

**W-2 CHILD SUPPORT
DEMONSTRATION EVALUATION
REPORT ON NONEXPERIMENTAL ANALYSES**

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Volume II: Fathers of Children in W-2 Families

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Executive Summary

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 made radical changes to the way the nation provides income support to low-income families, and included substantial changes to the child support system. Although the political rhetoric suggested that nonresident fathers could be providing substantially more for their children, several factors lead to skepticism regarding the potential for considerable increases in child support collections from this population. This volume includes the results of two studies of the characteristics and experiences of fathers of children in families participating in W-2, Wisconsin's TANF program. Chapter 1 presents a portrait of nonresident fathers drawn from survey and administrative data. Chapter 2 presents the results of an ethnographic study of the life experiences of African American fathers with children on W-2.

Chapter 1

Fathers of Children in W-2 Families: Results of an Analysis of Administrative and Survey Data

This chapter summarizes information on the fathers of children receiving TANF in Wisconsin, using data from administrative sources, as well as from surveys of mothers and fathers. In addition to the basic demographic characteristics of these families, we report on fathers' family background, health, and financial resources and assets. We then present descriptive information on nonresident fathers' earnings and income, as well as poverty and economic hardship.

Our results suggest that most of these fathers have limited economic resources and, like the mothers of their children, often face substantial barriers to providing for themselves and their families. For example, among nonresident fathers of children whose families participate in W-2:

- about one-third have less than a high school diploma, and only one in five has education beyond high school.
- median earnings are low; a third to a half of fathers had annual family incomes under \$10,000 and only about one in ten had family incomes over \$40,000.
- over a third have income below the poverty line.
- seventeen percent reported either fair or poor health, and about one-fifth stated that they had a health problem that deterred work.
- home ownership is relatively uncommon, with nearly half the fathers renting, over one-quarter living with relatives, and another 6 percent living with friends.

Given the challenges they face, should low-income nonresident fathers be expected to contribute to the support of their children? We argue that in the absence of an entitlement to cash assistance for poor mothers and children, increasing support from nonresident fathers may be essential—even if these fathers are poor themselves. However, although the difficult economic situation of resident mothers may make child support a continued focus, it is important to recognize its limitations. Overall, even were the Wisconsin standard applied in setting orders, and even if all orders were paid in full, the average father among those studied here would pay only about \$100 per month in child support. While this support could be an important contribution to self-sufficiency, it is not adequate to help many families relying on the earnings of a low-wage single mother to escape poverty.

Chapter 2

An Ethnographic Inquiry into the Life Experiences of African American Fathers with Children on W-2

This chapter is based on two years of extensive face-to-face interviews with 36 noncustodial fathers of children who received public assistance from the state of Wisconsin. We interviewed African American fathers who lived in Milwaukee. The report discusses these fathers' characteristics, their conceptions of their role and their responsibilities toward their children, the barriers they face in managing their daily lives and in seeking employment, and their understanding of the child support system and its interactions with the Wisconsin Works (W-2) welfare program.

A distinctive feature of this study is that fathers in the sample were randomly selected from the state administrative data system. Intensive efforts were made to contact potential informants through letter writing, phone calls, home visits, and personal meetings with other family members. The final sample consisted of 25 noncustodial fathers chosen from the pool of eligible fathers at large, and 11 fathers who had, in addition, taken part in the Children First program, a court-ordered program to provide work experience and training to unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents who were unable to meet their child support obligations. This second group was selected because there was particular interest in obtaining data on fathers who had participated in job search and job training programs.

Data for both groups were collected in a semistructured interview with each father, lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to 3 hours, between April 1999 and June 2000. A second wave of interviews with 16 of the fathers was completed by April 2001. Assurance of the confidentiality of the information was a high priority, in order to gain the trust of the parents and to encourage them to talk openly about their life experiences, their family relationships, and the ways, legal and illegal, in which they gained income.

Almost all fathers were involved with their children, but to differing degrees. All but two of the noncustodial fathers had been in telephone or physical contact with at least one of their children in the three months before the interview. Their efforts to do so were complicated by the fact that 22 of the men (over 60 percent) had children by more than one woman. But fathers, and members of their families and communities, assumed they had a responsibility to be involved with their children, both financially and emotionally. Most of these men aspired to be good fathers.

The extent of fathers' involvement with their children can be categorized in four ways: 6 of the fathers had custody/physical placement (formal) and 7 had informal custody of a child, 10 were frequent visitors, 6 were regular visitors, and 7 had occasional contact. Fathers with multiple children might have different levels of involvement with different children, often depending on whether the relationship with the mother was congenial or unpleasant. Some of the men were involved in relationships of long standing, and over the two years of the study, 11 fathers cohabited with the mothers of at least one of their children. At the time of the interviews, 15 of the fathers were living with a girlfriend, who was sometimes the mother of one of their children, and to different degrees they shared the responsibility for the household, which in some cases included the girlfriend's child(ren) by another father. Over half of the men considered it their responsibility to act as fathers to the nonbiological children who lived with them. Several also were responsible for the well-being of parents.

Of the 36 fathers, 25 held jobs at the time of the first interview (three of the unemployed were disabled recipients of SSDI). Their educational level was low: 25 percent of the fathers had some college, 42 percent had completed high school, and 33 percent had dropped out of high school. The men held full- or part-time jobs as painters, maintenance workers, meatpackers, child care workers, and fast food

workers, and their average wage was \$7 an hour. A large majority had worked or were working for temporary placement agencies. Most of these jobs did not hold out much prospect of advancement or future income growth. Some fathers participated in the informal economy, doing auto repair or yard work for direct cash payment, and in a few cases drug trafficking. Many fathers cited race/class prejudice and discrimination (in particular by law enforcement officers and by employers in the suburbs) as a barrier to employment.

Housing instability and interaction with the criminal justice system most strongly affected fathers' ability to maintain stable and continuous employment. Most could not afford an apartment on their own, often because of low wages and child support obligations. Some received assistance from family members, or lived on and off with their mothers; sometimes the grandparent and other relatives provided child care while fathers worked. Others lived with girlfriends but were not listed on the lease. Involvement with the courts was a serious impediment to adequate employment; by the end of the study, 33 out of 36 fathers had a civil or criminal charge against them, ranging from traffic violations to assault and battery. Eleven of the fathers had been incarcerated at some point for nonpayment of child support.

Many of these fathers did not understand the basics of the child support system. They did not know that an order of paternity establishment led to a child support order, understand the procedures for modifying orders, or know how to initiate legal actions. Nor did they know that women seeking assistance were required to cooperate with the child support agency and assign payments to the state as a prerequisite to cash assistance. The great majority had not heard about the pass-through waiver or its benefits to those paying child support for children on welfare in Wisconsin. Nor were they aware of the existence of the Children First program or other services for men in Milwaukee. For those who participated, Children First was seen as very helpful because of the staff, the ancillary services, and the job placement services it offered.

Fathers did have a better understanding of the child support enforcement tools, but in general viewed the child support system as hostile. They expressed willingness to participate if they could be assured that their support more directly benefitted their children. Their understanding of the monthly statement of child support received and disbursed that was sent to them ranged from minimal to zero. This lack of understanding and their generally poor employment opportunities often led to the accumulation of large arrearages, because many of the fathers did not distinguish the child support order from other expenses or monthly bills they were unable to pay. Arrearages for fathers in the study ranged from \$1,500 to over \$30,000; for some, the amount of child support debt to the state was so high that many of the dollars paid by fathers would not directly benefit the children, even with the full pass-through. Fathers were confused and sometimes angered by the withholding of support paid because of arrears owed to the state or by the extent of wage garnishment to meet child support obligations and arrears.

A number of policy implications emerge from the findings. This research:

- highlights the importance of efforts to develop programs to renegotiate or reduce child support arrearages.
- suggests that the benefits of the pass-through policy are undermined by the amount of debt that men owe from previous AFDC arrears.
- suggests that policymakers consider the actual impact of assignment of child support on the personal relationships and income of poor parents.

- makes it clear that fathers often do not understand the child support system. Among other responses, policymakers, legal professionals and the judicial system need to study the use and availability of effective “pro se” forms, for example for modifying child support orders.

Introduction

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 made radical changes to the way the nation provides income support to low-income families. The main program that had provided cash assistance to single-parent families for over sixty years, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was replaced with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF allows states to design their own programs, emphasizes work, and establishes a lifetime time limit on cash assistance. The new welfare programs also reflect an increased focus on the responsibilities of nonresident fathers to provide for their children. PRWORA and related legislation included a variety of changes to improve child support enforcement, and to provide employment and related services to nonresident fathers so that they might be better able to meet child support obligations.

One feature of Wisconsin's efforts to improve the child support and welfare systems was the implementation of a full pass-through and disregard of child support collected on behalf of families participating in Wisconsin's TANF program, W-2.¹ Financing for the full pass-through and disregard required a federal waiver, and a requirement of the waiver was to conduct an evaluation, the Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE), of this policy change. The CSDE includes an experimental evaluation (for which Phase 1 results were reported in Meyer and Cancian, 2001), a set of non-experimental evaluations of pass-through policy (discussed in the first and third volumes of this report), and an examination of the experiences of nonresident fathers, reported here.

In Chapter 1 of this volume we provide a brief report on nonresident fathers of children participating in W-2. This analysis is designed in part to provide background for the ethnographic research that follows. As described in greater detail below, we use data from administrative records, as well as from the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families. Our reliance on these data sources has important implications. Administrative data allow us to analyze only a limited set of characteristics of nonresident fathers. However, for those aspects we can address, we have the advantage of being able to include information on all legal fathers (those with paternity established), giving us confidence that our results,

The CSDE includes experimental and nonexperimental components. A previous report presented results from the experimental evaluation for the first cohort of cases. This three-volume report includes results from the nonexperimental analyses.

- Volume I summarizes and compares the experimental evaluation and three quantitative nonexperimental studies.
- This volume reports on fathers of children in W-2 families, and features findings from an ethnographic study.
- Volume III includes the full quantitative nonexperimental studies summarized in Volume I.

¹Under AFDC, states were required to pass through to the family the first \$50 per month of child support collected, and to disregard this amount in calculating AFDC benefits. Under TANF, states could set their own policies for passing through and disregarding any child support paid on behalf of children on cash assistance, and were required only to withhold the federal share of child support collected. Under the new rules, most states chose to pass no money collected to the resident parent. In 1997, Wisconsin received a waiver from federal rules allowing it to pass through the entire amount of support collected to the resident parent, and to disregard all child support in calculating TANF cash payments. One requirement of the waiver was to conduct an evaluation of this policy change, the Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE). A key component of the CSDE is a random-assignment experimental evaluation: although most parents in the state receive the full amount of child support paid on their behalf (the experimental group), a randomly selected group of parents (the control group) receives only a portion of what is paid.

while limited in detail, are representative of all fathers. In Chapter 1 we also include information from the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families. The survey provides more detailed information and, while low response rates for the survey of fathers² reduce our ability to generalize from the survey data, the availability of administrative data for all fathers provides a basis to reweight the data in an attempt to account for differential nonresponse. Thus, the data allow us to offer a portrait of fathers' experience which covers a limited set of issues, but which captures some aspects of the experience of all legal fathers of the children in our W-2 sample.

In contrast, the ethnographic research reported in Chapter 2 provides a much more detailed discussion of fathers' experiences than is possible using administrative or survey data. As discussed in Chapter 2, in-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to learn about important features of fathers' lives that cannot be captured by a standard survey. The advantages of the ethnographic approach derive in part from the ethnographer's ability to collect more detailed information about the complexity of fathers' lives. Another essential advantage is that the more flexible approach of this research allows respondents to explain the importance of factors that may not have been initially apparent to the researchers—and thus would not have been reflected in a formal survey. The detailed responses available from ethnographic research also allow the researcher to discern how variables work together in the experience of these men. For example, the ethnographer may gain a better understanding of how unemployment, housing problems, and behavior toward children are interrelated, and how problems in one area can cause problems in another. The ethnographic research reported here concerns many of the same issues addressed by other parts of the evaluation, but provides the details and depth that allow a fuller understanding of the situations of a group of nonresident fathers.

A key limitation of the ethnographic approach is the difficulty of generalizing from the experiences of a small group of respondents to a broader population. The research discussed here employed a number of strategies to address this concern. As described in detail in Chapter 2, most of the fathers interviewed for the ethnographic component were selected from a random sample drawn from administrative data. However, since only a minority of the fathers drawn were successfully located and agreed to participate, concerns about representativeness remain. In part to address these concerns, the report on the ethnographic research includes a comparison of the characteristics of the initial sample drawn and the final respondents included, based on administrative data available for both groups. The analysis provided in the Chapter 1 also serves to provide context for the ethnographic research that follows.

²Among all fathers in the sample 33 percent were interviewed in each wave. Completion rates for fathers in the random subsample eligible for telephone and in-person interviews were higher—43 and 46 percent for the first and second waves.

Chapter 1

Fathers of Children in W-2 Families: Results of an Analysis of Administrative and Survey Data

Maria Cancian and Daniel R. Meyer

I. Introduction

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 made radical changes to the way the nation provides income support to low-income families.¹ The main program that provided cash assistance to single-parent families for over 60 years, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), was replaced with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF allows states to design their own programs, has a focus on work, and establishes a lifetime limit on cash assistance. Because many TANF recipients have limited human capital, their earnings may always be below the poverty level. Because cash assistance is time-limited, and earnings are likely to be low, other sources of income have become more critical to the long-term economic well-being of these women and their children.² The legislation that created TANF recognized this, and also included substantial changes to the child support system designed to increase the amount of support that nonresident fathers pay. Part of the motivation for the child support reform was a hope that some single mothers would be able to rely on a combination of support from the nonresident fathers and their own earnings in place of cash assistance. Another motivation was a sense that some nonresident fathers were not providing what they could for their children, leaving taxpayers to foot the bill.

Who are these fathers and are they able to provide adequate amounts of support for children receiving TANF? Although the political rhetoric suggested that fathers could be providing substantially more for their children, several factors lead to skepticism regarding the potential for dramatically increased child support collections from this population. First, individuals tend to partner with others who have similar characteristics. Thus, because the mothers receiving TANF generally have low levels of education, many of the fathers of their children can be expected to have similarly low levels, limiting their earning potential. Second, as many families have left TANF programs, one might expect those who remain to include those least able to achieve economic self-sufficiency. If the fathers of their children have similar characteristics, the fathers of welfare recipients might therefore be those least able to provide support. Finally, the child support reforms come after two decades of child support changes, largely intended to increase the amount paid. It may be that most of the gains in child support have already been achieved, leaving only cases with little potential for collection.

Is this pessimistic account accurate? Or can fathers begin providing substantially more support? There have been a variety of studies of this question over the years, but surprisingly little is known about the fathers of current welfare recipients and their potential to provide more child support. The purpose of this report is to summarize information on the fathers of children receiving TANF in Wisconsin, focusing on their ability to pay support. The report provides a general portrait of all fathers of children in the Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE) sample and draws on data for those in both the experimental

¹The authors gratefully acknowledge the research assistance of Sangeun Lee and the help of John Wolf and Dawn Duren in preparing the manuscript.

²Some men receive cash assistance, but the numbers are very few. For this reason, we focus our language (and analysis) on the recipient families in which children live with their mothers, making the mother the resident parent and the father the nonresident parent.

and control groups. Although we note occasions in which outcomes are significantly different in the two groups, our focus here is to use the information on all fathers to provide a context for interpreting the results of the ethnographic research presented in Chapter 2.³

II. Previous Literature

A number of previous researchers have explored the characteristics of nonresident fathers of children, focusing on their ability to pay support. For example, Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson (1998) summarized the range of previous income estimates and showed that the range for all nonresident fathers—not just those whose children receive welfare—was about \$29,000 to \$32,400 (in \$1999).⁴ They also provided a new estimate, which is within this range. Sorensen (1997) reported average personal income of nonresident fathers to be somewhat lower, at about \$24,500, with poverty rates of 15–25 percent among this group. Meyer (1998) also estimated median personal income of fathers at about \$24,500, and provided additional information showing substantial variation in fathers' incomes—one-quarter of fathers had incomes below \$7,300 and one-quarter had incomes above \$41,000.

Because these estimates are based on all nonresident fathers, they do not provide much information on the fathers of children receiving welfare. As might be expected, estimates for these fathers show substantially lower income. For example, Oellerich (1984) estimated mean personal income of the fathers of Wisconsin AFDC recipients to be about \$16,000, compared with his estimates for all divorced fathers of about \$37,500 and all separated fathers of about \$28,000. Other estimates of the mean or median personal income of the fathers of AFDC recipients in North Carolina (Haskins, Schwartz, and Akin, 1985) and Ohio and Florida (Sonenstein and Calhoun, 1990) are also in the \$11,000–\$16,000 range.

Two more recent surveys have related information, though not a direct estimate of the ability of the fathers of children receiving welfare to provide support. Rangarajan and Gleason (1998) examined teen mothers receiving welfare in Camden, NJ, Newark, NJ, and Chicago who were asked questions about the fathers of their children. Although they did not present estimates of these fathers' incomes, they did note that only about two-thirds had a high school education, so their overall ability to pay may be low. Rich (2001) provided information on fathers of “fragile families” in seven large cities across the United States. Her sample included fathers of children receiving welfare, as well as other fathers. She found average incomes of about \$17,000 for the unmarried fathers, with 40 percent of them earning less than \$9,000.

Some research literature has examined whether paying child support is impoverishing fathers (see, for example, Bartfeld, 2000; Meyer, 1998; Nichols-Casebolt, 1986; Sorensen, 1997). This literature has found that few fathers fall below the poverty line because of the amount of support they are ordered to pay, or the amount they actually pay. Nonetheless, fathers with low incomes are generally ordered to pay a higher proportion of their income in child support than are fathers with moderate or high incomes. Whether the nonresident fathers of welfare recipients, particularly current recipients, can afford to pay more support is unknown.

