Under this kind of specialization model, once an individual worker completes his or her task she/he no longer has responsibility for the case, or even knowledge about what has happened to the case at subsequent stages. As one intake worker stated, "I might do a great job in getting information from the mother, but then I never know if that leads to her having paternity established for her child."

Underlying all of these problems is a resource issue. At the same time that interest and emphasis in the area of paternity establishment is increasing, state and local child support agencies are being faced with dwindling resources. As noted previously, the federal cost share of the child support program has been reduced to 66%. While the federal government continues to pay the greatest share for operating local child support agencies it is the level of state dollars that determines the resources available to the program, and in many states those dollars are also shrinking. In addition to trying to meet new federal performance mandates with less dollars, devoting more resources

to increasing paternity establishments may further reduce the money available to local programs. This is because another source of revenue for the child support program is the incentive payments made by the federal government to encourage states to improve their child support collections. The state receives an incentive payment equal to at least 6 percent of the state's total amount of child support collections for that year. While the federal government can levy financial penalties, there are no financial incentives for improving paternity establishment rates. To the extent that increased attention to paternity establishment will decrease the attention to the child support and enforcement program areas, states may actually see a decrease in incentive dollars based on child support collections. This is not to suggest that paternity cases cannot be cost effective. One research study on AFDC paternity cases concluded that paternity cases can be cost effective in the longer term and, while awards are lower, payment performance in these cases may be no worse than in nonpaternity cases.[33] The Nebraska project also estimated that the benefits would outweigh the costs over the life of the child support order.

Recommendations

Given the numerous problems within the system and the limited resources to deal with those problems, jurisdictions will have to be creative in their approach to paternity establishment, and this creativity will need to go beyond merely improving task functions within selected stages of the process. Programs also need to explore new ways to structure the delivery of their services.

Some jurisdictions are already implementing such delivery alternatives as the placement of child support staff in hospitals to educate new unwed mothers about paternity establishment and to assist them in completing the necessary intake forms. This is seen as a way to obtain more timely and accurate information on the alleged father, but in jurisdictions that allow voluntary acknowledgement of paternity, it could also be a strategy for diverting some cases from the agency process altogether. To the extent that at the birth of the child the father has contact with the mother, he may be available and interested in voluntarily admitting paternity. A hospital based child support worker could facilitate this process.

The informal procedures for establishing paternity appear to have facilitated the paternity process in several jurisdictions. Respondents in this study believe that in cases with cooperative mothers and fathers it has improved the rate of establishment and shortened the length of time to complete the process. On the other hand, it has not solved the problem of no-shows among alleged fathers. This suggests that the informal process does not increase participation, but to the extent it is less costly process, it may be a more efficient use of limited resources. An even more efficient use of resources, however, may be the Pima County model in which the mother is asked about the likelihood of cooperation from the alleged father. If she believes he will be cooperative the informal process is used, if not, they move directly to the formal procedures. If he does not show under the formal procedure they can enter a default judgment of paternity.

Education programs, particularly in high schools, should inform young people about paternity establishment. A high rate of nonmarital births are occurring among teens, and they are the least likely to understand or pursue the establishment of paternity. In addition, all child welfare professionals who deal with unmarried parents need to inform their clients of the child's right to a legal relationship with his or her father. This information needs to be given not only the mother, but to the father as well. Little attention has been paid to unmarried fathers, but it is likely they have even less knowledge of their rights and responsibilities than do unmarried mothers. Unfortunately, such a strategy may not be wholly supported by community professionals. The Ohio project attempted to implement a community education component with little success. It appears that many of the potential outreach agencies raised privacy concerns when the child support program wanted to identify and advise young mothers about services. This suggests that "education" of community professionals may need to occur before attempts at educating mothers and fathers -- and, of course, programs need to be able to provide the services they say are available.

Jurisdictions also need to closely examine the level of services they are providing relative to the needs of their caseload. With limited resources it is likely that many cases are not able to receive the necessary services (e.g. intensive locate and follow-up), however, there may be other cases that are receiving unnecessary services. For example, in Maricopa County all cases with at least a minimal amount of father information are forwarded from intake to a locate worker for

address location and verification. Yet, there may be cases, such as when the mother provides complete address information and indicates that the father is willing to acknowledge paternity, that locate services are unnecessary. Reducing services to these cases may not only save resources but should decrease the time lag from intake to father notification. In addition, jurisdictions must be realistic about which cases are not likely to have a successful resolution, and screen them out of the process at the earliest point possible. This is not to suggest that determining the level of needed services is always an easy task, but trying to provide all services for every case often means not doing enough for any case.

Soliciting input from line staff may also help jurisdictions to design creative strategies for improving the performance of the paternity establishment process. Staff often have a better understanding of some of the major problems and may be able to suggest innovative, and at times interesting, solutions. "We could create a position of someone to watch the arrests and compare the daily record to paternity cases in the system and have paternity proved while they are incarcerated or obtain an address to check if they are the alleged father."

Unfortunately, in most states there will be no cheap or quick solution when there have been decades of neglect. Overwhelming caseloads and increasing numbers of nonmarital births do not lend themselves to easy solutions. While there are strategies that have the potential for improving outcomes, there are also some difficult decisions that will have to be made. Pursuing paternity is not a cost-

free transaction. The state must weigh benefits versus costs in pursuing these actions. The decision to pursue paternity actions involves complex trade-offs and rests upon perceptions of what is important to society and to the principal parties.

Such public policies as the Family Support Act of 1988 seem to place a great deal of importance on the establishment of paternity and child support in general. Yet, as was stated by one frustrated administrator, "there is a lot of talk at the state and federal level that child support is critical to the welfare reform agenda, but the reality is that there is very little financial support or attention given to the child support program." Without adequate resources it is likely that significant numbers of nonmarital children will continue to be denied a legal relationship with their father and the benefits that accrue to that relationship.

## Notes

1. Public Law 100-485, October 13, 1988, 102 STAT. 2343. The mandated quotas are as follow: for each fiscal year (FY) after 1991, the state's paternity establishment percentage (PE%) must equal or exceed: (1) 50 percent, (2) the state's PE% for FY 1988 increased by 3 percentage points for each fiscal year between FY 1990 and such FY, or (3) the PE% for all states for such FY. The PE% for a state is obtained by dividing the number of nonmarital children receiving AFDC or IV-D services, and for whom paternity has been established, by the number of nonmarital children on AFDC.

2. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means. (Washington, D.C., 1990 ), p. 579.

3. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means. (Washington, D.C., 1991), p. 720.

4. A national survey of 249 counties in 42 states found that while paternity establishment was organized and administered quite differently in localities throughout the country, there were common patterns. A detailed analysis of the paternity establishment processes in the study counties led the authors to conclude that there are four broad models of the paternity establishment process Pamela Holcomb, Kristin Seefeldt and Freya Sonenstein. "Paternity Establishment in 1990: Results from a National Survey." (Paper presented at the Public Policy Analysis and Management 13th Annual Research Conference, Bethesda, Maryland, October 24-26, 1991.)

5. David A. Price and Victoria Williams, Nebraska Paternity Project, Final Report. (Denver, CO: Policy Studies Inc., November 1990); Charles F. Adams, Jr., David Landsbergen, and Larry L. Cobler. Evaluating the Impact of the Cuyahoga County Paternity Establishment Demonstration Project: Parents for Ohio's Children. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, School of Public Policy and Management, January 1990); Pat Brown and Renee A. Monson, Paternity Establishment in AFDC Cases: Three Wisconsin Counties. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty, January 1991). Both the Ohio and Nebraska projects were demonstrations to design and implement a series of new procedures aimed at improving the paternity establishment process and outcomes. The evaluation of each of these demonstrations included an indepth examination of the paternity process in the study county. The Wisconsin project examined a random sample of AFDC paternity case records in an effort to identify barriers in the paternity establishment process.

6. The federal government does reimburse states 90 percent for the costs of developing and improving their management information systems and for laboratory costs associated with the establishment of paternity.

7. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means. (Washington, D.C., 1991), p. 667. It should be noted that these numbers does not necessarily include all nonmarital children potentially eligible for child support. In the CPS we can only identify those nonmarital children who currently reside with a never-married mother. We have no way of identifying those children who were born outside of marriage but whose mothers subsequently married.

8. David Ellwood, "Targeting 'Would-be' Long-Term Recipients of AFDC," (Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research Report, 1986).

9. U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, Background Material and Data on Programs within the Jurisdiction of the Committee on Ways and Means. (Washington, D.C., 1991), p. 668.

10. The state is gradually moving total responsibility for the child support program to Pima County.

11. It is likely that we had less success in locating cases in Pima County than in Maricopa county because cases can be filed in one of several different locations. In Maricopa County there is a central file room where all cases are kept. If a worker needs a case they must check it out from a file clerk who indicates via a code in the computer system who has the case. In Pima County there is only a designation to indicate if a case is filed with the state Child Support Office or the County Attorney's Office. However, within the County Attorney's Office, a case may be filed with either the paternity, initiating, support or enforcement units.

12. Some of the stages in this process may not apply to all cases. For example, in some instances the mother and father jointly seek to have paternity established for their child. In this case, some of the steps become unnecessary.

13. see for example, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. "Effective Paternity Establishment Practices: Technical Report" (Springfield, VA:National Technical Information Service, January 1990).

14. For the purposes of the analysis every non-marital child in the sample is considered a case.

15. The 1975 legislation also required the child support program to locate fathers, and establish and enforce child support orders for all support eligible children, including non-AFDC children.

16. see for example, papers prepared for the Conference on Unwed Fathers, Catholic University, October 1, 1986: A.B. Elster, "Adolescent Fathers: Fact, Fiction, and Implications for Federal Policy," Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah School of Medicine, Department of Pediatrics; R. L. Lerman, "A National Profile of Young Unwed Fathers: Who Are They and How Are They Parenting?" (Boston, MA: Heller Graduate School, Brandeis University, 1986).

17. Esther Wattenberg, "Establishing Paternity for Nonmarital Children: Do Policy and Practice Discourage Adjudication?" Public Welfare, 45, no. 3 (1987): 9-13, 48.

18. We were unable to determine the AFDC status at case opening for 35 cases in Maricopa County and 3 cases in Pima County. The reason for the large number of cases with this information missing in Maricopa county is because these cases were closed and sent to archives.

19. These estimates are for all individuals referred to the child support workers. There is no accurate data on the severity of non-cooperation at this stage for paternity cases. This is because the AFDC referral form for child support services in the study county does not distinguish between case types (i.e. paternity, child support establishment, or child support enforcement). Thus, the child support agency cannot determine what percentage of AFDC children needing paternity established never enter the system. It should also be noted that because there is no consistent monitoring of cases that do not keep appointments we do not know if they did not keep their interviews because they are no longer on AFDC or because of mother noncooperation.

20. Maricopa county has changed this practice and now opens a child support case for all AFDC referrals.

21. The state receives an incentive payment equal to at least 6 percent of the state's total amount of child support collections for that year.

22. Sandra K. Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Child Support for Children Born Outside of Marriage: An Analysis of Paternity Cases." Social Service Review, 64, no. 3 (1990): 458-474.

23. Laura Loyacono, OCSE News, XII, no. 3 (1988): 1, 4-5.

24. We coded it as a successful contact if there was no evidence in the case file of the dear dad letter being returned or of lack of service of a Summons.

25. Because of the split responsibilities for AFDC and non-AFDC cases in Pima county, staff were not able to provide comparable data is not available on the number of no-shows.

26. In the study county if a father stipulates to paternity during the informal process he does not have to participate in any court action. An attorney simply files the appropriate stipulation papers with the court.

27. Laura Loyacono, OCSE News, XII, no. 3 (1988): 1, 4-5.

28. Williams, Victoria. "Trial of a Paternity Case". In Family Law Litigation Guide, Matthew Bender (ed.), pp. 36-23 to 36-25; and D.H. Kaye and Ronald Kanwischer, "Admissibility of Genetic Testing In Paternity Litigation: A Survey of State Statutes." Family Law Quarterly, 22 (1988): 109-116.

29. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General. "Effective Paternity Establishment Practices: Technical Report" (Springfield, VA:National Technical Information Service, January 1990).

30. As an incentive to AFDC mothers to cooperate with the child support agency, they are allowed to keep the first $50.00 of child support collected on their behalf each month without a reduction in their AFDC benefit.

31. Frank Furstenberg, "The Social Consequences of Teenage Parenthood," Family Planning Perspectives, 8 (1976), 148-164.

32. Sandra K. Danziger and Ann Nichols-Casebolt, "Teen Parents and Child Support: Eligibility, Participation, and Payment," Journal of Social Service Research, 11, no. 2/3 (1988): 1-20.

33. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child Support Enforcement. "Costs and Benefits of Paternity Establishment". (Washington, D.C.: Office of Child Support, 1985).

# Paternity Establishment for AFDC Mothers: Three Wisconsin Counties

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A major weak link in the current U.S. child support system is the failure to establish paternity for children born out of wedlock. Without paternity, these children have no legal claim on their fathers' income, and the decision to pay child support is left entirely to fathers' discretion. In 1989, 77 percent of children living with a divorced mother had a child support award and 59 percent received child support payments. For children born to unmarried parents the figures were 24 percent and 17 percent respectively.[1] In recognition of this disparity, the Family Support Act of 1988 contained several provisions explicitly aimed at increasing paternity establishment. The Act required states (1) to increase the proportion of AFDC cases with child support awards; (2) to obtain social security numbers from both parents in conjunction with the issuance of birth certificates; and (3) to require parties in contested paternity cases to take a genetic test. The Act also exhorted states to simplify paternity establishment by setting up civil procedures for voluntary acknowledgement of paternity and for resolving disputes in contested cases.

In December of 1989 we began an evaluation of the paternity adjudication process in the state of Wisconsin. The evaluation included interviews with key officials at the state and local level, direct observations of several stages of the adjudication process in both the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) and the Family Court, and analyses of case records taken from the OCSE files in several counties. This paper reports analyses based on the OCSE records in three Wisconsin counties: Dane, Racine, and Milwaukee. These counties differ substantially with respect to the size of the general population. Milwaukee is the largest county with a population of over 959,000

in 1990. Dane County has a population of over 367,000 and Racine County has about 175,000 people. The counties also differ in racial composition. Dane and Racine are 10 and 11 percent nonwhite respectively, and Milwaukee is 25 percent nonwhite (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1988). Paternity adjudication rates range from 42 percent in Milwaukee County to 69 percent in Dane County.[2]

The paper is divided into five parts. The next section describes the administrative structure of the adjudication process in Wisconsin. The third section discusses our sample and data collection techniques. The fourth section presents descriptive information on the three Wisconsin counties, including the demographic characteristics of the caseload in each county and success rates at different stages of the process. The final section of the paper presents results from a multivariate analysis. All of the analyses reported here are based on samples taken from the AFDC caseload and processed by the Office of Child Support Enforcement, and therefore the findings are generalizable to this population only.

## II. THE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESS

The administrative process for identifying and locating the alleged father of a child whose mother is receiving AFDC is basically the same in each of the three Wisconsin counties we studied. The process is made up of the following steps: (1) all AFDC cases with a child eligible for paternity adjudication are identified by the Social Services Office and a referral is made to the Office of Child Support Enforcement in that county. Basic demographic information concerning the mother and any child for whom AFDC benefits are claimed is collected and recorded by the Social Service Office.

(2) After receiving a referral, OCSE sends a letter to the mother notifying her that she is required to cooperate with the paternity adjudication process as a condition of continued eligibility for AFDC benefits. The letter sets an appointment date for the mother and OCSE worker. (3) After a letter is sent, the mother comes in for an appointment, called an intake interview, and the interviewer collects information about the pregnancy, birth, and alleged father of the child. If the mother does not cooperate with OCSE, she may be sanctioned by having her AFDC grant reduced by an amount equal to her individual benefit for the period in which she refused to cooperate. The OCSE has the authority to recommend sanctions, but the ultimate decision to sanction is made by the Social Services agency.

(4) After information on the alleged father is obtained, the OCSE sends a letter asking him to appear in Family Court for a paternity hearing. At this stage, a father can either admit or contest paternity. If the alleged father does not appear at the paternity hearing, the judge may enter a default judgement. (5) If he appears but contests paternity, blood tests are ordered for the father and the child. In cases where the tests confirm the mother's allegation, the father is again asked to acknowledge paternity. If he continues to deny responsibility, the judge rules on the allegation.

## III. DATA AND STUDY DESIGN

To obtain our sample, we scanned the AFDC caseload in each county in December 1988 and identified families with at least one child eligible for paternity adjudication, i.e., a child born to unmarried parents. From this universe, we randomly selected approximately 600 cases from each county. In Dane County the actual number of cases selected was 573, in Milwaukee County

it was 600, and in Racine County it was 599. If a record contained more than one eligible child, the youngest child on each record was designated as the focal child. Thus our sample is a sample of families with an eligible child rather than a sample of children eligible for paternity adjudication. Moreover, it is a sample of youngest children in such families.

Once the sample was selected, information on each case was obtained from the AFDC record and OCSE file. The following information was collected on parents and children. For the mother, we recorded information on current age (as of December 1988), age at child's birth, and number of children eligible for paternity adjudication listed on the AFDC record. In Milwaukee and Racine counties we also recorded information on mothers' race and current marital status.[3] For the focal child, we recorded information on age (as of December 1988) and state of residence at birth. In cases where information on the state was not available on the OCSE record, we used the mother's AFDC record to determine whether the child was born before or after the mother moved to Wisconsin.

Information on the father was taken from the OCSE file and included age in December 1988, age at child's birth, race, state of residence at the time of the intake interview, and social security number. In Racine and Milwaukee counties we also collected information on father's employer. In many instances, complete information on the father was not available. This is because fathers' information was contingent on a successful intake interview with the mother.

In addition to gathering data on the characteristics of parents and children, we also recorded the dates of key administrative events, including the date a letter was sent to the mother asking her to come in for an

interview, the date the intake interview took place, and the date paternity was established. This task turned out to be more difficult than we had anticipated. In Milwaukee and Racine counties there was often no record of an initial letter being sent to the mother even though an intake interview had occurred. In some of these cases, the mother may well have been sent a letter but a copy was not placed in her file. In others, the mother may have contacted OCSE herself or appeared for an intake interview without a letter. Similarly, in some cases a considerable amount of information on the father was found in a file, although no date for an intake interview was recorded. Again this may reflect poor record-keeping or a different administrative procedure, e.g., information on the father was collected (1) by phone or mail, (2) from correspondence with other counties or states, or (3) from Social Services.

In addition to collecting information on the date of the initial letter, the intake interview, and adjudication, we also recorded information on the use of sanctions (whether the OCSE recommended that sanctions be used against the mother) and on the type of adjudication (whether the father admitted paternity and whether blood tests were used). The decision to gather information on sanctions and contested adjudication was made after the Dane County data were collected, and therefore this information was available only for Milwaukee and Racine counties. Finally, in Milwaukee and Racine counties, we collected data on the reasons for nonadjudication. This information was used to examine unsuccessful cases in more detail.

Since the purpose of our study was to evaluate paternity establishment within the Office of Child Support Enforcement, three types of cases were eliminated from the sample prior to our analysis: (1) cases in which paternity

was established outside the OCSE—this included cases which were adjudicated previously in another location; (2) cases in which the child was legitimated by the marriage of the parents or the father held custody of the child; and (3) cases which were closed because the youngest child had reached 18 or because the mother had left the county. These cases represented a trivial proportion of the caseload in all three counties.

## IV. THREE CASE STUDIES

In the following section we describe the adjudication process in each of the three counties. Our discussion is organized around the following questions: What did the paternity caseload look like in December of 1988 in terms of the demographic characteristics of parents and children? How well were the counties doing with respect to (1) making referrals to the OSCE, (2) conducting intake interviews with the mother, (3) gathering information on the alleged fathers, and (4) establishing paternity? Where were the major roadblocks? Were they due to lack of administrative capacity or to noncompliance on the part of parents?

### The Dane County Case

The OCSE office in Dane County has a child support caseload of 7,100 cases and a staff of 24 people. Of the 573 cases, 21 were identified as having had paternity adjudicated outside of the OCSE, either through parents' marriage or prior adjudication. Eight additional cases were marked closed. The remaining 545 cases were designated as the official OCSE caseload. We were unable to locate a file in the OCSE office for ten of these cases, and they were treated as missing data.

*Demographic Characteristics of the Caseload*

Information on the demographic characteristics of mothers, focal children, and alleged fathers in the Dane County sample is reported in Table 1. For mothers and children, the percentages are based on the entire OCSE caseload. Missing data for mothers and children were very low, ranging from 0 to 4.4 percent.[4] For fathers, the percentages are based on a subsample of cases where a single alleged father was named by the mother. Missing data on fathers' characteristics ranged from 6.9 percent to 19.0 percent.

In 1988, the typical mother referred to the Dane County OCSE was in her late twenties. Just over 30 percent of the mothers were in their teens when the focal child was born. Almost two thirds of the mothers had only one child listed on the AFDC record, and only 10 percent had more than two children listed. We did not collect information on mother's race or current marital status in Dane County. However, assuming that father's race is a good proxy for mother's race, we may conclude that over half the Dane County sample was white. Clearly, these women do not fit the stereotype of the nonwhite, welfare mother caring for several out-of-wedlock children born to different fathers.

The typical child in the Dane County OCSE caseload was between two and three years old. About a third of the sample was under 18 months and another third was over 4 years. A high proportion of the focal children were born in Wisconsin, about 71 percent.

The typical father was in his late twenties at the time of the intake interview. Only 15 percent of these men were teenagers when the focal child was born. Again, this profile does not fit the stereotype of the teen father too young to accept responsibility for supporting his offspring. Fifty-four percent of the fathers were white and 71 percent lived in Wisconsin. We should

**Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Mothers, Children, and Fathers**

| | DANE | RACINE | MILWAUKEE |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mothers' Characteristics** | | | |
| age in 1988 | | | |
| under 20 | 6.8 | 8.5 | 10.1 |
| over 30 | 31.3 | 30.6 | 36.1 |
| missing data | (0.0) | (1.2) | (2.5) |
| age at child's birth | | | |
| under 20 | 31.5 | 33.3 | 34.4 |
| race (nonwhite) | - | 66.4 | 83.0 |
| missing data | | (6.7) | (7.0) |
| marital status (unmarried) | - | 72.2 | 76.3 |
| missing data | | (5.2) | (3.0) |
| # children on grant | | | |
| one only | 64.2 | 56.8 | 48.0 |
| more than 2 | 10.7 | 18.1 | 23.8 |
| missing data | (0.0) | (5.0) | (4.8) |
| **Children's Characteristics** | | | |
| age in 1988 | | | |
| under 18 months | 31.2 | 26.0 | 27.3 |
| over 4 years | 32.8 | 39.9 | 41.7 |
| missing data | (4.4) | (5.1) | (5.4) |
| born in Wisconsin | 71.0 | 68.8 | 57.5 |
| missing data | (13.8) | (24.2) | (38.5) |
| info from AFDC record | - | 82.8 | 82.3 |
| **Fathers' Characteristics** | | | |
| age in 1988 | | | |
| under 20 | 4.6 | 10.2 | 5.5 |
| over 30 | 39.3 | 34.7 | 48.0 |
| missing data | (6.9) | (22.2) | (32.5) |
| age at child's birth | | | |
| under 20 | 15.3 | 23.9 | 21.8 |
| race (nonwhite) | 45.9 | 72.3 | 84.9 |
| missing data | (12.1) | (11.7) | (28.4) |
| lives in Wisconsin | 71.5 | 83.3 | 83.4 |
| missing data | (19.0) | (17.9) | (28.4) |

remind the reader that our estimates of fathers' characteristics were based on a subset of fathers for whom an intake interview with the mother was completed. This information, therefore, is less complete than the information for mothers and children. In addition, some mothers were unable (or unwilling) to provide full information on the fathers, even though an interview was carried out. Missing information on fathers' characteristics for the subsample of cases with an intake interview ranged from a low of 6.9% for age to a high of 19% for state of residence.

*The Adjudication Process*

Table 2 provides an overall picture of the flow of cases through various stages of the adjudication process. The first row reports the original OCSE caseload as determined from the AFDC records. The second and third rows report cases that were missing from the OCSE files. Row 4 reports the number of cases which were located and therefore available for analysis. Rows 5 through 7 report the number of cases that progressed through each stage of the process.

The next set of numbers report transition rates for each stage of the adjudication process. Row 8 reports the percentage of cases for which we were able to locate a OCSE record. Row 9 reports the percentage of cases with an OCSE record that had an intake interview. Row 10 reports the percentage of cases with an interview that provided full information on the father. (Full information was defined as name, date of birth, race, and address.) And row 12 reports the percentage of cases with full information that had paternity adjudicated.[5]

The last three rows in Table 2 report the **total paternity adjudication rate** (using the entire eligible OCSE caseload as the denominator), the

**Table 2. Data on the Case Flow Through Different Stages in the Adjudication Process**

| | Dane | Racine | Milwaukee |
|---|---|---|---|
| Raw Numbers: | | | |
| 1. original OCSE caseload | 552 | 577 | 590 |
| 2. closed cases | 8 | 5 | 7 |
| 3. missing/out cases | 10 | 79 | 79 |
| 4. available cases | 534 | 493 | 504 |
| 5. cases with intake | 484 | 447 | 358 |
| 6. cases with full info | 439 | 399 | 305 |
| 7. cases adjudicated | 381 | 352 | 247 |
| Percentage of cases: | | | |
| 8. with a file | 96.7 | 85.4 | 85.4 |
| 9. with an interview | 90.6 | 90.7 | 71.0 |
| 10. with full information | 90.7 | 89.3 | 85.2 |
| 11. with paternity adjudicated | 86.8 | 88.2 | 81.0 |
| Total adjudication rate | 69.0 | 61.0 | 41.9 |
| Adjusted adjudication rate | 71.3 | 71.4 | 49.0 |
| Recent adjudication rate | 74.0 | 71.6 | 37.5 |

**adjusted adjudication rate** (using the available cases as the denominator), and the **recent adjudication rate** (using children born since January of 1988 in both the numerator and denominator). The last row tells us how well the counties were doing with their newest cases.[6]

What is most striking about Table 2 is the high success rate in Dane County at each of the stages. About 97 percent of the original sample had an OCSE file. Of this group, 90 percent had been interviewed by an OCSE worker. Of those interviewed, 90 percent had provided full information on the father. And of those cases with full information, almost 87 percent had paternity adjudicated.

The overall adjudication rate of the Dane County OSCE office as of June 1990 was nearly 70 percent. Excluding cases for which there was no file, the rate was slightly higher, 71.3 percent. Given that the national average ranged between 25 and 33 percent at that time, and given that the average for the state of Michigan, which is generally acknowledged to have the best rate in the nation, was about two-thirds, we conclude that Dane County had an outstanding record in the area of paternity establishment.[7] Moreover, for the youngest children in our sample, the adjudication rate was 74 percent, which indicates that the Dane County system was moving swiftly as well as effectively. These numbers suggest that speed and success are correlated with one another.

Table 3 provides more detailed information on the rate of the case flow. The top panel reports the age of the child when the case was first opened (defined here as the mailing date of the letter requesting the mother to come in for an interview.) The second panel reports the age of the child when the intake interview took place, and the third panel reports the age of the child

**Table 3. Administrative Practices**

| | Dane | Racine | Milwaukee |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age of child at start of case | | | |
| median age (in days) | 21 | 59 | |
| % before birth | 44.3 | 18.7 | |
| % missing data | (16.8) | (27.6) | (83.1) |
| Age of child at intake | | | |
| median age (in days) | 55 | 82 | 288 |
| % before birth | 37.4 | 17.7 | 5.2 |
| % missing data | (15.5) | (19.2) | (28.8) |
| Age of child at adjudication | | | |
| median age (in months) | 8.3 | 8.5 | 12.5 |
| % by six months | 38.4 | 37.5 | 17.5 |
| % missing data | (3.7) | (0.0) | (7.3) |
| Sanctions | | | |
| % of caseload | | 31.8 | 3.0 |
| prior to intake | | 68.0 | 80.0 |
| after intake | | 32.0 | 20.0 |

at the time of adjudication. These numbers were based on cases for which an OSCE file was found and for which information was available on the dates of the letter and interview. In the third panel, the numbers were based on successful cases only. We report the amount of missing data for each variable so that the reader is aware of the extent to which the estimates are based on a selective subsample of cases.