³For a discussion of the impact of the CSDE on outcomes for fathers, see *W-2 Child Support Demonstration Evaluation, Phase 1: Final Report* (Meyer and Cancian, 2001), especially sections I.4.1 (child support payments), I.4.2 (paternity establishment and child support orders), I.4.7 (fathers' employment and earnings), I.4.8 (fathers' income and economic hardship), and I.4.9 (fathers' social and economic involvement).

⁴For consistency we convert all dollar amounts to 1999 dollars using the CPI-U.

Research in this area has been limited by the difficulty of collecting adequate data on the nonresident fathers of children receiving welfare. One approach has been to survey mothers, collecting information on their welfare use and asking them questions about the characteristics of the fathers of their children. This was the approach taken in the first national sample about child support, the Current Population Survey - Child Support Supplement of 1980. However, relatively few mothers responded with current information about the father, so these questions were dropped in subsequent years. Moreover, even if more mothers had responded, those who did would include only mothers who had stayed in touch with the father or had other sources of information on the fathers' current situation, and thus the information would probably not have been representative of all fathers of children receiving welfare.

A second approach has been to examine mothers receiving welfare, and from their characteristics attempt to estimate what the fathers of these children were like (see, for example, Oellerich, 1984, and Miller, Garfinkel, and McLanahan, 1997). These estimates rely on the accuracy of the estimation method and the assumptions about the relationship between the characteristics of mothers and the characteristics of the fathers of their children. A third approach has been to use the administrative records of the child support office, perhaps combined with administrative records on earnings and welfare use (see Haskins, Schwartz, and Akin, 1985, for an example). A limitation of this work is that a substantial number of fathers do not have administrative records of earnings, perhaps because they are not working at all (including those in prison), are working out of state, or have other sources of income (e.g., working in the informal economy or self-employed). Finally, some have looked at the characteristics of men who claim to be fathers. This approach is also limited in that the number of men claiming to have fathered a child is much smaller than the number of women who have had children. In addition, the standard surveys tend to undercount low-income men, primarily men of color, especially if they are only loosely attached to more than one household. Although a variety of strategies have been used to address these problems, including reweighting the data (see Garfinkel, McLanahan, and Hanson, 1998, and Sorensen, 1997), uncertainty remains. Another limitation of this approach is that many men do not know if the mother of their children is receiving welfare. Finally, attempts to interview nonresident fathers have been beset with numerous problems, with low response rates a particular concern (see, for example, Hofferth et al., 1997).

III. Data and Sample

An ideal data set for examining the economic status of the fathers of children receiving welfare would have information on matched pairs of fathers and mothers. Fathers' reports could be used to measure their characteristics, and mothers' reports could be used as the source of information on welfare participation. Moreover, one could argue that the ideal data set would combine survey and administrative data, since welfare use is not reported accurately in surveys (e.g., see Meyer and Sullivan, 2001). Finally, having access to recent data is particularly important given that both the child support and welfare systems have undergone substantial reform in the last several years. Tougher laws on paternity establishment may mean that there are more legal fathers of welfare recipients than previously and that the fathers brought into the system may not be similar to those in the system previously. The welfare policy changes of 1996, combined with an unprecedented economic expansion, have led to the lowest welfare caseloads in years. Given caseload declines, current welfare recipients (and the fathers of their children) may represent a different population than the welfare recipients (and the fathers of their children) of a decade ago (see, for example, Cancian and Meyer, 1995; for a different perspective, see Zedlewski and Alderson, 2001).

Although we do not have a single data source that is ideal, as discussed in detail below, we do have information on matched pairs, administrative data on welfare payments, and quite recent data. We combine several sources of data, attempting to choose the best source for each question.

Administrative Records

We use three sources of administrative records. CARES, a management information system for the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, provides information on those receiving W-2, including demographic characteristics and information about program receipt. The second source is KIDS, the management information system for child support. KIDS contains limited demographic information on fathers and information on child support orders and payments. It also contains information on paternity, so we can examine whether each of the children living with the mother has a legal father (that is, whether each child was a marital child—in which case legal paternity is presumed—or a nonmarital child for whom paternity has been formally established). The third source is the earnings information in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) data system. The UI file contains quarterly earnings for individual covered workers. “Covered” workers include about 91 percent of Wisconsin workers. Not covered are the self-employed, federal employees, commission sales workers, farmers, church employees, and employees of not-for-profit organizations with fewer than four workers. Also lacking is information on the earnings of any workers employed outside of Wisconsin. UI records do not provide information on occupations, hourly wages, or hours worked.

Our analysis of administrative records begins with CARES, and includes all mothers who entered W-2 during its initial months (that is, from September 1, 1997, through July 9, 1998) and who were demographically eligible for child support (that is, there was a living nonresident father). We make other selected sample exclusions to reach the sample of mothers in the CSDE, as described by Meyer and Cancian (2001). The final sample includes 15,977 mothers, about three-quarters of the mothers who entered W-2 over this period. We merge these records with information from KIDS, using the mother’s Social Security number. About 30 percent of these mothers have only nonmarital children who have not had paternity established, so no legal fathers associated with these mothers are in our sample. Of the remaining 11,179 mothers, 28 percent are associated with more than one legal father. This results in a total of 14,343 couples. However, because about 7 percent of the fathers are associated with more than one mother in our sample, and because we include each father only once, our final sample includes 13,339 fathers. In these analyses, we use fathers in both the experimental and control groups of the CSDE, noting when there is a significant difference between the two groups. For this sample of legal fathers of children in families receiving W-2, we use the Social Security number from KIDS to merge the earnings records from the UI data system. We also use CARES data to identify any additional legal children of the father from among all the children whose mother received W-2 at any point between September 1997 and September 2000.

We present descriptive information on the 13,339 legal fathers of children in families receiving W-2, based on information in the administrative records, including age, race, number of children, and selected information on the mother receiving W-2.⁵ We also present earnings information on the 12,732 fathers for whom we have Social Security numbers and thus have searched for an earnings record in the UI file.

In analyses using administrative data, we present information on the entire sample. We also present information separately for two subgroups. We present data for African American fathers in Milwaukee because this is the sample used in the ethnographic research presented in Chapter 2. We also

⁵When a father is associated with more than one mother, we employ several strategies. For the number of children, for example, we sum across mothers. For the fathers of children without AFDC history, we examine the mothers of all of his children. For mother’s education, we randomly select a mother to consider.

present limited information on fathers whose children had not received AFDC in the 2 years prior to W-2 entry.⁶ This subgroup provides information on fathers who are generally new to the welfare system.

Survey Data

We surveyed mothers and fathers in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families (Krecker, 2001). We attempted to survey about 3,000 mothers in spring 1999 (covering calendar year 1998) and again in spring 2000 (covering calendar year 1999).⁷ Completion rates for mothers were 82 percent during each period. We also randomly selected one “focal” child for each mother, and, if that child had a legal father, attempted to survey him. Location of fathers was particularly difficult, and completion rates were 33 percent during each period. Completion rates were higher for fathers in a random subsample eligible for in-person as well as telephone interviews, 43 percent at Time 1 and 46 percent at Time 2. The data on fathers were weighted to account for differential nonresponse (see Ziliak and Krecker, 2001). We have information on 572 fathers at Time 1 and 603 at Time 2.⁸

The survey contains demographic information on fathers, including education, health, family background, their own earnings, other income, their spouse’s or partner’s earnings and other income, and the composition of their households.

IV. Findings

We use data from administrative sources, as well as from the surveys of mothers and fathers, to describe the characteristics and situation of nonresident fathers of children whose mothers received W-2 benefits. In addition to the basic demographic characteristics of these families, we report on fathers’ family background, health, financial resources, and assets. We present descriptive information on nonresident fathers’ earnings and income, as well as poverty and economic hardship. We show current child support paid, as well as an estimate of potential support.

Characteristics of Nonresident Fathers of Children Whose Families Receive W-2

Table 1 shows characteristics of the legal fathers of children whose families receive W-2, with information taken from the administrative records at the time the family entered W-2. The first two panels show age and race. The first column, reflecting the full sample, shows that nearly half of these men are younger than age 30, and about 20 percent are younger than 25. Although these men are relatively young, they are older on average than the mothers of W-2 children, of whom 64.1 percent are younger than 30. Although we do not know the race of a substantial number of fathers, more than three-quarters of the men whose race we know are men of color, primarily African Americans.

In the next panels, we consider all children for whom each man is a legal father and whose mothers received W-2 at any point between September 1997 and September 2000. About four-fifths of

⁶We check welfare history in the 2 years prior to each case’s “baseline,” which is generally defined as the time of a W-2 interview (for cases that transitioned from AFDC) or a request for W-2 assistance (for cases that did not transition). See Cancian, Caspar, and Meyer (2001) for more details.

⁷The target sample was a stratified random sample of mothers in the administrative data sample, stratified on the initial W-2 tier and on whether a case transitioned from AFDC to W-2 or was a new case.

⁸We also have limited information on fathers from some mothers who were asked to provide basic information on the father of the focal child.

TABLE 1
Initial Characteristics of Nonresident Legal Fathers and Associated Resident Mothers,
Administrative Data

Characteristics	All		African American Fathers in Milwaukee		Fathers Whose Children Had no History of AFDC Receipt	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
All Nonresident Fathers	13,339	100.0	4,144	100.0	765	100.0
Characteristics of Fathers						
Age of Father						
Missing	112	0.8	1	0.0	13	1.7
<20	313	2.4	95	2.3	31	4.1
20–24	2,595	19.5	862	20.8	110	14.4
25–29	3,571	26.8	1,251	30.2	148	19.4
30–34	2,818	21.1	894	21.6	163	21.3
35–39	2,108	15.8	585	14.1	155	20.3
40+	1,822	13.7	456	11.0	145	19.0
Race of Father						
Unknown	5,436	40.8	n.a.	n.a.	308	40.3
White	1,802	13.5	n.a.	n.a.	289	37.8
African American	5,219	39.1	n.a.	n.a.	128	16.7
Hispanic	583	4.4	n.a.	n.a.	24	3.1
Native American	220	1.7	n.a.	n.a.	14	1.8
Asian	79	0.6	n.a.	n.a.	2	0.3
Marital vs. Nonmarital Child						
Only nonmarital children	10,740	80.5	3,803	91.8	339	44.3
Only marital children	2,098	15.7	189	4.6	406	53.1
At least one of each	467	3.5	151	3.6	13	1.7
At least one unknown	34	0.3	1	0.0	7	0.9
Number of Children						
One	6,579	49.3	1,657	40.0	449	58.7
Two	3,466	26.0	1,101	26.6	222	29.0
Three or more	3,294	24.7	1,386	33.5	94	12.3

(table continues)

TABLE 1, continued

Characteristics	All		African American Fathers in Milwaukee		Fathers Whose Children Had no History of AFDC Receipt	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Characteristics of Mother^a						
Mother's AFDC Receipt in Last 2 Years Before Entry						
None	969	7.3	161	3.9	765	100.0
1–18 months	3,974	29.8	975	23.5	0	0.0
19–24 months	8,396	62.9	3,008	72.6	0	0.0
Education of Mother						
Missing	245	1.8	117	2.8	1	0.1
Less than high school	6,846	51.3	2,323	56.1	230	30.1
High school diploma	4,896	36.7	1,394	33.6	371	48.5
Some beyond high school	1,352	10.1	310	7.5	163	21.3
Children Who Don't Belong to This Father						
Missing	225	1.7	107	2.6	1	0.1
Several legal fathers	5,591	41.9	1,876	45.3	189	24.7
One legal father, but other unestablished paternities	3,507	26.3	1,101	26.6	162	21.2
One father	4,016	30.1	1,060	25.6	413	54.0

Source: KIDS, CARES.

^aWhere fathers were associated with more than one mother, we show the characteristics of a randomly selected mother in these panels.

these fathers had only nonmarital children in families receiving W-2. About half the fathers had one nonresident child, about one-quarter had two, and about one-quarter had three or more. Because only children currently in families receiving W-2 are included in this count, it is likely to be an underestimate. Nonetheless, it suggests that at least half of these fathers face obligations to support multiple children.

In the remaining panels we show characteristics of the mother of each father's children.⁹ The first panel shows that the majority of men were partnered with long-term AFDC recipients. Although we do not have information in the administrative record on the educational level of these men, the educational level of their partners provides a crude indicator of their own characteristics because many men have similar characteristics to those with whom they partner. About half the fathers were partnered with women with less than a high school diploma, suggesting that they may have limited education themselves. Finally, the last panel shows that many of these men were partnered with women who have complicated families. In two-fifths of the families, there is at least one child from a different father, in addition to the child(ren) of this father.¹⁰ Moreover, in another one-quarter, there are children for whom paternity has not yet been established, who may be fathered by another man.¹¹

The second column shows the characteristics of 4,144 African American fathers in Milwaukee, the sample for the ethnographic research presented in Chapter 2.¹² These fathers were similar in age to the whole sample, had more children, were more likely to have had nonmarital children, and were partnered with women with more AFDC history, somewhat lower education, and somewhat more complicated families.¹³ These factors may be associated with a reduced ability to pay support.

The final column of Table 1 focuses on fathers "new" to the welfare system (that is, fathers who at the time of their children's entry to W-2 were not legal fathers of *any* children who had received

⁹In these rows, when men are associated with more than one W-2 participant, we show the characteristics of a randomly selected participant.

¹⁰The proportion of nonresident fathers whose children live in households that include children of another father is higher than the proportion of mothers in this sample who have children from multiple fathers. Assume, for example, that there are 100 mothers, 80 of whom have children with one father (totaling 80 fathers), and 20 have children with two fathers (totaling 40 fathers). When we examine fathers, 33 percent (40 out of 120 fathers) will have partnered with mothers who have multiple partners, and only 20 percent of mothers (20 out of 100) will have been partnered with multiple fathers. The difference in this sample is even greater, in part because the sample of fathers by definition excludes cases in which no legal father has been identified.

¹¹Table 1 shows characteristics for the full sample, including fathers of children with mothers in the control group and fathers of children with mothers in the experimental group. Because W-2 participants were randomly assigned to the two groups, we expect baseline characteristics to be similar, and generally they are. However, there are statistically significant differences in mother's AFDC history (59 percent of control cases had received AFDC benefits in at least 19 of the last 24 months, compared with 65 percent of cases in the experimental group), mother's education (49 percent of mothers in the control group and 52 percent of mothers in the experimental group had less than a high school education), and the proportion for which there are children in the household from another father (42 percent for the control group, 43 for the experimental).

¹²This column includes 2,494 African American fathers in Milwaukee and an additional 1,650 fathers in Milwaukee of unknown race, but for whom the mother is African American. We impute race to these fathers because when we know the race of both parties and the mother is African American, 98 percent of the fathers are African American. Additional analyses based on the more restrictive sample of 2,494 generally show similar patterns.

We use KIDS data from September 1997 through June 2000 to ascertain whether a father lives in a ZIP Code in the city of Milwaukee. These records do not have a continuous record of addresses; we assume that fathers stay at a given address until there is a record of a change.

¹³These patterns also hold when we consider a sample of all nonresident fathers.

AFDC within the last 2 years). These men were somewhat older, much more likely to be white, had fewer children, and were much more likely to have had marital children. They were partnered with women with higher education and less complicated families. These characteristics suggest a greater ability to pay support.

Table 2 provides a richer set of descriptive information on the 572 men who responded to the first wave of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families. As discussed above, these data have been weighted in an attempt to correct for nonresponse (see Ziliak and Kreckler, 2001). This table also reveals substantial barriers to employment and earnings. For example, the first panel shows that about one-third of those in the sample had less than a high school diploma, and only one in five had education beyond high school. About three-fifths of the fathers reported either excellent or very good health, but 17 percent reported either fair or poor health, and about one-fifth stated that they had a health problem that deterred work.

The next three panels show information about these fathers' families of origin. Few had parents with more than a high school diploma, although the proportion not knowing their mother's or their father's educational level is substantial, about one-third. More than half did not live with both parents through age 16.

The final panels provide information on housing, transportation, and use of financial institutions. Home ownership is relatively uncommon and nearly half the fathers were renting. A surprisingly large number shared housing, over one-quarter lived with relatives, and another 6 percent lived with friends. These situations may be less stable than those in which the father owned or rented. Only about one-quarter of fathers reported that the safety of their neighborhood was "excellent," with 11 percent reporting that it was "fair" or "bad." About half of fathers reported owning a car (about a third of those who did not own a car reported other access to a vehicle, not shown on table). However, use of formal financial institutions was low: about one in five fathers reported having a credit card, and about two in five had a checking and/or savings account.¹⁴

The second column focuses on 151 African American fathers in Milwaukee. These fathers had similar levels of education, tended to report somewhat better health, came from more disadvantaged families, were somewhat less likely to own their own home, and were much less likely to report that their neighborhood was safe. In the final column, we examine 116 fathers whose children did not have recent AFDC history. Again these fathers appear more advantaged, had higher education, were more likely to own a car and to have a credit card and a checking or savings account, and were more likely to report living in a safe neighborhood.

Overall, the figures in Tables 1 and 2 suggest that many of the fathers of children whose families are in W-2 have relatively low levels of human capital and few economic resources to draw on in supporting their children. We now turn to measures of fathers' current earnings and income.

¹⁴Table 2 reports the characteristics of fathers of children with mothers assigned to the experimental group, and of fathers of children with mothers assigned to the control group. There are statistically significant differences for the following characteristics: housing status (45 percent of control group fathers versus 49 percent of experimental group fathers rented), rating of neighborhood safety (40 percent of control group fathers and 53 percent of experimental group fathers rated neighborhood safety as very good or excellent), and car ownership (42 percent of control group fathers and 54 percent of experimental group fathers owned a car).