The results in Table 3 show that the paternity adjudication process begins quite early in Dane County. The median age of the child when the case was started was twenty-one days. Forty-four percent of the cases were started before the child's birth. At the time of the intake interview, the typical child was between four and five months old. Thirty-seven percent of the interviews occurred before birth. Finally, for cases in which paternity was established (over 70 percent), the median age of the child at adjudication was 8 months. Information on the use of sanctions was not collected in Dane County.

In sum, the Dane County OCSE had a very effective paternity adjudication process as of June 1990. Files were readily available and record-keeping was good, intake interviews were completed in a high proportion of cases, and pertinent information regarding the father was elicited effectively. It is not known to what degree Dane County used the threat of sanctions and/or blood tests to achieve their high success rate.

## The Racine County Case

Data collection began in Racine County in August 1990 and continued for three months. Since the number of months that elapsed between the date of sample selection and the date of data collection was longer in Racine than in

Dane County, we might expect the adjudication rate to be slightly higher in Racine County, all else being equal. The data collection instrument in Racine was an expanded version of the Dane County questionnaire. In addition to the information collected in Dane County, it recorded data on the mother's race and current marital status and whether sanctions and blood tests were used by OCSE workers. The OCSE caseload in Racine County was 10,723 and the staff size was 21. Of the 599 cases, 22 were adjudicated prior to OCSE referral and another 5 were deemed ineligible because the case was closed. The remaining 572 cases were designated as the eligible OCSE caseload. Of these, we were unable to locate 79 cases. One explanation for the large number of missing cases is that our shortened data collection period (two and a half months instead of five months) did not allow enough time for files "in use" when we began our data collection effort to be returned to their original location. Racine County was in the midst of converting their manual filing system to a computerized system when our data collection began, and this overhaul could partly explain the higher incidence of missing files in that county.

*Demographic Characteristics*

As in Dane County, the typical mother in the Racine County caseload was in her late twenties when our sample was drawn (see Table 1). One third of the mothers were teenagers when the focal child was born. Over half of the mothers in Racine County had only one child listed on the AFDC grant, and only 18 percent had more than 2 children listed. This figure suggests a slightly large family size in Racine as compared with Dane County. A majority of the mothers in Racine were black and over two thirds had never been married.

The typical child in the Racine County caseload was somewhat older than the typical child in Dane County. About forty percent were over 4 years old and a quarter were under 18 months. At least 69 percent were born in the state of Wisconsin. Because of the large number of missing files in Racine County, we used information on the AFDC record to determine the child's state of birth. The latter showed that about 83 percent of the children in the Racine County sample were Wisconsin-born.

The average alleged father in Racine County was somewhat younger than his counterpart in Dane County. About 34 percent of the fathers were over 30 at the time of the survey and about 10 percent were under 20. Nearly a quarter of the fathers had been teenagers when the child was born. Eighty-three percent were reported as living in Wisconsin at the time of the intake interview. The latter figure is somewhat surprising, since Racine County is an urban area near the state border. This estimate may be biased because of the large amount of missing data on fathers' characteristics. Recall that our percentages are based on a subsample of cases in which a single father was named during the intake interview. In addition to excluding cases with missing files, our estimates also exclude cases in which the mother did not provide full information on the father. Missing data of the latter type range from a low of 11 percent for fathers' race to a high of 22 percent for fathers' age. The biggest difference between fathers in Dane and Racine counties is race. Whereas a majority of Dane County fathers were white, less than 28 percent of Racine fathers fell in this category. If the missing cases are disproportionately nonwhite, this figure would be even lower.

*Adjudication Rates*

The flow of paternity cases in Racine County is reported in Table 2. According to these numbers, 85.4 percent of eligible cases had a record at the Racine County OCSE. Of these, 90.7 percent had an intake interview, and nearly 89.3 percent of cases with an interview contained "full" information on the father.[8] Recall that full information is defined as father's name, date of birth, and state of residence. Finally, 89.3 percent of the cases with full information on the father were successfully adjudicated by the time of our study. The principal difference between Racine and Dane County is in the percentage of cases with a file. Dane County performed slightly better in collecting full information from the mothers and Racine performed slightly better in establishing paternity for cases with full information. But these differences are minor.

The last row in Table 2 reports the overall adjudication rate for Racine County as well as the rate for recent cases. While Racine County's overall record is not quite as good as Dane County's or the state of Michigan's, it is well above average for the nation as a whole. Moreover, if we exclude cases for which no file was found, the Racine record is nearly identical to that of Dane County. Similarly, when we look only at recent cases, Racine County appears to be doing about as well as Dane County, even taking into account the cases with missing files.

Table 3 reports time-lapse information for Racine County. In Dane County, the start date for each case was designated as the date a letter was sent from OCSE to the mother. The large number of missing letters makes this definition problematic for Racine County. Almost 28 percent of the cases with a OCSE file had no record of a letter being sent to the mother. For those

cases with a record of a letter, the median age of the child at the time the letter was sent was about two months; over 18 percent of letters were sent prior to the birth of the child. The median age of the child at the intake interview was 82 days; about 18 percent of the interviews occurred prior to birth. These numbers suggests that Racine County begins the process of adjudication fairly early, although not as early as Dane County. Finally, for successful cases, the median age of the child at adjudication was 8.5 months, nearly identical to the median age in Dane County.

In Racine, we also collected information on the use of sanctions. The data identifies only cases for which sanctions were recommended by the OCSE. The recommendations were in the form of a letter sent from the OCSE to Social Services, requesting that the mother's AFDC benefits (though not the AFDC benefit of her children) be eliminated, owing to noncooperation in paternity establishment. When and whether these recommendations to sanction were actually followed cannot be determined from our data. The data on sanctions shows that the latter were used primarily to "encourage" the mother to come in for an intake interview. In about one-third of the cases sanctions were used to gain additional information from the mother after the intake interview.

Finally, we recorded additional information on successful and unsuccessful cases. This information is reported in Table 4. According to our numbers, in the overwhelming majority of successful cases, fathers admitted to paternity once they were contacted by the OCSE. In over 85 percent of the cases in which the father admitted his responsibility, he did so without a blood test. In only 33 cases was paternity established by default or over the father's objection.

Under "unsuccessful" cases we listed several different obstacles that appeared consistently in the files. These ranged from lack of a name for the father to cases dismissed because of administrative error. It is clear that the biggest set of problems faced by OCSE workers was in the area of identification and location of the fathers, including out-of-state problems.[9] About 70 percent of the cases fell into this category. Another 15 percent of the problems were due to administrative delay, i.e., cases with addresses but no action and cases dismissed because of administrative delays. Thirteen cases had been closed because the mother was no longer on AFDC, and 11 cases involved fathers living out-of-state.

Milwaukee County Case

The Milwaukee OCSE caseload was 77,776 in 1990 and the staff size was 104.[10] Our sample contained 600 AFDC cases, ten of which were adjudicated outside of OCSE and 7 of which were closed because the mother moved or the child turned 18. Of the remaining 583 cases, 79 were missing from the OCSE system. As in Racine County, the large number of missing files in the Milwaukee OCSE makes our data less reliable than in Dane County.

*Demographic Characteristics*

The typical mother in the Milwaukee sample was in her late twenties when the sample was taken. Only 10 percent of the mothers were teenagers when we began our study, and only 34 percent were teenagers when the focal child was born. The greatest difference across the three samples was in family size: less than half of the mothers in the Milwaukee sample had only one child on the AFDC record and nearly 25 percent had more than two children. Eighty-three

percent of the mothers in Milwaukee County were black and 76 percent had never been married.

The children in the Milwaukee sample were slightly older than the children in the other two samples: over 40 percent were over age four. A high percentage of children were born in Wisconsin, about 58 percent. When information from the mothers' AFDC records was used instead of information from the OCSE file, the number was higher, about 82 percent, suggesting that about two-thirds of the cases with missing OCSE files were born inside Wisconsin.

Information on fathers' characteristics was even less reliable than information on mothers and children's characteristics, insofar as additional cases were excluded because there was no intake interview or because information was missing from the intake interview. For cases with information, the numbers suggest that Milwaukee fathers were somewhat older than fathers in the other two counties. Nearly half were over 30 years old at the time the sample was taken. At the same time, over 20 percent were teenagers when the child was born, just slightly less than in Racine County. A large percentage of the fathers in Milwaukee County were black, about 85. Thus the racial contrast between Milwaukee and Dane counties is quite pronounced. Eighty-three percent of the fathers were living in Wisconsin at the time of the intake interview. This number is 12 percentage points higher than the number for Dane County, although again it is probably distorted because of missing information.

*The Adjudication Process*

Looking at the case flow in Milwaukee County, we see that 85.4 percent of the original sample had a file at the OCSE that was readily available. Of cases with a file, 71 percent of the mothers had completed an intake interview, and 85.2 percent of the intakes had produced "full" information on the alleged father. Eighty-one percent of the cases with full information had paternity established. The last three rows of Table 2 provide information on overall adjudication rates, adjusted rates, and recent rates. Milwaukee's adjudication rate is 41.9 percent when all cases are included, 49 percent when cases with missing files are excluded, and 37.5 percent when only recent cases are examined.

Comparing success (adjudication) rates at each stage in the adjudication process, we see that Milwaukee's performance is below that of Dane and Racine at all junctures. The difference is especially pronounced at the interview stage. We find that if Milwaukee had achieved the same intake level as Racine County, holding all else constant, its total adjudication rate would have been 53.4 percent instead of 41.9. In other words, over 60 percent of the difference between the two counties is due to differences in obtaining an intake interview. About 10 percent of the difference between Milwaukee and Racine is due to differences in collecting full information, for cases that have an intake; and about 20 percent is due to differences in establishing paternity, for cases that provide full information.

The large number of missing files and the large amount of missing data on letter dates and interview makes the time-lapse analysis for Milwaukee County highly unreliable (see Table 3). In over 83 percent of the cases for which there was a file, no record of a letter being sent to the mother

existed. Less than 21 percent of all adjudicated cases contained a record of letters to the mother. Clearly, there is no policy for keeping copies of these letters in the Milwaukee OCSE. Records of intake interviews are more complete, with only 28.8 percent of the cases showing missing data on this variable. Here we find that the average length of time between child's birth and intake interview was 233 days, between 7 and 8 months. This is over four times longer than the time lapse in Dane County and about three times longer than the lapse in Racine. For children who had paternity established, the average age at adjudication was just over 1 year.

Recommendations to sanction were rare in Milwaukee County. It is possible that sanctions were actually used more often than our figures show because of inconsistent record-keeping of sanction requests. To the extent they exist, the records suggests that sanctions were used primarily to encourage the mother to come in for an intake interview.

Table 4 provides more detailed information on successful and unsuccessful cases. According to our numbers, in successfully adjudicated cases, most fathers admitted paternity (197 out of 247 adjudicated cases). In another 30 cases the father did not appear in court and paternity was established in a default judgment by the court. In only six cases was paternity established in spite of the father's denial. With respect to unsuccessful cases, about 70 percent of the problems were due to lack of name (or incorrect name), lack of address, or interstate location. Another 20 percent were due to administrative delays.

**Table 4: Analysis of Successes and Failures**

| | Racine | Milwaukee |
|---|---|---|
| Successful Cases | 352 | 247 |
| father admits paternity | 305 | 197 |
| without blood test | 248 | 177 |
| with blood test | 57 | 20 |
| father does not admit paternity | 48 | 50 |
| direct denial | 6 | 6 |
| default judgement | 27 | 30 |
| missing | 15 | 14 |
| Unsuccessful Cases | 141 | 257 |
| no name/wrong name | 25 | 36 |
| no address | 66 | 118 |
| out-of-state | 11 | 28 |
| address, no action | 14 | 29 |
| dismissed for error | 7 | 21 |
| mother left AFDC | 13 | 14 |
| other | 5 | 11 |

## V. MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

In this section of the paper we present a multivariate analysis of the determinants of paternity adjudication in Wisconsin. The analysis is designed to answer two questions: which demographic and administrative characteristics are associated with successful adjudication in all three Wisconsin counties, and which characteristics account for the differences across counties? To answer these questions we combined data from the three counties and estimated an equation that treated adjudication as the outcome variable and demographic and administrative characteristics as predictor variables. Since the outcome variable was dichotomous - adjudicated, not adjudicated - we used a logistic regression model to obtain our parameter estimates. The results are reported in Table 5.

The first column in Table 5 presents results from a model that included only the county dummy variables. Dane County was the omitted variable. The purpose of the first model was to test whether the cross-county differences presented in Table 2 were statistically significant. As expected, the coefficient for Racine County was not significant whereas the coefficient for Milwaukee was.

The second column in Table 5 reports results from a model that included demographic characteristics of mothers and children. The variables were mother's age in 1988, mother's age at birth of the focal child, mother's race, and whether the child was born in Wisconsin. We hypothesized that mother's age in 1988 would have a negative effect on adjudication. We also hypothesized that children born outside Wisconsin to teenage mothers would be less likely to have paternity adjudicated than other children. Finally, we expected nonwhites to have lower adjudication rates than whites. With the exception of

**Table 5. The Effects of Demographic and Administrative Characteristics on Paternity Adjudication.**

| | Model with County Variable (1) | Demographic Traits Included (2) | Intake Interview Data Included (3) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Racine | -.002 | -.149 | -.048 |
| Milwaukee | -.588* | -.677* | -.488* |
| Mom's age in 1988 | | -.026* | -.003 |
| Mom's age at birth | | .004 | -.187 |
| Mom's race | | | |
| black | | -.377* | -.376 |
| other | | -.549* | -.472* |
| missing | | -.634* | -.308+ |
| Child's birth place | | | |
| outside Wisconsin | | -.965* | -.961 |
| missing | | -1.540* | -1.017* |
| Intake | | | .903* |
| Age at intake (in months) | | | -.006* |

race, the demographic characteristics of their caseload did not vary across the three counties and therefore we did not expect them to explain much of the cross-county difference. The coefficients reported in column 2 behaved as we had expected with one exception: mother's age at child's birth was not significant. Similarly, the new variables did not "explain" any of the Milwaukee-Dane difference. In fact, the dummy for Milwaukee was larger in column 2 than in column 1.

The third column in Table 5 reports results from a model that added two variables: whether an intake interview occurred, and age of the child at intake interview. We hypothesized that these two variables would be significantly related to adjudication and that they would account for a substantial part of the cross-county difference in adjudication. According to our estimates, both variables are significant and the point estimates are in the expected direction. Having an intake interview increases the likelihood of adjudication, and the age of the child at the time of the intake reduces adjudication. The two new variables account for less than 20 percent of the difference between Milwaukee and Dane counties. The fact that the intake variables do not account for more of the cross-county difference is probably due to the unreliability of the data. Recall that many of the successful cases in Milwaukee had no record of an intake interview. We suspect that if the data had been better, these two variables would have accounted for a much large share of the difference across counties.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of OCSE records in the three counties. First, and most important, all three of the Wisconsin

counties are doing very well. Adjudication rates in Dane and Racine counties are well above the national average for OCSE cases and Milwaukee's rate is close to average. Second, a number of barriers remain which, for policy reasons, can usefully be distinguished as those due to client characteristics and those due to administrative capacity and practices.

We find that the demographic characteristics of the caseloads in all three counties are quite similar. Most of the parents in all three counties were not teenagers when their child was born. Most of the mothers did not have multiple nonmarital births on their AFDC records, most of the children were born in Wisconsin, and most of the fathers were still living in Wisconsin. Thus, while some of these client characteristics are related to adjudication, they cannot account for the difference in success rates across the three Wisconsin counties. The only major difference in caseload composition was racial composition: the Dane County caseload is over 50 percent white, whereas the Racine and Milwaukee caseloads are predominantly nonwhite. But again, the multivariate analyses shows that while race is related to adjudication, it does not account for the cross-county difference in adjudication rates.

Administrative factors appear to be more important in determining success. The biggest difference between the three counties is caseload size and staff/caseload ratios. In Dane and Racine Counties, the ratio is about 300 to 400 cases per staff person whereas in Milwaukee County the ratio is 700 to one. Clearly, Milwaukee's administrative capacity is much weaker than that of Dane or Racine county. It is possible that all of the administrative practices that distinguish Milwaukee from the more successful counties are due to staff overload as opposed to inefficient management.

A second major difference across counties is in record keeping procedures. The Dane County records are more available and more complete that the records in Racine or Milwaukee County. We reiterate that Racine was moving offices at the time we were collecting our data, and therefore the absence of some records in that office may have been a temporary phenomenon. The fact that Racine has a very high success rate indicates that they are more efficient that their "missing files" would suggest.

Third, Racine and Dane counties do much better than Milwaukee county at getting an intake interview from the mother. This is very important because over 85 percent of cases with an intake provide full information, and over 80 percent of those with full information have paternity established. Differences in the intake interview account for over half of the difference in success rates across the three counties. Failing to conduct an interview appears to be related to two administrative practices (1) not getting an early start, and (2) not assigning responsibility for intake interviews to OCSE staff. In Dane County, the interview process starts well before the child is born. In both Dane and Racine Counties, 38 percent of the cases are adjudicated by the time the child is 6 months old. In contrast, only 5 percent of the Milwaukee cases are interviewed before birth, and only 18 percent of the cases are adjudicated by age six months.

Fourth, about 10 percent of the difference between Racine and Milwaukee is associated with the failure to obtain full information from the mothers and another 20 percent is due to failure to establish paternity for cases with full information. If all of these failures are due to bad information, lack of client cooperation might account for as much as 30 percent of the difference between Racine and Milwaukee Counties. More realistically, at least some of

the failure is probably due to administrative practices. The fact that Racine and Dane counties conduct their interviews closer to the time of birth means that mothers have more accurate information about the fathers and fathers are easier to locate.[11] Unfortunately we did not collect information on who conducted the intake interview (a OCSE worker or a social services worker) or where the intake was conducted (at the OCSE office, at the Department of Social Services, or by phone). The absence of information on the intake interview in the Milwaukee OCSE office suggests that this office relied more heavily on social service staff to conduct intake interviews. This would make sense given the large client-staff ratio in the Milwaukee child support enforcement office. We recommend that future studies collect information on who conducts the intake interview and where it takes place.

A final point worth noting is that most fathers in Racine and Milwaukee counties eventually admitted paternity. Less than 20 percent of successful cases were adjudicated by default or in spite of fathers' denial and less than 20 percent required blood tests. This adds support to the argument that administrative practices rather than client cooperation are the key determinants of successful adjudication. It also argues for minimizing the proportion of the caseload that is subjected to judicial procedures.

## NOTES

1. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1991. "Child Support and Alimony: 1989, Current Population Reports. Series P-23. No. 154. Washington, D.C.

2. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1988. Statistical Abstracts of the United States. Washington, D.C.

3. The data collection in Racine and Milwaukee counties began later and therefore we were able to redesign our questionnaire so as to include information that we felt was important but had not collected in Dane County.

4. The one exception is "state in which the child was born." Here 13.8% of the cases have missing data. We also calculated an "adjusted state of birth" for this variable, which excluded missing data.

5. For this part of the analysis we recoded the data so that each stage in the process was conditional on successful completion of the previous stage. For example, if paternity was established, we coded the case as having full information and as having an intake interview. Similarly, if full information was provided, we coded the case as having an intake interview.

6. Children born in 1989 would appear in our sample if the mother were receiving a maternity benefit in December 1988.

7. We should note that the national average and the Michigan average are based on all eligible cases, whereas the Wisconsin average reported here is based on the AFDC caseload. Thus, the two rates are not exactly comparable. Michigan may be doing better than average for its AFDC caseload.

8. As in Dane County, we recoded our data so that cases with full information were all coded as having had an interview and cases with paternity established were all coded as having full information on the father.

9. The out-of-state number probably underestimates the degree to which interstate location is a problem insofar as some fathers in the no address category may live outside Wisconsin.

10. In 1988 a backlog of 5,800 unprocessed paternity cases existed in Milwaukee County. Special funding from the Milwaukee IV-D Office was allocated to Milwaukee from June 1988 through January 1990 to hire additional personnel to work through the backlog. The numbers reported here are for the normal staff size rather than the augmented staff that existed during the catch-up phase. The Milwaukee sample used in our analysis is representative of paternity cases that were initiated during the backlog as well as the catch-up phases. This should effect paternity adjudication rates in two ways. The large number of backlog cases should reduce adjudication rates, whereas the increased staff size during the catch-up phase should improve adjudication.

11. Of course, a mother may be less willing to provide information when the relationship with the father is ongoing and she is afraid of losing his affection (or his informal support).

# Executive Summary of a Study of Paternity Decisions: Perspectives from Young Mothers and Young Fathers

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This paper contains highlights from the full report submitted to the Ford Foundation, February 12, 1991.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have examined young peoples' decision-making about sexuality, parenting, and other social behaviors, but this is the first systematic attempt to identify factors that influence young unmarried parents' decision to establish legal paternity for their out-of-wedlock (non-marital) children. It builds on a previous exploratory study ("Issues in Paternity Adjudication for Teen Parents") funded by the Ford and McKnight foundations and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, that revealed the pivotal importance of establishing paternity for the out-of-wedlock child.

Benefits most commonly associated with paternity are child support, health care, and inheritance. Other benefits, however, can include Social Security entitlements earned by fathers and benefits given to military families including health care, housing allowances, commissary and post exchange privileges, and financial aid for education. In addition, paternity may provide important genetic information, family medical history, and the beneficent value of a birth certificate that includes a father's name.

In spite of these advantages, an escalating number of children are growing up without legal paternity. To appreciate the magnitude of the problem, note that the last available census showed that 90 percent of births to young African-American women and 49 percent of births to young white women were out-of-wedlock.

The federal government, since 1975, has enacted a series of mandates designed to increase the rates of establishing paternity. The latest federal effort, the Family Support Act of 1988, gives stringent requirements to expedite paternity procedures for all out-of-wedlock children in the nation, AFDC and non-AFDC status alike.

Despite increased policy interest and more than a decade of legal decisions establishing entitlements for out-of-wedlock children, significant barriers remain, frustrating equal protection efforts to safeguard the interests of these children. The number of paternity actions remains inadequate to serve a growing generation of children born to unmarried parents. Although the data, as reported state by state, have varying degrees of reliability, generally, only one child in three born to unmarried parents has paternity established.

This study was designed to identify from the point of view of the parents themselve, those factors that encourage or discourage the "avowal" or "disavowal" of paternity. The findings from the study may provide a more complete understanding of the circumstances of this critical decision, and thereby inform both program and policy decision-makers on an issue that has long-term consequences for the social and economic status of children born out-of-wedlock. The research philosophy assumed a child-centered focus. One distinction of this study is that it is based on separate interviews with both mothers and fathers of the child(ren). A second distinction is the use of a multi-racial data base.

A thirty-three-page questionnaire formed the basis for in-depth interviews with 334 unmarried young parents, conducted by same race, same gender graduate students. The participants were drawn from a pool derived from Hennepin County's AFDC and IV-D files. Mothers age 21 and younger who had a child born out-of-wedlock that was 12 months old or younger and the fathers of these children were the study participants. The study explored family and peer experiences, attitudes and expectations, and demographic and socioeconomic variables that differentiated parents who acknowledged paternity and those who did not.

Readers of this report will need to know that Minnesota, like most states, provides two methods by which paternity is established. In one, parents sign a form, the ***Declaration of Parentage*** (sometimes known as an "Affidavit of Paternity," or some variation of this) before a notary public (Minnesota Statutes 257.34). This allows the father's name to be entered on the birth certificate. Typically, the declaration is signed at the hospital following the birth of the child. The declaration is considered a presumption of paternity for a wide range of benefits. In practice, however, child support, custody and visitation rights are, typically, left to court ajudication. In a few local jurisdictions, however, the declaration is valid for establishing child support.

The second method of establishing paternity requires court action. This method, commonly known as ***Adjudication of Paternity***, usually begins with a legal notice to the father, often delivered by the sheriff, alleging fatherhood and ordering him to appear in court for a hearing. The court proceeding usually combines the issue of paternity with issues of child support, custody, and visitation in one or several hearings (Minnesota Statutes 257.66 Judgment or Order). A judge presides over these hearings or, in a growing number of jurisdictions, hearings are conducted by administrative personnel in uncontested cases and signed off by a judge.

Whether or not the findings from this study can be generalized to all young unmarried mothers on AFDC and the fathers of their children is open to question. It is our judgment that the parents interviewed, multi-racial and across gender, were very poor. The urgency with which they requested the participant fee, along with biographical details in the interviews, reinforce the poverty and near-poverty status of children born out-of-wedlock whose mothers rely on public assistance for their major source of income.

*"They tried to serve papers, but he told them he wasn't there when they talked to him at the door. In court, he was a 'no show.' They haven't pursued it."*
young unmarried mother

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Make the ***Declaration of Parentage*** a routinely available document for purposes of establishing paternity. Although, the Declaration of Parentage can be signed before a notary public in various settings, the hospital setting should be the focus of attention.

- Decriminalize the procedures for those parents who voluntarily wish to establish paternity for their child. Disentangle voluntary establishing paternity from issues such as child support, visitation rights, and custody. Maintain the court system for settling challenges to paternity allegations and for assessing the circumstances about fairness in child support, visitation, and custody orders.

- Focus attention and support on the parents' decision while the mother and newborn are still in the hospital. This presents a unique opportunity for establishing paternity that is currently being overlooked. This study shows almost two-thirds of unmarried fathers, both African-American and white, attend the births of their children, and that both parents describe strong, positive feelings about the birth of their child. Further, 80 percent of parents, across racial lines, stated that it is important for the father's name to be on the birth certificate.

- Mandate that hospitals be made responsible for presenting written and oral information to both parents on child benefits that flow from the ***Declaration of***

***Parentage.*** Explanations of the rights and responsibilities of fathers should also be available.

- Require that culturally sensitive materials, adapted to low literacy levels, be made available. A non-threatening environment and legal referral sources should be maintained for young parents requesting legal assistance.
- Reinforce the societal value of the ***Declaration of Parentage*** by information programs specifically geared to social service, health, and other agencies concerned with children, youth and families. A more comprehensive information program aimed at the general public can also help create a climate of opinion that supports young unmarried parents' obligation to sign the declaration.
- A provision for challenges should be limited to eighteen months after the child is born. In order to constrain frivolous uses of the challenge, a blood test should be ordered if a challenge is raised. If the results are positive, then the challenge should be dismissed automatically.
- Exceptions must be maintained in policy and procedures to allow for instances when the legal link of father to child should not be encouraged, as with the "good cause exceptions" in current law.

We conclude that voluntary declaration of paternity can be encouraged. By using the Declaration of Parentage, a legal connection between father and child can be made efficiently and effectively. The strong interest fathers interviewed in this study showed in completing school and in job training leads us to believe that fathers can be encouraged to provide for the economic well-being of their children as well and allows us to end this study on a note of optimism.

## CONCLUSION

Procedures for establishing paternity are presently enmeshed in confusing legalities. Identifying the ***Declaration of Parentage*** as a routinely available document for establishing paternity should counter the lagging paternity rates among the large and growing number of young, unmarried parents. Whether or not legally attaching a father to his child ensures a more optimum future for the child remains to be seen. However, in a life situation replete with uncertainties, paternity is an indisputable anchor.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FULL REPORT

*"I know if I die tomorrow, there'll be part of me here."*
unmarried father after his baby's birth

*"There's not a single feeling to describe it; take all the good feelings together."*
another unmarried father after his baby's birth

*"I feel very connected to this baby. I want my name on his birth certificate... Stay away from courts and red tape... They treat you like a second class citizen."*
yet another unmarried father

## DEMOGRAPHICS

In all, 334 unmarried mothers and fathers were interviewed between September 1989 and March 1990. Of the total, 252 had partnered a child together (but were interviewed separately); the remainder were single parents for whom the partners could not be located. Of the 126 couples interviewed, 45 were African-American, 45 white, 32 interracial, and 4 American Indian. The eighty-two single-parent interviews were conducted with sixty-seven women and fifteen men.