TABLE 2
Initial Characteristics of Nonresident Legal Fathers and Associated Resident Mothers,
Survey Data

Characteristics	All		African American Fathers in Milwaukee		Fathers Whose Children Had no History of AFDC Receipt	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
All Nonresident Fathers	572		151		116	
Father's Education						
Less than high school	147	32.1	46	31.3	22	18.7
High school diploma	305	48.3	77	51.5	61	53.4
Some beyond high school	120	19.6	28	17.2	33	27.9
Father's Health						
Excellent	148	29.3	38	31.9	32	24.4
Very good	173	29.2	48	36.5	41	33.0
Good	168	24.8	44	21.4	32	31.3
Fair	69	14.4	16	6.8	7	6.3
Poor	14	2.2	5	3.4	4	5.0
Health Problem That Deters Work						
Yes	93	21.0	29	24.4	14	15.1
No	479	79.0	122	75.6	102	84.9
Education of His Mother						
High school dropout	89	15.2	24	21.4	16	14.6
High school	237	39.2	62	38.9	56	46.2
More than high school	69	11.3	15	10.7	14	14.6
Don't know/refusal	177	34.4	50	29.0	30	24.6
Education of His Father						
High school dropout	100	19.8	19	25.0	25	16.3
High school	173	24.8	41	21.0	42	34.9
More than high school	70	9.8	17	8.4	13	16.1
Don't know/refusal	229	45.7	74	45.6	36	32.8
Lived with Both Parents until 16						
Yes	256	45.6	52	37.2	59	52.7
No	316	54.4	99	62.8	57	47.3

(table continues)

TABLE 2, continued

Characteristics	All		African American Fathers in Milwaukee		Fathers Whose Children Had no History of AFDC Receipt	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Housing Status						
Own	74	14.7	15	9.2	23	20.3
Rent	305	46.6	89	52.7	61	52.1
Live in friend's home	31	6.4	12	8.2	5	4.2
Live in relative's home	141	27.1	30	23.6	20	16.9
Homeless/living on street	1	1.3	1	3.4	0	0.0
Don't know/refusal	20	3.9	4	2.9	7	6.5
Safety of Neighborhood						
Excellent	129	23.4	14	8.0	34	31.6
Very good	165	25.2	37	23.6	38	37.9
Good	223	40.7	75	52.7	36	26.1
Fair	32	7.7	14	10.0	6	3.8
Bad	22	3.0	10	5.8	1	0.7
Own a Car						
Yes	353	49.2	76	44.5	91	74.5
No	218	50.8	75	55.5	24	25.3
Don't know/refusal	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3
Credit Cards						
Yes	115	18.1	20	13.7	36	29.6
No	456	81.8	131	86.3	79	70.2
Don't know/refusal	1	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.3
Has Checking or Savings Account						
Checking account	80	10.2	11	4.9	23	19.2
Savings account	103	16.3	18	10.9	21	16.0
Both checking and savings account	103	13.6	21	7.3	33	25.2
No checking or savings account	282	59.6	100	76.1	38	39.3
Don't know/refusal	4	0.4	1	0.9	1	0.3

Source: Fathers' responses in the first wave of the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families, fielded in Spring, 1999.

Economic Status of These Fathers

In this chapter, we examine fathers' earnings and income before paying child support. A more detailed discussion of earnings, as well as information on wages, job skills, and occupations, can be found in Cancian and Haveman (2001). As above, we report economic status for all fathers, those with children living with mothers in the control group, and those with children living with mothers in the experimental group. We note outcomes for which the experimental impact evaluation suggests a significant difference between the two groups.¹⁵

Figure 1 shows the distribution of fathers' earnings in the UI records in 1998 and 1999. The first two bars show that these earnings are very low. In 1998, 38 percent of fathers had no earnings recorded in the UI records, and another 33 percent had earnings of less than \$10,000. Only about 5 percent had earnings above \$30,000. There was little improvement among these categories between 1998 and 1999.¹⁶

Fewer African American fathers in Milwaukee had no recorded earnings, but more had earnings between \$1 and \$10,000, making the total percentage with earnings of less than \$10,000 about the same. As might be expected, fathers of children who did not have recent AFDC experience had somewhat higher earnings, but even among these fathers, 60 percent have reported earnings below \$10,000.

Although the share of fathers with no earnings was quite similar between 1998 and 1999, for those fathers with earnings, earnings did increase, from a mean of \$11,800 to \$13,000 and from a median of \$8,600 to \$9,800. But the overall increase masks substantial change at the individual level. Figure 2 examines the change in earnings from 1998 to 1999. About half the fathers showed very little change in earnings from 1998 to 1999; two-thirds of these were fathers without earnings in either year. Consistent with the small increase in mean and median earnings, those with large increases slightly outnumber those with large decreases (13 percent to 9 percent), and those with small increases slightly outnumber those with small decreases (16 percent to 13 percent).

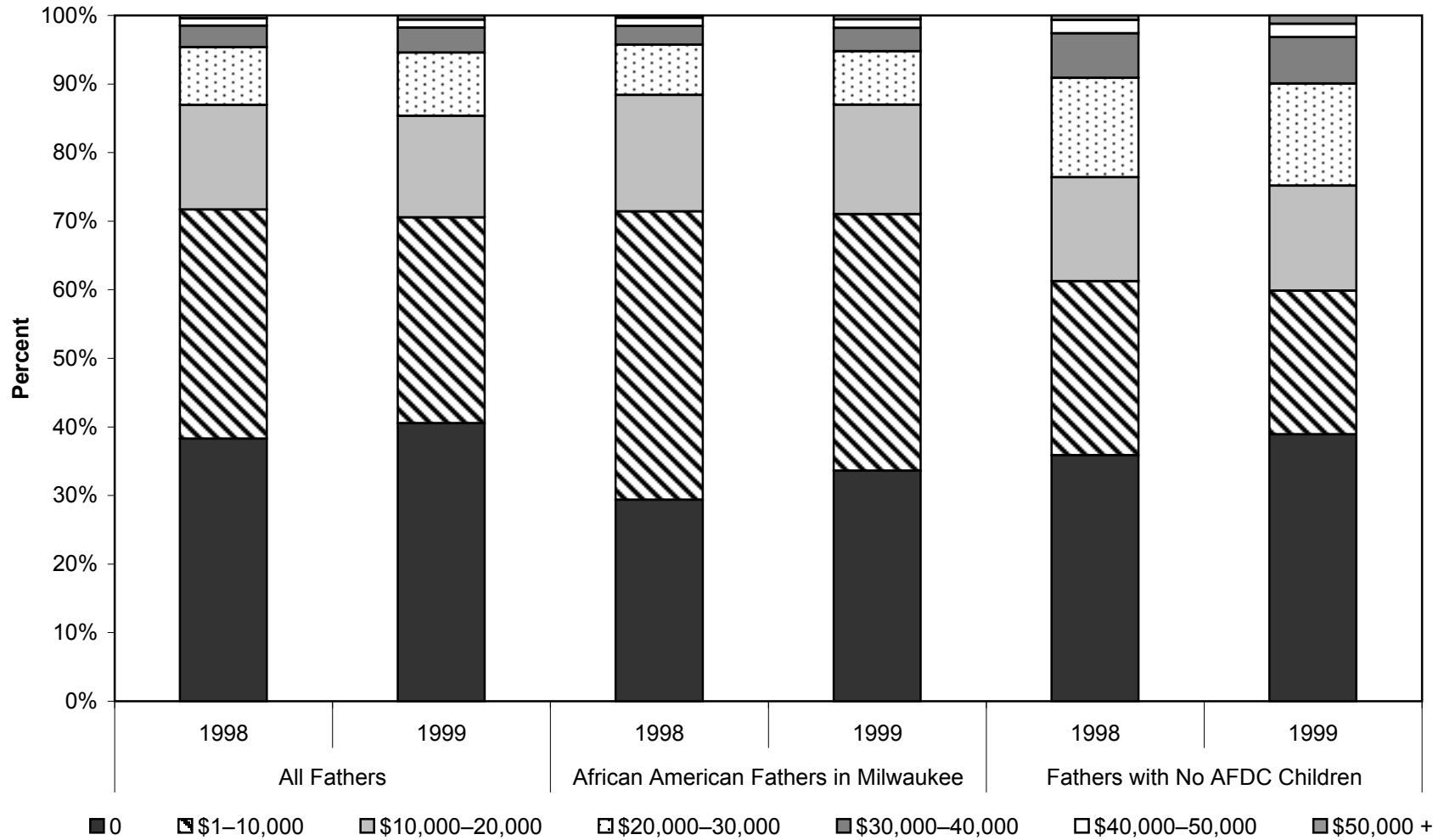
Earnings are not the only source of income for the fathers of children receiving welfare. We now turn to the survey to examine other sources of nonresident fathers' family income, as reported by these

¹⁵As discussed in the experimental impact report (Meyer and Cancian, 2001, see especially Cancian, Caspar and Meyer, Technical Report 1 in Volume III) the experimental evaluation relies on regression-adjusted results. The figures reported here are very similar, but a simple comparison of these figures for the experimental and control groups is not strictly equivalent to the comparison used in the experimental impact evaluation.

¹⁶For some fathers, we also have survey information on their own reports of their income. In addition, some mothers were asked questions about the income of the father of one of their children. When we consider *all* fathers, these other sources provide additional information on only a few men, in part because we have survey information on few fathers and because many mothers did not report their ex-partners' income. Thus, while we are missing earnings information in the UI record for 607 fathers (those for whom we have no Social Security number), we are able to gain information on only 30 of these in 1998 and 26 in 1999 from the surveys.

One of the disadvantages of the UI data is the large number of fathers who have no earnings record. In all calculations in the main text, we treat these fathers as having zero earnings. If we instead treat these fathers as having missing earnings, then survey responses become more important. For example, consider a hierarchy in which we first examine the father's own report, then if that is missing, examine the mother's proxy report, then if that is missing, examine the UI data. In this hierarchy, if we count those cases with no UI data as zero income, we have information for 12,762 fathers in 1998, with 71 percent having income less than \$10,000. On the other hand, if we count those with no UI data as missing, we have information for only 8,135 fathers in 1998, with 54 percent having income less than \$10,000. This suggests that a substantial proportion of fathers will have low income even if we make optimistic assumptions.

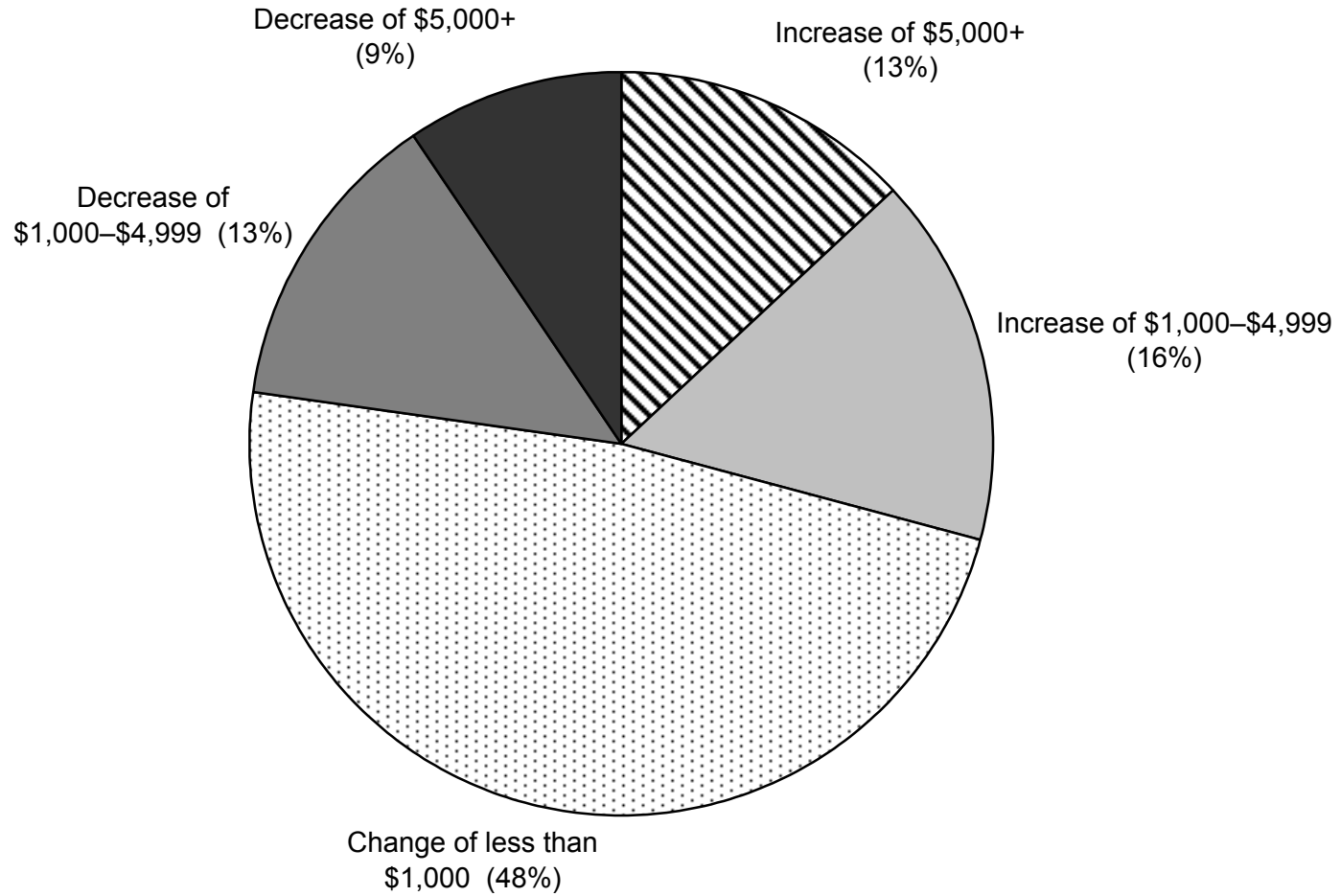
FIGURE 1
Earnings of Fathers



Source: Unemployment Insurance records.

The sample of all fathers includes 13,339 cases. Of these, 607 cases were excluded here because the Social Security number was missing and there was no match with UI records. Thus, 12,732 cases were used in the figure. The sample of African American fathers includes 4,046 cases. Of these, 98 cases were missing because the Social Security number was missing and there was no match with UI records. Thus, 3,948 cases were used in the figure. The sample of fathers whose children had no history of AFDC receipt includes 765 cases. Of these, 40 cases were missing because the Social Security number was missing and there was no match with UI records. Thus, 725 cases were used in the figure.

FIGURE 2
Changes in Earnings, 1998–1999



Source: Unemployment Insurance records.

The full sample includes 13,339 cases. Of these, 607 cases were excluded here because the Social Security numbers were missing and there was no match with UI records. Thus, 12,732 cases were used in the figure.

fathers.¹⁷ When we examine income in the survey, we show results for all fathers, not subgroups.¹⁸ Figure 3 shows that a father's own earnings were about 70 percent of the family income package in both years. In 1998, 78 percent of fathers reported earnings, with an average among these fathers of \$14,600, and an overall average (including those without earnings) of \$11,400. These amounts are higher than the averages in the administrative record: the 62 percent of fathers with earnings in the administrative record had average earnings of \$11,800, with an overall average of only \$7,300. About 30 percent of fathers reported other income, which may include unemployment compensation, Social Security Disability, SSI, etc. Among fathers who reported this source, it averaged about \$2,600; over all fathers, it averaged about \$800. Thus, average personal income for these fathers was about \$12,200, within the range of the estimates from the previous literature. Only a minority of fathers were living with partners, but among the 30 percent of the sample who had partners with earnings, this was a significant source, averaging over \$12,000, for an overall average of nearly \$4,000. Other income from a partner increases average family income of nonresident fathers by about \$600, raising total average family income for nonresident fathers in 1998 to \$16,620.

Between 1998 and 1999, both the share of fathers with earnings and the share of fathers with other income increased, as did the average amounts, bringing a father's personal income total to \$15,200. Partner income was quite similar to 1999, bringing total average family income for nonresident fathers to \$19,566.

There was substantial diversity within this average, as shown in Figure 4. Half of fathers had family incomes of \$10,000 or lower in 1998, and nearly one-third had family income of \$5,000 or less. In contrast, 9 percent of fathers had family incomes over \$40,000. The increase in income between 1998 and 1999 seen in Figure 3 is due in large part to fewer fathers having very low incomes—the percentage with incomes of \$10,000 or less declined from 50 percent in 1998 to 33 percent in 1999.

A more explicit examination of income changes is shown in Figure 5. Of fathers for whom we have information on family incomes in both years, 43 percent showed a large increase (\$5,000 or more), and another 18 percent showed a small increase (\$1,000–\$4,999). On the other hand, 17 percent of fathers showed a large decrease. This figure shows substantially more change than the figures on changes in earnings using administrative data, in part because there are fewer fathers with zero income.