The mothers ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-one, and revealed a pattern of childbearing that began in early adolescence. This was particularly the case with African-American study participants. All had a child twelve months old or younger. Fathers were aged fifteen to thirty-six.

## INCOME AND HOUSEHOLDS

Generally speaking, the sample was a very low income group of young people, heavily reliant on public assistance, strikingly unstable in their living arrangements, and often marginalized from work. The jobs they held were chiefly in the unskilled, part-time labor market and were often described as temporary. Yet, they were optimistic about the

future for themselves and their children. However, it was the white males who showed the most pessimistic view of the future. Twenty-one percent believed the future would be worse for their children. Only 4 percent of African-American males shared this perception.

One in five reported less than $500 in household cash income the previous month. Almost half reported between $500 and $1,000. Mothers reported less income than fathers. African-Americans had lower incomes than whites.

Fewer than 10 percent had lived at their current address for a year or more, and 88 percent had lived there for less than six months. These young families were on the move, doubling-up with family, friends, and relatives.

## EDUCATION

Fewer than half of the respondents, across gender and racial lines, had graduated from high school. One-third reported a troubled school experience: disciplinary problems, truancy, and finally dropping out. White males more than African-American males reported unsatisfactory school experiences. Almost 75 percent across gender and racial lines, who were not in school, expressed an interest in going back to school, and showed a special interest in vocational-technical education.

## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG UNMARRIED PARENTS

- The birth of a baby is not the result of a casual encounter. Almost half of the young unmarried parents had been living together before the birth of the baby, in periods varying from a few months to a few years.
- However, having a child does not bond fathers into a family formation. Approximately 75 percent of respondents were not living with their partners and their child following the birth of the child.
- In the year following birth, whether or not they had established paternity, 80 percent of young unmarried fathers took care of the baby in some way. Many describe their feelings toward the baby with warmth, a caring attitude, and a feeling of responsibility.

- Nevertheless, a family formation, which includes the father under one roof with the child, is formed in only one out of four instances. Fathers and mothers, across racial lines, move separately into a variety of kinship, sometimes friendship, networks following the birth of the baby.
- These young families are on the move, doubling up with friends and relatives. More than 88 percent, across racial lines, have lived in their current households for less than six months.
- Most babies, 77 percent, were living with their mothers in households shared by grandparents, relatives, or friends. A small portion lived in independent households. About 18 percent were living with both parents, while 5 percent were in foster care, with relatives, or, in one case, living with the father as primary caregiver.
- Marriage among the respondents in this study was a fading option. Only one in four reported that they would eventually marry the mother/father of their child. African-American females were the most pessimistic about this outcome.

## THE MEANING OF THE BIRTH OF A CHILD

- Two-thirds of the unmarried fathers were present at the birth of their child, and many described it in emotional terms.
- While the birth of a child to a very young mother and father is widely considered a premature event with serious and disabling long-term disadvantages to all concerned, those interviewed for this study described the birth as a moment of rejoicing and the opportunity for a fresh and optimistic beginning.
- Across racial lines, 80 percent of young, unmarried parents said it is important that the father's name appear on a baby's birth certificate.

*"It straightened my life out a lot. It gave me a look out on how life really is ... puts you in the pictures instead of seeing it through glass."*

young unmarried father

*"I was proud and happy...Now I know I'll get my life together..."*
young unmarried mother

- The frequency with which mothers reported fathers' coming to see the baby, even though their own relationship had ended, argues convincingly that the attachment the father has to the child may be maintained, even when the parents are estranged.

## PERCEPTIONS ON PATERNITY PROCEDURES

- The court system is dysfunctional for establishing voluntary paternity. It cannot respond to the chaotic living arrangements and relationships constantly in flux that are typical of young unmarried parents. The court calendar is often out-of-step with the timing needed for a voluntary commitment to legal paternity.

- The intimidation of the court system discourages legal paternity. For example, using the sheriff to serve papers frightens families when a young unmarried father has had juvenile crime problems. Repeated delays in courtroom sessions also discourages them. In Hennepin County, for example, after the father is identified through an AFDC application, four or five months elapse before he is served papers by the sheriff to appear for a hearing in court. The court date is likely to be six or eight months later.

- When child support enforcement is linked to paternity, parents evade the entire procedure. The young unmarried fathers in this study drew a distinction between their willingness to acknowledge biological paternity and their capability to respond to a support order.

- Only 15 percent of fathers who disavowed their children reported receiving information about paternity, while 53 percent of fathers establishing paternity had knowledge about the legal rights of fathers.

- Of our total sample, only 25 percent of the white fathers and 19 percent of the African-American fathers were at some stage of establishing paternity through court adjudication. In contrast, 57 percent of white fathers and 54 percent of African-American fathers have signed the ***Declaration of Parentage***.

In most jurisdictions, the court system combines paternity, child support, visitation, and custody in one or several hearings. Although these issues are linked, there is very little recognition that paternity is the first prerequisite for the other issues and that a major proportion of fathers voluntarily identify their paternity. The inappropriateness of the court system for establishing voluntary paternity is clearly disclosed.

- "Mundane neglect" describes how hospital personnel presented the ***Declaration of Parentage*** form to young unmarried parents. Explanations, written or vocal, were not given; discussion was haphazard; persons presenting the form ranged from medical records clerks, nurses, and social workers to doctors, occasionally.

One respondent said she was in the shower when the form was left on her chair. Another said she was confused with all the forms. Yet another said she didn't know whether a nurse or a social worker gave her the form.

Fathers reported being overlooked, even though they were present in the room. African-American fathers, in some instances, reported a dismissive attitude from hospital personnel, as if they didn't count. Among African-American fathers, 70 percent reported receiving no understandable information on paternity procedures compared to 40 percent of white fathers.

*"A notary from the hospital gave it (paternity declaration form) to my girlfriend's half sister instead of to me. I took it to a lawyer and he said not to sign."*
young unmarried father

*"It was a nurse or social worker. They asked if he wanted his name on the birth certificate. I said yes, but he was asleep. They never came back."*
young unmarried mother

## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM YOUNG UNMARRIED PARENTS FOR IMPROVING PATERNITY PROCEDURES

One in five young parents had no idea how to improve the system. Answers from those who did have ideas ranged widely across gender and race lines. Among those who volunteered recommendations:

- White fathers said that better information on visitation, custody, and ways to get the father's name on the birth certificate would help. African-American fathers thought that if fathers were not pursued for child support more would acknowledge their paternity. Both African-American and white parents believed the court's role should be reduced and more counseling services be made available to help fathers accept their responsibilities.
- "Diverting" the money they pay for child support to offset the county's payment of the AFDC grant was generally deplored. At least $100 per month was recommended as a pass-through for the benefit of their child.
- Both African-American and white fathers cite fear of financial responsibility and poor relationships with the mother as the chief impediments to paternity.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM FERTILITY PATTERNS, FAMILY HISTORIES, RELATIONSHIPS, AND PEER MILIEU

Mothers in this study were younger than their own mothers were when they began childbearing, and most also had sisters with out-of-wedlock children. A startlingly high proportion of respondents had early family experiences that were stressful and traumatic; 79 percent of the young mothers ran away from home or wanted to, as a solution to family situations. One in four grew up being cared for by extended family members or friends. A few grew up in foster homes, and 10 percent of the white respondents had been adopted.

Repeat pregnancies were prevalent with a striking absence of monogamy across racial lines. More than half the mothers with two or more children had different fathers for succeeding children. Among the fathers with more than one child, 46 percent of the white fathers and 80 percent of the African-American fathers had succeeding children with different mothers.

A sizable proportion spent their childhoods in a family that relied on welfare assistance. Although our sample was economically poor overall, African-American adolescents appeared to come out of a social class background which was even more impoverished than that of the white adolescents. Fully 72 percent of the African-American adolescents grew up as welfare dependents while only 40 percent of the white adolscents grew up on welfare. Presently, two-thirds of the parents we interviewed lived in households that used food stamps. Four times as many African-American males as white males relied on general assistance.

Respondents, across racial and gender lines, said they contribute money, emergency assistance, and transportation to the multiple households in which they live.

## PEER GROUP ATTITUDES

Most of these young parents were embedded in satisfying friendship networks and did not feel alienated, although their connections to churches and community organizations were sparse. Their peers and families generally counseled them to acknowledge paternity but not to marry.

These young unmarried parents, across racial and class gender categories, said that in their peer groups, fathers generally acknowledge fatherhood on hearing of the pregnancy. Few reported that men will leave town, or make themselves unavailable, although 25 percent of white females believe this is a possibility.

## MISUNDERSTANDING PATERNITY

The study explored the extent of factual information about paternity procedures known to the young parents. Information and understanding of how to establish legal paternity was incomplete across all groups. Generally speaking, women were better informed than men. But correct information, partial and distorted information, and "don't know" responses were threaded through all the responses.

Both white and African-American fathers, in sizable proportions, did not know that the ***Declaration of Parentage*** could be signed in locations other than the hospital. African-American males were aware (90 percent), more than other groups, that a range of benefits accrue to children of armed forces personnel, providing paternity has been established. Fathers received their information chiefly from the mothers of their children.

Mothers acquired their information from AFDC workers and their peer networks. Child support information was incorrect and incomplete among all groups.

## BENEFITS OF PATERNITY VALUED

The study also asked which benefits of paternity were most valued.

- Health benefits for the child from a work-related health plan through the father's employment received high marks across all groups.
- The psychological benefits of identity and security in one's heritage was particularly valued by women, both African-American and white, with a slightly higher emphasis among whites. Of all groups, African-American males place least value on this item.
- For African-American respondents, Social Security was highly valued, especially among African-American women. Distinctly less value was placed on this item by both white women and the men.

## FACTORS THAT PREDICT "AVOWERS"

There were no substantive differences between fathers who avowed their paternity and those who did not. However, more avowers grew up with a father in the household (75 percent) than disavowers (50 percent). Further, avowers perceived their own fathers as having been nurturing; disavowers had no such perceptions. Moreover, disavowers were more likely to live below poverty levels, especially African-American fathers.

For white fathers who were avowers, the following profile appears in the order of saliency:

- His father is pleased about the pregnancy.
- He recalls that while growing up he was looked after and nurtured by his father.
- He has discussed the possibility of marriage with the child's mother.
- He receives some kind of information about paternity and parental rights.
- His mother suggests he take responsibility for the child.

- He has consistent (positive) feelings about having a baby during the course of the pregnancy.
- His friends encourage him to take responsibility for the child.
- He frequently sees the baby.
- He is presented with a ***Declaration of Parentage*** at the hospital, and is not discouraged or deterred by the paternity system in establishing paternity.
- He does not view the mother of the baby as emotionally abusive.

For African-American fathers who were avowers, the following profile appears in the order of saliency:

- He has not graduated from high school.
- He believes it is important that paternity be established for the child.
- He is advised by friends to assume responsibility for the child.
- He has friends who are pleased about the pregnancy.
- He has frequent contact with the adults that raised him.
- His friends do not suggest abortion as a pregnancy outcome.
- He is currently employed.
- He receives information about paternity and parental rights.

## THE CAPACITY OF YOUNG UNMARRIED FATHERS TO PAY CHILD SUPPORT

Most of the study's fathers work and yet are very poor. Child support orders will have to be based on income from the marginal jobs that are characteristic of the fathers. The current United States economy offers very few low-skill entry jobs of the kind that a generation ago opened the path for millions of young American men to middle-class incomes. In contrast, most unskilled jobs today are in the service sector. They usually do not offer basic benefits like paid sick-leave, vacations, and health insurance. The majority of men in this study work in low-paid or part-time jobs at gas stations, warehouses, or

fast-food restaurants. To supplement their low wages, they probably rely on relatives, public assistance, or illicit activities.

Among white fathers in this study, 42 percent lived in households with combined incomes of less than $1,000 a month; among African-American fathers, 56 percent were in that situation. More white fathers were employed than African-American fathers, 65 percent versus 47 percent. And only 6 percent of African-American fathers had had household incomes of $2,500 in the last month, while 25 percent of white fathers reported such incomes.

A substantial proportion of fathers who continued to live with their family of origin contribute money to that household, which suggests that earned income is not necessarily income available to support the family of their non-marital child. While the capacity of most fathers in this study to contribute cash child support was small, more than 80 percent reported that they contributed in non-financial ways such as babysitting, transportation, food, and diapers.

More than 75 percent of all fathers wished they could go to school. Community college or vocational-technical school was their primary choice.

## QUESTIONS STILL TO BE EXPLORED

- Why do fathers play a dwindling role after the first year of the child's life?
- What will the contribution of AFDC-UP be to a stable family formation?
- What are the design features of successful outreach to fathers who want to continue school and job training?

## ONE-YEAR LATER

*"I have time. I'm young. I will make something of myself."*
14-year-old unmarried mother

A follow-up study one year after the interviews was thwarted by disconnected telephones, letters returned "address unknown," and tracking efforts that failed. This suggests a deteriorating housing situation for a large portion of the group. Nevertheless, those that could be reached showed remarkable optimism and resiliency.

A distinctive difference appeared, however, between white and African-American young unmarried mothers. The economic status of the African-American women had steadily deteriorated; there was a further loss of confidence that establishing paternity would improve the lives of their children; and the African-American fathers had already drifted away from a relationship with their children.

Copies of the full report are available from the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, University of Minnesota, 330 Hubert H. Humphrey Center, 301-19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455. Telephone (612) 625-1551.

# Teen Fathers and the Child Support Enforcement System

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This paper was prepared for "Paternity Establishment: A Public Policy Conference" sponsored jointly by the Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, February 26-27, 1992. Comments were also received from the members of the Colloquium on Childhood Poverty and Adolescent Parenting at Indiana University, Bloomington. The NLSY data analysis was funded by the Adolescent Family Life Program, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The survey of CSE programs was supported by the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University. The views expressed in this paper reflect the opinions of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the conference organizers or funding agencies. Research assistance was provided by Tom Woodley, Lara Roholt, Sabine Rieble, and Heather Ratliff. The author takes full responsibility for any errors.

**Introduction**

With good cause, enormous attention has been paid to adolescent mothers and their children. The United States has a higher rate of teen pregnancy than any other industrialized country (Jones et al., 1985). In 1988, alone there were 488,941 births to women under the age of 20 (NCHS, 1990). If there were no adverse effects of adolescent parenting, the high incidence of teenage childbearing in the U.S. would not surface as a policy issue. However, despite some controversy over the consequences of early parenting (Geronimus & Korenman, 1991), consensus continues to grow indicating that the adverse outcomes for young mothers and their children are varied and substantial (Miller & Moore, 1990; Hofferth & Hayes, 1987; Chilman, 1980; Waite & Moore, 1978; Titi & Lamb, 1989; McAnarney & Hendee, 1989; Furstenberg, 1980). Further, the public costs of adolescent parenting are increasing with a conservative estimate of $19.83 billion in 1988 (Stone & Wasznak, 1989; Burt & Levy, 1987). In the same year, over 50 percent of all Aid for Dependent Children expenditures went to families in which the mothers were adolescents when their first child was born (Stone & Wasznak, 1989). Because of the high personal and social costs of teen parenting, the antecedents, consequences, and factors associated with adolescent motherhood have been widely researched.

In contrast, young fathers are infrequently the focus of researchers. Our knowledge of this population contains neither the breath nor depth of knowledge concerning young mothers. Currently, there are only six published studies of young fathers which use nationally representative data. Of the six, one focuses on absent fathers many of whom are in their early to mid twenties (Lerman, 1986). The remaining five studies use outdated data (Card & Wise, 1978; Russ-Eft, 1979), are narrowly focused (Elster et al., 1987), or use biased subsamples of nationally representative data (Marsiglio, 1986, 1987). Consequently, public policies directed towards this population are made in a virtual vacuum of knowledge. However, few public policies are specifically targeted at teen fathers,

rather such policies are made, *de facto*, by ignoring the special characteristics and needs of this population.

To partially fill the void of knowledge concerning teen fathers, this article provides a general overview of this population. First, their personal characteristics, fertility outcomes, marital histories, criminal involvement, educational attainment, age-income profiles, and self-reports of their child support contributions are discussed. Second, an example of how teen fathers are handled by public organizations is provided. This section reports the variation both within and between states in the treatment of teen fathers by the child support enforcement program.

**Data and Methods**

The data for the ensuing analyses are derived from two different sources. The description of the teen father population is based on data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experiences-Youth Cohort (NLSY). NLSY is a balanced panel which includes information on 6,403 males ages 14-21 in 1979. At the time the analyses for this article were conducted, ten years of data were available, 1979-1988. Approximately 93 percent of the survey participants were interviewed in each survey year. Further, because the NLSY over sampled blacks, Hispanics, and poor whites, the data contain a larger absolute number of teen fathers than would be found in a representative national survey. There are over 650 observations on young men who became fathers prior to the age of 20. Despite the over sampling of some demographic groups and survey attrition over the years of the panel, weights are provided for each survey year so that nationally representative estimates can be generated.

While the NLSY data are limited, they are arguably the best existing data on teen fathers (Sonenstein, 1986; Card, 1986). The NLSY surveys were conducted with well trained interviewers. There is a wealth of information on respondents with over 28,000 variables contained in the 1979-1988 surveys. While the emphasis of the surveys was labor market experiences, substantial fertility data are available. However, the

reliability of the birth records of young men has been called into question by Mott (1983) who found at least one discrepancy, usually a child's birth date, in 47 percent of birth records of male respondents as of the 1981 survey. After resolving as many inconsistencies as possible, the discrepancy rate among men remained at 28 percent. As misreporting was the most pronounced among absent teenage fathers, it was conjectured that these fathers are less likely to remember the birth dates of their children. Additionally, the extent of under reporting of live births in this population is unknown. Consequently, the NLSY data are likely to be biased in favor of fathers whose involvement is above average given that they are willing to admit their paternity at least once.

The second source of data for this article is a survey mailed to the directors of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) programs and the State Court administrators in every state and the District of Columbia in January, 1992. The organization responsible for oversight of CSE programs varies from state to state, and it was felt that personnel within these organizations were best qualified to respond to the survey or to forward the survey to the most appropriate organization. At least one and as many as eight responses were received from every state and the District of Columbia. For example, in South Carolina, the Child Support Enforcement Administration within the Department of Social Services completed a survey. Additionally, the South Carolina Court Administration conducted a phone survey of the members of the Family Court Judges Advisory Committee and returned seven completed surveys. When multiple responses were returned from a state, all surveys were reviewed for consistency of answers. When, as was sometimes the case, survey responses conflicted, the "Don't Know" code was marked for that question. In such cases, it was noted that such practices varied within the state.

The analyses presented within are descriptive, statistical methods are elementary and encompass frequencies, cross-tabulations, and means. Because the NLSY data are weighted to reflect the nation as a whole, the

number of observations in national tables are quite large, approximately 16 million and almost any statistical tests based on this number of observations would be significant. Therefore, all statistical tests using weighted data were modified. They are based on the actual number of observations in the table (maximum 6,403) while maintaining the distribution given by the weighted data.

**Results**

Overall, teen fathers appear to depart in many respects from young men who do not become fathers in their teen years. Examination of Table 1 reveals that young fathers come from all racial backgrounds. Among the cohort of young men who were 14-21 in 1979, 65% or 791,000 teen fathers are white; 29.9% or 361,000 are black; and, 4.9% or 55,000 are Hispanic or other races. While the majority of teen fathers are white, teen fathers are over represented in the black and other-nonwhite racial categories.

Teen fathers become sexually active about 1.3 years earlier than other young men. However, only 43,000 or less than 1% of all young men become teen fathers prior to age 16. The numbers of young men becoming fathers is greatest among 18 and 19 year olds who constitute approximately 896,000 teen fathers. The average age at first birth is 18 for teen fathers. A good comparison is not available for non-teen fathers as 74% of the non-teen fathers had not had a child as of 1988, the most recent survey. Among the relatively small number of young men who were not teen fathers but who experienced a birth by 1988, the average age at first birth was 22.7 years. Further, within the time frame of the survey, the teen fathers had more children than those who postponed having children. By 1988, the teen fathers had an average of 2.21 children in contrast to .6 children among non-teen fathers.

A number of attitudinal scales are also reported in Table 1. The Rotter scale is a four item scale measured in the 1979 survey. The scale attempts to measure to extent to which respondents maintain a fate orientation versus a belief that they control their own destiny. The locus

# Table 1

## Characteristics of the Population

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Race: | | |
| White | .655**** | .847**** |
| Black | .299**** | .126**** |
| Other | .046**** | .028**** |
| Age at First Intercourse, 1983 | 14.96**** | 16.27**** |
| Number of Children Ever Born, 1988 | 2.21**** | .60**** |
| Rotter Scale: Locus of Control, 1979 | .095**** | .201**** |
| Self-Esteem, 1980 | .428**** | .479**** |
| Self-Esteem, 1987 | .465**** | .531**** |
| Sex-Role Beliefs, 1979 | .030**** | .093**** |
| Sex-Role Beliefs, 1982 | .038**** | .160**** |
| Sex-Role Beliefs, 1987 | .144 | .175 |

*Significance level **** =p<.0001*
*All scales range from -.75 to .75. For the Rotter Scale -.75 = Least in Control while .75 = Most in Control. The self-esteem scale is set such that -.75 = Very Low while .75 = Very High. Sex role attitudes are measured such that -.75 = Very Conservative while .75 = Very Liberal.*

of control of young fathers has received previous attention with some researchers arguing that teen fathers are characterized by an external locus of control (Hendricks & Fullilove, 1983; Hendricks & Montgomery, 1984). Others have rejected the fate orientation which implies an externalization of responsibility (Hendricks, 1980, 1981; Robinson et al., 1983). Bivariate analyses of the NLSY data seem to support an external fate orientation although these results are preliminary and will eventually control for the age and race of the respondents. (At this point, all we know is that teen fathers were, on average, two months younger than other young men as of the 1979 survey.) If indeed, the locus of control result is robust, then the externalization of responsibility of young fathers could forbode difficulty in securing child support on behalf of their children.

Self-esteem was measured for survey respondents in 1980 and 1987. Self-esteem is measured by a ten item Likert scale where respondents strongly or somewhat agree or disagree with statements such as "I am a person of worth." In both 1980 and 1987, teen fathers performed slightly worse on the self-esteem scales relative to young men who deferred having children. Again, these results merit further investigation as controls for age and race are not part of the results presented in Table 1.

Sex-role beliefs were measured three times in 1979, 1982 and 1987. The sex-role beliefs scale measures the extent to which respondents adhere to traditional roles concerning men and women, especially the role of women in the workplace. It is an eight item Likert scale in which respondents are asked whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with statements such as "A woman's place is in the home." In 1979 and 1982, teen fathers held considerably more traditional beliefs. As the cohort ages, however, all young men begin to adopt more liberal sex-role beliefs and by the 1987 survey, the differences between teen fathers and other young men are not statistically significant.

Family background was also examined and the results are portrayed in

Tables 2 and 3. None of the results concerning teen fathers are encouraging. The mothers and fathers of teen dads achieve lower levels of education than the parents of men who defer parenting. The fathers of teen dads are less likely to hold professional positions and are more likely to be employed as laborers, a fact which probably reflects their lower level of educational attainment. Teen fathers come from households with more siblings, 3.4 versus 2.9, and more older siblings, 2.3 versus 1.9. The eldest siblings of teen dads are older but posses less education than the oldest siblings of non-teen fathers. In 1979 and 1987, teen fathers were approximately twice as likely to live in households below the poverty threshold.

Another indicator of the home lives of these young men was obtained by determining whether or not any household member received magazines, newspapers or had a library card when the respondents were age 14. A smaller percentage of the teen father households received magazines, newspapers, or had a householder who possessed a library card.

Family instability appears to be much more pronounced among the teen father population. As shown in Table 3, only 44.6% of teen fathers live with both parents until age 18 in contrast to 68.2% of other young men. They are also more likely to live with step parents or in a children's home, group care home, detention center, or other institution. Between two to three times as many teen fathers stopped living with a biological, step or adoptive parent prior to age 18. Teen fathers also exited and re-entered parental households more frequently. Among those young men who did not live with both parents until age 18, the reasons for household disruptions were examined. Teen fathers were less likely to experience a disruption because of the death or illness of a parent or to run away from home. Teen fathers were more likely to experience disruptions in their living arrangements because they got in trouble and were taken away from their parents, because they left to get married, got a job, entered the military or left to live on their own.

# Table 2

## Family Characteristics

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Mother's Education, 1979 | 10.53**** | 11.75**** |
| Father's Education, 1979 | 10.39**** | 12.02**** |
| Father's Occupation, 1979: | | |
| Professional | .092**** | .247**** |
| Sales | .028 | .045 |
| Clerical | .018* | .035* |
| Crafts | .223 | .189 |
| Army | .025 | .019 |
| Worker | .245**** | .165**** |
| Farming | .024 | .036 |
| Service | .039 | .047 |
| Number of Siblings, 1979 | 3.448**** | 2.866**** |
| Number of Siblings Older than R, 1979 | 2.294**** | 1.939**** |
| Age of Oldest Sibling, 1979 | 25.04* | 24.31* |
| Highest Grade Completed by Oldest Sibling, 1979 | 11.635**** | 12.473**** |
| Household Below Poverty Threshold, 1979 | .252**** | .122**** |
| Household Below Poverty Threshold, 1987 | .190**** | .090**** |
| Any HH Member Receive Magazines at Age 14 | .456**** | .681**** |
| HH Receive Newspaper at Age 14 | .748**** | .848**** |
| Any HH Member Have a Library Card at Age 14 | .606**** | .744**** |
| Area of Residence at Age 14, 1979: | | |
| Town or City | .800 | .773 |
| Country, not Farm | .152 | .171 |
| Farm or Ranch | .059 | .056 |
| Residence in the South, 1979 | .386**** | .305**** |

*Significance levels, ****=p<.001, ***=p<.005, **=p<.01, *=p<.05*

# Table 3

## Living Arrangements Prior to Age 18, 1988

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Lived With Both Biological Parents | .446**** | .682**** |
| Ever Live With Step Parents | .212**** | .106**** |
| Ever Live With Adoptive Parents | .024 | .021 |
| Was There Any Time R Was Not Living With Biological, Step, or Adoptive Parent | .307**** | .119**** |
| Age R Stopped Living With a Parent - 1st Time | 13.44**** | 14.73**** |
| Ever Live With a Foster Parent | .001**** | .006**** |
| Ever Live in a Children's Home, Group Care Home, Detention Center, or Other Institution | .003**** | .001**** |
| Number of Times R Stopped Living With Parents | 1.57*** | 1.40*** |
| **For Those Who Did NOT Live With Parents Until Age 18, the Percent Whose Living Arrangements Changed Prior to Age 18 Because of:** | | |
| Parent's Death | .215**** | .233**** |
| Parent's Illness | .487**** | .527**** |
| Parents Unable to Care for R | .013 | .004 |
| Agency/Court Took R Away Because of Neglect or Abuse | .010 | .007 |
| R Got in Trouble and Was Taken Away From Parent | .018**** | .008**** |
| R Ran Away From House | .008** | .017** |
| Left to get Married | .067**** | .002**** |
| Left to Go to College | .0 | .013 |
| Left to Get a Job or Enter the Military | .077* | .042* |
| Left to be on Own | .213**** | .107**** |

*Significance levels ****=p<.001, ***=p<.005, **=p<.01*

Self-reports of criminal involvement, convictions and the ages at which various drugs were first tried are given in Tables 4-6. In the vast majority of the comparisons, teen fathers compare poorly with men who defer parenting and most of these differences are statistically significant. Teen fathers indicated that they committed more status offenses (crimes for which adults cannot be arrested), violent and economic crimes than their non-father peers. Further while most respondents earn no income or very little income from illegal activities, teen fathers report earning more income from these activities than other young men.

When examining convictions, the comparisons are even more pronounced. More than twice as many teen fathers are ever convicted of an illegal activity, 18.6% versus 8.0%. The risks of conviction for assault, robbery, theft, theft by deception, destruction of property, possession of marijuana, hashish, or other drugs are roughly two to six times greater for teen fathers. Moreover, the seriousness of the offenses appears more pronounced among teen fathers as more than twice as many report convictions in adult rather than juvenile court, 9.2% versus 4.2%.

Table 6 reports the 1984 survey results concerning the percent of young men who have tried drugs as well as the average age at which each drug was tried for the first time. Also the number young men who tried each drug is given in parentheses and this number provides the number of observations on which the age data are based. In all cases where there are significant differences between the teen fathers and other young men, teen fathers are more likely to try drugs. This was true for cigarettes, marijuana/hashish, tranquilizers, and heroin. Even when similar percentages of teen fathers and other young men try a specific drug, the teen fathers try drugs at earlier ages. This was true for all eleven drug categories and statistically significant in nine of the eleven cases. These findings appear consistent with the observations that criminal behavior, drug involvement and other deviant behaviors may be associated with teenage paternity (Chilman, 1980; Pirog-Good, 1988, Good & Pirog-Good,

# Table 4

## Self-Reported Illegal Activity in Past Year, 1980

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Number of Times Ran Away From Home (<18) | .317*** | .135*** |
| Number of Times Skipped School (<18) | 1.982**** | 1.392**** |
| Number of Times Drank Alcoholic Beverages (<18) | 2.595 | 2.571 |
| Number of Times Intentionally Damaged Property | .711 | .620 |
| Number of Times Fought at School or Work | 1.266**** | .832**** |
| Number of Times Shoplifted | .744* | .650* |
| Number of Times Stolen Belongings Worth < $50 | .689** | .546** |
| Number of Times Stolen Belongings Worth > $50 | .403**** | .149**** |
| Number of Times Used Force to Obtain Things | .291**** | .146**** |
| Number of Times Seriously Threatened to Hit/Hit Someone | 1.434**** | 1.099**** |
| Number of Times Attack With Intent to Injure/Kill | .485**** | .273**** |
| Number of Times Attempted to "Con" Someone | .626 | .600 |
| Number of Times Took an Auto w/o Owner's Permission | .292* | .217* |
| Number of Times Broken into a Building | .334*** | .219*** |
| Number of Times Knowingly Sold/Held Stolen Goods | .592**** | .358**** |
| Number of Times Aided Gambling Operation | .173* | .098* |
| Total Income From Illegal Activities (1 = None, 2 = Very Little) | 1.476**** | 1.297**** |

*Significance Levels, ****=p <.001, ***=p <.005, **=p <.01, *=p<.05*

# Table 5

## Convictions in Past Year, 1980

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Ever Convicted of an Illegal Activity Charge | .183**** | .080**** |
| Ever Convicted of: | | |
| Assault | .034**** | .009**** |
| Robbery | .024**** | .004**** |
| Theft | .061**** | .024**** |
| Theft by Deception | .007** | .002** |
| Received/Possessed Stolen Property | .005 | .002 |
| Destruction of Property | .019* | .008* |
| Other Property Offense | .020 | .011 |
| Possession of Marijuana or Hashish | .025*** | .010*** |
| Possession of Other Illegal Drugs | .012**** | .002**** |
| Major Traffic Offense | .016 | .017 |
| Drink or Purchase Alcohol when Under Age | .007 | .008 |
| Ever Convicted of an Illegal Activity in an Adult Court | .092**** | .042**** |

*Significance levels ****=p<.001, ***=p<.005, **=p<.01, *=p<.05*

# Table 6

## Age at Which Respondent First Tried Drugs, 1984

| | Age When First Tried: | | Percent Who Ever Tried: | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Teen Father** | **Not Teen Father** | **Teen Father** | **Not Teen Father** |
| Cigarettes | 12.44 (574) | 12.77 (4453) | .898**** | .824**** |
| Marijuana/Hashish | 14.92** (168) | 15.54** (1044) | .263**** | .183**** |
| Amphetamines/Stimulants | 17.11** (141) | 17.60** (1137) | .271 | .234 |
| Barbituates/Sedatives | 15.74**** (76) | 17.35**** (567) | .126 | .118 |
| Tranquilizers | 16.55** (68) | 17.67** (410) | .125** | .081** |
| Psychedelics | 16.49** (74) | 17.47** (596) | .119 | .123 |
| Cocaine | 18.39** (118) | 19.25** (1073) | .188 | .219 |
| Heroin | 17.34 (20) | 18.54 (53) | .034**** | .008**** |
| Other Narcotics | 16.09*** (49) | 18.02*** (320) | .081 | .064 |
| Inhalants | 13.27*** (20) | 16.47*** (182) | .033 | .031 |
| Other Drugs | 15.68* (10) | 19.00* (50) | .012 | .009 |

*Significance Levels, ****=p<.0001, ***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05*

1989; Barglow et al., 1968; Sullivan, 1986; Elster et al., 1987).

Marital outcomes are described in Table 7. By 1988, a high proportion of teen fathers have married at least once, 76.4% versus 55.4% of other young men. Additionally, teen fathers marry nearly four years earlier than young men who postpone parenting. Further, this age differential is biased downwards given the censorship of this variable. Specifically, 44.6% of young men who were not teen fathers had not married by 1988. If the postponement of their marriages could be factored into the age estimates for those who were not teen fathers, the age at marriage differential would clearly be even larger than four years. Among those who married, teen fathers are twice as likely to divorce. Thirty-two percent of the marriages of teen fathers ended in divorce by 1988. Among males whose first marriages end, 15.8% and 7.7% of the teen fathers and other young men remarried within the survey period, respectively. Statistics on the end of second marriages, beginning of third marriages, etc. can be constructed but small sample sizes prohibit reliable comparisons.

Table 8 provides information on educational aspirations and attainment. For the three years in which it is measured, the amount of education which young men would like to achieve exceeds their expectations of what they will actually acquire. However, by age 23, young men who were not teen fathers attain the amount of education that they wanted to achieve rather than the lower level of education they thought they could attain. This is not true for teen fathers. In 1979, 1981, and 1982, they reported that they would like to attain approximately 13.5 years of education. By age 23, these young men attained 12.35 years of education. Further by age 23, the teen fathers had acquired approximately two years less education than their non-teen father peers. Only 64.7% of the teen fathers finished high school or a GED in contrast to the 84.9% of the other young men. Of all teen fathers, 19.4% received a GED and 44.1% received a high school diploma. Of teen fathers receiving either a high school diploma or GED, 30.6% received their high school certification through a GED program. The

# Table 7

# Marriage

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Mean Age of First Marriage | 19.09**** | 22.87**** |
| Mean Age at End of First Marriage | 23.54**** | 25.171**** |
| Mean Age at Second Marriage | 24.57*** | 25.89*** |
| Mean Age at End of Second Marriage | 25.93 | 27.48 |
| Ever Married, 1988 | .764**** | .554**** |
| Of Those Ever Married, Percent Divorced, 1988 | .320**** | .159**** |
| Of Those Dissolving First Marriage, Percentage Remarried, 1988 | .158**** | .077**** |

*Significance levels, ****=p<.0001 ***=p<.005*

# Table 8

## Education

| | Teen Fathers | Not Teen Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| Education Level R Would Like to Achieve, 1979 | 13.62**** | 14.45**** |
| Education Level R Expects to Achieve, 1979 | 12.69**** | 13.88**** |
| Education Level R Would Like to Achieve, 1981 | 13.55**** | 14.45**** |
| Education Level R Expects to Achieve, 1981 | 12.60**** | 13.89**** |
| Education Level R Would Like to Achieve, 1982 | 13.58**** | 14.49**** |
| Education Level R Expects to Achieve, 1982 | 12.73**** | 13.97**** |
| Average Years of Education Completed by Age 23 | 12.35**** | 14.49**** |
| Percent Receiving H.S. Diploma or GED by Age 23 | .647**** | .849**** |
| Percent Receiving H.S. Diploma or GED by 1988 | .636**** | .876**** |
| High School Diploma | .441**** | .797**** |
| GED | .194**** | .079**** |
| Average Age Receive H.S. Diploma or GED | 19.07**** | 18.47**** |

*The Age 23 variables in Table 8 are unweighted, as NLSY weights are designed to reflect the national population in a survey year, not at a particular age. Significance levels **** = p<.0001*

heavy reliance on the GED contrasts sharply with the experiences of young men who did not become fathers in their teen years and is consistent with prior research (Marsiglio, 1986). Among young men who were not teen fathers only 7.9% received a GED which translates into 9% of non-teen fathers who received a high school credential. Last, but consistent with the rest of the findings concerning the educational outcomes, the mean age at which teen fathers obtain high school certification exceeds the mean age of certification for other young men. Overall, the educational deficits of teen fathers are similar to those reported Marsiglio (1987).

Table 9 presents the percent of absent fathers who report paying child support. The number of observations on which these percentages are based are given in parentheses. Between the ages of 20 and 27, significantly smaller percentages of teen fathers report paying child support. These differences are pronounced at every age. While the percentages paying support generally increase with the age of the respondent, the vast majority of teen fathers never pay child support up through their mid twenties. Among absent fathers at age 20, 16.2% versus 33.6% of the absent teen fathers and absent non-teen fathers report paying child support. At age 27, only 30.3% of absent teen fathers report paying child support in contrast to 50.9% of the absent fathers who had their children at age 20 or later. Moreover, the NLSY survey did not distinguish between formal and informal payment of child support. Thus, it is very probable that some of the young men who report paying child support have not had paternity established or formal support payments ordered.

Less data were available in the NLSY on the magnitude of child support payments. The available information for the 25th, 50th, and 75th percentiles is provided in Table 10. The data should be viewed with some skepticism as the number of observations on which these figures are based are relatively small. While it is not true at every age and percentile, those who became fathers in their teens generally report paying less child support than young men who became fathers in their twenties. At age 26,

# Table 9

## Percent of Absent Fathers Paying Child Support by Age

| | Age at First Birth < 20 | Age of First Birth ≥ 20 |
|---|---|---|
| Age 20 | .162**** (307) | .336**** (266) |
| Age 21 | .188**** (352) | .369**** (511) |
| Age 22 | .233**** (398) | .389**** (694) |
| Age 23 | .229**** (384) | .404**** (856) |
| Age 24 | .244**** (309) | .447**** (795) |
| Age 25 | .268**** (235) | .489**** (653) |
| Age 26 | .296**** (172) | .552**** (486) |
| Age 27 | .303**** (108) | .509**** (350) |

*Number of observations on which percentages are based are in parentheses. Table 9 values are unweighted as NLSY weights are designed to reflect the national population in a survey year, not at a particular age. Significance levels **** p < .0001*

# Table 10

## Magnitude of Child Support Payments Per Absent Child at the 25th, 50th, and 75th Percentiles for Absent Fathers

| | Age at 1st Birth < 20 | | | | Age at 1st Birth ≥ 20 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N_OBS | 25th | 50th | 75th | N_OBS | 25th | 50th | 75th |
| Age 20 | 49 | 208.20 | 578.40 | 1040.00 | - | - | - | - |
| Age 21 | 60 | 218.00 | 670.60 | 1104.00 | 29 | 493.60 | 713.20 | 1581.10 |
| Age 22 | 63 | 420.00 | 903.30 | 1500.00 | 46 | 457.10 | 905.80 | 1572.00 |
| Age 23 | 70 | 531.30 | 983.90 | 1595.70 | 85 | 398.70 | 1032.40 | 1515.10 |
| Age 24 | 68 | 572.60 | 1037.80 | 1554.90 | 78 | 573.90 | 1255.90 | 1800.00 |
| Age 25 | 63 | 564.90 | 806.70 | 1560.00 | 84 | 825.70 | 1300.00 | 1807.00 |
| Age 26 | 44 | 572.60 | 948.70 | 1740.00 | 69 | 809.20 | 1300.80 | 1848.40 |

*Table 10 values are are unweighted as NLSY weights are designed to relect the national population in a survey year, not at a particular age.*

the annual, per child, median support payments were $948.70 and $1300.80 for men having children in their teens versus their twenties, respectively.

Given the lower educational attainment and the multitude of risk factors which characterize the teen father population, one would expect the earnings of teen fathers to eventually fall short of the earnings of other young men. Table 11 provides income and labor force participation data by age and teen father status. The income from salary and wages is measured in 1988 dollars and represents the income from a calendar year given the respondent's age as of January first. Teen fathers earn significantly more than their nonfather counterparts up through age 20. However, at and after age 22, the young men who defer parenting consistently earn more than teen dads. By age 29, the average annual incomes of young men who defer parenting is roughly 74% greater than that of the teen fathers, $21,452 versus $12,340. The median income figures for the two groups show even greater disparities, $9,615 versus $19,750 for the teen fathers and non-teen fathers, respectively.

Consistent with the above income patterns, teen fathers spend significantly more weeks employed each year, on average, up through age 19. Between the ages of 20-21, there are no significant differences between the two groups. However, after age 21, teen fathers spend fewer weeks employed than young men who deferred parenting. At age 29, there is a six week differential in the average number of weeks worked by teen fathers and non-teen fathers, 36.8 versus 42.8 weeks. Similarly, teen fathers spend fewer weeks out of the labor force until age 20. Typically, at and after age 23, teen fathers usually spend significantly more weeks out of the labor force in comparison to their nonfather peers. Last, among teen fathers, the average number of weeks spent unemployed and the number of jobs ever held always exceeds these figures for other young men irrespective of the ages at which these comparisons are made.

Because of the emphasis in the child support arena is on young men who are absent from their children, similar income and labor force

# Table 11

## Income and Labor Force Participation by Age and Teen Father Status

| | Average Income+ | | Average Weeks Out of Labor Force | | Average Weeks Worked | | Average Weeks Unemployed | | Average Number of Jobs Ever Reported | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age: | Not Teen Father | Teen Father | Not Teen Father | Teen Father | Not Teen Father | Teen Father | Not Teen Father | Teen Father | Not Teen Father | Teen Father |
| 18 | $4,922**** | $6,573**** | 18.9**** | 13.8**** | 27.0** | 29.7** | 5.9**** | 8.7**** | 2.9*** | 3.3*** |
| 19 | $6,150**** | $7,824**** | 18.3**** | 13.5**** | 27.9* | 29.9* | 5.7**** | 8.1**** | 3.3**** | 3.8**** |
| 20 | $7,208*** | $8,358*** | 17.2** | 14.8** | 29.6 | 29.7 | 5.1**** | 7.6**** | 3.6**** | 4.1**** |
| 21 | $8,629 | $8,982 | 14.9 | 13.3 | 32.0 | 31.7 | 5.1**** | 7.3**** | 4.3**** | 4.8**** |
| 22 | $10,605* | $9,654* | 11.9 | 12.3 | 34.9*** | 32.1*** | 5.1**** | 7.5**** | 5.0*** | 5.5*** |
| 23 | $12,564** | $11,012** | 9.9* | 11.8* | 37.4**** | 33.3**** | 4.5**** | 6.7**** | 5.4**** | 6.1**** |
| 24 | $13,981**** | $11,799**** | 8.6** | 11.0** | 39.2**** | 34.1**** | 4.2**** | 6.7**** | 5.7** | 6.3** |
| 25 | $15,608**** | $12,331**** | 7.6** | 10.1** | 40.3**** | 36.3**** | 4.0* | 5.3* | 5.9* | 6.4* |
| 26 | $17,770**** | $14,076**** | 6.1 | 7.7 | 42.3* | 39.4* | 3.5* | 4.7* | 6.2* | 6.9* |
| 27 | $19,298*** | $14,897*** | 5.5* | 7.9* | 43.5**** | 38.1**** | 2.8**** | 5.8**** | 6.3* | 7.0* |
| 28 | $20,564**** | $12,718**** | 5.2**** | 11.5**** | 43.8**** | 35.5**** | 2.6 | 4.1 | 6.3 | 7.3* |
| 29 | $21,452*** | $12,340*** | 6.1* | 11.1* | 42.8* | 36.8* | 2.6 | 3.9 | 6.3 | 7.4 |

*+ Income from salary and wages (including tips) in 1988 dollars.*
*Significance levels, ****=p<.0001, ***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05*

participation data were obtained for teen dads who always lived with their children, and teen dads who lived apart from their children some or all of the time. These figures are given in Table 12. Teen dads who always live with their children (hereafter referred to as present teen dads) earn more than absent teen dads between the ages of 18 and 20. After age 22, however, absent teen dads earn more than present teen dads although the differences are only significant at age 24. Absent teen dads earn more than young men who defer parenting at ages 18 and 19 and less at ages 25 and 26. At all other ages the income comparisons of absent teen dads and the non-fathers are insignificant. Overall, the income of young men who live apart from their children always falls between the income of present teen dads and the non-teen fathers. Thus, it would appear that young men who chose to live with their children suffer the greatest disadvantages in the labor market in adulthood. By age 27, the income of absent teen dads is roughly 8% less than the income of young men who did not have children in their teens and 27.5% greater than the income of present teen dads.

In examining other labor market variables, it is found that absent and present teen dads do not differ in the number of weeks spent out of the labor force. Absent dads work fewer weeks than present dads age ages 18 and 19 and more weeks at age 24. At ages 18 and 19, absent dads spend more weeks unemployed but less weeks unemployed at age 25. At nearly every age, absent teen fathers report having held more jobs than present teen dads as well as young men who deferred parenting until their twenties or later. Thus, variations along these dimensions additionally suggest that absent rather than present teen dads look the most similar to young men who defer parenting.

Combined, several of the results lead to a perplexing conundrum. First, if we try to encourage young men to live with and take responsibility for their children, their educational and economic progress may be hindered. In turn, this may adversely their ability to effectively parent their children. Second, among absent fathers, teen dads are less

## Table 12

## Income and Labor Force Participation for Teen Fathers by Age and Living Arrangements

| | Average Income | | Average Weeks Out of Labor Force | | Average Weeks Worked | | Average Weeks Unemployed | | Average Number of Jobs Ever Reported | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age: | Present Teen Father | Absent Teen Father | Present Teen Father | Absent Teen Father | Present Teen Father | Absent Teen Father | Present Teen Father | Absent Teen Father | Present Teen Father | Absent Teen Father |
| 18 | $9,678$^{****}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $6,020$^{****}_{+++}$ | 9.7$_{\#\#\#}$ | 14.5$_{++++}$ | 34.6$^{*}_{\#\#\#}$ | 28.9$^{*}$ | 6.6 | 9.0 | 3.0 | 3.3$_{+++}$ |
| 19 | $10,216$^{****}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $6,980$^{****}_{+}$ | 14.1$_{\#}$ | 13.4$_{++++}$ | 32.8$^{*}_{\#\#}$ | 28.9$^{*}$ | 3.7$^{****}_{\#}$ | 9.4$^{****}_{++++}$ | 2.8$^{****}_{\#}$ | 4.2$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 20 | $9,564$^{*}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $7,728$^{*}$ | 16.9 | 13.9$_{++}$ | 30.9 | 29.1 | 4.4$^{****}$ | 9.1$^{****}_{++++}$ | 2.8$^{****}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 4.9$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 21 | $9,023 | $8,961 | 14.1 | 12.8$_{+}$ | 31.3 | 31.9 | 6.9$_{\#}$ | 7.6$_{++++}$ | 3.6$^{****}_{\#\#\#}$ | 5.5$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 22 | $9,230$_{\#}$ | $9,875 | 13.1 | 11.8 | 30.7$_{\#\#}$ | 32.9$_{+}$ | 8.3$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 7.2$_{++++}$ | 4.2$^{****}_{\#\#}$ | 6.2$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 23 | $10,251$_{\#\#}$ | $11,488 | 12.9$_{\#}$ | 11.1 | 31.8$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 34.3$_{++}$ | 7.3$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 6.4$_{++}$ | 4.8$^{****}_{\#}$ | 6.9$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 24 | $10,546$^{*}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $12,731$^{*}$ | 12.5$_{\#\#}$ | 9.9 | 31.7$^{*}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 35.9$^{*}_{++}$ | 7.7$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 6.0$_{++}$ | 5.0$^{****}_{\#\#}$ | 7.2$^{****}_{++++}$ |
| 25 | $11,423$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $13,180$_{+}$ | 9.2 | 11.0$_{++}$ | 35.4$_{\#\#\#}$ | 37.1$_{+}$ | 7.0$^{**}_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 3.7$^{**}$ | 5.7$^{***}$ | 7.2$^{***}_{++++}$ |
| 26 | $13,773$_{\#\#\#}$ | $14,469$_{+}$ | 7.2 | 8.5 | 39.9 | 38.7$_{+}$ | 5.0 | 4.5 | 6.7 | 7.1$_{+}$ |
| 27 | $13,939$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | $17,771 | 8.6$_{\#}$ | 5.7 | 37.8$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | 39.2 | 5.3$_{\#\#\#}$ | 7.4$_{+++}$ | 7.1$_{\#}$ | 6.7 |
| 28 | $12,718$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | | 11.5$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | | 35.5$_{\#\#\#\#}$ | | 4.1 | | 7.3$_{\#}$ | |
| 29 | $12,340$_{\#\#\#}$ | | 11.4$_{\#}$ | | 36.8$_{\#}$ | | 3.9 | | 7.4 | |

Comparing absent and present teen fathers: significance levels, ***=p<.0001, ***=p<.001, **=p<.01, *=p<.05. Comparing present teen fathers with young men who were not teen dads: significance levels, ####=p<.0001, ###=p<.001, ##=p<.01, #=p<.05. Comparing absent teen fathers with young men who were not teen dads: significance levels, ++++=p<.0001, +++=p<.001, ++=p<.01, +=p<.05.

likely to pay support in adulthood in comparison to absent fathers whose children were born in their twenties. Further, among absent fathers who report paying child support, those having children prior to age 20 typically report paying less child support than absent fathers who postponed having children until their twenties. Nevertheless, the earnings of the absent teen father population are roughly equivalent than that of men who become parents after their teen years. Although there is no evidence to support the following conjecture in the NLSY data, it may be that CSE operators are either unaware of or reluctant to establish paternity for teen fathers.

To assess current CSE practices with the teen father population, the results of a survey of the directors of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) programs and the State Court administrators in every state and the District of Columbia are reported below. The survey was a combination of ten open and closed ended questions. The results of the closed ended questions are summarized in Table 13. It should be noted at the outset, however, that discussions with several CSE administrators echoed the same sentiment--- they see very few teen fathers and teen fathers comprise a small portion of their caseload. This seemed consistent with the NLSY results.

When they encounter teen fathers, CSE administrators were asked if there were some putative fathers who were so young that they would not attempt to establish paternity. Of the 51 states (including District of Columbia), 40 or 78.43% indicated that they attempted to pursue all paternity cases regardless of the age of the putative father. Nine states, 17.6%, indicated that in some cases, the putative father is too young and that they defer paternity establishment. For example Michigan and California indicated that the decision to pursue such paternity cases was handled on a court by court basis. Vermont, South Carolina and Montana frequently wait until the putative father is 18. Montana further indicated that whether paternity cases for fathers under age 18 are pursued depends on whether compliance is voluntary and if the father is employed. Kansas

# Table 13

## State CSE Practices with Teen Fathers

| | | Number | Percent |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do You Encounter Some Noncustodial, Teenage Fathers Who Are so Young That You Do Not Attempt to Establish Paternity? | Yes | 9 | 17.6 |
| | No | 40 | 78.4 |
| | Don't Know | 2 | 3.9 |
| If You Establish Paternity for Some Teen Fathers, is a Guardian-Ad-Litem Regularly Provided or Made Available During Paternity Proceedings? | Yes | 26 | 51.0 |
| | No | 21 | 41.2 |
| | Don't Know | 4 | 7.8 |
| Is There a Minimum Level of Support Award in Your State That Applies to Teen as Well as Older Noncustodial Parents? | Yes | 29 | 56.9 |
| | No | 19 | 37.3 |
| | Don't Know | 3 | 5.9 |
| If There is a Minimum Support Award, What is Its' Magnitude? | Range $10-$100/month per child | | |
| Are Youths Age 15 or Younger Ever Required to Pay Child Support? | Yes | 26 | 51.0 |
| | No | 7 | 13.7 |
| | Don't Know | 18 | 35.3 |
| Are Any Teen Father Programs Operated Through CSE Offices in Your State? | Yes | 11 | 21.6 |
| | No | 36 | 70.6 |
| | Don't Know | 4 | 7.8 |

indicated that IV-D policy is to review cases where the putative father is under 16 to determine if, as a consequence of pursuing a paternity case, criminal charges for indecent liberties with a minor would be brought against the minor or the mother of the child. Oklahoma indicated that most attorneys tend to shy away from paternity cases with very young fathers while New Mexico suggested that typically only voluntary paternity cases where the alleged father could bring his parents were pursued.

Among those states that pursue paternity cases with teen fathers, respondents were asked if a guardian-ad-litem was regularly provided or made available during paternity proceedings. Twenty-six states indicated that a guardian-ad-litem was present during paternity proceedings. Twenty-one states (41.2%) indicated that this procedure was not always followed. Most the states which commented on the fact that they do not regularly provide a guardian-ad-litem indicated that the parents or guardians of the putative fathers typically served this function and that when a parent or guardian was not available, the court would appoint a guardian-ad-litem.

Twenty-nine states indicated that there was a minimum support award which would apply to teen as well as older fathers. The minimum, monthly, support payment ranged from $10/child to $100/child. Half the states indicated that they knew of cases in which fathers under the age of 16 were required to pay child support. Usually these support orders were low and the magnitude of the award was based on imputed income that the teenager could earn by mowing lawns, delivering newspapers, doing odd jobs, etc. Most states indicated the magnitude of the award depended on the ability of the obligor to pay. As high school attendance and employment status impact ability to pay, these factors were likely considered in setting the magnitude of support awards. Overall, states seem to suggest that the amount of support ordered would vary from judge to judge and that there was likely to be as much within state variation as across state variation.

Eleven states indicated that the CSE program operated special programs targeted specifically to teen fathers. Most of these states

provided information to teen groups, community organizations, schools and individuals which detail the rights and responsibilities of teen fathers. Some states provide curriculum and training programs for public school educators who then teach the legal ramifications of parenting. Such information dissemination may serve to help prevent births to young men although the effectiveness of this approach has not been evaluated.

Additionally, a few states attempt to work directly with teen fathers. These programs usually focus on factors which directly affect the ability to pay of the obligor. For example, Tennessee operates the Responsible Teen Parent Program in which judges identify teen parents in need of employment and refer them to JPTA opportunities. However, Tennessee indicates minimal success with this program. Alabama has implemented a "Parent's Fair Share" program in one county which court mandates education and training for parents that are not in school. Similarly, some counties in Nevada have small work programs for teen fathers. Marion county, Indiana has implemented the Teen Alternative Parenting Program (TAPP) where teen fathers are allowed to pay their child support with in-kind contributions such as child care, school attendance, job training, and attendance at parenting education classes. A detailed description of this program can be found in Pirog-Good (1992). Pennsylvania suggested that similar strategies were tried less formally with some judges in the state.

**Conclusions**

In the cohort of young men who were 14-21 in 1979, there were roughly 1,207,000 teen fathers. This translates into 7.3 percent of all males ages 14-21 in 1979. While teen fathers constitute a diverse population, on almost every dimension examined, teen fathers they fare worse than young men who defer parenting until their twenties or later. Teen fathers are drawn in greater proportions from poor, minority, and unstable households. Household members generally acquire less education and when the fathers of teen dads are present in the households, they are less likely to hold

professional positions and are more likely to be employed as laborers. Teen fathers acquire less education than their peers, and are more likely to get involved with drugs at earlier ages. They are more involved in criminal activities and the seriousness of these offenses are likely to be above average given that more that twice as many young fathers are prosecuted in adult courts. Teen fathers are more likely to marry, at earlier ages, and to divorce, at earlier ages.