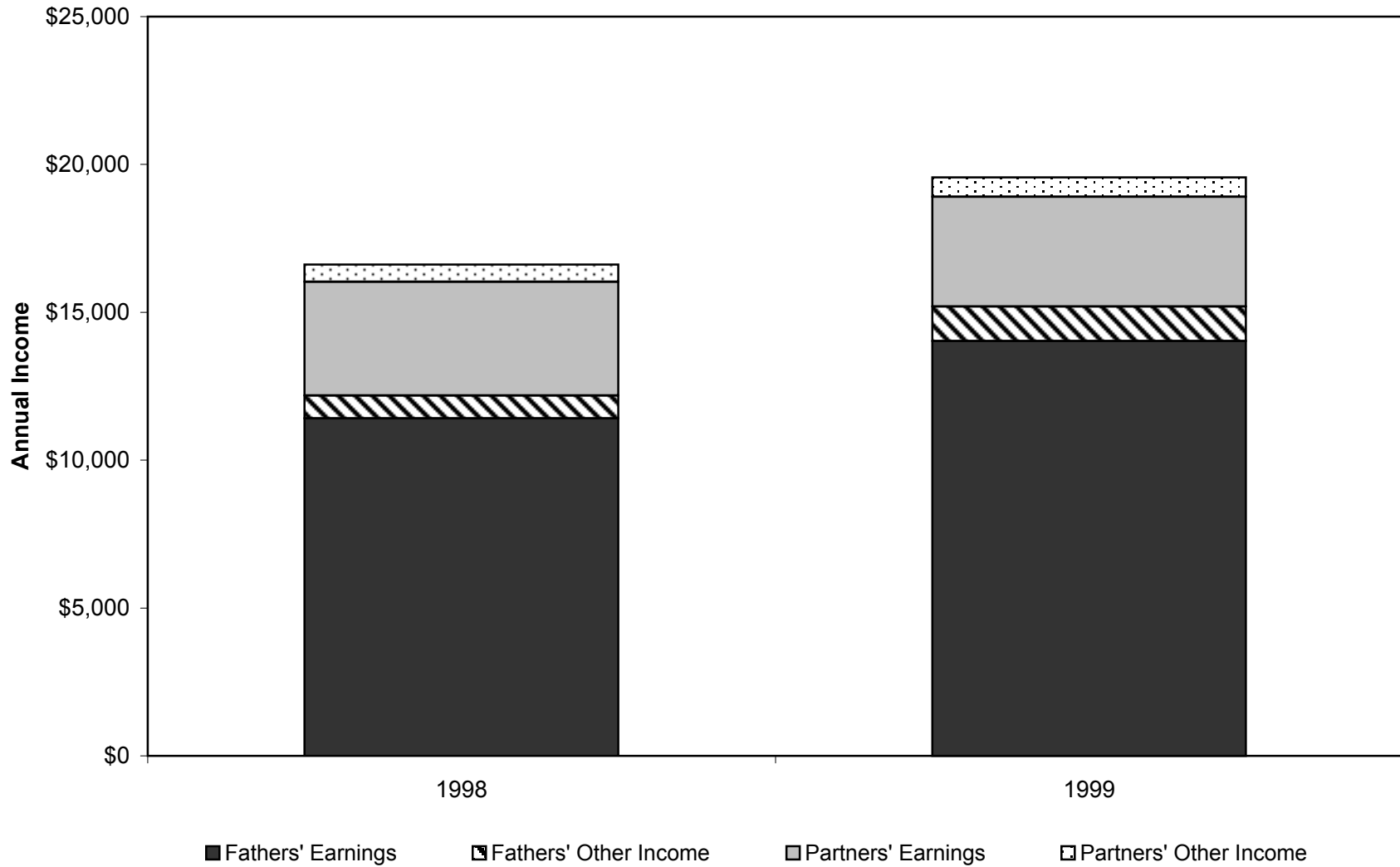
Is Child Support Impoverishing These Fathers?

The picture that emerges of fathers' resources shows substantial diversity. How well does the child support system take this diversity into account? Are a substantial number of fathers being impoverished by the child support they pay? Are fathers with higher incomes paying more than those with lower incomes? In this chapter, we use fathers' own reports of the amount of formal child support they paid. A discussion of the relationship between formal payments and informal cash and in-kind

¹⁷Administrative data include all legal fathers. The target sample for the survey included the father of a randomly selected focal child. Thus, the survey underrepresents fathers of children in multiple-father families receiving W-2. To test the sensitivity to this difference in sample definitions, we estimated earnings in administrative data only for fathers of the focal child. The figures are generally quite similar to those for all fathers. For example, in 1998, 37.0 percent of fathers of focal children had no earnings, compared with 38.3 percent of all fathers, and 4.6 percent of fathers in both samples had earnings over \$30,000.

¹⁸Because several fathers did not answer all income questions, the total sample of fathers with family income information is 460 in 1998 and 504 in 1999. We do not show subgroups because the sample size for some categories would be small.

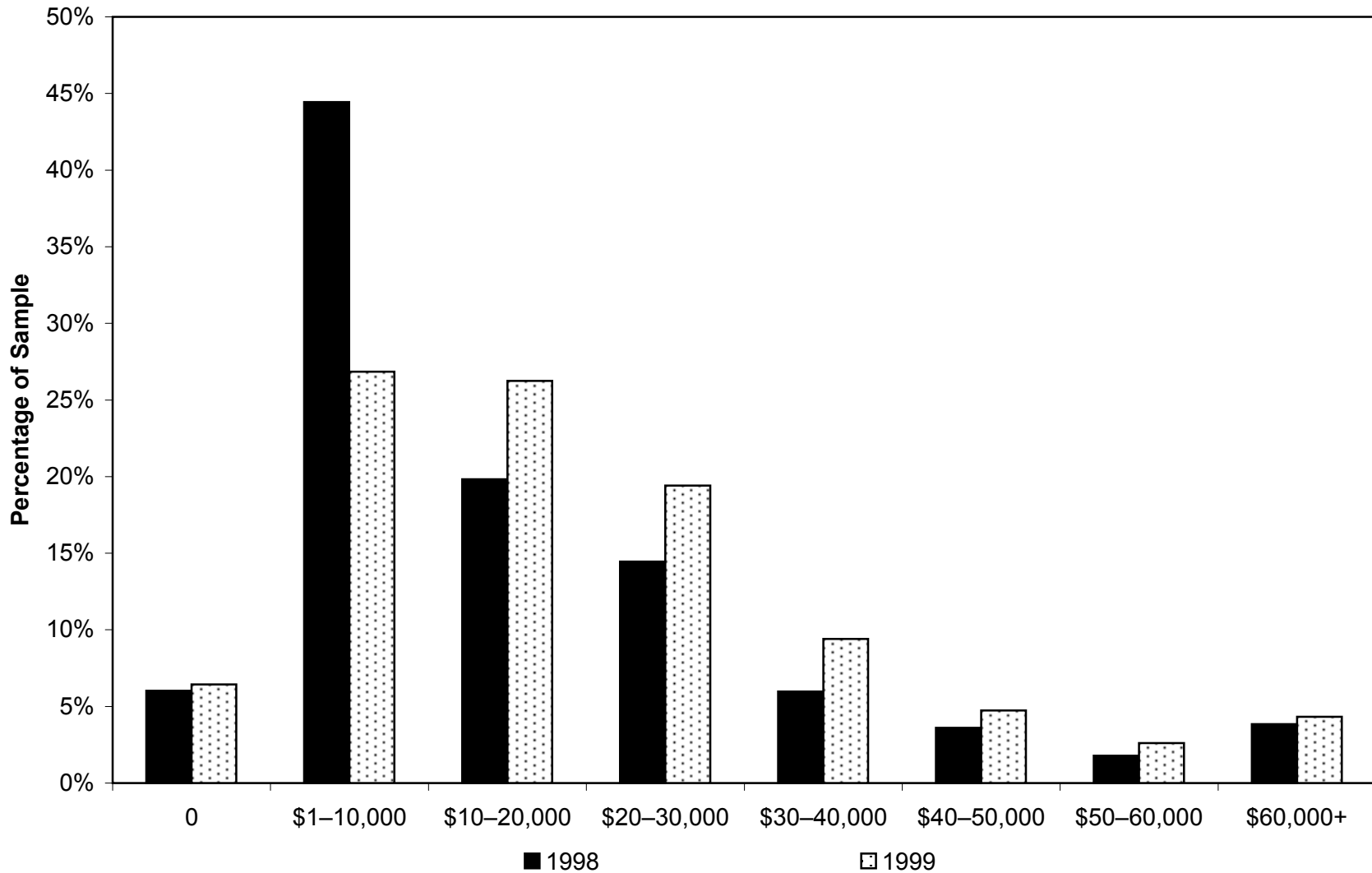
FIGURE 3
Fathers' Average Family Income



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

The sample includes 572 cases for 1998. Of these, 112 cases refused to answer or responded that they did not know. Thus, 460 cases were used for 1998. The sample includes 603 cases for 1999. Of these, 99 cases refused to answer or responded that they did not know. Thus, 504 cases were used for 1999.

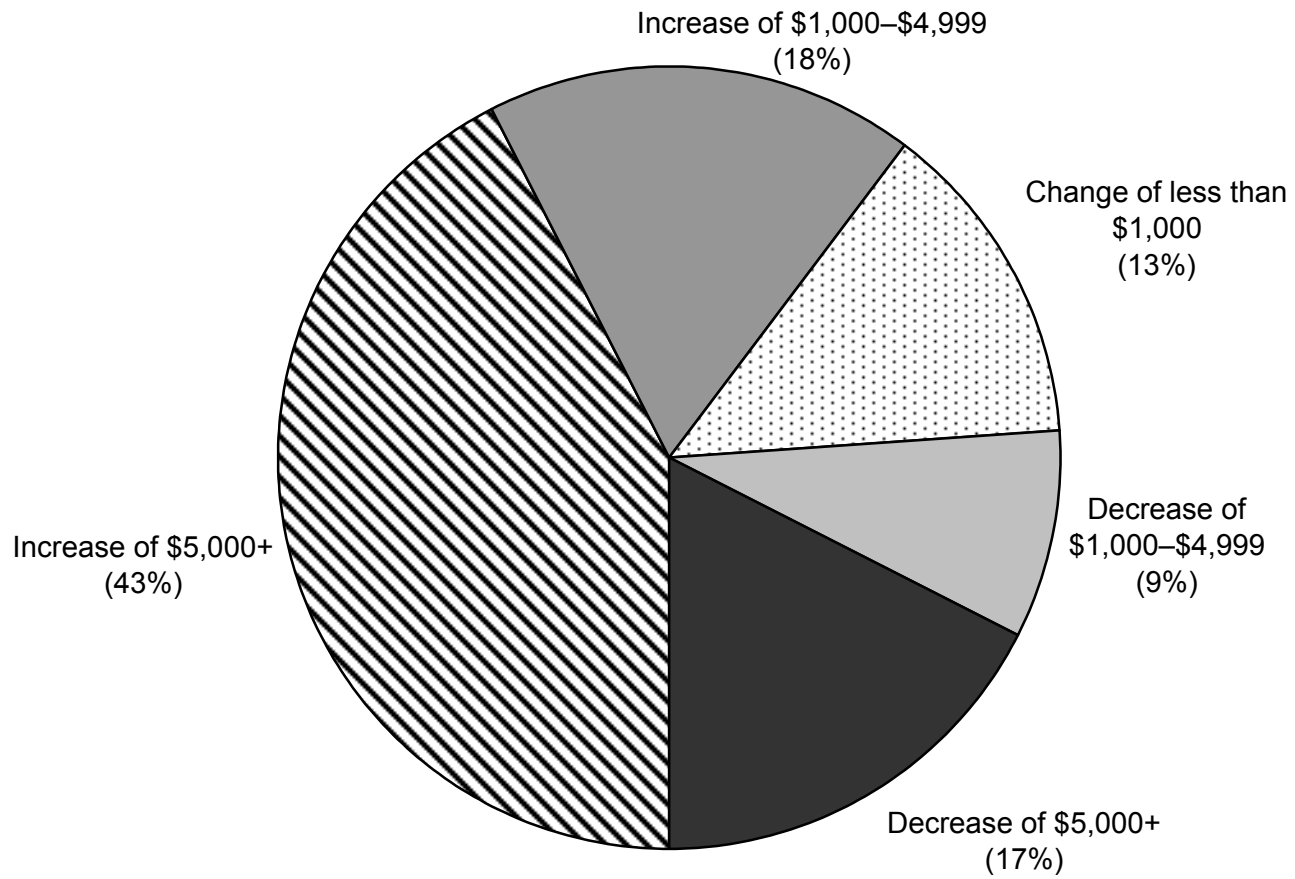
FIGURE 4
Distribution of Fathers' Family Income before Paying Child Support



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

The sample includes 572 cases for 1998. Of these, 112 cases refused to answer or responded that they did not know. Thus, 460 cases were used for 1998. The sample includes 603 cases for 1999. Of these, 99 cases refused to answer or responded that they did not know. Thus, 504 cases were used for 1999.

FIGURE 5
Changes in Family Income, 1998–1999



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families. 345 cases were interviewed in both 1998 and 1999. Of these, 85 cases did not provide income information. Thus, 260 cases were used.

supports, as well as other father involvement, is included in Seltzer and Schaeffer (2001). A more detailed examination of the types of fathers who pay support can be found in Bartfeld and Meyer (2001).

We begin by examining the proportion of fathers paying support by category of fathers' personal income in Figure 6. This figure shows the expected relationship between income and likelihood of paying—those with the least income are least likely to pay. We note, however, that the tendency for higher-income fathers to be more likely to pay seems to hold only for fathers with incomes up to \$20–30,000. Those in the highest income category (over \$30,000) are no more likely to pay than those with income of \$20–30,000.¹⁹ Figure 7 shows the average amount paid among those paying something. With the exception of those with no reported income,²⁰ there is generally a positive relationship between income and support paid. On average, however, lower-income fathers who pay support pay a higher proportion of their income.

Because our focus in this report is on the general context and payment patterns of nonresident fathers, the figures discussed here are based on a sample that includes fathers of children whose mothers are in the experimental group and fathers of children whose mothers are in the control group. The CSDE experimental impact evaluation found that fathers in the experimental group were more likely to pay support in both 1998 and 1999.²¹ There was also a significant increase in the amount paid in 1999.

A number of criteria could be used to evaluate the fairness of child support payments. One important issue is whether paying child support leads to the impoverishment of low-income nonresident fathers. We now turn to a comparison of poverty status before and after paying child support. To calculate poverty status, we compare the official poverty thresholds to our measure of family income.²² In 1998, the poverty rate for fathers before paying support was quite high, 43 percent. The situation improved substantially by 1999, but the rate was still quite high, 34 percent. Only a few fathers fell below the poverty threshold if child support was subtracted, as the poverty rate increased from 43 to 45 percent in 1998 and from 34 to 38 percent in 1999. The number of fathers who fell below a particular line owing to child support payments was fairly small, but this figure does not reflect the impact of child support payments made by fathers who were already poor and who became more impoverished as a result of paying support. Among those poor in 1998, 30 percent paid support, averaging \$1,860 among those who paid. While there were fewer fathers who were poor before paying child support in 1999, the percentage paying increased to 44 percent, and the average decreased to \$1,550.

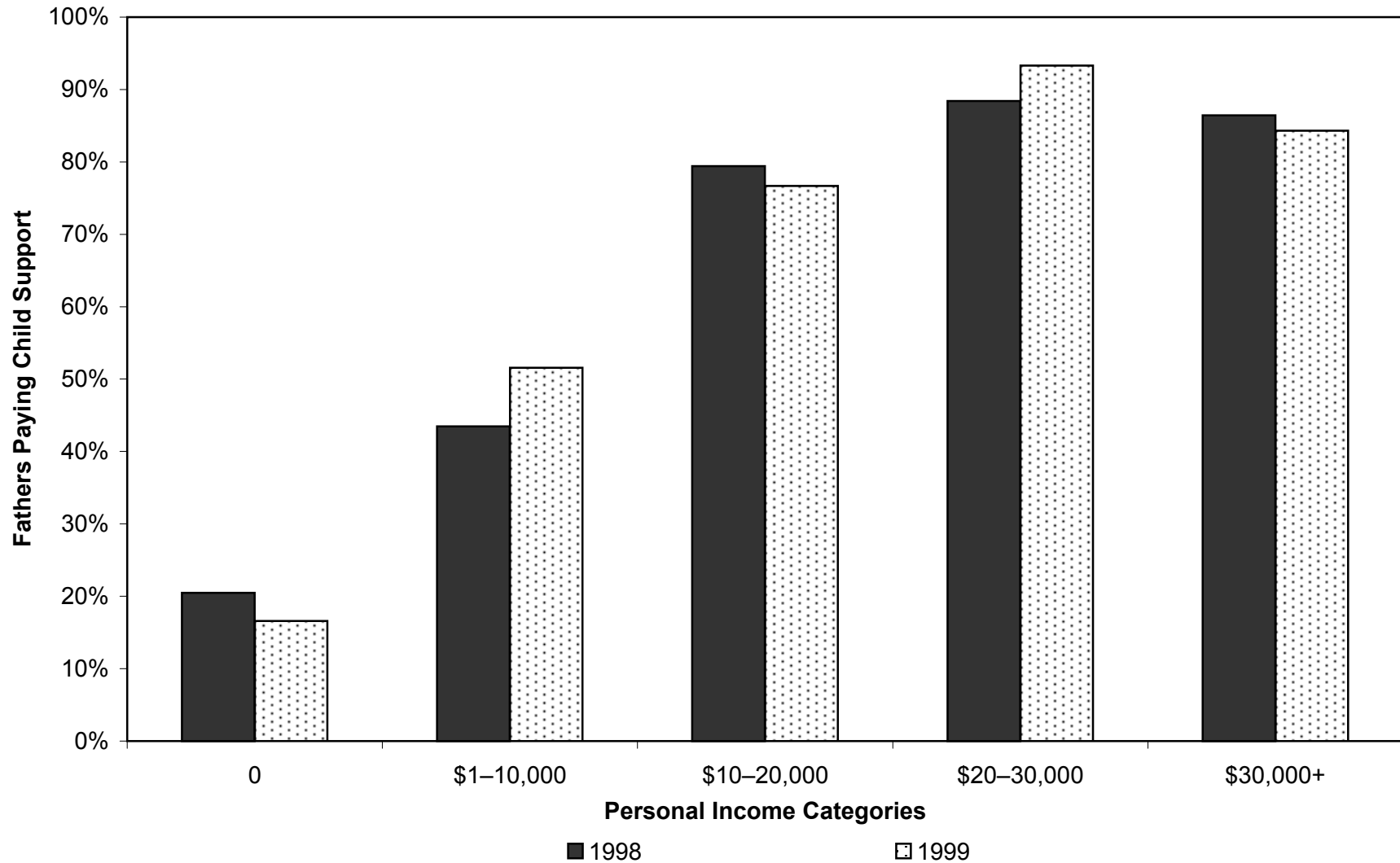
¹⁹Our sample includes only fathers of children in families participating in W-2. Nonresident fathers with higher income who pay support may be paying enough that their ex-partners would not be receiving W-2.

²⁰The few fathers who reported no personal income and also reported that they were paying child support (14 in 1998 and 11 in 1999) reported fairly high amounts of payment, perhaps because of reporting errors, perhaps because they are drawing down assets or using credit, or perhaps because they were relying on the incomes of others.

²¹For more details see Meyer and Cancian (2001), Section I.4.1. The experimental evaluation relied on administrative reports of the full administrative data sample, so the figures are not directly comparable.

²²The official poverty threshold varies with family size. For example, the poverty threshold for a family of one, two, or three in 1998 was \$8,050, \$10,850 and \$13,650 respectively. We calculate the number of people in the family, including the father, his spouse or partner (if he has one), and any children living in the household. We tested another measure that also counted any other adults in the father's household in the family size used to determine the poverty threshold. With this measure, poverty rates are slightly higher (49 percent in 1998 versus our base 43 percent; 38 percent in 1999 versus our base 34 percent). However, we believe this measure is less accurate, as it includes other adults in the calculation of family size but does not consider their incomes (not measured in our data) in the measure of family income.

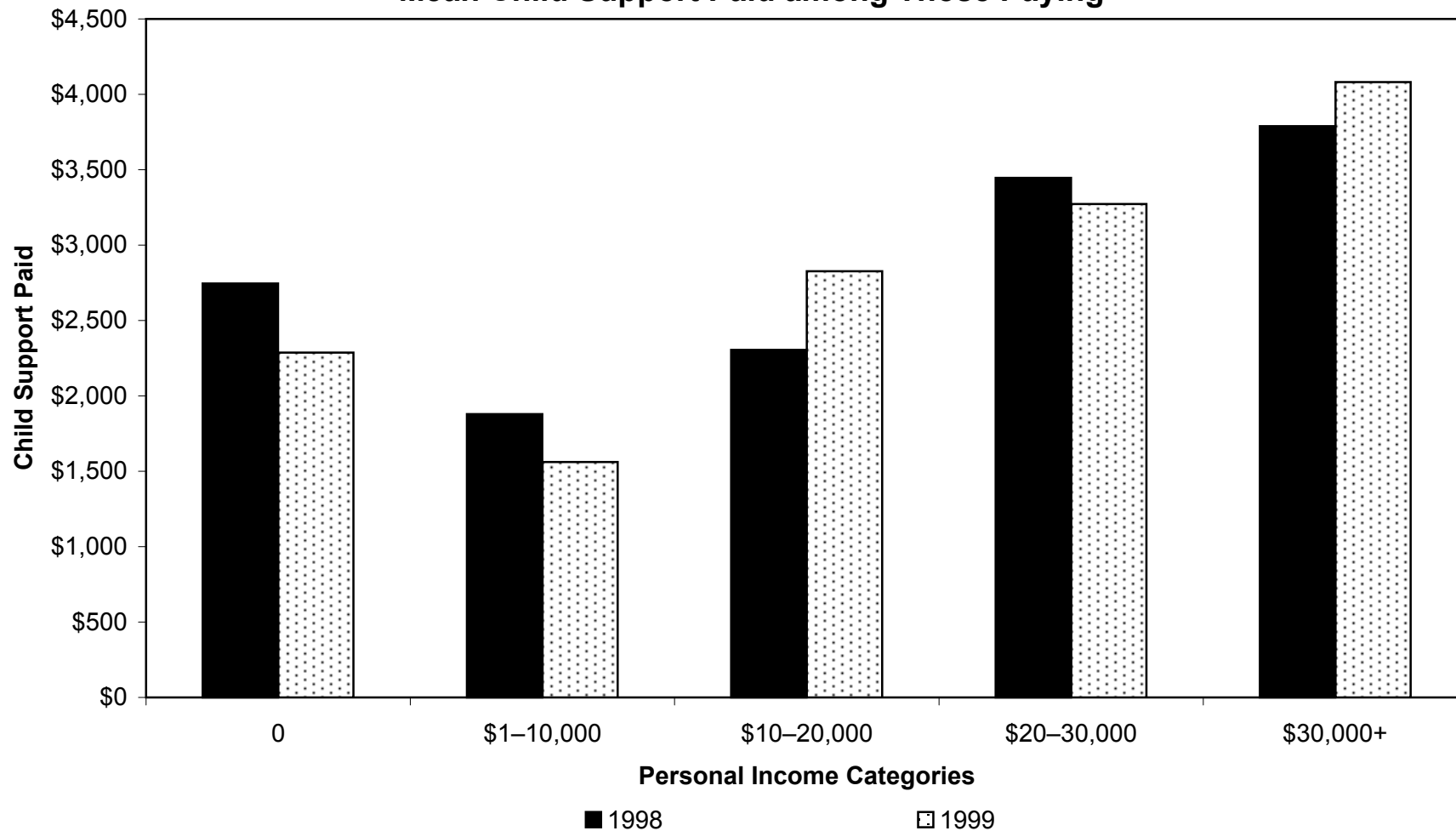
FIGURE 6
Percentage of Fathers Paying Child Support



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

The sample includes 572 cases for 1998. Of these, 49 did not provide income information. Among the remaining 523 cases, 35 did not provide child support information. Thus, 488 were used for 1998. The sample includes 603 cases for 1999. Of these, 59 cases did not provide income information. Among the remaining 544 cases, 31 cases did not provide child support information. Thus 513 cases were used for 1999.

FIGURE 7
Mean Child Support Paid among Those Paying



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

The sample includes 572 cases for 1998. Of these, 49 did not provide income information. Among the remaining 523 cases, 35 did not provide child support information. Thus, 488 were used for 1998. The sample includes 603 cases for 1999. Of these, 59 cases did not provide income information. Among the remaining 544 cases, 31 cases did not provide child support information. Thus 513 cases were used for 1999.

We have seen that a substantial number of these fathers have low incomes and that some of these low-income fathers then pay support. What types of economic hardships do they face? Figure 8 shows the percentages of fathers reporting various types of hardships. In 1998, 11 percent of fathers said they often or sometimes had not had enough to eat, 16 percent reported having their gas or electricity turned off, and 17 percent had moved in with others because they could not pay the rent. Relatively few of the fathers had lived in a shelter or were living on the street—though this type of hardship may be particularly underrepresented in our data, given the difficulty of locating and interviewing homeless fathers. About one-third of the fathers had spent some time without a phone. Most measures of hardship fell somewhat from 1998 to 1999. Considering all these hardships together, we find that 47 percent of fathers reported at least one hardship in 1998, compared with 44 percent in 1999.

We also asked these fathers if they had received help from private charities, churches, or community groups, including cash or vouchers to pay for rent, utilities, or telephone bills (about 4 percent), clothing or vouchers for clothing (2–6 percent), and food supplies or hot meals (10–14 percent). Thus, even though the figures reported for hardship are fairly high, only 13–15 percent of fathers reported receiving any help from charities, churches, or community groups.

Should We Expect More in Child Support from Fathers of Children in Families Receiving W-2?

We asked fathers how many biological or adopted children they had who were not living with them, then estimated the amount of child support they would be ordered to pay if the Wisconsin standard were applied to their reported personal income. The Wisconsin standard requires 17 percent of gross income for one child, 25 percent for two, 29 percent for three, 31 percent for four, and 34 percent for five or more children. The estimated order reflects a simplification in that the court has the discretion not to apply the standard if the father has very low income. Moreover, if the father had children with more than one woman, the total child support required by the standard would be higher, and if any child lived with him for at least 30 percent of the time, the amount required would be lower.²³

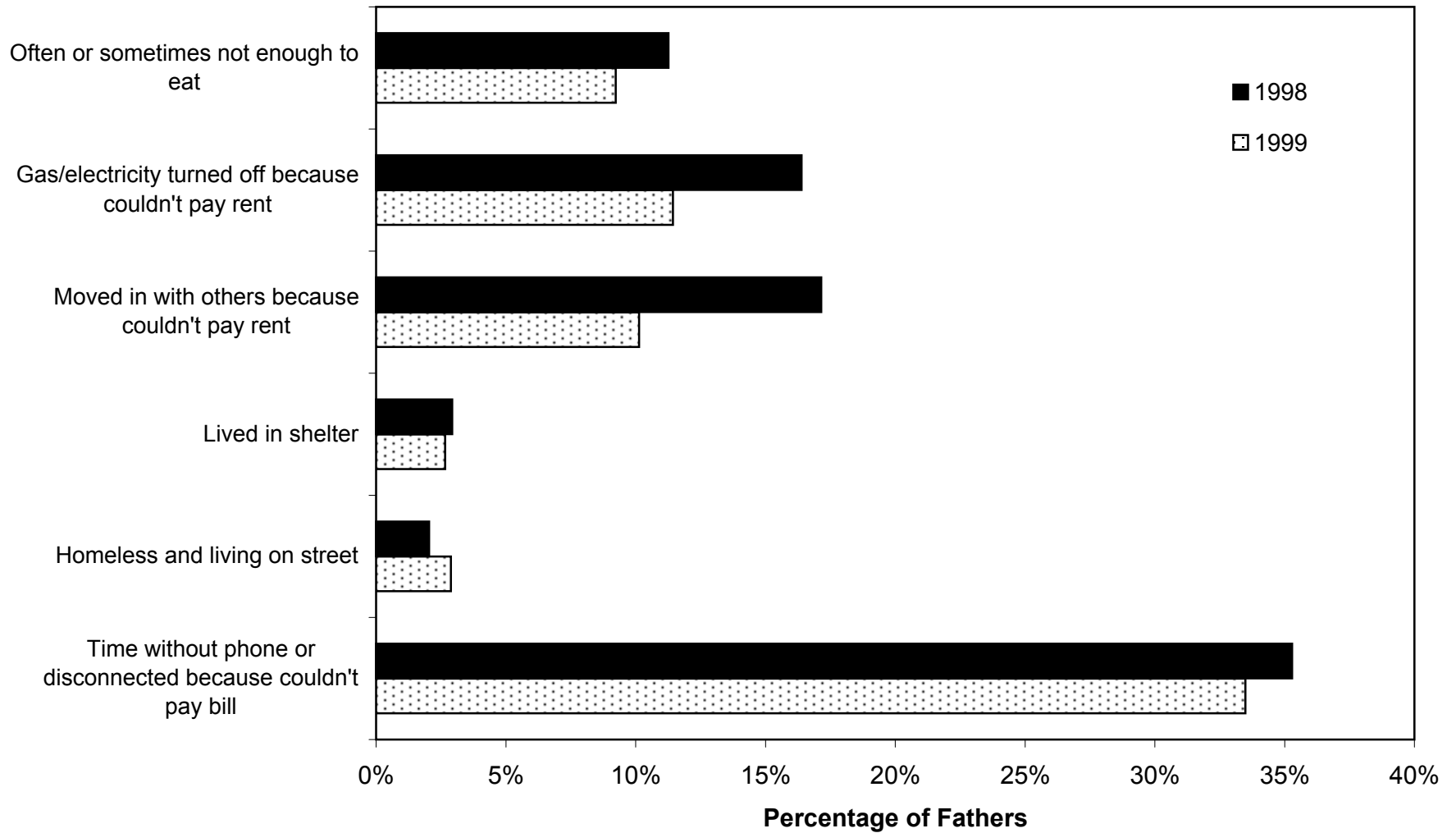
If this estimated order were actually paid by fathers of children in families receiving W-2, it would obviously affect their income and their poverty status. Evidence from the survey of fathers suggests that in 1998 the median personal income of nonresident fathers was \$8,000 before paying child support, and \$7,300 after paying support. If all fathers paid the potential child support amount, median income would decline to \$6,640, so the gap between actual support and potential support is \$660 at the median. Comparable figures for 1999 are median personal income of \$12,000 before paying support, \$10,997 after paying support, and \$9,750 if they paid potential support, for a gap of \$1,253. Poverty rates would also be affected by the payment of potential child support. As noted above, poverty rates for fathers in 1998 were 43 percent before paying and 45 percent after paying support. If fathers paid potential support, the poverty rate would rise further, to 48 percent. Comparable figures for 1999 are 34 percent, 38 percent, and 39 percent.

V. Implications

Recent welfare reforms aim to move poor families with children from welfare to self-sufficiency. Recognizing that many single mothers on welfare will face major obstacles in supporting their children on their own, the PRWORA legislation included measures aimed at increasing child support payments by

²³A father with two children with the same mother would owe 25 percent of his income. A father with two children with different mothers would owe 17 percent of his income for the first child, and then 17 percent of the remaining income to the second child, for a total of 31 percent ($.17 + .17 [1.00 - .17] = .3111$).

FIGURE 8
Economic Hardship of Fathers



Source: Fathers' responses in the Survey of Wisconsin Works Families.

The total sample includes 572 cases in 1998 and 603 cases in 1999. Almost all fathers answered all questions; the greatest nonresponse was 6 fathers who did not answer the question on food sufficiency in 1998.

nonresident fathers. In this paper we have not focused on the many ways fathers contribute to their children outside the child support system; a review of these can be found in Seltzer and Schaeffer (2001). We have used administrative and survey data to assess the situation and potential financial contributions of nonresident fathers of children whose mothers participated in Wisconsin's TANF program. Our results suggest that most of these fathers have limited economic resources, and, like the mothers of their children, often face substantial barriers to providing for themselves and their families. Median earnings are low, and over a third of these fathers have incomes below the poverty line.

Given the challenges they face, should low-income nonresident fathers be expected to contribute to the support of their children? With the limited potential for substantially increasing payments, is increased child support enforcement a reasonable strategy? In answering these questions it is important to recognize the radical change in context associated with PRWORA limits on cash assistance. In the absence of an entitlement to cash assistance for poor mothers and children, increasing support paid by nonresident fathers may be essential—even if these fathers are poor themselves. Although the poverty rates for fathers are quite high, and are made somewhat higher by the payment of child support, the poverty rates among mothers are substantially higher than those of fathers, even after child support is received. Among all mothers participating in W-2, the overall poverty rate after receiving child support was 76 percent in 1998 and 68 percent in 1999; for mothers of children who entered W-2 with legally established paternity—those most immediately eligible for support—poverty rates were 66 percent in 1998 and 63 percent in 1999. Forty-four percent of fathers reported at least one hardship in 1999—a substantial proportion, but lower than the 57 percent of mothers of children with legally established paternity who reported hardship in the same year.²⁴

The difficult economic situation of resident mothers may make child support a continued focus, but it is important to recognize its limitations. Overall, even were the Wisconsin standard applied in setting orders, and even were all orders paid in full, the median father would pay only about \$100/month in child support. Although this support could be an important contribution to self-sufficiency, it is not adequate to help many families relying on the earnings of a low-wage single mother to escape poverty. Continued public support is likely to be essential if these children and their parents are going to rise above the poverty level.

²⁴It is noteworthy that even with time-limited TANF benefits, resident mothers may have greater access to other income supports than many nonresident fathers. One policy of particular interest is the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). We calculated potential EITC payments for resident-mother and nonresident-father families. We found that if resident-mother families received the maximum estimated EITC, their poverty rate would fall from the pre-EITC rate of 76 percent to a post-EITC rate of 68 percent in 1998 and from a pre-EITC rate of 68 percent to 59 percent in 1999. The comparable figures for nonresident fathers (who may have higher family income due to the EITC if they or their new partners have resident children) suggest that the EITC has a more modest poverty reduction potential for these families—from 43 to 40 percent in 1998 and from 34 to 30 percent in 1999.

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Chapter 2

An Ethnographic Inquiry into the Life Experiences of African American Fathers with Children on W-2

David J. Pate, Jr.

I. Overview

Since passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA), policymakers, academics, and philanthropic foundations have been actively engaging in discussions on the role of divorced or unmarried low-income fathers in the lives of their children.¹ Five bills on the subject have been introduced in either the House of Representatives or the Senate since 1999.² Discussions have focused most particularly on the emotional and financial role of these fathers in their children's lives, and much attention has focused on the desirability of increased involvement of unmarried low-income fathers by marrying the mothers of their children. This concern has been based on the presumption that noncustodial fathers have not been involved in their children's lives. Yet research on low-income noncustodial fathers over the last five years has challenged this, showing that they are indeed involved with their children and that basing policy on the presumption that they are not is problematic.³

¹The author gratefully acknowledges the following people for their assistance in the production of this report: Cynthia White and Steven Cook for their assistance with administrative data analysis; Dawn Duren, Jan Blakeslee, and Elizabeth Evanson for editorial assistance; Virginia Knox for early comments on the project; Earl Johnson and Jane Collins for their research training and feedback on various drafts of the report; Jacquelyn Boggess for her legal and policy advice on child support and editorial advice on drafts of the report; Daniel Meyer and Maria Cancian for their advice, editorial guidance and support for this report; most importantly the thirty-six men who allowed me to document their lives and finally my family, Jacquelyn Boggess, Rachel and Benjamin Pate for their unconditional support.