Teen fathers who live with their children appear to enter the labor market earlier and ultimately earn less than other young men through their late twenties. The pattern is similar for absent fathers except that they do not experience the same severe reduction in income in adulthood as teen dads who live with their children. Despite the fact that the income of absent fathers who had children in their teens who had children prior to age twenty, earn at least as much as young men who defer parenting until after their teens. Despite this fact, relatively few of the absent fathers who had children prior to age twenty report paying child support. This seems to suggest that teen fathers infrequently come into contact with the CSE program or that CSE administrators are sometimes reluctant to pursue young men for child support.

The survey of the CSE programs suggests that states, counties and judges are individually grappling with the best mechanisms for handling teen fathers. Some states defer paternity adjudication while others treat teen fathers as adults, adjudicating paternities, ordering support, and enforcing support orders. What special programs exist for teen fathers largely disseminate information on the responsibilities of paternity. While little is currently known about CSE programs that attempt to facilitate the labor force participation of teen fathers, the existing meager evidence suggests that these programs have met with marginal success at best. This is hardly surprising given the multitude of poor outcomes which characterize this population.

The fact that so few teen fathers report paying child support even in

their mid twenties suggests that CSE programs have focused their paternity establishment and enforcement efforts elsewhere. The current federal financial incentive payments to states which reward higher ratios of collections to administrative costs may further discourage states from working with populations that are unusually costly and intrinsically difficult with which to work (Wattenberg, 1987). Nevertheless, the early establishment of paternity and the enforcement of at least a token support award may impart an understanding that young men must share the financial burden of raising their children.

While the CSE survey indicated that states, counties and individual judges are trying a variety of different tactics with teen fathers, the unfortunate fact remains that we know very little about what approaches work with this population. For this population, it is essential to know if there are differences in outcomes when paternity is established immediately versus deferred. In those cases where paternity establishment is deferred, it would be desirable to know if the paternity cases are ever reopened. We should determine if, by deferring paternity, young men are more likely to finish school and/or support their children. Basically, support enforcement during the teen years may be sound public policy or completely unrealistic. The NLSY survey suggests that there is income to be tapped but that working with this the population may be formidable. In particular, given the bad experiences of many young fathers with institutions such as the police, courts, schools, and the family, the likelihood that the CSE program will successfully interact with teen dads is dubious.

One of my final two observations is that we are doing little other than applauding those young men who live with and take care of their children. Because these young fathers impose smaller or less obvious costs on society, there has been little concern for the fact that they also experience educational deficits and substantially lowered incomes. Although it is not the role of the CSE program to deal with young fathers

who live with their children, schools, community agencies, and social service agencies should be aware of the deficits experienced by this population and attempt to ameliorate these negative outcomes. Some good prototype teen father programs exist (Association of Maternal & Child Health Programs, 1991; Bloom et al., 1991; Pirog-Good, 1991). If public policies were to reward positive behaviors, we might find fewer young, absent, fathers who fail to support their children.

My last observation is that part of the teen father population attains more education, earns high income and supports their children. Investigation of the "success" stories may provide some insights into how we may promulgate programs and policies which will generate more and better outcomes for this population. Moreover, multivariate analyses and causal modeling with respect to this population is essential to explore the robustness of the results presented here.

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# Do the Earnings Deficiencies of Unwed Fathers Account for Their Low Child Support Payments?

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Fatherhood brings new financial responsibilities. Given the added cost of supporting a child, parents must increase their earnings or reduce their own material living standards. In principle, both married and unwed fathers feel the heightened financial pressure. Married fathers living with their children see their families' rising expenses on a daily basis. Unwed fathers living apart from their children become liable for providing child support payments while continuing to pay for their own households.

Yet, the case of unwed fathers is complicated. While some experience the same urgency as married fathers, others feel little or no financial obligations toward their children. In either case, unwed fathers may differ in their capability to raise their earnings. If unwed fathers are very young, high school dropouts, and have little work experience, even the most sincere efforts could yield little increased income.

Until recently, public officials charged with collecting child support from non-custodial parents acted as if unwed fathers have little capacity to contribute support payments and that the costs of collecting their modest potential payments exceed their benefits. But recent legislative and administrative actions have made establishing paternity and support orders from unwed fathers a high priority. The 1988 Family Support Act (FSA) mandated new standards requiring states to determine paternity for increasing proportions of out-of-wedlock children born in the state. One rationale for this provision is the belief that unwed fathers have or will have in the future enough resources from which to pay child support. However, acknowledging that unwed fathers sometimes lack enough earnings to pay child support, the FSA allows for waivers to permit five states to mount demonstrations of employment and training services to unemployed unwed fathers.

The deliberations over the FSA had to proceed without reliable information on the job market patterns of unwed fathers or on the relationship between their earnings and support payments. But, efforts are under way to uncover these patterns and consider their implications for policy.

This paper asks about the linkages between earnings and child support payments. We begin by examining the job market success of unwed fathers. Do young unwed fathers earn significantly less than other young men? If so, what accounts for their disadvantages? Are the differences between unwed fathers and married fathers caused by differences in worker capabilities, such as low education and limited work experience, or differences in worker effort? Do young unwed fathers eventually experience rapid earnings growth or do their earnings stagnate?

The next section examines the child support payment record of unwed fathers and the relationship between increased earnings and added support payments. A common assumption guiding public policy is that increased earnings among unwed fathers will generate increased support payments. But do high levels of earnings always translate into increased support payments? Perhaps the causation runs in the opposite direction; that is, maybe the willingness to pay child support influences earnings. A third possibility is that unmeasured attitudes, such as responsibility, influence both earnings and child support.

These findings bear on questions concerning the appropriate government role in dealing with earnings deficiencies of unwed fathers. Should public programs provide targeted employment and training assistance to these young men? How should programs link the fulfillment of child support obligations with job-related services? Do adjustments in government benefit programs make sense? The paper concludes by reporting on demonstration projects

aimed at learning more about unwed fathers and how to increase their earnings and support payments and to improve their fathering.

**Earnings Patterns of Unwed Fathers**

All young workers are in the early stages of their job market career. For some, it is a time to receive training and higher education; for others, it is a time for casual involvement in jobs; still others try to gain work experience to raise their long-term earnings. Given this variety of situations, current employment and earnings are not necessarily reliable indicators of a young man's performance in the labor market. At the same time, if the responsibilities of fatherhood ever affect earnings, the impact should be especially striking during an early stage of their labor market careers.

Because marriage and fatherhood patterns vary significantly by race, we begin by examining job market indicators within racial groups. All the data for the analysis comes from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Behavior (NLSY). The NLSY tracks the experiences of nearly 13,000 young men and women who were between the ages of 14 and 21 in 1979. Table 1 reveals the differences among youth in hours and earnings during 1983 and 1987 by their marital and fatherhood status in 1984 and 1988. Note that unwed fathers worked only about the same hours as unwed young men without children. In contrast, married fathers as well as married young men without children worked much longer than either unmarried group. Thus, in terms of hours worked, unwed fathers resembled other unmarried young men rather than other young fathers. The earnings of unwed fathers were substantially lower than all other groups, including unmarried young men without children.

The labor market outcomes cited in Table 1 show patterns for two different cohorts of young men. To see whether unwed fathers raise their earnings as they age, we can view the

Table 1: Annual Hours and Annual Earnings of 23-27 Year-Olds by Fatherhood and Marital Status in 1983 and 1987

| Hours, Earnings by Family Status | Hispanic | Black | White |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1983 Hours** | | | |
| Single, No Child | 1,563 | 1,463 | 1,764 |
| Married, No Child | 1,676 | 1,827 | 1,898 |
| Unwed Father | 1,434 | 1,365 | 1,585 |
| Married Father | 1,975 | 1,824 | 1,953 |
| **1987 Hours** | | | |
| Single, No Child | 1,530 | 1,446 | 1,811 |
| Married, No Child | 1,696 | 1,868 | 1,988 |
| Unwed Father | 1,548 | 1,401 | 1,548 |
| Married Father | 1,945 | 1,714 | 2,042 |
| **1983 Earnings** | | | |
| Single, No Child | $13,236 | $10,906 | $14,850 |
| Married, No Child | 15,007 | 13,179 | 17,458 |
| Unwed Father | 8,961 | 8,048 | 9,912 |
| Married Father | 16,076 | 12,896 | 15,913 |
| **1987 Earnings** | | | |
| Single, No Child | $13,273 | $11,033 | $15,707 |
| Married, No Child | 16,932 | 13,978 | 19,096 |
| Unwed Father | 9,223 | 8,850 | 9,944 |
| Married Father | 16,030 | 12,692 | 17,811 |

Source: Tabulations by author from National Longitudinal Survey of Youth.

1983-87 trends among those who were 20-24 years old in 1984 by their status in 1984. The results appear in Figures 1 and 2. Unwed fathers started the period working about the same hours and earning almost as much as single men without children. However, their earnings did not keep up with any of the other groups. By 1987, unwed fathers were working 400-500 fewer hours and earning $5,000-9,000 less per year. The severe stagnancy of earnings of unwed fathers suggests that without some policy initiatives, their capacity to pay significant amounts of child support will be limited.[1]

A close look at the trends indicates the importance of unwed fatherhood status rather than a young man's initial earnings capacities in limiting earnings growth. Note in Table 2 that the 20 percent of unwed fathers who subsequently married achieved extraordinary gains in earnings. While their 1983 earnings (when they were unwed fathers) were nearly as low as those of other unwed fathers, they reached parity with other married young men by 1987.

These results capture the overall differences in the job market outcomes of unwed fathers and other young men, but they do not reveal how these differentials arise. Young fathers, especially those living with and helping to raise their children, may become more responsible and mature in the process of building a family. These traits may encourage them to work harder at their job and make special efforts (on and off the job) to find good-paying jobs. The more pressing monetary needs of heading a family may discourage young men from taking positions that pay less but have other desirable characteristics. In particular, young single men may spend more years at low earnings but investing in training so as to gain higher earnings in the future.[2]

A second possibility is that only young men with the capabilities to earn an adequate income end up marrying and forming intact families. Potential mates, including the mothers of their children, may decide not to marry or live with men who cannot financially support a

Figure 1: Trends in Annual Hours of 20-24 Year-olds
by Marital and Fatherhood Status in 1984

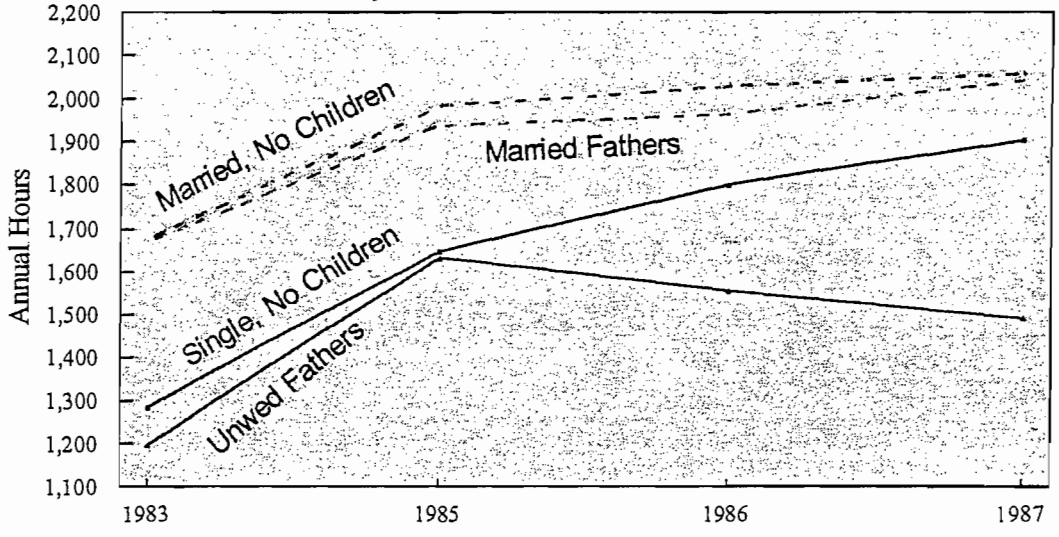


Figure 2: Trends in Annual Earnings of 20-24 Year-olds
by Marital and Fatherhood Status in 1984

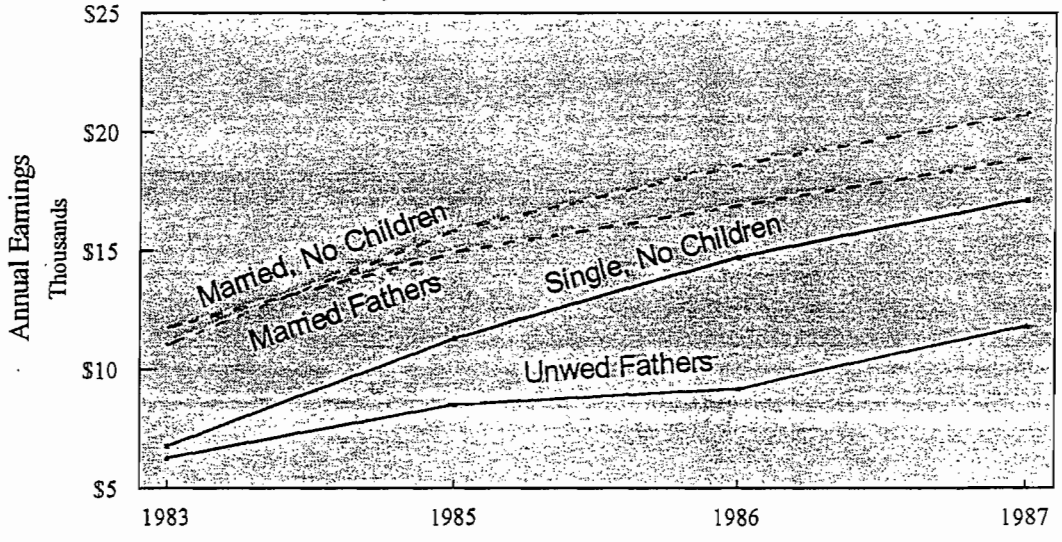

Table 2: Hours Worked and Earnings in 1983 and 1987 of 1984 Unwed Fathers by Marital Status in 1988

| | Hours Worked in 1983 | Hours Worked in 1987 | Earnings in 1983 | Earnings in 1987 | Flow from Unwed Fatherhood | Unweighted Number of Fathers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hispanic | | | | | | 49 |
| Never-Married | 981 | 1,491 | $4,735 | $10,413 | 65.8% | |
| Married | 1,476 | 1,982 | 7,835 | 18,409 | 28.9% | |
| Separated, Divorced | 778 | 1,903 | 4,999 | 14,000 | 5.3% | |
| Black | | | | | | 256 |
| Never-Married | 1,005 | 1,389 | 4,877 | 9,791 | 69.5% | |
| Married | 1,314 | 1,941 | 6,898 | 14,903 | 20.8% | |
| Separated, Divorced | 1,923 | 1,185 | 8,944 | 10,696 | 9.7% | |
| White | | | | | | 65 |
| Never-Married | 1,218 | 1,480 | 6,844 | 11,656 | 70.9% | |
| Married | 1,809 | 1,923 | 8,022 | 22,084 | 21.1% | |
| Separated, Divorced | 1,634 | 2,645 | 6,607 | 11,958 | 8.0% | |
| Total | | | | | | 370 |
| Never-Married | 1,078 | 1,428 | 5,552 | 10,485 | 69.7% | |
| Married | 1,496 | 1,939 | 7,370 | 17,669 | 21.5% | |
| Separated, Divorced | 1,782 | 1,671 | 8,041 | 11,236 | 8.8% | |

Note: The sample consists of young men, ages 20-27 in 1984, who completed NLSY interviews in 1984 and 1988.

Source: Tabulations by author from NLSY.

family. Third, some outside event, such as low area unemployment rates, might both create increased earnings opportunities and spur young men to marry and/or have children. A fourth possible linkage is that unwed fathers might avoid working too hard if a significant portion of their earnings goes to the child's mother in the form of child support payments or to the government to offset the mother's welfare benefits. Alternatively, the need to provide child support payments might spur unwed fathers to increase work effort, largely through an income effect.

To examine these possibilities, we estimate the impact of marital and fatherhood status net of other characteristics of young men. The analysis begins with multivariate regressions on annual earnings and the proportion of the year that young men (ages 23-31 in 1987) are employed. Using the rich array of information from the NLSY, we isolate the effects of fatherhood and marriage from the impacts of education, prior or current military activity, other family income, race, local unemployment rates, and a set of aptitude measures (including paragraph comprehension, math knowledge, auto shop skills, and electronic knowledge). Table 3 reveals the net impact of each factor on earnings and employment relative to the base case of a white young man who is single, childless, a high school graduate, and has no prior military experience.

While education, skill, and other characteristics of young men have large and significant impacts, fatherhood and marital status continue to exert extremely large impacts. Note that married fathers living with their children earned about $4,500 more than single, childless men with similar personal, family, and area characteristics. In contrast, unwed fathers living away from their children earned about $500 per year less and worked about three fewer weeks.[3] The

Table 3: Effect of Fatherhood and Marital Status on Earnings and Employment of 23-31 Year-Old Men: 1987

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Predicted Levels for Young Men with Base Level Characteristics | $17,550 | .870 |
| Change in Earnings Relative to Base Level Associated with Each Status Change Below: | Effects on Earnings | Effects on Employment |
| No Child, Married | +3,791 | +0.11 |
| Unmarried Absent Father | -478 | -0.07 |
| Married Absent Father | +771 | 0.03 |
| Married Resident Father | +4,490 | +0.10 |
| Unmarried Resident Father | -240 | 0.04 |
| HS Dropout | -3,719 | -0.07 |
| Some College | -809 | -0.03 |
| College Graduate | 1,654 | -0.05 |
| Post-Graduate | -983 | -0.13 |
| Black | -1,599 | -0.03 |
| Hispanic | +806 | +0.01 |
| Past Military Experience | -1,505 | -0.04 |
| Active Military | -758 | -.003 |

Note: These results come from OLS regressions of 1987 earnings and employment rates on the variables listed above plus age, other family income, scores on four tests from the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitute Battery (ASVAB) and area unemployment. All the impacts listed above come from coefficients that were statistically-significant at the 1 percent level. The base level characteristics are young men who are white , age 27, unmarried, high school graduates with no college, had median scores on ASVAB tests of math, reading, electricity, auto shop, living in area with no reported unemployment rate, and with other family income of $10,000. The overall sample consists of young men, ages 23-31 in 1988. The employment rate is equal to the percentage of the year the young man was employed or in the military (i.e., weeks employed plus any weeks in military service divided by 52).

Source: Regressions based on the NLSY.

few unwed fathers living with their children have lower earnings but higher employment rates than single, childless men.

Taking personal and family characteristics into account raises the position of married fathers relative to married young men without children. Note in Table 1 and Figure 2 that married young men without children earned more than married fathers did. However, the results in Table 3, which compare young men with the same personal characteristics and family backgrounds, reverse that pattern and show married men with children having higher earnings.

The impacts of explanatory variables other than family variables are interesting. Black young men earn less than expected on the basis of observed characteristics, but Hispanic men earn more. Not surprisingly, high levels of other family income reduce earnings and employment while high skill levels (as measured by the Armed Forces Vocational Aptitude Battery) raise earnings significantly. Both past and current military service lower earnings; however, active duty in 1987 leaves employment rates virtually unchanged. Skills and other job market characteristics might well affect earnings differentially by fatherhood status. For example, high levels of education might have a less positive effect on single, childless men than on married fathers. One reason may be that those with fewer family responsibilities do more experimenting in the job market and give more weight to job quality than to current income.

The effects on earnings of education, race, and employment conditions differed by fatherhood status.[4] First, marriage had a substantially larger effect on fathers than on non-fathers. Even among fathers living away from their children, the earnings gain associated with marriage was higher than for childless young men. Divorced or separated young men generally earned more than those who never married, but the effects were much larger among

absent fathers than among non-fathers. Apparently, the experience of marriage was most consequential for earnings of young absent fathers.

Education effects also varied somewhat by fatherhood status. College graduation had a large effect among childless young men, but none among fathers. In contrast, graduate education yielded big gains only for married fathers. Other surprising findings emerged from racial and ethnic impacts. Hispanic non-fathers and absent fathers actually earned more than whites with similar family and job market characteristics. The only negative effect of Hispanic status is among resident fathers, and even for this group, the effect was extremely small. For black young men, the largest earnings reduction showed up among non-fathers. Black fathers earned less than white fathers with similar characteristics, but the employment gaps were small or nonexistent.[5]

Overall, the results point to large and independent effects of fatherhood and marriage. Living with one's child clearly matters as shown by the fact that absent fathers earn much less than resident fathers of the same marital status. However, marriage differences can override fatherhood effects; for example, married absent fathers have higher earnings than unmarried resident fathers with similar characteristics.

How are we to interpret these results? One possibility is that high potential earnings permits young men to marry, to live with and support their children, and to do well in the job market. However, the *observed* earnings advantages of married men and resident fathers cannot be due solely to higher skills and favorable employment conditions since the positive effects of marriage and resident fatherhood were measured net of these differences.

Of course, some *unobserved* characteristic that help young men do well in the job market might also influence them (together with their female partners) to marry and have children.

Perhaps, some young men simply choose to take on more responsibilities than others. This responsibility trait could explain both why some men marry, have children, and remain married and why married men, especially resident fathers, work more of the year and achieve higher earnings than other young men. Another explanation is that the decisions to marry or become a resident father are unrelated to job characteristics, but that the experiences of marriage and raising children influence young men to work harder and earn more.

What about the earnings disadvantages observed among unwed fathers? Does unwed fatherhood push some young men to raise their earnings, in order both to provide financial support for their children and to achieve an adequate living standard for themselves? Or, do unwed fathers---most of whom do not pay child support---regard their dual responsibilities as more apparent than real?

**Earnings Levels and Child Support Payments by Young Absent Fathers**

Support responsibilities are likely to interact with fatherhood in a variety of ways. Because unwed fathers are much less likely to face a legal support obligation than other absent fathers, the linkages between support payments and earnings may be less significant. Still, if unwed fathers view child support obligations as a tax , they may reduce their work effort because some of each dollar of earnings will have to go toward child support. Alternatively, they may increase their work effort because of the increased need for income. The interplay between child support obligations and the formation of second families is especially interesting. The needs of children in a second family might compete with or take priority over the needs of dependent child from the first family and thus reduce the father's ability and willingness to make

child support payments. On the other hand, young men who form second families may be more responsible and have added capabilities, which leads them to support both families.

Table 4 presents simple tabulations showing the child support paid in 1987 by unwed fathers and other absent fathers. Clearly, married absent fathers provided more in child support than did unwed absent fathers. Even the proportion of earnings spent on child support is higher for married than unwed fathers. However, the highest rate of spending on support payments is among divorced or separated fathers.

Racial differences were linked largely to differences in marital status. Hispanic young fathers pay the highest proportion of earnings for child support. Their high rate of contribution is the result of the 22 percent burdens experienced by divorced and separated fathers and the fact that this group makes up about 60 percent of Hispanic absent fathers. White fathers have similar payment patterns, except that white divorced and separated fathers spend only about 14 percent of their earnings on child support. Blacks showed the lowest levels of support payments, providing only $770 per father as compared to about $1,300 paid by Hispanic and white fathers. The low payments among blacks were the consequence of the unusually small amounts provided by black divorced and separated fathers as well as the high proportion of absent fathers who have never married. Black absent fathers who are married actually pay a substantial 20 percent of their earnings for child support.

The differences in payment performance had most to do with whether fathers made any payment at all. Among fathers making some payment, the average amount provided was almost as high among unwed fathers as among married, divorced, or separated father.

Earnings can influence child support payments in a variety of ways. High earnings tend to raise legal support obligations and thereby force many fathers to increase payments. A high

Table 4: Child Support Payments of Absent Fathers by Marital Status and Race: 1986

| | Mean Support Payments | Payments As Percent of Earnings | Percent Making Payments | Mean Payment by Those Who Pay | Number of Fathers (thousands) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| All Races | | | | | |
| Single | $678 | 6.7 | 35.2 | $1,928 | 690 |
| Married | 1,052 | 9.9 | 47.2 | 2,231 | 323 |
| Separated or Divorced | 1,476 | 13.6 | 58.0 | 2,545 | 771 |
| Hispanic | 1,301 | 15.0 | 49.3 | 2,638 | 140 |
| Single | 458 | 4.3 | 24.6 | 1,866 | 37 |
| Married | 1,352 | 6.4 | 77.5 | 1,745 | 20 |
| Separated or Divorced | 1,667 | 22.0 | 53.8 | 3,101 | 83 |
| Black | 770 | 9.4 | 40.6 | 1,895 | 726 |
| Single | 698 | 7.8 | 37.6 | 1,856 | 465 |
| Married | 1,152 | 19.6 | 55.2 | 2,086 | 106 |
| Separated or Divorced | 724 | 7.2 | 39.7 | 1,824 | 155 |
| White | 1,312 | 10.2 | 52.1 | 2,519 | 918 |
| Single | 672 | 4.5 | 31.2 | 2,153 | 187 |
| Married | 969 | 5.1 | 39.8 | 2,434 | 197 |
| Separated or Divorced | 1,664 | 14.2 | 63.9 | 2,602 | 533 |

Source: Tabulations by author from NLSY.

capacity to earn will increase a father's ability to make payments without jeopardizing his own living standard. A third possibility is that fathers who have close relationships with their children or who feel a strong moral commitment will increase their efforts to earn in order to provide support for their children. Other factors may have direct effects as well as indirect effects related to earnings. Fathers who have started second families by marrying and having children in their current home might pay less in child support payments so as to maintain their current family's living standard. However, the presence of a spouse or own children might stimulate fathers to earn more and thus avoid reducing payments. Still another possibility is that only those absent fathers who are most responsible are willing to start second families and this responsibility pushes more of them to pay child support.

Responsibility and necessity may also play a role among absent fathers who have been or still are in the military. Military experience, especially current active duty, can make fathers easier to locate, but also might increase the father's sense of the importance of fulfilling his obligations. Aging should increase a young father's maturity and thus cause him to pay more. But, aging might also be associated with a drifting away from earlier relationships, including those with one's children. Income from other family members should also raise support payments, although this impact is likely to vary with family size. Finally, even after taking account of these labor market and family obligation factors, there may be cultural differences between white, black and Hispanic absent fathers in their capacities, willingness and sense of obligation to pay child support.[6]

Given a young man's personal and family characteristics as well as area employment conditions, earnings and child support can interact in the following ways: 1) the earnings of young fathers can largely determine the child support they pay; 2) the level of child support

payments provided by young fathers can strongly influence their earnings; and/or 3) the degree of responsibility can have a large impact on both the earnings and child support payments of young fathers.

The analysis of the interaction between child support payments and earnings draws on two sets of multivariate tobit equations. The first set estimate the impact of earnings and other factors on child support, while the second project how child support and other factors affect earnings.[7] Using transformations of the tobit coefficients, one can distinguish the impacts on the probability of making payments from the impact on payments, among those who made at least some payment.

The starting point is to estimate the impact of marital status, age, race, number of children living away from the father's household, and number of children living in the father's household. Equation (1) in Table 5 indicates that married and divorced fathers pay more than unwed fathers, that black and Hispanic fathers pay less than white fathers, and that support payments increase with added numbers of children outside the household. Surprisingly, fathers that start second families, via marriage and having children in their own homes, actually pay more in child support than other young fathers. Unwed fathers who do not subsequently marry provide the least support.