²To date, legislation introduced includes Senate Bill 685, the Strengthening Working Families Act of 2001, sponsored by Sen. Evan Bayh (D-IN) and co-sponsored by 11 senators from both parties, with a companion bill, Responsible Fatherhood Act of 2001, H.R. 1300, in the House. The Child Support Distribution Act of 2001, H.R. 1471, sponsored by Representatives Nancy Johnson (R-CT) and Benjamin Cardin (D-MD), has also been introduced. Both bills focus on marriage promotion in the fatherhood provisions, and similar changes concerning the distribution of child support. In May 2000, Representative Johnson introduced the Child Support Distribution Act of 2000, which included some provisions regarding the distribution of child support as well as allowing some private collection agencies access to child support enforcement tools. The Fathers Count Act, H.R. 3073, was passed by the House in the fall of 1999. Senator Bayh also sponsored the Responsible Fatherhood Act of 1999, S.1364, with a counterpart House bill introduced by Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr., on June 15, 2000. These bills would also have affected the distribution of child support. None of the bills was acted on in the Senate, so have been reintroduced this session in various forms (May, 2001). President George W. Bush and Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson have stated that promoting involved, committed, responsible fatherhood is a national priority. To further expand these efforts, HHS fiscal year 2002 budget request includes an additional \$131 million to support fatherhood initiatives. For more information go to <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/fact20010607.htm>

³The most recent city report from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, "Baseline City Report," Milwaukee, Wisconsin (October 2001) was based on research conducted in the city of Milwaukee. One of the findings of this research was the proportion of fathers living with their children. The analysis suggests that 43 percent of the unmarried parents are cohabiting. A copy of the full report is available at [www.crcw.princeton.edu/crcw/papers/city reports/MILWAUKEE 100801.pdf](http://www.crcw.princeton.edu/crcw/papers/city%20reports/MILWAUKEE%20100801.pdf).

This report, based on two years of interviews with low-income noncustodial fathers, examines in detail their involvement in their children's lives and in the child support system.

The research presented in this report is part of an evaluation of the child support component of Wisconsin's welfare reform, conducted by the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP).⁴ The report presents findings of an ethnographic study of African American fathers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, whose children were receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.⁵ The aim is to add to the limited research concerning the involvement of these fathers with their children and their children's mothers and to inform policymakers about the extent of the fathers' knowledge of the current changes in welfare and child support policy. This report presents a picture of 36 African American fathers as they manage their day-to-day existence in the context of the new welfare policy.

The report first provides background and context for the present interest in low-income fathering, and then explains the research methodology. The main part of the paper concerns the emotional and financial role of fathering from the perspectives of these 36 men. In brief, the majority of them were involved with their children, but all were delinquent in their child support payments. The barriers these fathers face and the minimal amount of supports they receive in their daily lives are discussed. This report provides information on the fathers' understanding of the child support system, the "pass-through" waiver, and available services for fathers in the city of Milwaukee. The final section offers conclusions and policy implications.

Since the mothers were not interviewed, their side of the story is absent. To compensate in part for this absence, fathers were asked for their perspectives on their relationship with the mothers and the mothers' opinions about how the fathers have handled their role as parent. Also lacking are the voices of the children, although in many instances the interviews permitted observation of the fathers' interactions with their children.

II. Background and Context

In the 1960s, amid rapid growth in one-parent families and tripling of the welfare rolls, studies and policy initiatives dealing with single-parent families began to proliferate. Virtually all the research and program activities dealt with mothers and their children (Lerman and Ooms, 1993).

⁴Under AFDC, states were required to pass through to the family the first \$50 per month of child support collected, and to disregard this amount in calculating AFDC benefits. Under TANF, states could set their own policies for passing through and disregarding any child support paid on behalf of children on cash assistance, and were required only to withhold the federal share of child support collected. Under the new rules, most states chose to pass no money collected to the resident parent. In 1997, Wisconsin received a waiver from federal rules allowing it to pass through the entire amount of current child support collected to the custodial parent, and to disregard all child support in calculating TANF cash payments. One requirement of the waiver was to conduct an evaluation of this policy change, the Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE). A key component of the CSDE is a random-assignment experimental evaluation: although most parents in the state receive the full amount of current child support paid on their behalf (the experimental group), a randomly selected group of parents (the control group) receives only a portion of what is paid. See Volume I of the report on the Wisconsin CSDE at www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp/childsupp/home.htm for more explanation.

⁵Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) replaces the former welfare entitlement program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Although each state has substantial flexibility in designing its own program, specific work requirements and time limits are mandated.

Recent statistics available show that births to unmarried mothers account for about 33 percent of all births in the United States.⁶ The dramatic increase in out-of-wedlock childbearing led federal and state governments to take an increasingly active role in requiring never-married fathers to accept paternal responsibilities, in part to reduce costs to society. In one study, about four of five young unmarried mothers reported going on welfare within a few years of their first child's birth (U.S. Congress, Congressional Budget Office, 1990). The families most subject to poverty were those headed by single mothers. According to a recent report from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (Dalaker, 2001), children living in families with a female householder and no husband present had a poverty rate of 39.8 percent in 2000, about five times the rate for their counterparts in married-couple families.⁷

As a result of previous research in this area, scholars and policymakers have concluded that the association between nonmarital births, poverty, and welfare reciprocity led to policy changes. To reduce governmental costs and the incidence of poverty, policymakers in federal, state, and local government began to focus on child support collections among the population that received welfare benefits. Research suggested that an area of particular concern was the low rate of paternity establishment to children born out of wedlock.

A major weakness in the U.S. child support system was failure to establish paternity for children born to unmarried parents. State paternity establishment rates in the late 1980s ranged from a high of 67 percent in Michigan to a low of 14 percent in Louisiana and 20 percent in New York. At that time, over two-thirds of nonmarital children in the United States had no legally recognized father (Dowd, 2000). The legal system regards it as necessary to establish paternity so that the child has legal access to a father for emotional, physical, and—more important—financial support.

Moreover, for children on welfare, child support may have very little impact on economic resources, depending on the state in which the child resides. Most states retain child support payments to offset the state's financial outlay on cash welfare. Wisconsin, at the time of this research, provided a full pass-through of current support based on a waiver from federal distribution law.⁸

Since 1980, researchers have sought to identify the effects of increased paternal involvement on children. In most of these studies, researchers have compared the status of children in "traditional" families with that of children whose fathers share in or take primary responsibility for child care (Lamb, 1997). Other researchers have examined the correlates of varying paternal engagement (Mosely and

⁶The distribution of nonmarital childbearing by race is as follows: White 26.3%; Black 69.1%; American Indian or Alaska Native 59.3%; and Hispanic origin 41.6%. Source: Health, United States, 2000, Page 139 National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 49, No. 1 (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/hsr/tables/2000/00hus009.pdf>)

⁷The overall poverty rate for all those under the age of 18, regardless of family relationships, was 16.2 percent. The report demonstrated that despite a decrease in child poverty for the last ten years, children continued to have a higher poverty rate than other age groups. For a copy of the full report, *Poverty in the United States: 2000*, go to <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p60-214.pdf>.

⁸Thirty states have opted not to finance a pass-through of child support collected to welfare-reliant families, while eighteen states provide a \$50 pass-through to welfare-reliant families. One state provides a \$75 pass-through while Wisconsin provides a full pass-through of current child support collected. See the Urban Institute's hyperlink to obtain information <<http://anfdata.urban.org/drsurvey/login.cfm?CFID=19762&CFTOKEN=57393190>>

Note, however, that even in Wisconsin, families in the control group of the CSDE do not receive all support paid on their behalf. Moreover, even in the full pass-through group, amounts paid in excess of the current amount due could accrue to the state, rather than the family.

Thomson, 1995). However, the breadwinner role of fathers predominates in most segments of society today (Lamb, 1997).

In an effort to increase the financial contribution of noncustodial fathers, beginning in the mid-1970s new policies were established to collect child support from noncustodial fathers. Child support laws have gone through three major revisions: first in 1984, then in the Family Support Act of 1988, and most recently in the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.⁹ Each time the laws were reviewed, the penalties were harsher for those who were not paying child support.

PRWORA allowed state child support offices to institute more stringent practices to increase the number of men for whom paternity has been established and from whom child support is due. It also promoted voluntary paternity acknowledgment. These policy changes have been associated with an increased number of paternities established, possibly because of easier and more available voluntary acknowledgment policies, default judgments against noncustodial parents, and incentive payments to the states.

Through these efforts the amount of child support paid has increased, but large numbers of families still do not receive any child support. This has encouraged state and federal policymakers to support punitive measures directed at “deadbeat” dads, including basing orders on imputed income (assuming that a father can earn a certain level, regardless of his actual earnings) and revoking drivers’ licenses and other professional licenses for those delinquent in their payments.¹⁰

However, research on the population of fathers who do not pay child support suggests that nonpayers are a very diverse group and that some people lack the capability to meet the court order for child support.¹¹ In an attempt to address the employment barriers that some noncustodial fathers face, a few modest employment and training efforts have been undertaken in Wisconsin and elsewhere.¹²

⁹Federal child support legislation has been amended several times since 1975 to broaden its scope and to increase collections. Despite the enhancement of services to include non-welfare child support payments, the focus of the program remained upon welfare collections (Kelly, 1995). Moreover, under the provisions of the Child Support Performance and Incentive Act of 1998 (H.R. 3130), which were phased-in beginning October 1, 1999, a state’s annual incentive payment is based on its paternity establishment, support order, current and arrearage collections, and cost-effectiveness performance levels (Fishman, Dybal, and Tapogna, 2000).

¹⁰“Deadbeat” dads refers to noncustodial fathers who do not pay child support and can afford to pay the amount assigned by the court.

¹¹Mincy and Sorensen (1998) report in their research that a lack of income is a significant barrier to child support payments for a substantial minority of young noncustodial fathers. Heightened efforts to collect from nonpaying fathers, if appropriately targeted, may only push more noncustodial fathers into poverty. See also Sorensen and Zibman (2000).

¹²For more on the community-based programs available to noncustodial fathers go to <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/fi-prog.htm> for a report titled “Improving Opportunities for Low-Income Fathers.” For specific information on the Welfare to Work programs go to <http://fatherhood.hhs.gov/ncp-wtw-d00/index.htm> for a report titled “Serving Noncustodial Parents: A Descriptive Study of Welfare to Work Programs.” The report features three Wisconsin programs: Wisconsin Department of Corrections NOW Program, Private Industry Council, and the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization. All of these programs were based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Qualitative research into the complex lives of noncustodial fathers (Johnson et al., 1999, Edin et al., 2000, Sorensen and Zibman, 2001, and Waller and Plotnick, 2001) has documented that many of these fathers are involved with their children and make “informal” child support payments as well as paying into the formal child support system. Many live with the mothers of their children, provide financial support in excess of the monthly child support order, have physical and legal custody of their children, and face limited employment opportunities. At the same time, other analysts and practitioners no longer believe that fathers fill a unidimensional role in their families and in their children’s eyes; they find instead a number of significant roles and a variety of reasons for paternal involvement. Most researchers have implicitly assumed that variations in the definition of fatherhood are primarily the product of subcultural and cultural factors, rather than of individual characteristics. As discussed below, most men set goals that reflect their recollection of their childhood, choosing either to compensate for their fathers’ deficiencies or to emulate them. Parental involvement can be determined by their own personal motivation (Lamb, 1997), skills (Levine and Pitt, 1995) and self-confidence in the role of parent, and support, especially support within the family from the mother (Pleck, 1982).

Purpose and Significance of the Research

The research discussed here was supported by the Institute for Research for Poverty (IRP), which was awarded a grant by the state of Wisconsin to evaluate the child support component of the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program. The research plan of this Child Support Demonstration Evaluation (CSDE; see note 3) included an experimental evaluation, a survey of a sample of mothers and fathers, and an ethnographic component.

The ethnographic component gathered information to complement the research efforts of the overall project. It was designed to provide a deeper understanding of and perspective on the life experiences of noncustodial fathers in the context of social welfare generally, and specifically in light of welfare reform implemented through PRWORA, including changes in child support policies and distribution rules. An ethnographic study can examine and document the complexities of lives in a way that cannot be done by gathering information from survey and administrative records alone (Johnson et al., 1999).

The topics of the ethnographic analysis included noncustodial fathers’ understanding of the child support system and of welfare reform, their capacities for employment, and their conception of their role and responsibilities. This report uses the term “noncustodial” rather than “nonresident” in part because significant numbers of these fathers were *residing* in the same household with their children, at least at the time of the interview. Despite their residence in the household, few had been awarded legal rights, and thus the term “noncustodial” is generally appropriate.¹³

¹³Although Wisconsin statute and administrative code provide for a physical placement arrangement between parents, and therefore identifies parents not as “custodial” and “noncustodial” but as a parent with some designated percentage of shared time placement, the terms “custodial,” “noncustodial,” and “custody” are used, primarily because most of the men (all except six) in the sample have no specific court-ordered shared time arrangement. In this paper, when it is clear to the author that the “custody” referred to actually means physical placement, the term “physical placement” will be noted. The six who do have a court order as to placement are sole custodians, and do not share time with the child’s mother. Some of them may have “legal custody,” which allows them to be involved in parental decisions about the child’s life. However, none of the “noncustodians” understood the system (or their own cases) well enough to articulate whether or not they had legal custody. This raises the question (which this paper does not address) as to the ability of these men to understand the court system or law or to negotiate the child support system in an effective way to secure a placement order.

Two years of fieldwork collected data through face-to-face interviews with African American noncustodial fathers whose children were recipients of W-2 payments. As presented below, this information provides insight into the complexity of their day-to-day existence and their perspectives on the child support system.

Other Research on Noncustodial Fathers Using Qualitative Methods

In an article on low-income families and child support policy, Waller and Plotnick (2001) provide a summary of seven qualitative studies, four of which interviewed only fathers,¹⁴ and are therefore similar to this study. The sample sizes in these studies ranged from 16 to 47, and participants were primarily African American, followed by non-Latino whites. Two studies gathered information by in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations; the other two used only focus groups to collect their data. The majority of the studies lasted two years and were held in large cities across the country. Two of them included only unwed fathers with child support orders and children receiving AFDC. None of the samples were randomly selected.

Three recent studies have utilized qualitative methods as a part of their larger longitudinal studies examining welfare reform and child well-being, with a special focus on the involvement of fathers: a four-year study, Welfare Reform and Children: A Three-City Study, a five-year project, Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing, in 20 U.S. cities, and the Urban Change Project, in four of the nation's largest counties, sponsored by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC).¹⁵ In all of these studies the predominant race of the fathers is African American, followed by Latino. The primary methods of data collection were focus groups and intensive, semistructured, face-to-face interviews.

The picture that emerges from this research is one in which fathers have very low incomes, the majority being in poverty or just above the poverty line. In most of the studies fathers expressed dissatisfaction that assigned child support payments (that is, payments required to be assigned to the state by the mother who received cash assistance) did not actually go to the children.

III. Methodology and Sample

Study Design

The goal was to collect data on 40 noncustodial African American fathers in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The final sample consisted of 36 African American fathers. All were noncustodial fathers of children who received public assistance from the state of Wisconsin. The fathers in the sample were drawn from two tiers.

¹⁴The four studies are the Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project, designed by Public/Private Ventures (Achatz and McCullum, 1994); the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration, designed by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (Johnson et al., 1999); the Absent Parent Support Program—Kent County, Michigan (Sherwood, 1992); and the study conducted by Mercer Sullivan in New York City, specifically in Harlem, Brownsville, and Queens (Sullivan, 1993).

¹⁵For more information on these studies, go to: Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study <<http://www.jhu.edu/~welfare/>>; The Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study <<http://cwcw.princeton.edu>>; and The Urban Change Project <[http://www.mdrc.org/Welfare Reform/Urban Change.htm](http://www.mdrc.org/Welfare%20Reform/Urban%20Change.htm)>.

Tier One

The first tier consisted of African American noncustodial fathers in Milwaukee who were randomly selected from the KIDS state administrative data system.¹⁶ We began by identifying children who were receiving W-2 payments in Milwaukee County, using the state's management information system, Client Assistance for Re-employment and Economic Support (CARES), and who were eligible for the CSDE. We then located the children's case records in KIDS and identified their legal fathers. A specific list of criteria¹⁷ was used to identify the 1,009 noncustodial fathers that fit the profile for inclusion and formed the base sample of the research project. This population was then randomly ordered within strata: 252 were selected from (1) fathers of children in the experimental group (full pass-through) and control group (partial pass-through); (2) fathers whose children transitioned from AFDC to W-2 and those who entered W-2 directly, and (3) those whose children entered W-2 in different months. Eighteen of the 252 fathers did not meet the criteria for the study.¹⁸ The remaining 234 fathers were sent letters in eight waves requesting a face-to-face interview.¹⁹

All of the potential informants were initially contacted by a letter mailed to their place of residence as it appeared in KIDS. Follow-up included additional letter writing, telephone calling, home visits, dropping off a business card with a phone number, and face-to-face contact with other relatives in the family at the place of residence. Over time, another technique utilized to encourage participation in the research project was a letter with a color picture of the interviewer, an African American man, and a father engaged in a conversation. The picture was placed on the same project letterhead used by the

¹⁶Kids Information Data System (KIDS) is the state's automated child support enforcement system. KIDS contains case management data and information about all child support payments received and processed by the counties as a result of a court order.