Equation (2) reveals the effects of earnings as well as the impacts of family, race, age, and military activity variables while holding earnings constant. Note that the child variables increase in importance while the impact of marriage becomes weaker. By implication, some of the higher payments associated with marriage shown in equation (1) must be due to their higher earnings and not some unmeasured responsibility factor related to marriage. On the other hand,

Table 5: Factors Influencing Child Support Payments by Young Absent Fathers: 1986

| | | Change in Child Support Payments with Unit Change in Variable | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Means | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Married | 0.17 | 487[b] | 78 | 210[c] | 2 |
| Divorced, Separated | 0.37 | 560[a] | 362[c] | 411[a] | 192[b] |
| Own Child in HH | 0.15 | 91 | 306 | 179 | 175[c] |
| Children Not in HH | 1.52 | 176[b] | 221[c] | 255[c] | 126 |
| Black | 0.53 | -311 | -216 | -222 | -86 |
| Hispanic | 0.15 | -133 | -144 | -156 | -70 |
| Age | 26.0 | -32[b] | -57 | -57 | -35 |
| Military Experience | 0.03 | | 107 | 178 | 72 |
| Active in Military | 0.10 | | 368[a] | 373[a] | 175[c] |
| Actual Earnings | $11,461 | | 0.05[a] | | 0.02[a] |
| Earnings in 1985 | $9,924 | | | 0.05[a] | |
| Predicted Earnings | | | | | 0.01[b] |
| Other Family Income | | | | | 0.004[c] |
| Percent of Impact on Those Fathers Who Pay Child Support | | 32.8 | 30.8 | 30.5 | 22.5 |

Note: The numbers shown in columns (1), (2) and (3) reveal the independent effects on child support payments relative to the base case of a white 26 year-old, never-married, childless young man, with no military experience and average earnings. For example, the impact of being married is to raise payments by an expected $487 per year in equation (1). The bottom row indicates that part of the effect (32.8 percent in equation (1)) comes about through raising the amount paid by those young men making any payment. The remaining proportion shows how much of the effect is to raise the proportion of young men making a payment. The sample size is 763 absent fathers. The [a], [b], and [c] symbols denote statistical significance at the 1, 5, and 1o percent levels.

Source: Tobit equations estimated by author using data from NLSY.

the larger positive effect of having an own child at home means that such fathers are providing added financial support without any added earnings.

Involvement with the military raises support payments, independently of any impact on earnings. One can interpret the military variables in terms of a willingness to follow rules or to respect one's responsibilities and/or an easier target for child support collection efforts. Note that while both military variables are positive, the current active duty variable is much larger and statistically significant. This suggests that it is the ease of collection that is playing the strongest role in the process.

The negative impact of age is surprising. Note that the negative age effects are net of earnings and family factors. Any maturation process that encourages paying child support operates either through increased earnings or increased family responsibilities, or does not take place at all. Not surprisingly, higher earnings were associated with higher child support payments by young absent fathers. However, each dollar increase in earnings raised support payments by only about 5 cents.

Interpreting the connection between earnings and support payments requires us to consider alternative mechanisms. One possibility is simply that differences in earnings capacities generate differences in support payments; that is, those able to earn more because of higher education and favorable labor market conditions contribute some of their increased earnings. A second explanation is attaching a high priority to meeting support obligations stimulates fathers both to earn more and to pay more.

A two stage procedure can distinguish between these explanations. The first stage predicts earnings on the basis of human capital and area labor market variables; the predicted earnings variable is essentially independent of motivational influences on earnings associated

with fatherly responsibilities. The second stage estimates the effects of both *predicted* earnings and actual earnings on support payments. If actual earnings continues to have a positive effect on child support payments even after taking account of predicted earnings, one can conclude that some unmeasured characteristics--perhaps the father's effort to make adequate child support payment--is raising both earnings and support payments.

The right column (4) in Table 5 reveals that while predicted earnings exerts a positive effect on support payments, the impact is less than the impact of actual earnings. In fact, the effect of predicted earnings vanishes in the presence of the actual earnings variables. This pattern of results is subject to more than one interpretation. One possibility is that the predicted earnings variable shows the weaker impact because it is a less accurate measure of potential earnings than is the youth's actual earnings. Or increased effort, which may be stimulated by the desire to pay child support, causes both actual earnings of young fathers and support payments to rise.

Direct evidence of an impact of child support payments on earnings shows up in Table 6. Equation (1) includes only race, age, and the human capital and area unemployment variables. From equations (2) and (3), it is clear that family variables exerted impacts as large as the most powerful human capital variables. Married absent fathers earned about $5,400-5,900 more and separated absent fathers earned about $3,000 more than never-married fathers with similar labor market characteristics. On the other hand, those with an own child in their home or added children away from home earned less than other absent fathers. A few influences on earnings showed considerable sensitivity to the impact of family variables and child support payments. Note particularly the effects of race and age. When we include only human capital and labor market variables, black absent fathers show an earnings disadvantage in comparison with whites.

Table 6: Effects of Past and Current Child Support on Earnings of Young Absent Fathers: 1986

| Explanatory Variables | Means | Change in Earnings with Unit Change in Variables (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black | 0.53 | -1,465 | 152 | 589 | 451 |
| Hispanic | 0.15 | 1,700[b] | 2,040[a] | 2,254[a] | 2,060[a] |
| Age | 26.0 | 181[a] | 56[a] | 23[a] | 15[a] |
| Paragraph Comprehension | 0.29 | 483 | 869 | 2,614 | 1,270 |
| Math Knowledge | 0.24 | 5,628[a] | 5,297[a] | 4,692[a] | 5,669[a] |
| Auto Shop Knowledge | 0.38 | 10,323[a] | 10,583[a] | 9,057[a] | 9,565[a] |
| Electricity Knowledge | 0.25 | 277 | -658 | -304 | 226 |
| High School Dropout | 0.33 | -3,006[a] | -2475[a] | -2,158[a] | -2,196[a] |
| Some College | 0.13 | 590 | 839 | 543 | 920 |
| College Graduate | 0.17 | 2,633 | 3,123 | 3,847 | 3,302 |
| Military Experience | 0.03 | -829 | -1,691 | -1,267 | -1,568 |
| Active in Military | 0.10 | 2,057 | 1,392[a] | 1,010[b] | 1,228[b] |
| Low Area Unemployment | 0.30 | 1,911[a] | 2,858[a] | 3,101[a] | 3,187[a] |
| Medium Area Unemployment | 0.38 | -1,078 | -208 | 248 | 308[c] |
| High Area Unemployment | 0.21 | -3,576 | -2,856 | -2,120[a] | -2,234 |
| Married | 0.17 | | 5,831[a] | 5,883[a] | 5,400[a] |
| Divorced, Separated | 0.37 | | 3,279[a] | 2,842[a] | 3,119[a] |
| Own Child in HH | 0.15 | | -1,988[a] | -2,379[a] | -2,176[a] |
| Children Not in HH | 1.52 | | -279 | -659 | -308 |
| Other Income | 5,902 | | 0.010 | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Child Support in 1986 | 1,018 | | | 1.25[a] | |
| Child Support in 1985 | 622 | | | | 1.48[a] |

Note: These results come from tobit equations estimated by the author. The sample size is 746 absent fathers. The sample size is 746 absent fathers. The a, b, c symbols denote statistical significance at the 1, 5, and 10 percent levels.

Source: Tobit equations estimated by author from NLSY data.

However, with the inclusion of family variables and child support payments in Table 6, the situation reverses itself as black absent fathers earn more than white absent fathers with similar labor market, human capital, and family characteristics. The age effects go in the opposite direction. The presence of family variables and child support payments reduce the observed importance of age on earnings.

Equation (2) reveals the extremely high and positive impact of child support payments on earnings. Here, causation may run in both directions. The most natural explanation is that added earnings causes increased child support rather than the other way around. One way to limit the endogeneity is to measure child support payments with a lag of a year behind the year in which earnings is measured. This creates a type of exogeneity since the level of child support payments in 1985 cannot literally have been caused by earnings in a subsequent year. Of course, a third variable might have been at work in both years that stimulates higher earnings as well as child support. Whatever the explanation, the results in Table 6, equation (4), clearly show that added child support in 1985 was associated with higher earnings in 1986, even net of human capital, area unemployment, race, and other family variables. These large and highly significant impacts indicate that the requirement and/or the desire to pay child support helped to stimulate increased earnings.

Overall, the results show that unwed fathers pay less in support payments than other absent fathers and that their low support payments may be the cause as well as the effect of the low earnings of unwed fathers. Both marriage and the willingness to make child support payments raise earnins by statistically significant amounts. This suggests that policies aimed at raising the employment and earnings of unwed fathers should recognize that motivating young men to fulfill their financial responsibilities may be as important as providing training.

**Implications for Policy**

Public concerns over the job situation of unwed fathers are natural, since the low earnings of these men contribute to their children's high poverty rates and high rates of welfare dependency. The Congress and several Presidents have placed great emphasis on increasing child support payments, but many worry that young unwed fathers earn too little to provide meaningful support to their children. To address this problem, the government and several foundations are attempting to develop training, placement, and remedial education programs aimed at raising the earnings potential of unwed fathers and other absent fathers. While the 1988 Family Support Act stressed programs to help welfare mothers obtain good jobs and leave the welfare rolls, the Act did provide that the Department of Health and Human Services issue waivers that would permit five states to extend job-related services to unemployed, non-custodial parents.[8]

Two fundamental difficulties arise in any effort to structure job-related programs *specifically* for unwed fathers (as well as other low income absent fathers). The first is that such programs essentially offer special services on the basis of socially undesirable behavior and thus may encourage unwed fatherhood. Given the evidence cited in Table 2, any actions that deter unwed fathers from marrying are likely to harm earnings growth by more than the training programs help. Further, many will find it inequitable to provide a training slot to an unwed father over either a married father or childless young man wanting to enter the program. One way to mitigate these problems is to take measures to ensure that a large portion of any increased earnings induced by the program goes to support the unwed father's child rather than his own living standards.

But these actions run up against the second fundamental problem, the fact that a large part of the increased support payments by unwed fathers would go to offset welfare benefits instead of raising the income of the child and the custodial parent. For women receiving benefits from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamps, the income gain from added child support would amount to about $35-40 per month. Mothers now on welfare could reap a much larger benefit from added support payments only if they used the child support to supplement their earnings and thereby help them achieve a higher income moving off welfare than remaining on the rolls. Unwed fathers whose children remain on welfare might provide more money to their children by paying informally with earnings not reported to welfare authorities than by earning more in the formal sector and then having their child support simply offset AFDC and food stamp benefits.

Thus, providing special job training slots unlinked to support responsibilities is unwise and possibly inequitable, while requiring such a connection might deter fathers who see any earnings gains as going to the government.

The two national demonstrations both retain the connection between services that enhance earnings and provisions to collect added support payments. The largest effort is the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration organized by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, with funds from the U.S. Departments of Labor and Health and Human Services, the Pew Charitable Trust, and the Ford Foundation. This is the demonstration called for under the Family Support Act in which selected states can receive waivers to offer job-related services to non-resident fathers under the welfare system's JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) programs.. The ten pilot projects began in the spring of 1992 and a full social experiment in five of the sites is to begin in mid-1993.

The primary Parents' Fair Share model involves working with non-custodial fathers who report they cannot pay existing child support orders because of unemployment. In project sites, judges can refer nonpaying fathers to the Fair Share program in lieu of jail or other penalties. As long as the fathers participate actively in the program, they are not subject to serious penalties. Agencies funded under the demonstration work with fathers by offering training, including on-the job training positions that provide steady salaries. As fathers increase their earnings and agency monitoring insures increased collections, fathers may encounter disputes with custodial mothers about visitations and other issues. In anticipation of these problems, the operating agencies are offering dispute resolution services. In addition, participants obtain peer support and counseling about issues of fatherhood, such as relationships with their own fathers, their expectations for their children, and the appropriate obligations of fathers toward their children. Some fathers referred by the court to Parents' Fair Share but who never appear to participate are likely to admit having an existing job and decide to comply with the support order. Others are subject to jail or other stiff penalties.

The early intervention component of the Fair Share demonstration involves unwed fathers. Here, the idea is for agency personnel to meet with young putative fathers at the hospital or in the community soon after the child is born and then to encourage the young men to take advantage of the project's services and counseling. The goals are to increase paternity establishment, to establish formal support obligations, to increase collections, and to promote constructive fathering activities. Since spring 1992, the projects have been operating on a pilot basis in ten states. As of this writing, a social experiment, under which fathers are randomly assigned to treatment or control groups, is to begin in mid-1993.

A second large national demonstration--the Young Unwed Father's Demonstration Project--began operating in early 1991. Public/Private Ventures (PPV), a nonprofit organization, developed the project with funding from the Charles Stuart Mott Foundation. The focus of the demonstration is to influence unwed fathers and expectant unwed fathers between the ages of 16 and 25 who are unemployed and eligible for services under the Federal Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Each of six sites is serving a minimum of 50 young men over an 18 month period. Sponsoring agencies are to offer employment and training services, parenting classes, mentoring, counseling, and referrals for legal and health services. The sites also encourage fathers to declare paternity and work with fathers to assure child support payments.

The sites have flexibility in the provision of services and approaches to recruiting fathers. Two sites take fathers whose participation is mandated by the courts or the state IV-D agency (the agency responsible for collecting support).

Once sites have operated for about one year, PPV plans to design a social experiment using random assignment of young fathers to treatment and control groups. This experiment will attempt to answer similar to those posed by the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. Does a combined program of employment services, fathering classes and counseling, and monitoring for support payments increase the earnings of fathers, their support payments, and their fathering activities? Will this array of services affect the marriage rate of unwed fathers?

Both demonstrations have a dual goal of increasing the father's responsibility toward his children and of raising the father's earnings potential. A major question will be whether the projects are effective in promoting an increased sense of responsibility. If so, the efforts at training and job placement should be especially effective. However, as of this writing, the

designers of the projects have not aimed at trying to distinguish between the role of components aimed at encouraging responsibility from the role of the education and job training services. Still, the results of these two demonstrations should generate solid evidence on the ability of programs to raise the earnings and increase the support payments of unwed fathers and other non-custodial fathers. In addition, the projects will yield new information about the actual capabilities of fathers who claim they have too little income to pay their child support obligations.

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[1] For estimates of the child support payment capacity of all absent fathers, see Garfinkel and Oellerich (1986) and Lerman (1989).

[2] Several authors have reported that marriage exerts a powerful effect on motivation and, ultimately, on enhancing labor market outcomes. For example, see Christensen (1988) and Nakosteen and Zimmer (1987).

[3] The employment rate in Table 3 is equal to the individual's weeks worked divided by 52. Thus, the -.069 coefficient for unwed absent fathers represents a negative .069*52 week reduction, or 3.5 weeks per year.

[4] The full regression results with effects on earnings by fatherhood status are available from the author on request.

[5] The estimates of effects on employment rates by fatherhood status are available from the author on request.

[6] Mercer Sullivan argues in that such differences exist in selected New York City communities with black, Hispanic, and white communities.

[7] The tobit procedure is especially appropriate for continuous dependent variables truncated at zero. The model takes account of the fact that the observed zero values for a large number of observations mask an underlying distribution in which a related latent variable varies among those with the same observed zero level. In the case of child support, about 56 percent of absent fathers pay zero child support, but they differ in the likelihood of making positive payments. See McDonald and Moffitt (1980) for applications of tobit analysis.

[8] The original Senate bill included a provision that would have permitted states to offer employment services to non-resident fathers of AFDC children. However, the House-Senate

conference deleted the provision because of the lack of evidence documenting the benefits of such programs. See Ooms and Owen (1990) for a more detailed discussion.

# Can Fathers Support Children Born outside of Marriage? Data on Fathers' Incomes over Time

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# Can Fathers Support Children Born Outside of Marriage? Data on Fathers' Incomes Over Time

## I. INTRODUCTION

The number of children born outside marriage has increased dramatically in the last 30 years. In 1960, 5.3% of all births were to unmarried mothers. That percentage had increased to 18.4% by 1980 and to more than 25% by 1988 (U.S. House of Representatives, 1991). The percentage is even larger for African Americans: in 1988, 63.5% of the births to African American women were to unmarried women. This increase is critically important because these children are very poor. The poorest demographic group in this country is children in single-parent families (Garfinkel & McLanahan, 1986). And of these children living in single-parent families, children living with never married mothers are the poorest: 57% of these families had incomes below poverty in 1987, compared to 27% of divorced families and 15% of all families with children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991).

Because so many children who were born to never-married women are poor, the child support system is being scrutinized to determine if the noncustodial parents of these children are paying appropriate amounts of child support. The most recent data show that never-married women do not do well in the current child support system: fewer never-married women have child support awards, 24% in 1989 compared to 48% of separated women and 77% of divorced women. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991). Even when there is a child support award, child support payments may not be made. Further, when never married women are "lucky" enough to have an award and to receive something, they receive substantially less than other women, an annual average of $1888 compared to $3060 for separated women and $3322 for divorced women. Putting all these factors together, the average never-married woman receives only $273 annually in child support, compared to $951 for separated women and $1776 for divorced women.

That little is collected, however, does not necessarily mean that the system is not working. The amount of child support that is possible and, indeed, the amount that is equitable, depends to a large degree on the incomes of noncustodial parents. Unfortunately, this is an area in which we have had little information to date, particularly information that matches noncustodial parent incomes to custodial parents. Furthermore, the information that we do have is based almost entirely on parents who were divorced or separated, not on parents of children born out-of-wedlock.

To evaluate whether the current child support system is working, we need to know more about the incomes of the noncustodial parents of children born out-of-wedlock. If these noncustodial parents have very low incomes, this suggests that the child support system may be working as well as could be expected. Indeed, some believe that little child support will ever be collected on behalf of these children because the employment and income possibilities of their fathers are so bleak. Many nonmarital fathers are thought to be very young, poorly educated, nonwhite, and to live in central cities where job prospects are poor.

If, however, noncustodial parents have moderate levels of income, this suggests that the entire child support system, from the paternity establishment process, to the level of child support awards, to collection mechanisms, be examined to determine why never-married women are receiving so little.

A related perspective is that these fathers may be earning very little at the time their children are born, but they may earn moderate or even significant incomes at some point during their child's first eighteen years. If this is true, this could lead in two different policy directions: either the child support system could wait for these income increases before attempting to award and collect child support (or even to establish paternity), or the system could establish minimal awards as soon after birth as possible and attempt to increase them over time. The problem with the first approach is that some fathers may be lost during the wait. Some research (Monson and McLanahan, 1990, for example) has shown that if paternity is not established soon after birth, it becomes more difficult to

establish. And some believe that if child support awards are not set when the child is quite young, it will be difficult to set an award later. Thus it is important for policy purposes not only to know initial levels of father's income, but also to know whether these incomes increase over time.

The data have not been available to inform this debate or to give child support program directors direction in knowing what priority to place on aggressively pursuing child support in paternity cases. Data on the incomes over time of the fathers in paternity cases in Wisconsin are now available, and can provide some beginning answers to some of the policy questions about the incomes of the fathers of nonmarital children. Preliminary findings from these data were presented in Phillips and Garfinkel (1990); this paper summarizes and extends those results. Section II reviews the previous literature; Section III provides an overview of the data and methods used in this research; the results are summarized in Section IV, and Section V provides a brief discussion of conclusions, limitations, and policy implications.

## II. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

A variety of previous research has been completed that attempts to determine the incomes of noncustodial parents that could be paying child support. However, most of this research has looked at the incomes of divorced and separated men, primarily focusing on comparing the changes in income of men and women after divorce. Almost all of this work has concluded that women experience significant drops in income compared to their needs post-divorce, while the income of men compared to their needs has typically increased (Lewin/ICF, 1990). A typical mean income of divorced and separated men from this research is above $20,000. For example, the mean income in 1988 dollars of young divorced men in the year of divorce in the NLSY-72 is $23,076. The estimates of fathers' incomes, however, have varied widely. Appendix 1 provides the estimates of noncustodial fathers' incomes from a variety of data sources.

But the issue here is not the incomes of divorced men, but of men who have fathered a nonmarital child. Two samples are closer to the population of interest: young absent fathers and fathers from the child support enforcement caseload, particularly fathers from the AFDC women on the child support caseload. Estimates of these incomes are typically much lower.

Several small-scale studies of young absent fathers' incomes have been completed, and most of these show that unmarried fathers have very low incomes and very poor prospects. For example, Wattenberg, Brewer & Resnick (1991), in their study of young fathers in Minneapolis, find that about half of their 78 fathers had household incomes of less than $1000/month. Those who were employed were

> "chiefly employed in jobs such as fast food restaurants, warehouse work, gasoline station attendants, i.e., jobs that are temporary, part-time, with low-wage scales. With the increasing marginalization of relatively well paying jobs in the manufacturing sector that do not require higher education and advanced work skills, the prospects for improvement are slight." (p. 81).

Information from a national sample of young fathers was provided by Pirog-Good and Good (1990), who examine the earnings profiles of those who became fathers as teenagers in the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Experiences - Youth Cohort (NLSY). They find that the average incomes of teenage fathers who do not live with their children (including both divorced/separated and those who were never married to the child's mother) have incomes very similar to, and slightly above those who did not become fathers as teenagers. Average incomes are very low before age 18, rise to be about $10,000 by age 22 and to $20,000 by age 27.

The most comprehensive study of young absent fathers has been completed by Lerman (1990). He analyzed the incomes, employment status, and fatherhood status of men in the NLSY. His focus is most often on the differences between absent fathers, resident fathers, dual fathers (those

who do not live with at least one of their children and also live with at least one of their children) and those who were not fathers. For our purposes here, the most relevant categories are absent fathers and dual fathers. He finds that both absent fathers and dual fathers have lower average earnings (about $12,800 in 1987) than childless men ($15,900) and resident fathers ($19,500). The non-fathers, those who are absent fathers and the resident fathers show very different patterns of income over time. The resident fathers begin with substantially higher incomes ($11,675 in 1982), but perhaps because they entered the labor market earlier and received less education, their earnings increase only 63% from 1982 to 1987. Absent fathers begin at only $7013, but increase their incomes by 86%. Childless men also begin with low earnings, $6892, but increase their incomes by 137% by 1987, perhaps showing the returns to education. In a regression equation predicting earnings, unmarried absent fathers had lower incomes than all married men, other things being equal, but the difference was less than $500.

Some estimate of incomes of fathers of AFDC families in the IV-D caseload have been completed. Maximus (1980) found a mean income of $11224 in 1979 (over $17000 in 1988 dollars) for fathers of AFDC families in six states. Three single-state studies have been completed: McDonald et al. (1990) found average incomes of $11182 in 1980 (about $16000 in 1988 dollars) for fathers in the Wisconsin AFDC caseload; Alfasso & Chakmakas (1983) found average incomes of $12,064 in 1982 (about $14000 in 1988 dollars) in the New York AFDC-IV-D caseload; and Haskins et al. (1985) found average incomes of only $6653 during 1983 (less than $8000 in 1988 dollars) in the North Carolina AFDC IV-D caseload. Haskins also reports the number of these fathers who had positive income in the Employment Security records in each quarter. Although slightly more than half their sample of fathers had some income in each quarter, one-third of the fathers had no earnings in at least half the year. Finally, the pilot Survey of Absent Parents found median incomes

of $8000 in Ohio and $10000 in Florida during 1984 (about $9000 and $11000 in 1988 dollars) for a sample drawn from both the AFDC and non-AFDC IV-D caseload (Sonenstein & Calhoun, 1988).

So these estimates vary widely, and some of them, particularly the estimate from Haskins et al. suggest that average incomes are quite low. A different approach was recently taken by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (1991), who looked at what could be considered the "worst" AFDC IV-D cases in twelve counties nationwide, those in which there was no support order, or the order was less than $50/month, or there were arrears in twelve counties. For these 4600 fathers, they then obtained earnings data from 1985, 1986, and 1987. They found that a substantial number were earning significant amounts, with over one-fourth earning over $10,000, and more than 5% earning over $20,000.

Unfortunately, this previous research does not look at incomes of paternity fathers over time. Most of the research uses cross-sectional estimates of income, and mostly on divorced men. The work that has looked at unmarried men has focused on young men, has relied on self-reports of fatherhood, and, by focusing on unmarried men, does not provide information on all men who father children out of wedlock, some of whom are married, divorced or separated at the time of fathering the child, and some of whom subsequently marry. The AFDC IV-D data provides information on fathers of children receiving AFDC, but this usually includes fathers of divorced and separated women.

The Wisconsin data therefore provide a unique resource to examine the incomes over time of fathers in paternity cases. The initial analysis of these data was reported in Phillips and Garfinkel (1990), and had a somewhat different focus. Incomes of both paternities and divorces were examined at several points in time, beginning with the year before a child support award was established (or, in the case of no award, in the year of paternity establishment), and continuing for 7 years. In their preliminary analysis, they found that mean annual income increased from $11,060 in the year before

the award to $17,031 three years after, and to $21,735 7 years after, increases of 54% and 97%, respectively (all amounts are in 1988 dollars). They also divide the sample in two ways. Mean incomes of those who began below 150% of the poverty line show even more dramatic increases, from $5265 to $17,509 seven years later. And mean incomes of those whose children receive AFDC some time after paternity increase from $10589 to $22028.

This paper extends their work in five ways. First, the timing of paternity cases is handled differently. In their initial results, Phillips and Garfinkel counted years based on the time of the first support order, but for fathers with very low incomes at paternity establishment, who later began earning income and then had an award established, the "clock" would not start until the later award. I think it is more appropriate to start the "clock" at the time of the paternity petition, which should give a more accurate reading of income when the case first comes to court. In their later work Phillips and Garfinkel (1992) have started the "clock" in the year before paternity was established. Second, this paper builds on their estimates of mean incomes by providing information on the distribution of incomes. Third, this paper looks more closely at whose income changes over time. Fourth, this paper provides information on fathers whose children received AFDC prior to the paternity petition, an important group because they this group may approximate the AFDC IV-D paternity caseload. Finally, this paper provides a multivariate analysis of income changes to describe the relationships between several factors and income change when holding other factors constant.

## III. DATA AND METHODS

### Data

Two types of research could be completed looking at the incomes of the fathers of nonmarital births: one that looks at all admitted nonmarital fathers and one that looks at those for whom paternity has been adjudicated. The first type may get a broader sample, since it is possible, or even likely,

that paternity is not pursued if the father has very low income, and thus a sample based on only those who have paternity adjudicated may miss the lowest-income fathers. However, fathers of nonmarital children may be reluctant to admit fatherhood, and thus data based on self-reports of fathering nonmarital children may provide an unusual sample. The possible biases in this approach are difficult to predict: one possibility is that there is more stigma about fathering out-of-wedlock children in the middle class. If stigma affects the likelihood of acknowledging fatherhood, then a sample drawn from self-reports may miss some middle-income fathers, and resulting income estimates would be too low.

In this paper, I use data from a subset of the fathers of non-marital births in Wisconsin, those who have come to family court and had paternity established. Therefore these income figures may not be generalizable to the national population of men fathering children out-of-wedlock in two primary ways: first they are from Wisconsin, and may not be generalizable to the national population because Wisconsin has fewer minorities and its largest metropolitan area, Milwaukee, had only 1.6 million people in 1990; second, they are of all men who have had paternities established, not all men fathering children out-of-wedlock. Therefore they are probably providing higher estimates of income than in the total relevant population.[1] However, this sample does provide an estimate of the incomes of fathers for whom paternity has been established, the fathers already in the child support system.

The sample in this research is drawn from those who had paternity established by the family court in twenty-one counties in Wisconsin. Cases that came to court between July 1980 and December 1988 were included.[2] Information from the court records was collected, including the ages of the father and mother and the age of the child, and comprises the Court Record Database (CRD). In some cases, the court record has information on the income of the mother and father, and, less often, their race and marital status. The court records can also include educational level; unfortunately only 3% of the fathers in this sample have educational level recorded. Legal and physical custody information is included, and only cases in which the mother had sole physical

custody or the parents shared joint physical custody throughout the entire court case period were selected.[3]

Social security numbers were collected or determined from other identifiers for over 90% of these couples. The social security numbers were then used to match to computerized tax records from the Wisconsin Department of Revenue (DOR) for the years 1980-1989. Three-fourths of the paternity cases in this sample have a tax record in some year, although the number who have records in each year is lower. The DOR contains household taxable income, filing status, and the number of dependents. Because the tax form changed significantly during this time period, it is somewhat difficult to maintain consistency over the years. For example, in the early years, separate incomes were reported for two-parent filers, but in later years, separate incomes are not always available. For this analysis, personal income is more important than household income, so personal wage and salary income had to be substituted for personal total income during some years.[4]

A third administrative data set was also used, the Wisconsin administrative record of AFDC payments. This file contains the dollar amount of AFDC checks issued each month from January 1980 to December 1989. It was also collected based on social security numbers and was used in two ways: first, the AFDC recipiency status of the mothers was determined so that the income patterns of the fathers of AFDC children could be examined. Second, AFDC amounts received by fathers were determined (either through the AFDC-Unemployed Parent program or through the father receiving AFDC-Regular himself, if he were a single father). Because this income is not taxable, this income was then added to taxable income to get a more comprehensive income figure for fathers. Adding in AFDC adds about 30 fathers each year to the list of those with income, and increases the mean annual income by about $150 in each year.