¹⁷The criteria for selection as a noncustodial parent (NCP) in the qualitative sample were: only males and only NCPs who have legally been determined to be a father in a paternity case. Any NCP who was associated with the CSDE survey in any way (including those who were tracked for the survey even if they were later dropped) was deleted. Other exclusions include: those reported deceased in KIDS, those in which the CP or the child is reported deceased in KIDS, those reported in any "good cause" case in either KIDS or CARES, including good cause cases that are pending. To be included the NCP must be associated with at least one W-2 case that meets all other analysis requirements for the CSDE; this sample is therefore limited to cases that were receiving AFDC on August 31, 1997, or requested assistance from W-2 through July 8, 1998, when Milwaukee stopped assigning control group members (see Cancian et al., 2001, for more details). Only NCPs whose race is recorded in KIDS as African American or unknown are included. The final randomized sample of 252 from the population of 1,009 was stratified according to the quarter entered and AFDC transition status (transitioned directly from AFDC vs. did not transition directly), and experimental or control group. The eventual desired outcome was to have 20 experimental group members and 10 control group members from Tier One and 8 from the experimental group and 2 from the control group for Tier Two.

¹⁸The ineligible fathers were excluded because they were white, American Indian, and/or Latino. The only participants selected were African Americans.

¹⁹The waves of letters were sent out in groups of 15 to 40. Generally, each wave was sent out in approximate intervals of every 3 to 4 weeks.

CSDE quantitative researchers for their recruitment purposes.²⁰ The final number selected from Tier One was 25 noncustodial fathers.

Tier Two

We were particularly interested in obtaining data on fathers who had participated in job search and job training programs, so the second tier of fathers consisted of participants in the Children First²¹ program. Children First began in 1988 as a pilot program. The stated mission of the Children First program is to provide work experience and training to unemployed and underemployed noncustodial parents who were unable to meet their child support obligations. In some of the county-based programs, the mission includes a charge to enhance the parents' emotional and financial responsibility to their child(ren). In all of the Children First programs, participation is court-ordered. The participants in this tier were drawn from two W-2 agencies in Milwaukee, United Migrant Opportunity Service (UMOS) and Employment Solutions. The Children First sample is thus a purposive sample²² and is similar to the sample in the Parents' Fair Share program (see Johnson et al., 1999). The initial interview with these men occurred at the agency. The final sample for Tier Two informants consisted of 11 noncustodial fathers.

Fathers in both tiers shared common characteristics, in that their children were recipients of public assistance and were due child support. In addition, they were all African American and lived in Milwaukee. We assumed that this sample would include many noncustodial fathers who had experienced difficulty in maintaining employment and making payments and that they would be able to discuss the issues and barriers they faced.

Interview Procedures

Prior to interviews with either tier, we conducted two focus-group sessions with Children First participants in Milwaukee, which provided background and context for developing research questions for

²⁰The use of the picture of an African American man was to encourage more of the fathers to want an interview. However, several of the men who agreed to an interview stated that they were still unsure or apprehensive. The use of a color picture of the researcher and an African American father was received with mixed results. It did provide some reduction in the fear of a "sting" operation because I am African American, but the letterhead used for recruitment caused some discomfort in that many sample members complained that the use of letterhead with the University of Wisconsin logo raised suspicions about the reasons for and the intended use of the research.

²¹The court orders participation in the Children First program, but a noncustodial parent can also voluntarily enroll, by stipulation through the child support agency, and perhaps avoid having to experience the contempt proceedings. The Children First program is successfully completed when the participant makes full and timely child support payments for three consecutive months or completes 16 weeks of employment and training activities. In Milwaukee County, program services are provided by the W-2 agencies, the County Department of Child Support Enforcement, and the state. Some of the services are job placement, résumé preparation, parenting classes, and transportation assistance. Participants who fail to participate can be jailed for up to six months (for failure to pay support), and will still owe the full amount of their child support, along with interest.

²²Qualitative sampling is generally purposive or purposeful. A purposive sampling means adopting certain criteria to choose a specific group and setting to be studied. The criteria for sampling must be explicit and systematic. See LeCompte and Preissle (1993). The Parents' Fair Share demonstration conducted by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation was a multisite test of programs that required noncustodial parents (usually fathers) of children on welfare to participate in employment-related and other services when they were unemployed and unable to meet their child support obligations. See Bloom and Sherwood (1994) and Johnson et al. (1999).

this population of fathers, particularly with regard to the welfare reform changes in Wisconsin and even more specifically in Milwaukee.

Data for both tiers were collected in semistructured interviews lasting anywhere from 45 minutes to 3 hours. A copy of the interview protocol is included as Appendix A.²³ The interviews allowed the participants an opportunity to guide the conversation and to feel that they had ownership of the process over time (see Johnson et al., 1999). Fathers who participated in the initial interview were contacted (but not formally interviewed) 1–3 more times; the purpose of these additional contacts was to obtain updated information.

The interviews began in April 1999. Interviews occurred in the fathers' homes and in public places.²⁴ This phase of the research ended in June 2000, at which point interviews with 36 fathers had been completed. We attempted to conduct a second wave of interviews with 32 of these 36 fathers in June of 2000, using the protocol in Appendix B.²⁵ Interviews with 16 fathers had been completed by April 2001, when the data collection phase of this project was completed. Thus the information that follows is based on 52 formal face-to-face interviews (36 from the first wave, 16 from the second). At the completion of the first interview participants received \$25 in cash; at the end of the study they received \$50 in cash.²⁶ All of the interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.²⁷

Confidentiality

The assurance of confidentiality was a major priority. Previous researchers (Edin and Lein, 1997, Johnson et al., 1999, Waller and Plotnick, 2001) have discovered that the sensitivity of their information requires a high level of confidentiality. This research project was interested in learning about all of the ways that people engage in income-producing activities. We needed to guarantee confidentiality to these parents in order to gain their trust and convince them to share their life experiences. The project was awarded a Certificate of Confidentiality by the Department of Health and Human Services. All interviewees were required to construct a pseudonym.

²³The protocols for the semistructured interviews were developed under the guidance and direction of Earl S. Johnson, Ph.D., Research Associate for Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation (MDRC). He served as consultant and co-researcher for the CSDE ethnographic research. In his MDRC capacity, he was responsible for documenting the activities and challenges of low-income fathers participating in the Parents' Fair Share program from February 1994 to August 1996.

²⁴In the initial round of interviews, we did not have permission from the university's Human Subjects Committee to interview men in prison. Although we eventually were given this permission for wave two, no interviews with prisoners were completed.

²⁵Two of the fathers were murdered. Two of the fathers were provided assistance with housing and employment by the author and thus were not eligible for further research into their life circumstances.

²⁶The stipend was in the form of cash to prevent any additional cost to the informant. It should be noted that for some of the men the barriers to cooperate with interviewing were unrelated to financial costs; for these men the level of the stipend was irrelevant to their decision to participate.

²⁷A professional transcription firm approved by the university was hired by the Institute for Research on Poverty. Those doing the transcribing were required to sign a confidentiality form which was archived by an IRP staff member.

The Certificate of Confidentiality was needed because sensitive information is generated which, if disclosed, could expose the subjects to adverse legal, economic, psychological, and social consequences. This information includes, inter alia, information about illegal income and/or in-kind or informal payments to the mother which, if unreported, might be construed as the mother engaging in fraudulent activity. In providing informal support to the mother, the noncustodial parent continues to accumulate a large debt and subsequently places himself at the serious risk for being jailed for contempt of court for nonpayment, or for conviction of a felony for criminal nonsupport.²⁸ Some of these men may be engaged in illegal activities or in work for which they do not report earnings. Often they are trying to make money to provide for their child(ren) financially. This certificate helps the researchers protect the confidentiality of this information from subpoena and involuntary disclosures.

All informants had access to the researcher throughout the duration of the study via a toll-free number for his UW campus office and cell phone. The researcher was the only person who could access the phone messages through a password.

Challenges of Random Sampling for a Qualitative Research Project

A distinctive feature of this qualitative research project is that the majority of the sample participants were randomly selected from an administrative data set. The method of random sampling in this population posed unique challenges to the researcher. It was difficult to gain access to prospective subjects, to persuade individuals that there would be no negative repercussions from participation, and to obtain their consent to an interview. It is understandable that these men were distrustful of intentions. Many had experienced consistently negative interactions with government officials, police, and people in positions of authority.²⁹

²⁸The charges are based on Wisconsin state failure to support law (Wis Stat Ann 948.22(2) and (3)).

948.22(2) Any person who intentionally fails for 120 or more consecutive days to provide spousal, grandchild, or child support which the person knows or reasonably should know the person is legally obligated to provide is guilty of a Class E felony. A prosecutor may charge a person with multiple counts for a violation under this subsection if each count covers a period of at least 120 consecutive days and there is no overlap between periods.

984.22(3) Any person who intentionally fails for less than 120 consecutive days to provide spousal, grandchild, or child support which the person knows or reasonably should know the person is legally obligated to provide is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

²⁹The purpose of random sampling was to generate a sample representative of the population (or at least to enable comparisons between the population and those interviewed). During the first year of data collection, there were few refusals to participate in the research project. In fact, several of the informants participating referred friends with similar backgrounds to participate. They were subsequently refused because no "snowballing" recruitment of participants was accepted. Also see Duneier (1999); the Introduction and Appendix sections of that book provide excellent insights on the challenges faced by ethnographers in conducting their research.

Data Analysis

The data from the transcripts were analyzed using content³⁰ and narrative³¹ analysis techniques. Using content analysis, the author coded for pre-established themes and topics known to be of interest to the project, and supplemented that with open-ended coding to capture themes of importance to sample members. Narrative analysis provided more information about the meaning and value that sample members assigned to events and issues, specifically how they understood causality and how they saw events as relating to one another.³²

Characteristics of African American Fathers in Milwaukee Whose Children Received W-2

Appendix C compares information on the two groups of men we actually interviewed with all those in Tier One, randomly selected from the Wisconsin administrative records (KIDS). The first column shows the characteristics of the 252 men in the initial sampling frame (African American fathers in Milwaukee whose children received W-2); the second column shows characteristics of the men we interviewed from the random sample, and the third shows characteristics of men interviewed from the Children First sample.

A comparison of the three columns shows that the fathers actually interviewed have similar numbers and ages of children receiving W-2 (cash assistance) as those in the initial sampling frame.³³ Similarly, the vast majority of all three groups had children who had received AFDC within the two years prior to the beginning of W-2 (cash assistance). Although our sampling frame included fathers listed in KIDS as being either African American or having an unknown race, we intentionally interviewed only African American fathers. In all three samples, the majority of fathers were listed in KIDS as being African American. The majority of fathers in all columns were associated with mothers in the experimental group of CSDE cases.

The first column shows that the fathers had low levels of formal earnings as reported in the state Unemployment Insurance records (UI), averaging about \$9,000 in 1999 and \$8,400 in 2000. The men actually interviewed from this sample had similar earnings: \$9,600 in 1999 and \$8,000 in 2000. The

³⁰Content analysis is a technique for systematically analyzing the features of speech or documents. The researcher establishes categories of theoretical interest and systematically codes the transcript data for instances where the topic or category arises. While some content analysis simply counts instances of occurrence, this research performed an “interpretive content analysis” (see Reinharz, 1992:155) which examined what research subjects said about particular topics (such as paternal responsibility). It investigated the themes elaborated, claims made, attitudes expressed, and critiques voiced within the transcripts.

³¹A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world “out there.” Narrative analysis allows for systematic study of personal experience and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects (Reissman, 1993).

³²All of the coded data were managed through a software package called QSR NUD*IST4, which stands for Qualitative Solutions and Research (QSR), Non-Numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing. This is a computer package designed to aid users in handling non-numerical and unstructured data in qualitative analysis, by supporting processes of coding data in an index system, searching text or searching patterns of coding and theorizing about the data (QSR NUD*IST User Guide, June 1997).

³³The table shows information only on children receiving W-2. These fathers may have other children they are responsible for, they may be paying child support on behalf of these children, and they may have arrearages owed to these children.

earnings of those in the Children First sample were lower, averaging \$5,000 in 1999 and \$7,500 in 2000.³⁴

The 252 fathers paid an average of \$1,100 in child support in 1999 and \$1,300 in 2000. Those interviewed paid roughly similar amounts (\$1,400 in 1999 and \$1,200 in 2000), and those in the Children First sample paid less in 1999 (\$800) and more in 2000 (\$2,100).³⁵ Men in all three groups owed substantial (and similar) arrearages to the state when their children entered W-2, averaging \$6,700 for the larger group and \$6,200 for the other two. However, the difference in arrearage owed by June 30, 2001, was substantial. The fathers in column two owed on average \$2,100 to the mothers, whereas the fathers in column three owed on average \$4,700 to the mothers. The amount owed to the state was substantial for both groups of fathers; however, it was higher for the Children First sample.

In sum, the fathers interviewed from Tier One seem roughly comparable to the fathers in the group from which they were drawn (Milwaukee African American fathers with children whose families receive W-2 cash assistance services.). The Children First sample (Tier Two) is also generally comparable, but appears to have lower earnings, consistent with the eligibility requirements for Children First.

Appendix D displays information about the fathers interviewed, taken from the interviews themselves. The fathers ranged in age from 21 to 57. Ten had only one child; two had more than ten. Thirty-one of the 36 fathers had lived with their biological children, and 21 had lived with children that they did not father (primarily partners' children). The fathers' family relationships are complex: multiple partners were relatively common, and most fathers were currently living with others, about half with a female friend/partner. The majority of the men were neither homeowners nor listed on the lease of their current residence, and some had no stable address, but were in transit between the homes of family members and friends. Eight of the 16 ever-married fathers were married but not necessarily living with their wives.³⁶ The remainder of the columns show the fathers' education, employment, and interaction with the civil and criminal justice system, topics discussed below. All of the fathers had a current child support order at the time of the interview.

IV. Research Findings: Father Involvement

This section begins with a discussion of the issues surrounding fathers' involvement with children who are on welfare. Since passage of the Family Support Act of 1988, there has been an increased effort to examine and encourage the emotional and financial involvement of the noncustodial father in the life

³⁴A purpose of Children First is employment placement. Children First participants showed an increase in earnings between 1999 and 2000, although the sample is very small.

³⁵A purpose of Children First is to increase the amount of child support paid. Children First participants showed an increase in support payments between 1999 and 2000, although the sample is very small.

³⁶Two of the currently married men had not lived with their wives for 10+ years and had started new lives with other women. This seems to be a common phenomenon among families with minimal financial resources. For more discussion on this topic, see Cherlin (1992).

of his child(ren).³⁷ On a national level, two programs, Young Unwed Fathers and Parents' Fair Share (both mentioned in Section II), were the first major programs to examine efforts to increase the involvement of fathers in their children's lives and develop potential for increased child support payments.³⁸ Two efforts that are building on past findings are the Partners for Fragile Families and the Fathers at Work Initiative; both examine the necessary efforts to assist low-income fathers.³⁹

In Wisconsin, father involvement has been a topic of high priority. Executive Order 39, issued by the office of Governor Tommy Thompson in August 1998, charged all state departments to examine their programs and policies to see what could be done to make them more father-friendly and father-inclusive. The first state chapter of the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI) was established in Wisconsin under the guidance of Wade Horn, now an Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services, then director of NFI. In Milwaukee, a fatherhood community collaborative was created to encourage more father involvement.⁴⁰ These efforts provide background to the information presented below on the fathers who were interviewed.

Relationships with Their Children

Of the noncustodial fathers in this study, all but two reported either telephone or physical contact with at least one of their children within the three months prior to the interview. All of these fathers made efforts to be involved with their children. Many, indeed, took it for granted that they would be involved in the lives of their children. Moreover, family members and the community believed that fathers had a

³⁷Two programs conducted in the early 1980s provided some early insights into the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. The programs were the *Adolescent Male Responsibility Program*, sponsored by the Urban League, and the *Teen Fathers Collaborative*, sponsored by the Bank Street College. They provided information on the psychological and personal development of young fathers.

³⁸The Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project was managed by Public/Private Ventures. The project was located in six states (1991-1993). The program provided employment and training services, fatherhood development activities, case management, and educational opportunities. All program staff were requested to ask the participants about the establishment of paternity for their child and to assist with interactions with the child support enforcement system.

The Parents' Fair Share demonstration program, located in seven states (1994-1996) tested a new approach to child support enforcement for low-income noncustodial parents. The program mandated participation of all court-ordered participants in peer support discussion groups, employment and training services, and enhanced child support services. The ultimate goal was to increase child support payments and involvement of the father in the life of his child(ren). The demonstration was managed by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (Miller and Knox, 2001).

³⁹The Partners for Fragile Families project, based in ten states, is described as the first comprehensive initiative designed to help poor single fathers pull themselves out of poverty and build stronger links to their children and their children's mothers. The project was established in 1996 and operates in conjunction with the state and local child support enforcement office. The services offered at the sites include but are not limited to promoting wage growth, improved parenting skills, child support payment and peer support. Wisconsin participated in the National Responsible Fatherhood Demonstration Projects with the Team Parenting Project in Racine. The project ended September 30, 2001. Wisconsin is now a participant of the Partners for Fragile Families project with the Wisconsin Partners for Fragile Families project also in Racine.

⁴⁰The Milwaukee Fatherhood Collaborative website address is <http://www.milwaukeeefathers.org/>. The website opened on August 15, 2001, and is hosted by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The site contains information on the various social service agencies providing resources for fathers.

responsibility to be involved with their children, both financially and emotionally. Most of these men aspired to be a good fathers.⁴¹

Several of the men commented on their desire to be just like their own fathers. Slim, age 23, said of his father: “He was always around—. I got two brothers and two sisters. He always been there. He ain’t never been outside the home.” Slim’s life demonstrates his desire to be as involved with his children as his father was. His first child was living with Slim’s mother, who was assigned “legal guardianship.” His second child, a six-month-old, lived with him and his new girlfriend. Two months after the interview, Slim was murdered in a suspected drug-related activity.