In summary, the sample includes 2670 fathers of nonmarital children from Wisconsin. The primary variable of interest is the income of these fathers over time. Incomes are sometimes

available at the time of paternity establishment through the court record, and these are reported in an initial table. The bulk of the research in this paper, however, concerns the way incomes change over time. For this purpose, incomes in the year the paternity case came to court and in several years thereafter have been constructed by adding Wisconsin taxable incomes (when available) to AFDC income (if received). Note that this means for fathers whose paternity petition came to court in 1988, we only have two years of data, 1988 and 1989; for fathers with petition dates in 1980, we could have up to 10 years of data (although to keep sample sizes substantial we only look at up to 8 years of data per father). After these merges, we have three or more different years of income from tax and/or AFDC records for half our sample and are missing all income information for 665 fathers, approximately one-fourth our sample. There are four primary reasons why income would not be available through these sources: First, the individual could have taxable income too low to file. This problem has been somewhat mitigated by adding in AFDC amounts. Second, the individual could have moved out of state, and, since this is based on Wisconsin tax returns, we would show this person as missing income. Third, we did not have social security numbers for 156 fathers in this sample. Finally, the method used to merge tax data with our court data may have missed some fathers if they had married and their new wife was listed as the primary taxpayer.

Methods

Because this research is among the first of its kind, the analysis reported here is primarily descriptive. Specifically, I will provide information on three questions:

a) What are incomes at the time of the petition for paternity establishment? Straightforward information on incomes will be presented, along with differences in income by age of father, by age of child, and by source of income.

b) Do incomes increase over time? Simple comparisons of income several years after the paternity petition relative to income during the year of petition will be presented.

c) Whose incomes increase? This analysis will also begin with simple descriptives of the changes in incomes three years after paternity for several groups. Because there is some interest in "controlling for" various factors, a multivariate analysis will also be presented.

Several types of multivariate analyses are possible; one type of comprehensive approach would be to use the income data at all points in time, perhaps using a fixed effects model. This research uses a simpler approach, looking at income for each person at only two points in time. Assume income during the two periods ($y_{it}$ and $y_{it+1}$) is distributed normally and is a linear function of the following: a)a dummy variable for the year of petition, b)some demographic variables fixed at time t ($x_{it}$), c)an individual term ($\delta_i$) that is constant over time (and could reflect motivation, for example) and d)an error term ($\epsilon_{it}$). Incorporating the year dummies into the $x_{it}$, the two equations are:

$$(1) \quad y_{it} = a_1 + \beta_1' x_{it} + \delta_i + \epsilon_{it}$$

$$(2) \quad y_{it+1} = a_2 + \beta_2' x_{it} + \delta_i + \epsilon_{it+1}$$

Subtracting the first equation from the second yields:

$$(3) \quad y_{it+1} - y_{it} = a_2 - a_1 + (\beta_2 - \beta_1)x_{it} + \epsilon_{it+1} - \epsilon_{it}$$

Note that this differencing approach means the individual constants do not have to be estimated. This equation can be estimated with ordinary least squares (OLS) if the new error term, $\epsilon_{it+1} - \epsilon_{it}$, has mean zero and has a variance that can be written in the form $\sigma I$. This is something of a heroic assumption, since it is quite possible that there remain a nonzero covariance between $\epsilon_{it}$ and $\epsilon_{it+1}$ even after

allowing for individual constants. If the assumptions are not true, this estimation would produce biased results.

A second approach is to estimate income at the later point in time using income at the point of petition and other factors as independent variables, or:

$$(4) \quad y_{it+1} = a + \beta' x_{it} + \gamma y_{it} + \epsilon_{it+1}$$

This equation could also be estimated by ordinary least squares techniques if restrictive assumptions hold. However, without an individual constant, using OLS is perhaps even less credible. Note that if $\gamma$ is equal to one, this equation is equivalent to equation (3). Both equations (3) and (4) will be estimated in this paper; a more sophisticated random or fixed-effects model could be estimated but is beyond the scope of the present effort.

## IV. Results

What are incomes at the time of the paternity petition?

The sample includes a total of 2670 paternity cases. Table 1 shows the composition of these court cases. Because this data is taken from court records, a substantial amount of demographic information is missing. As expected, the fathers in these cases are quite young, with 18% being teenagers and a total of 57% being less than age 25. Also as expected, over 90% of the fathers on whom we have marital status information have never been married. More than three-quarters of the mothers had received AFDC prior to the paternity petition, suggesting that the mothers in this sample are poor. Finally, almost three-quarters of the paternity petitions were filed before the child's first birthday.

Table 1
Information about Sample
Fathers in Paternity Cases

| | Number | Percentage of Non-Missing |
|---|---|---|
| Total | 2670 | 100.0 |
| Fathers' Race: White | 539 | 59.8 |
| Nonwhite | 363 | 40.2 |
| Missing | 1768 | |
| Marital Status at Petition: Never Married | 955 | 90.2 |
| Ever Married | 104 | 9.8 |
| Missing | 1611 | |
| Size of County: Rural | 722 | 27.1 |
| Urban other than Milwaukee | 1298 | 48.6 |
| Milwaukee | 650 | 24.3 |
| Age of Father at Paternity Petition: < 20 | 453 | 17.9 |
| 20-24 | 992 | 39.2 |
| 25-29 | 554 | 21.9 |
| 30-39 | 400 | 15.8 |
| 40+ | 132 | 5.2 |
| Missing | 139 | |
| AFDC History of Mother: Record of Receiving AFDC Prior to Paternity Petition | 2007 | 78.0 |
| No Record of Receiving AFDC Prior to Paternity Petition | 564 | 22.0 |
| Missing AFDC Information | 99 | |
| Age of Child at Petition: 0 | 1947 | 73.6 |
| 1-5 | 624 | 23.6 |
| 6-12 | 58 | 2.2 |
| 13-17 | 15 | 0.6 |
| Missing | 26 | |

Notes: Unweighted numbers from the Wisconsin CRD.

Sample: Paternity cases that came to court 1980-1988 in which the mother had sole physical custody or shared joint physical custody over the entire time period.

Table 2 provides information about the mean incomes of fathers at the time of the paternity petition. The first two columns provide data for the 30% of the fathers that have income information in the court record; the last two columns provide data for the almost half of the fathers who have either tax or AFDC income in the year of petition. All incomes in this table have been adjusted to 1988 dollars through the Consumer Price Index.

As expected, incomes are fairly low, averaging $9253 for the cases with income in the court record and $11199 for cases with tax/welfare income. As a benchmark, the poverty line for a family of three in 1988 was $9435. This means that a father making the average income would have been poor if he had lived with the mother and they had had no other income and no other children.

Not surprisingly, whites have higher incomes than nonwhites, and those who have been married have higher incomes than those who have not. The youngest fathers clearly have the lowest incomes, with teenage fathers having mean incomes between $4000 and $6000, about 1/3 the income of those over age 30. Somewhat surprisingly, the partners of AFDC recipients do not have significantly lower incomes than the partners of those not receiving AFDC. Those whose children are older have higher incomes, perhaps because they themselves are older, and those with earnings or self-employment have substantially higher incomes than those without.

Figure 1 shows information on the distribution of incomes in the court record by age of the father. The figure shows that 48% of the teenage fathers have no income, and another 16% have less than $5000. Incomes are substantially higher, but still quite low, for fathers in their early 20s, as 21% have zero income and another 45% have annual incomes between $1 and $10,000.

The tables and figure clearly show that the fathers of nonmarital children have low incomes. Mean incomes are quite low, especially for young fathers, and a substantial portion of these fathers have no income at all.

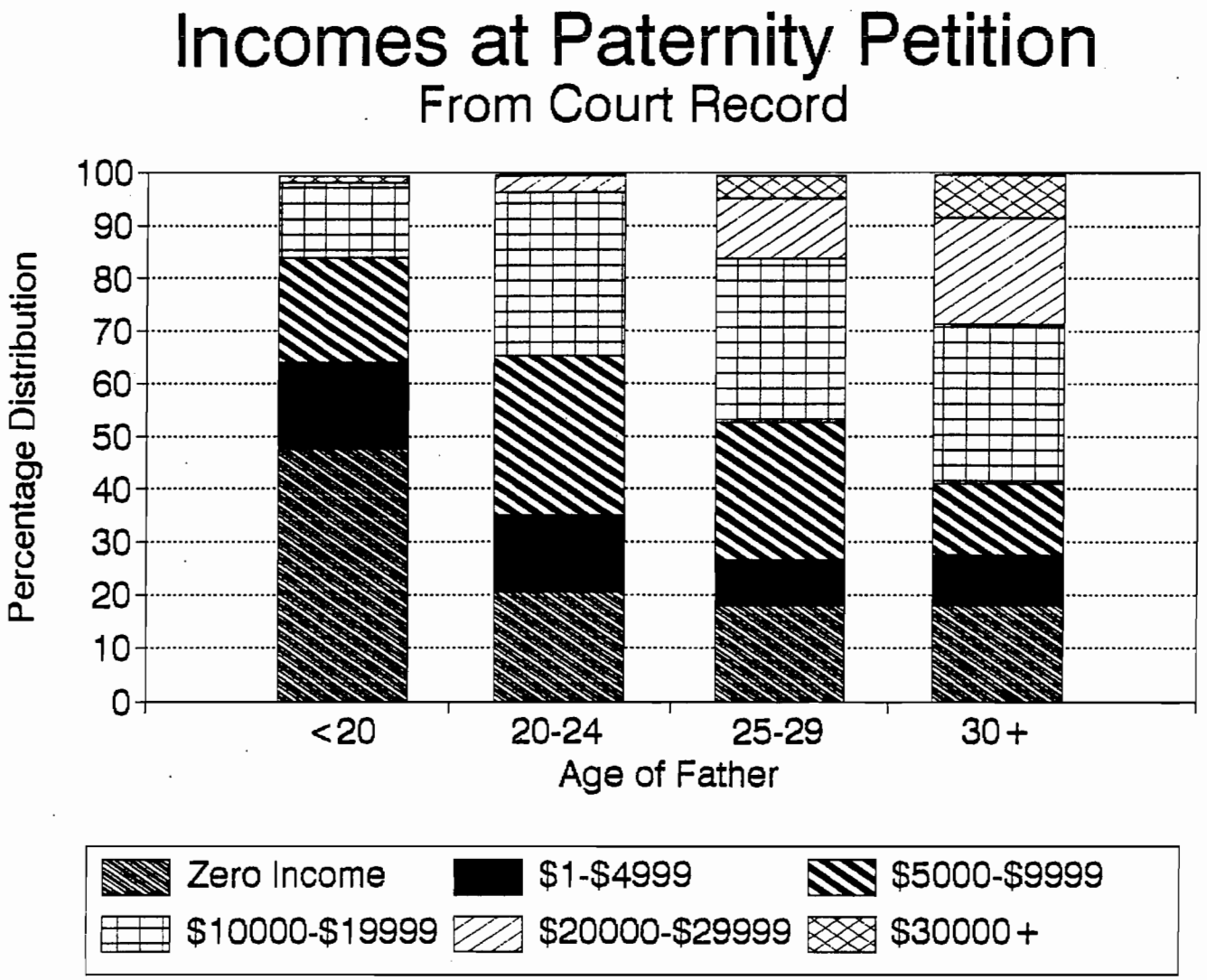
Table 2
Fathers' Income Information
in Paternity Cases

| | Court Record | | Tax and AFDC | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean Incomes | N | Mean Incomes | N |
| Total | $9253 | 809 | $11199 | 1277 |
| Race: White | $10910 | 184 | $12411 | 292 |
| Nonwhite | $6935 | 120 | $10561 | 114 |
| Marital Status at Petition: Never Married | $7874 | 293 | $10452 | 442 |
| Ever Married | $12961 | 43 | $15116 | 48 |
| Size of County: Rural | $9957 | 170 | $11312 | 348 |
| Urban other than Milwaukee | $9777 | 367 | $10874 | 717 |
| Milwaukee | $8105 | 272 | $12112 | 212 |
| Age of Father at Paternity: < 20 | $4406 | 134 | $5852 | 193 |
| 20-24 | $7800 | 314 | $10159 | 536 |
| 25-29 | $11350 | 183 | $12799 | 287 |
| 30-39 | $13186 | 114 | $15214 | 169 |
| 40+ | $14149 | 31 | $17360 | 51 |
| AFDC History of Mother: Record of Receiving AFDC Prior to Paternity Petition | $9277 | 623 | $11120 | 967 |
| No Record of Receiving AFDC Prior to Paternity Petition | $9452 | 164 | $11649 | 284 |
| Age of Child at Petition: 0 | $8599 | 605 | $10772 | 982 |
| 1-5 | $10894 | 179 | $12102 | 272 |
| 6-12 | $16402 | 17 | $25898 | 11 |
| 13-17 | $7185 | 4 | $14807 | 5 |
| Main Source of Income at Petition: Earnings or Self-Employment | $13127 | 483 | $12725 | 689 |
| Other (unemployment, social security, AFDC, SSI, etc.) | $6868 | 76 | $8553 | 71 |

Notes: Unweighted cases from the Wisconsin CRD and Wisconsin DOR.
Incomes adjusted to 1988 dollars through the CPI.

Sample: Paternity cases that came to court 1980-1988 in which the mother had sole physical custody or shared joint physical custody over the entire time period.

# FIGURE 1




Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes in the Wisconsin CRD. Sample sizes: age < 20, n = 134; age = 20-24, n = 314; age = 25-29, n = 183; age = 30+, n = 145; unknown age = 33.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

Do incomes increase over time?

The decision of which sample to use for examining incomes over time is not straightforward; three methods for drawing the sample will be used in this paper. One method is to allow any father for whom we had income information to contribute to the figures for a given year. An advantage of this approach is that we can use data for fathers who had paternity petitions in 1988: they have information on income during petition and one year after petition, but since we only have tax and AFDC data through 1989, they cannot contribute data to income in two or more years after petition. A disadvantage to this approach is that the sample keeps changing. In the first years after petition, we draw from the entire sample, but by the time we look at income seven years after petition, only the oldest cases are used. If there are differences between the paternity cases from the early 1980s and the later 1980s, these differences may confuse our estimates.

A second method is to only include fathers for whom we had income in each year. An advantage of this approach is that we are looking at the same fathers each year. A disadvantage, however, is that we may be missing a disproportionate number of fathers whose incomes were too low to file taxes. Excluding fathers with missing incomes therefore may lead to an overestimate of mean incomes.

A third method is to select a fixed period of time that has elapsed since petition. Then all fathers who have information during that year and the petition year comprise a sample that is constant and may not be as biased over time.

In addition to the sample question, a decision is needed on dealing with missing incomes. One approach is to look at each father's income path, and, for years of missing information that are bounded on both sides by non-missing income, assume that the fathers had zero income during those years. This approach is appropriate if the reason incomes are missing in these bounded years is

because incomes are too low to file taxes. However, this approach will underestimate incomes, because income could be missing for several factors unrelated to low incomes.

Table 3 shows mean incomes over time, using the first two samples and including information on the effect of imputing zeroes for the missing years. The first two columns use the sample of any father for whom we have income information during that year, and do not include imputed zero incomes. The number of fathers decreases dramatically, from 1277 to 424 by seven years after petition, because we have this length of data only for the earliest cohorts. Mean incomes rise steadily and substantially, increasing by 30% in the first three years and by 69% by the seventh year.

The second two columns use the same sample but include the fathers for whom we impute zero incomes when missing income information is bounded by non-missing information. Mean incomes in the petition year and year 7 are the same, since these are boundary years and thus no missing information was changed to zero. Using this conservative assumption, mean incomes decrease by between 4 and 5 percent in the first year, but rise thereafter until a leveling between years 5 and 6. With this conservative treatment of missing values, the increase in income is still 18% by the third year, compared to 30% when zeroes are not imputed. The number of cases increases each year by at most 160 when zeroes are imputed.

The last three columns of this table use the constant samples, fathers for whom we have incomes in each year. These samples, as expected, have higher average incomes than the samples in the other columns. The percentage increases, however, are fairly similar to those in the first column.[5]

The distribution of incomes for the sample shown in the first two columns is shown graphically in Figure 2. It shows that the number with very low incomes (less than $5000 annually) decreases steadily from over one-fourth of the sample during the petition year to 11% in year seven.

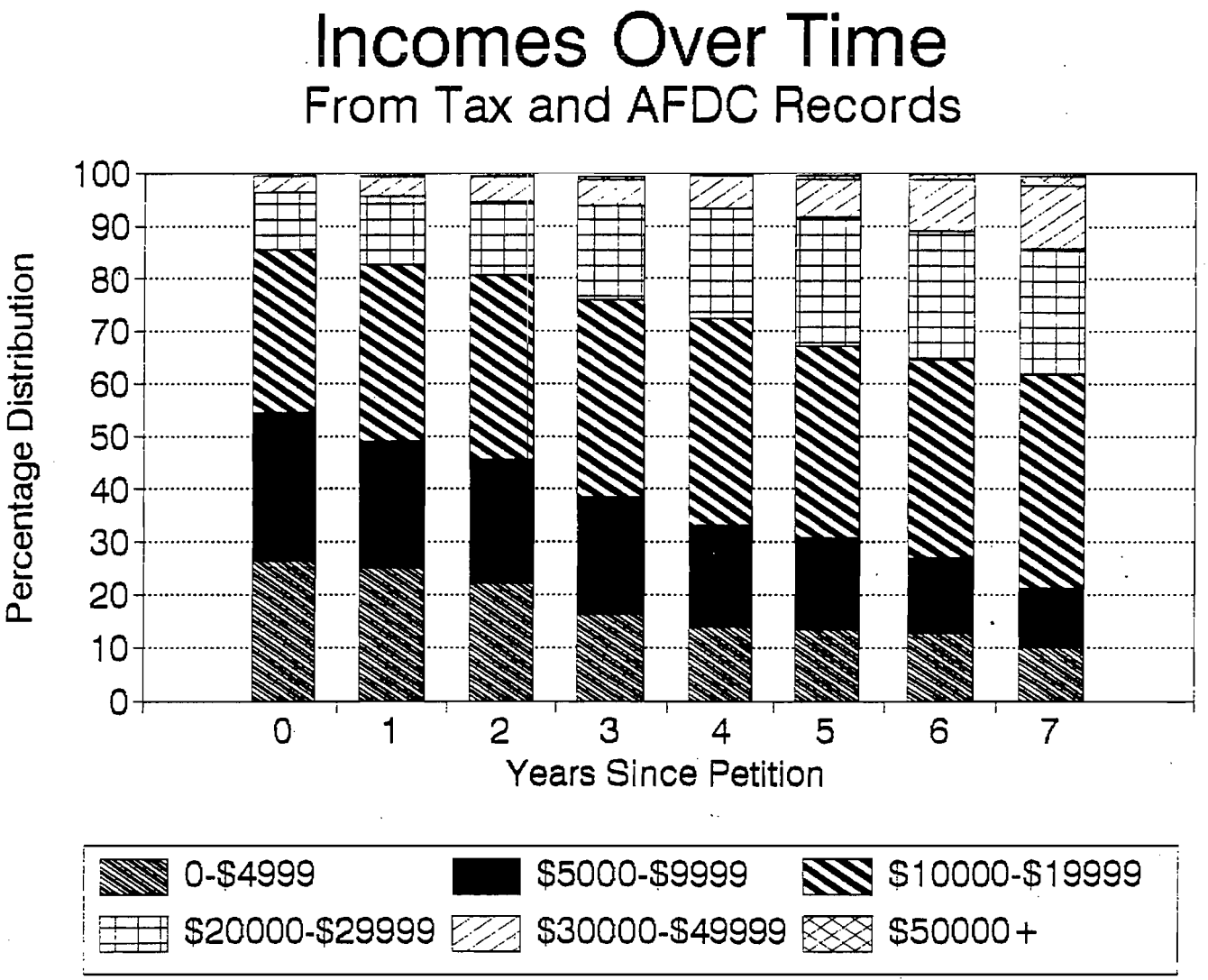
Table 3
Mean Incomes Over Time

| | All With Non-Missing Incomes; No Zeroes Imputed | | All With Non-Missing Incomes; Zeroes Imputed | | Constant Sample for 3 Years (n=656) | Constant Sample for 5 Years (n=338) | Constant Sample for 7 Years (n=157) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean Incomes | N | Mean Incomes | N | Mean Incomes | Mean Incomes | Mean Incomes |
| Petition Year | $11199 | 1277 | $11199 | 1277 | $12917 | $12692 | $13312 |
| 1 Year After | $12088 | 1243 | $10710 | 1403 | $14321 | $14007 | $14269 |
| 2 Years After | $13060 | 1237 | $11749 | 1375 | $15818 | $15228 | $15194 |
| 3 Years After | $14536 | 1110 | $13204 | 1222 | $17244 | $17185 | $17420 |
| 4 Years After | $15531 | 917 | $14157 | 1006 | | $18527 | $18914 |
| 5 Years After | $16336 | 733 | $14894 | 804 | | $19518 | $20230 |
| 6 Years After | $17019 | 542 | $14871 | 578 | | | $21692 |
| 7 Years After | $18902 | 424 | $18902 | 424 | | | $21891 |

Notes: Unweighted cases from the Wisconsin DOR.
Incomes adjusted to 1988 dollars through the CPI.

Sample varies by columns.

# FIGURE 2




Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes in relevant years. Sample sizes: year 0. n = 1277; year 1, n = 1243; year 2, n = 1237; year 3, n = 1110; year 4, n = 917; year 5, n = 733, year 6, n = 542; year 7, n = 424.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

Correspondingly, the percent with incomes $20,000 and above rises substantially, from less than 15% of the sample to almost 40%.

Figure 3 uses the third sample mentioned, the fathers that had income information in both the year of petition and three years later (n=794). The mean change over this time period was an increase of $4146, with the median change being a $3353 increase. The figure shows that 64 fathers (8% of the sample) lost more than $5000 in annual income over these three years. An additional 18% lost smaller amounts of income. (Note that incomes have been adjusted to constant dollars by the CPI, so slight increases in nominal income would show as losses in real income). The rest of the sample (74%) showed income increases over the three year period, some by large amounts, with 147 fathers (18% of the sample) showing an increase of over $10,000.

In summary, the average incomes of these fathers clearly increases over time. Although some fathers show decreases in income, a majority show increases, and some show substantial increases.

Whose incomes increase?

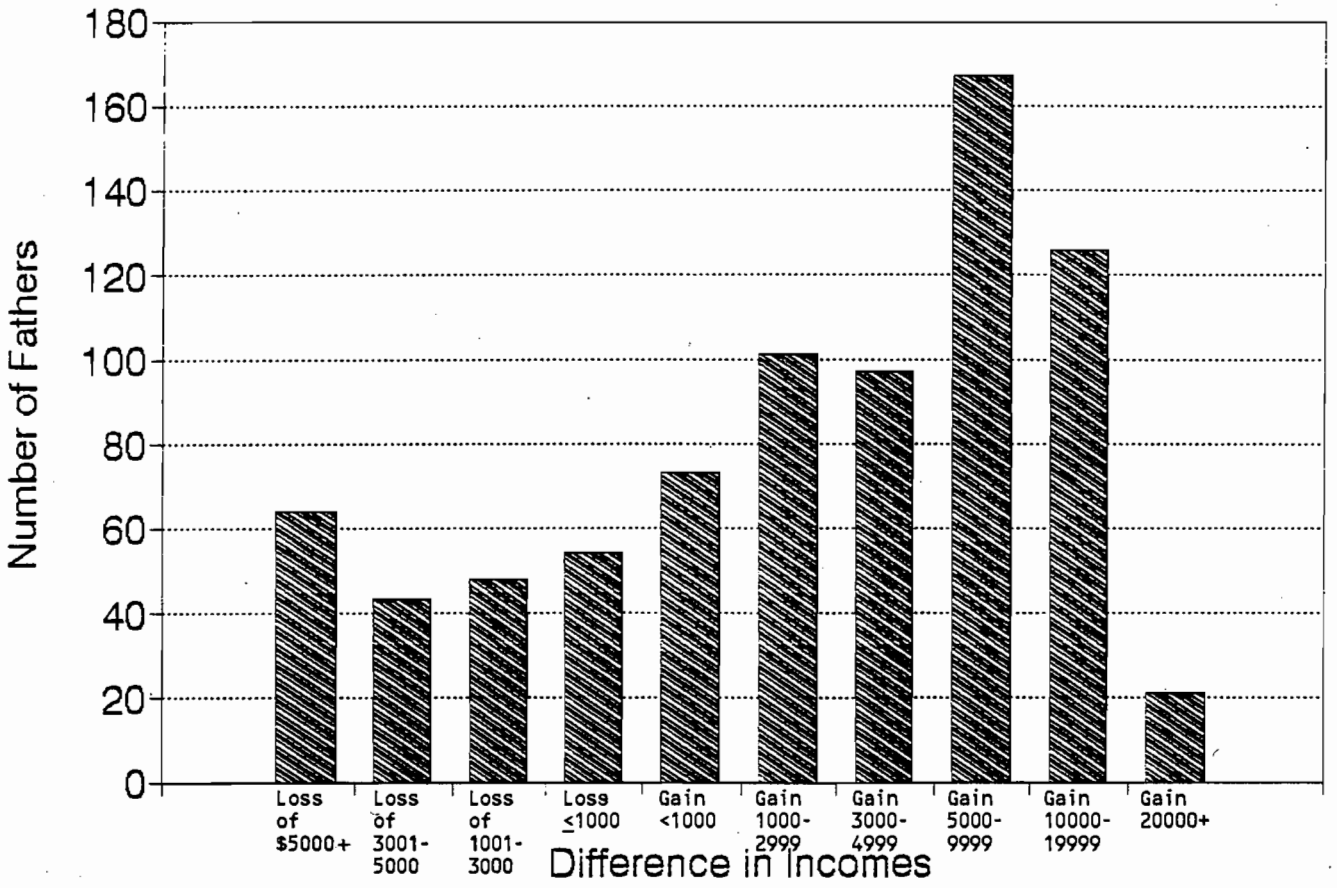
The distribution of the changes in income is critically important. If the increases in income are concentrated among those who were already making significant incomes when paternity was established and those who were making little when paternity was established are not doing much better, this would suggest that an inability to pay child support does in fact persist over time.

One approach to understanding this is to divide the fathers for whom we have income in the petition year and in the third year into income categories at both points in time, and see if fathers change categories over time. Figure 4 shows this comparison. Of the fathers with incomes $5000 or less at petition, about one-third stayed in this very low income category, and 39% had incomes over $10000 three years later. Of those with incomes between $5001 and $10000 at petition, 10% moved into the lowest category, 30% stayed the same, and 60% moved into higher income categories, with 14% having incomes over $20000. Of those in the $10,001 to $20,000 range initially, about 20%

# FIGURE 3

## Income Change 3 Years After Paternity

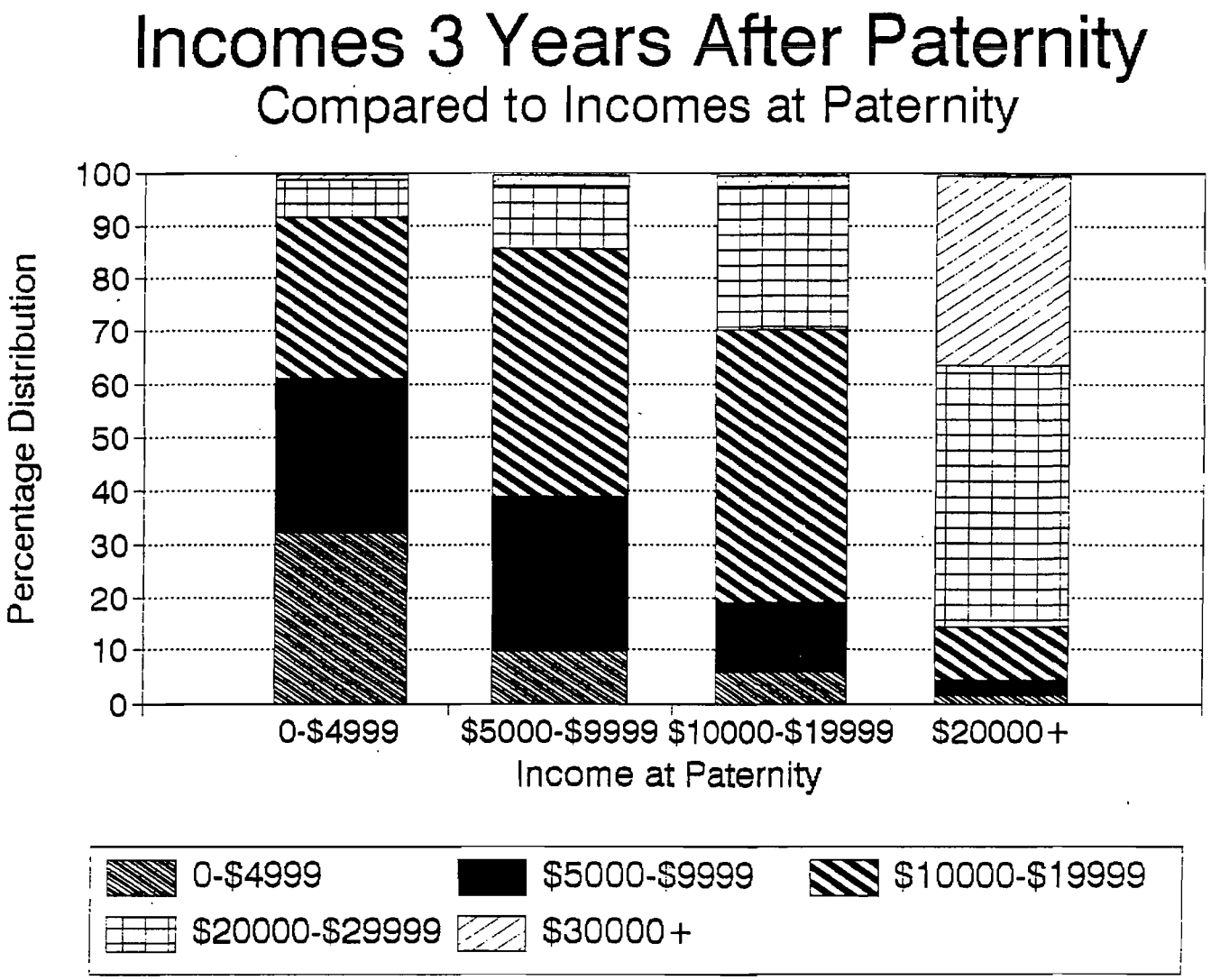
### Incomes from Tax and AFDC Records




Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes at petition and 3 years later.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

# FIGURE 4




Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes at petition and 3 years later.

Sample sizes: income 0-$4999 at petition, n = 183; income $5000-$9999 at petition, n = 217; income $10000-$19999 at petition, n = 258; income $20000+ at petition, n = 136.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

dropped into a lower category, about 50% stayed in the same category, and about 30% increased. Those with higher incomes initially continued to do well, although 15% dropped into a lower category. The general pattern is one of higher increases for those with lower initial incomes. For example, those with incomes $5000 or less at petition had a mean change in income of +$7027, those with incomes of $5001 to $10000 had a mean change of +$5516, and those with incomes of $20001 to $30000 had a mean change of +$1524.

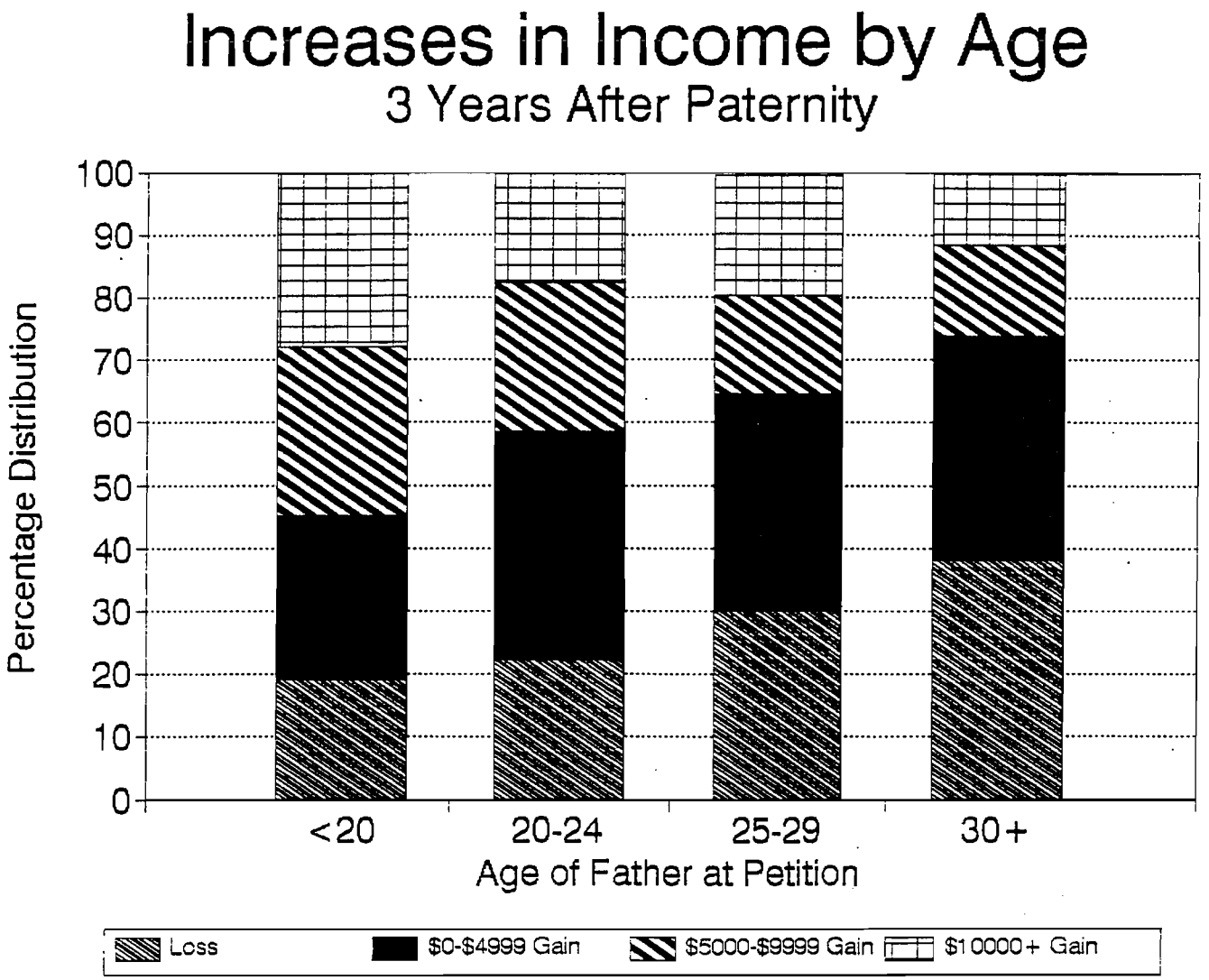
The expectation of most would be that young men should show the largest increases in income, with incomes of older men holding steady or slightly rising. Figure 5 shows that this is the case in this sample. Among the teenage fathers, those who gained income outnumbered those who lost by more than four to one, and increases were sizable, with 28% gaining more than $10,000. Those aged 20-24 at petition showed a similar pattern, although the increases were not as dramatic. "Older" men (those 30 and over) showed roughly equal numbers of losses and small income gains, with a slightly smaller number of large income gains.

The fathers of non-marital children who received AFDC prior to the petition may be seen by some as having a low likelihood of achieving significant increases in income. Figure 6 shows that this is not the case, with the non-AFDC and AFDC columns being almost identical.

Finally, Table 4 shows the results of the two regression models described earlier on the sample of all fathers with income at petition and year 3. The models examine the relationships between income three years after petition, earlier income and various demographic factors.

The first two columns are the result of estimating equation 3, in which the difference in incomes is the dependent variable. As expected, the youngest fathers show the greatest increases in income. Neither race, the county of residence, nor the child's age is significantly related to the increase over this time period (perhaps because they are related to income during petition year, but not to the increase). Controlling for the year of petition shows that those with petitions in 1980 did

# FIGURE 5



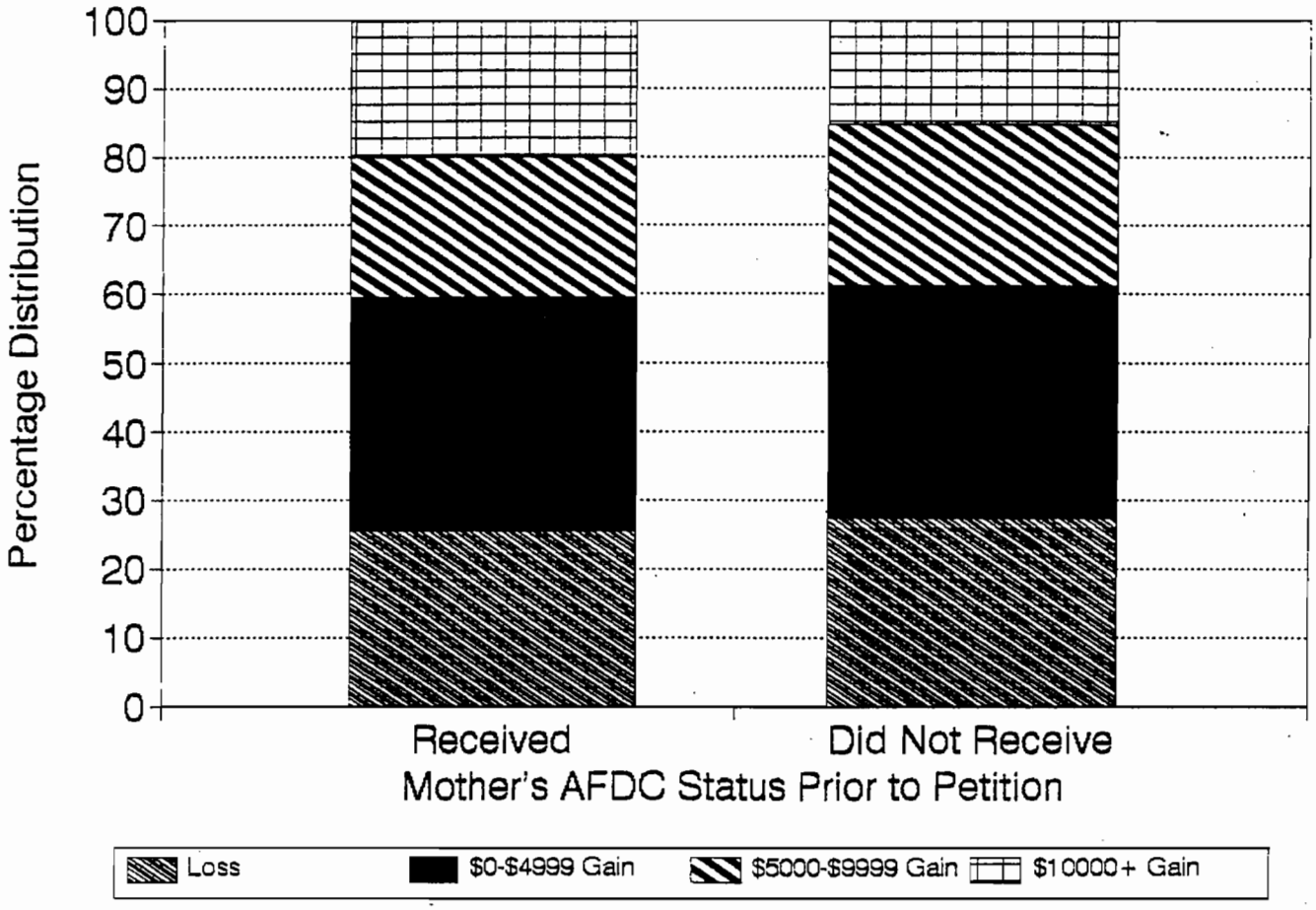

Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes at petition and 3 years later.

Sample sizes: age < 20, n = 126; age 20-24, n = 350; age 25-29, n = 170; age 30+ n = 123; unknown age, n = 25.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

# FIGURE 6

## Increases in Income by AFDC Status
### 3 Years After Paternity




Sample: Paternity cases with non-missing incomes at petition and 3 years later.

Sample sizes: received AFDC prior to petition, n = 596; did not receive AFDC prior to petition, n = 186; unknown AFDC status, n = 12.

Incomes have been adjusted to 1988 dollars by the CPI.

Table 4
Regression Estimates of Fathers Income
Three Years after Paternity Petition

| | Model 1: Dependent Variable Income in Year 3 - Income in Year 1 | | Model 2: Dependent Variable Income 3 Years After Petition | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | Coefficient | Standard Error | Coefficient | Standard Error |
| Intercept | 3122.8 | 1976.7 | 2855.3 | 2066.4 |
| Income in petition year | | | 1.015 * | .033 |
| Father's Age (compared to over 30): Teenager | 4424.1 * | 1190.8 | 4607.3 * | 1260.0 |
| 20-24 | 2093.3 * | 959.3 | 2199.9 * | 989.0 |
| 25-29 | 1306.7 | 1073.2 | 1355.0 | 1079.2 |
| Missing | 3505.7 | 2097.7 | 3551.6 | 2101.3 |
| Race (compared to nonwhite): White | -903.1 | 1598.4 | -954.0 | 1603.2 |
| Race Missing | -2258.7 | 1509.7 | -2280.6 | 1511.3 |
| County (compared to rural): Urban (includes Milwaukee) | 750.3 | 726.4 | 743.8 | 726.9 |
| Milwaukee | -1499.8 | 1197.5 | -1543.1 | 1202.0 |
| Child less than age 1 at petition | -1479.2 | 784.9 | -1464.1 | 786.1 |
| Year of petition (compared to 1986): 1980 | -2990.4 | 1511.1 | -2989.0 * | 1512.0 |
| 1981 | -1114.6 | 1112.9 | -1123.6 | 1113.7 |
| 1982 | 1648.5 | 1072.1 | 1668.2 | 1073.6 |
| 1983 | 1812.5 | 1263.6 | 1834.6 | 1265.3 |
| 1984 | 5.1 | 1065.5 | 10.8 | 1066.2 |
| 1985 | 2619.8 * | 1081.6 | 2613.2 * | 1082.3 |
| Custodial Received AFDC prior to paternity petition | 1451.9 | 785.9 | 1479.8 | 788.8 |
| Missing custodial AFDC data | -2295.2 | 2726.2 | -2246.7 | 2729.8 |

Number of Cases = 794
R-Squared = .05, .58
* Coefficient is at least twice its standard error.

Notes: Unweighted regression from fathers in the Wisconsin CRD.
Incomes adjusted to 1988 dollars through the CPI.

Sample: Paternity cases that came to court 1980-1988 in which the mother had sole physical custody or shared joint physical custody over the entire time period and in which we had income information during the year of petition and 3 years later.

worse, and those with petitions in 1985 did better, than those with petitions in 1986, the omitted category. This may be a function of the business cycle, in that the economy in Wisconsin was perhaps worst during 1983 (the year measured for the 1980 cohort), best during 1988 (the year measured for the 1985 cohort), and had started to turn down somewhat during 1989 (the year measured for the 1986 cohort). Once other factors are controlled for, whether the custodial parent received AFDC prior to the petition is not significantly related to the increase.

The last two columns show the results from equation 4, in which the dependent variable is income 3 years after petition. As noted above, if the coefficient on income in the year of petition is one, then the two models are identical. The estimated coefficient is 1.015, and thus the other coefficients are quite similar. The coefficient being so close to one suggests that the change in income is not proportionately related to initial income.

## V. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND SOME POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The results show that although many fathers in paternity cases have zero or very low incomes at the time the paternity case comes to court, a sizable minority, indeed half of the fathers age 25 and older, have incomes over $10,000. A second finding was that these incomes do increase dramatically over time, with mean incomes increasing 69% over seven years. The idea that many of these young men have very poor employment and income prospects did not gain much support in these data: the fathers who gained the most income over time were those who became fathers in their teens. Finally, there were few differences between the incomes of the fathers of children who had received AFDC and the fathers of children who had not.

Two limitations of this study come from the sample, fathers who had paternity established in 21 Wisconsin counties during 1980-1989. The data may not be generalizable to a national sample of fathers who had paternity established, in part because Wisconsin has fewer minorities and does not

have one of the twenty largest metropolitan areas in the country. Secondly, the data is for fathers who have had paternity established, and this is clearly a subset of all those who have fathered a child out-of-wedlock, and is probably a subset with somewhat higher income.

The data themselves also give rise to some limitations. Taxable income is used, and many fathers are missing income in the tax records. However, even a very conservative assumption on how to treat these missing cases (assuming zero income for cases in which there was missing income between two years of non-missing income) still provides estimates of significant increases in incomes over time.

These results, if corroborated by more detailed analysis, have significant implications for child support policy. The main conclusion is that incomes of paternity fathers need to be monitored regularly, since many of the fathers will show dramatic increases in income over time. Therefore the amount of child support these fathers are capable of paying also increases rapidly over time. Regular matches with tax data or social security data should receive a high priority in child support offices, and awards should be updated to reflect new incomes. If further analysis shows that paternity cases show greater increases in income over time than divorce cases, this would suggest that paternity cases should receive priority in determining which cases to monitor for regular modifications.

Although these data do not directly address this question, a suggestion from these results is that paternity should be established and a child support award set as soon as possible in the child's life, even if the father does not have significant income. Once the father is known to the system, the system can much more easily monitor his income changes over time, and thus be prepared to take action if his income increases.

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## Endnotes

[1] This bias may not be as serious as it may at first appear. Since AFDC recipients are required, as a condition of their grant, to cooperate with the child support agency in its attempts to establish paternity, many low-income women who have children outside marriage are included in this sample. If their partners are likely to have low incomes as well, then this sample may not seriously undercount low-income fathers.

[2] The paternity data was part of a larger data collection effort designed to test the effectiveness of several child support reforms. The twenty-one counties include ten counties that were selected to test the reforms, ten counties that matched them on some demographic variables, and Milwaukee County, the only large urban county in the state. Further information on the sample can be found in Garfinkel, et al., 1988.

[3]Including those with joint physical custody makes little difference to the results. The mean income at paternity from the court record is $9258 if the joint custody cases are deleted, compared to $9253 if they are included.

[4] There are a variety of other problems with this data set. Income information was requested several different times, so, for example, cases that came to court after 1986 were not included in the earlier requests for data, and thus we do not have information for 1980-1985. (This does not, however, affect this analysis since only income during petition and years after the petition are being examined). Secondly, the files provided by the DOR for the years 1986 and later were in a form that does not enable the researcher to determine if the "primary taxpayer" was the husband or wife, so the primary taxpayer was assumed to be the husband. The recipient of asset income is not always identifiable in joint returns, so in some cases it has been evenly divided between the partners. Finally, no negative incomes were allowed in these data, so those with negative incomes were recoded to have zero income.

[5] Another way to assess the biases present in ignoring missing incomes is to look at the initial incomes of fathers that are lost to the sample over time. The 1277 fathers who had income information during the petition year can be divided into four groups:

Group A: fathers for whom we did not have income information three years later because of data censoring (they came to court during 1987-1988 and we do not have income information during 1990) (n = 191)

Group B: fathers for whom we did not have income information three years later but the missing information was not due to data censoring (n = 292)

Group C: fathers for whom we had income information three years later but missed information in at least one of the two intervening years (n = 138)

Group D: fathers for whom we had income information at petition and during each of the next three years (n=656)

These four groups have the following mean incomes during the petition year: $10348, $9180, $8476, and $12917. Because the mean incomes at petition in Group B are relatively similar to those of Group A, this would suggest that the missing cases are not necessarily low income cases. However, the larger difference between Group D and Group C suggests that those who are occasionally missing income information may be those with lower incomes.

# APPENDIX I

## ESTIMATES OF FATHERS' INCOMES

Table A-1 provides a sampling of the estimates of noncustodial father income from previous research. The studies are grouped by sample and are listed in order of the highest estimates to the lowest. All estimates have been translated to 1988 dollars through the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Most of the estimates relate to divorced and separated men, rather than fathers in paternity cases.

Drawing conclusions from the variety of studies is obviously quite difficult because they have different samples, are from different time periods, and use different definitions of income. However, in general the direction of the differences in income estimates could be predicted:

* Different samples. In general, the lowest income estimates are thought to be for young fathers, and especially young men who father children out-of-wedlock. Thus, fathers of ever-married custodial mothers are thought to have higher incomes than partners of never-married custodial mothers, because they are typically older; similarly partners of custodial mothers who have been through court are thought to have higher incomes because low-income fathers of children born out-of-wedlock may not come to court. Partners of the child enforcement caseload are thought to have lower incomes because mothers receiving welfare comprise a substantial part of the caseload, and they are thought to have lower-income partners. In addition, men paying child support probably have higher incomes than those who do not, because low-income fathers may not have awards or may not be able to pay.

In addition, the pool of noncustodial fathers may be changing over time. In particular, if more and more noncustodial fathers are young never married men, average noncustodial incomes may be falling. If the child support system improves in that more low-income men become payors (obligors) then the mean income of payors (obligors) will decrease over time.

* Different time periods. If incomes generally rise over time, then estimates taken at the point of divorce or paternity will be lower than cross-sectional estimates in which incomes of some fathers are being measured several years later. Or if divorce produces a "shock" to income that a person recovers from, later cross-sectional estimates of income would also be higher. In fact, Duncan and Hoffman (1985) examine men's income in the PSID relative to the year of divorce, and find that all men had an average income of $25,403 (1981 dollars) in the year before divorce, $21,488 in the year after, and this figure rises to be $25,874 five years after divorce. Therefore, estimates (like estimate 3) that use person-years will produce higher estimated income, since older men will contribute more years of data and each year after divorce (post-shock) will contribute an observation, compared to only one observation point for the year of divorce.

* Different definitions and sources of income. Obviously estimates of household income will be higher than estimates of family income, which will be higher than estimates of personal income. The appropriate unit of analysis depends on the question asked; I would argue that if the question is the level of income the noncustodial parent should be sharing with the custodial, then personal income is appropriate, whereas if the question is the extent to which child support obligations damage the noncustodial parent's current family, then family income is appropriate.

Different sources of income also affect these estimates in predictable ways. Estimates based on earnings records will be lower than survey responses to the extent fathers have income other than earnings (assuming reported income is approximately equal to actual income). Estimates based on tax records will underestimate income in that some sources of income are not taxable.

An additional limitation of this table is that mean income is not always a good indication of ability to pay. Mean incomes are in general higher than median incomes: Oellerich (1984) reports

that in the SIE mean incomes of divorced and separated men with children are about 9-19% higher than median incomes. He also argues that different income distributions with the same mean provide very different measures of potential child support awards under some child support award guidelines. In particular, much less child support might be expected from a group of fathers that includes many high-income fathers and many very low-income fathers, even if the mean income is the same as in a group of fathers all of whom have moderate incomes.

# TABLE A-1

## Estimates of the Income of Noncustodial Fathers in 1985 Dollars

| | Data Source | All Noncustodial Fathers | Partners of Ever Married Custodials | Partners of Custodials Who Have Been Through Court | Partners of Child Support Enforcement Caseload |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Men Paying Child Support in 1984 from SIPP (n=724) (Garasky, 1990) | N | 25,239<br>23,177 UM<br>27,309 M | | | |
| 2. Men Aged 22-30 Who are Absent Fathers in 1987 from NLSY (n=about 500) (Lerman, 1990) (Personal Earnings) | N | 13,389<br>15,855 W<br>13,006 H<br>10,485 B | | | |
| 3. Married Fathers Experiencing Divorce 68-82 from PSID (n=114 fathers, 709 person-years) (Hill, 1988) (Family Income) | N | | 33,810 | | |
| 4. Men Reporting a Child from a Disrupted Marriage Living Elsewhere from CPS 1980 (n=1422) (O'Neill, 1985) (Family Income) | N | | 29,287<br>26,464 D<br>32,639 M | | |
| 5. Custodial Mothers With Child Support Due in 1978 from CPS-CSS (n=563) (Garfinkel and Oellerich, 1989). (Estimated from categorical variable) | C | | 26,387<br>28,451 W<br>24,501 NW | | |
| 6. Divorced and Separated Men with Children in 1976 from SIE (n=8589) (Oellerich, 1984) | N | | 25,742 D<br>19,286 S<br>26,582 D-W<br>23,376 S-W<br>19,489 D-NW<br>12,760 S-NW | | |
| 7. Divorced fathers from women aged 18 to 34. 72-86 from NLSY. Earnings at Divorce. (n=664) (Teachman and Polonko, 1989) | N | | 23,076 D | | |
| 8. Fathers of Child Support Enforcement Caseload in Six States 1979 (n=552) (Maximus, 1980) | R | | | | 17,659 A<br>22,257 NA |
| 9. Fathers of AFDC Caseload in Wisconsin 1980 (n=943) (McDonald et al., 1990) (Probably Personal Income, might be Family) | T | | | | 16,054 A |
| 10. Fathers of Child Support Enforcement Cases in New York 1982 (n=2651) (Alfasso & Chakmakas, 1983) | R | | | | 14,273 A |
| 11. Fathers of Child Support Enforcement cases in 10 states without orders, with low orders, or with arrearages. 1986 (n=3241) (US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, 1989) | E | | | | 11,944 NA |
| 12. Fathers of Court Cases and Child Support Enforcement Cases from Ohio in 1985 in SOAP. (Median) (n=109)(Sonenstein and Calhoun, 1988) | N | | | 21,989 | 8,796 |
| 13. Fathers of Court Cases and Child Support Enforcement Cases from Florida in 1985 in SOAP. (Median)(n=94) (Sonenstein and Calhoun, 1988) | N | | | 18,581 | 10,994 |
| 14. Fathers of Child Support Enforcement Cases in North Carolina 1975-1982 (n= 16106 - 7646) (Haskins et al., 1985) | E | | | | 7,626 A<br>9,198 NA |

**ABBREVIATIONS AND CODES:**

Abbreviations:
SIPP: Survey of Income and Program Participation
PSID: Panel Survey of Income Dynamics
CPS: Current Population Survey
CPS-CSS: Current Population Survey - Child Support Supplement
SIE: Survey of Income and Employment
NLSY: National Longitudinal Survey - Youth Cohort
SOAP: Survey of Absent Parents

Codes for Data Source:
C = Custodial Report
E = Earnings records
N = Noncustodial Report
R = Case records
T = Tax records

Other codes:
A = Child Support Enforcement Agency clients from the AFDC program.
B = Black
D = Currently Divorced Men
DI = Divorce Cases
H = Hispanic
M = Currently (re)married men
NA = Child Support Enforcement Agency clients not from the AFDC program.
NW = Nonwhite (In some cases the average income reported on the table is an estimate of the overall mean based on the reported means for white and nonwhite).
PA = Paternity Cases
S = Currently Separated Men
UM = Currently unmarried men (never married, divorced, separated)
W = White