Black, a forty-one-year-old father of twelve biological and five nonbiological children (children he considers his own), was a participant in the Children First program. He talked about his dead father, and the responsibility that he had to take care of his children to uphold the honor of his father. He had sole custody (both sole physical custody/placement and sole legal custody) rights for three of his children. He said during his interviews that his mother always encouraged all of her children to be involved with their biological father.

I don’t know how some people speak, when they say I want to treat my kids . . . like my daddy didn’t treat me. I can’t say that—. I am going to treat my kids the way— my daddy would have treated me— if he would have been alive—. That’s why I stepped in and took my shorties [slang for children]. To make my daddy feel good in his grave—. I did it out of my heart because it was born in me.⁴²

Other fathers discussed a wish to be rid of the pain of not having a father in their own home. Langston is a 31-year-old unemployed father of eight. He has sole custody of two of his children. Our interview occurred two nights before Thanksgiving, and he was facing eviction from his apartment the next day. He had no family or friends that he could turn to for temporary assistance in Milwaukee. He had sought shelter services in anticipation of his eviction but, as he explains, the shelters were not prepared to receive him and his preteen, asthmatic son. Langston expresses his desire to be a different kind of father from his own:

Like, we got the same dad, my [half] brother and I—. My dad stayed with him [the brother] and his mom. Never been around me, and my mom. And that’s how come I go around with my kids—. I want my kids to know they got a daddy—. I want to raise my kids the way my daddy didn’t raise me—. I want my kids to know you can talk to me about sex, or your penis getting hard, or you coming on your period—. Talk to me about things like that, because I was never able to talk to my dad—. My dad never said, go upstairs—, go upstairs as your punishment. Or don’t play ball—. Things like that. The streets had to grow me up, but it’s not a negative thing—. Experience is the best teacher. And I like to learn. And life is full of experiences . . . You can’t dig where I’m coming from, if you don’t know where I was—. So now, I can talk to somebody who missing a father. I can talk to somebody, who say, man, it’s hard out here, but trying to take care of his kids—. I can talk to a lady now, when she say my baby daddy skipped out of town—. I can communicate and relate to her. I can say, I understand how you feel. I know how it

⁴¹Hamer (2001) provides rich descriptions from the fathers on the issues related to ongoing involvement with their children.

⁴²In the transcripts that follow, dashes indicate pauses; underlining indicates emphasis added by the author.

feel to do my daughter hair without no grease—. Cause I do my daughter hair . . . I know how it feel to wash dishes, when you ain't got no washing powder or dishwasher liquid, so we got to boil soap in the water just to make some suds up.

Like Langston, other fathers want to be a better father than their own fathers were. For RJ, being a better father seems to be a part of his definition of manhood:

You know, I don't even know who my dad is. And I wish that I wouldn't be like my dad. And that is the main reason why I am a man now and I take care of my kids. My mother raised me. My mother raised a good man. And my mother [will] tell you, I have a good son. I never thought he would amount out to what he is, but he is a good son. I ain't like my brothers. My brothers, they sit in jail.

Another father, Mansour, expressed his anger that his father was not involved in his life and did not express any affection as a part of their relationship; he has made a commitment to be more involved in his children's life, and had sole custody of five of his children. Mansour explains his relationship with his father:

[My] father was a very shallow man—. Very insecure . . . when we lived with him, he never spent any time with me—. Only time, he ever spent time with me, was to take me to the barber shop. My mother would make him . . . When I was in the boy scouts, my mother went—. My dad was at home, wouldn't come—. Football games, practice, my mother would take me, he wouldn't—. Broke my leg, through playing football—. That's the only time I seen him come—. Other than that, and then the whole time, I'm in pain—, I'm 11, my leg's broke, major fracture, right? And I'm like, "Ohhhh." He's like, "Shut up. It doesn't hurt that bad." In my mind, I'm like—, "How do you know?" Totally insensitive—. I don't ever remember him saying to me, "I love you." . . . And I asked him one day and I said, "Why weren't you a father to me?" And his, this response to me—. He said, "Well, I didn't have a father. I didn't think you needed one. You can raise yourself—." And that was it. I knew you [his father] were insensitive—. You don't care. I knew you were insensitive . . . It's giving what you were never given—. I mean we do this all day, all day. All day, every day. [demonstrates to me – him kissing his children] . . . "Love you dad! Love you guys!" like the Waltons. Because they're my babies—. My mother was kissy-huggy, always saying "I love you."

These fathers present common ideals of wanting to be involved with their children and supportive of the primary household of their child. A common theme among all of the men was their equating the definition of fatherhood with a quality of manhood. This was particularly true of fathers under the age of 25.

As stated earlier, at the time of the interview nearly all of the men had had some contact with at least one of their children within the last three months. Some of the younger men were actively involved in the lives of their children; for many this was their first child. Fathers under the age of 25 accounted for 14 percent of the sample. Jimmy, a former high school football player, was very involved in the daily care of his 3-year-old daughter. He explains the circumstances leading to the current caretaking arrangement:

Yeah, the child care thing works because I work third shift, and she works, you know what I'm saying, during the day— Okay. And I get my daughter every day at two o'clock from day care. . . . So, that's just how our schedules fit. . . . I love it, you know, my sister

stays next door with my little nephew— and he’s three years old, about to turn four. My daughter, just turned three so, and they both be over here doing their thing—, . . . I don’t have a problem watching my daughter every day. That’s not a problem at all. Cause if it was a problem, I would’ve never had my daughter first of all . . . basically like she is staying with me . . . , I’d say eighty percent of the day—, . . . cause she don’t go home until nine o’clock—. When she go home, she’s in bed, then the next morning she go to day care at nine o’clock until two and she’s right back up here—. . . I only have my daughter like four days a week now . . . It all depends on how the week falls . . . but then it might start back up, you know it’s going to be five, six days a week, like that again, but for right now, you know, it’s cool.

It does appear from the interviews that a father involved with multiple women may experience difficulty negotiating and managing those relationships, except in a few cases. John Smith described his relationship with the mother of his twin boys as “cool”; with the other mothers, he said, he is seldom involved in any type of conflict or “drama.” John discusses his relationship with the mothers of his children and his views on discipline and parenting:

They [mothers of his children] love the relationship that I have with my children. All my children love me.—And, sometimes, they [the mothers], are in a sense, jealous. Because there are a lot of things that they [his children] will do for me, you know, I say order, or not say order, but anything I say do, or don’t do, this and that, it’s done.— So where they [the mothers] got to repeat and constantly yell, and they don’t understand why.— But, like I said, I started from the time, they was young with discipline and teaching and showing right from wrong. If I did have to spank their butt, I just didn’t whup them and leave it go. I’d sit them down and tell them why. And the [mothers] used to say, well, you going to make them afraid or they ain’t going to like you—, but what it did was made their love and respect for me stronger.— You know, like I said, I got a different relationship with them and I always bonded, stayed close. They [the mothers] will say to me, like sometimes, I need a vacation—. I need some time off. No, they don’t need no baby sitter—. We made them, we raise them. Except, if you need time for yourself, then you shouldn’t have had them.

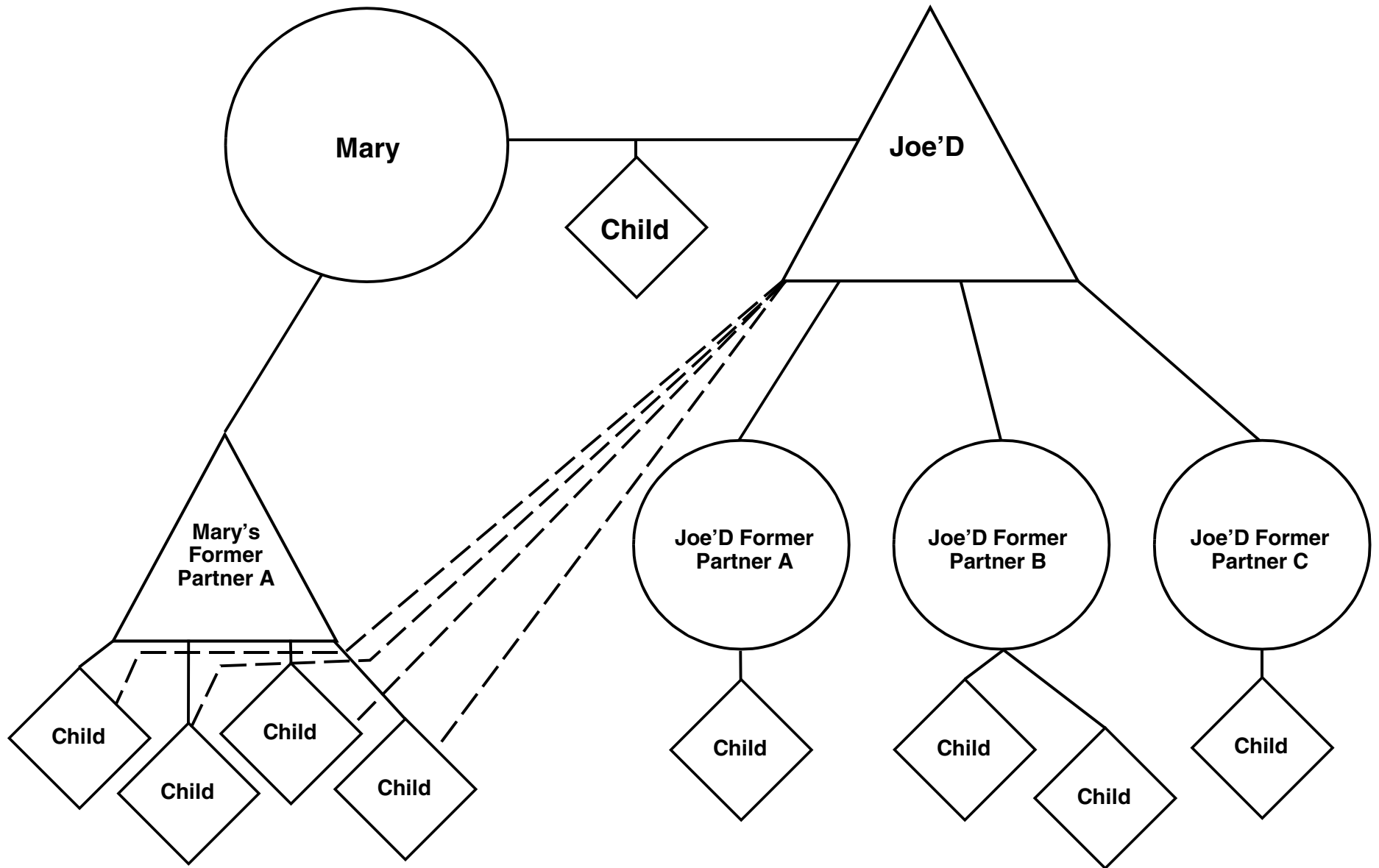
Sometimes the relationship between a new wife or girlfriend and the former girlfriend can be very difficult, and neither is interested in facilitating a relationship between the children and their father. The scenario described below and illustrated in Figure 1 was not uncommon.

Joe’D is a 30-year-old father of five biological children and four nonbiological children. He fathered his first child at the age of 20. The children ranged in age from 5 to 14 years. He was employed as a technician at a blood bank, a job of six years that compensates him at \$10 an hour. He hustles on the side by repairing cars in his garage. He has been married to Mary for five years. They have one child as a result of their marital union. She works as a bus driver for a local Milwaukee company. Mary has custody of four children from a previous relationship. The father of these children is not very involved with them.

In addition to Joe’D’s biological child who lives with them, Joe’D has four other biological children with three different women. Of course it is possible that these women have other children, with other partners, as well. The figure demonstrates the complicated relationships involved in Joe’D’s life.

He has four child support orders. He has been making informal and formal child supports payments for a decade and has made formal payments consistently for the past six years. The diagram

FIGURE 1
Joe'D, Mary, and Their Children



Notes:

- Indicates the nonbiological relationship of Joe'D with the children in the household.
- Indicates the biological relationship of the parents with their children.

shows the relationship of the father (Joe'D) with the mothers of his children. The three mothers of his other four children are not on speaking terms with him. The mother with two of their children has moved to the state of Georgia. The remaining two mothers reside in the city but have minimal to no contact with him. One source of tension between Joe'D and his wife was that she demanded that he have minimal contact with the other children and previous girlfriends. Also on occasion she complained about the amount of money leaving the house for child support, to go to other children's houses. Joe'D talks about the pain that he feels because he cannot be the father that he wants to be to his children because of the tension between him, his wife, and ex-girlfriends. He describes a situation in which he was able to have an unscheduled talk with his daughter at her school:

I think that my kids know, that I might not have my share— and my moments with them, you know, but they are going to have sense enough to think—. You know. And, the fact that they [the mothers] think that just cause, I don't see them, [it] is hurting me—, no, it's not going to hurt me. Due to the simple fact, that, I will run into them on the streets—, cause that has happened. And it has been times, when they ask me certain things . . . outside of momma . . . you know, cause— I got this one relationship, where I have the woman that got the two kids . . . My daughter came, and one day I pulled up (at her school), she saw me, and she said, what you doing up here? And I was talking to her, and I said, I was dropping my stepson off. And when she sat there— and saw who it was, she said, "that's your son? I can't stand him." You know, it's like that— But they ended up being cool about that. You know—. So, and well, as my daughter, they went to the same school, so, when I was sitting up there talking to her, she started one day to open up, and told me you know, "momma told me that you don't care none about me." You know, and the way she told me that, I was like— that ain't never true. You know. I care about all of my kids— I'm just not there to spend time, or I might not see you walk across the stage, or I may not be able to hold you when you sick— But deep down inside, daddy loves you. You know. I wish the circumstances was, where that I had open relationship, with the understanding that, I could go see them.

The efforts exerted by these 36 fathers to be involved in at least one child's life can be complicated. To further exacerbate the situation, 22 (61 percent) of them have children by multiple women.⁴³ More research is needed to assess the issues of managing multiple relationships with children in different households.

Relationships with the Mothers

The majority of the men in the sample had an ongoing relationship with the mothers of their children. The relationships varied from very congenial to unpleasant. Many of the fathers presented the mothers as wanting them to be involved in the lives of their children. In many cases fathers had longstanding relationships with the mothers. One of the men in the sample had been with his wife for 27 years, and 11 of the 36 (about 30 percent) cohabited with the mothers of at least one of their children during the two years that I followed them. These men also had a sense of compassion for the mothers of their children. Don talks about his relationship with the mothers of his children (interviewer questions in italics):

⁴³A recent article by Manning et al. (2001) discusses the complexity of noncustodial fathers' parenting circumstances with multiple partners.

Do you have a friendly relationship with the mothers of your children?"

Yeah, I do. I can't really say nothing bad about the mothers— Cause they [are] there. They ain't out running the streets, fucking around with Larry, Curly, and Moe. They there—. . . you know, shit, it's hard on them, too. You know, kids got field trips, "If you want this money, you got to go over here and work four hours a day." Well, my kids got a field trip. I understand you going to say they don't want the women sitting on they ass getting free money, but, shit, you ain't got luxury here—. Shit, if she got four kids, kids going to be kids. She all day cleaning up the house, washing clothes. . . . You [the state] want her to go here or there? . . . They ain't got no time to even keep they [own] house.

Another father talks about the reasons that his ex-girlfriend has given for his continued involvement with her and their child:

Because when she was growing up, her father wasn't around, so you know what I'm saying— when she got my daughter . . . she was kind of upset that we . . . split up, but you know it had to happen like that— As long as I was there for my daughter, when my daughter's in my life like that— . . . She won't take that away from me cause she never had it.

In general, the relationships as perceived by these fathers were workable for the benefit of their children. Also, given that a significant number of these fathers have either been married to or cohabited with the mother of their children, there was an ongoing relationship, based on some degree of caring and intimacy. However, over the course of the two years, even though I did witness loving and caring parents, I was also privy to times of conflict between the two parents.

Levels of Father Involvement

The extent of involvement of the fathers with their children can be categorized in four ways: custody, frequent visitation, regular visitation, and contact. This categorization is difficult because fathers with multiple children may have different levels of involvement with different children, often based on their relationship with the mother. I generally categorized fathers based on the child with whom he had the highest level of involvement or contact. The sample was distributed across these categories as shown in this tabulation:

Custody:	13 of 36 fathers = 36 percent
Frequent visitation:	10 of 36 = 27 percent
Regular visitation:	6 of 36 = 16 percent
Contact:	7 of 36 percent = 19 percent

Custody or Physical Placement

Thirteen of the 36 fathers were in the category of custody, defined as the father having one or more of his children living in his principal residence. Generally, this was the only residence for this child. This category can be divided into formal and informal custody. Formal custody is defined for the purpose of this study as a legal determination from the court that the child will reside in the home of a designated parent. Five of the 13 fathers categorized here as having custody had been awarded sole custody of their children. Four of these 5 fathers were awarded sole custody (physical placement) because the mother was

declared unfit based on drug-related problems.⁴⁴ In addition, one father, a Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) recipient, had been designated the legal guardian of his three grandchildren who lived with him, as his daughter was in prison for a drug-related offense.

One of the fathers, Mansour, explains his situation as follows:

The system was fittin [getting ready] to get my kids. Because she's on drugs and you know how people calling in on you—. The state take[s] over your kids—. Her mother called me in Chicago—, told me—, “Mansour, you got to come up here because your kids are about to go into the system”—. What, mamma? I left my job in Chicago, moved to Milwaukee, went to court—. Brother, let me tell you, honest to God truth, they could not have took my kids from me—. But when push came to shove, I could just about talk, because when I talk—, I could cry—. You can just look at my face—. I don't lie because of my kids. But I came . . . now they did grant them to me—. But they could [not] have took my kids, because I would have went to jail, cause they could not have took mine—. Because I didn't do anything wrong, it was their momma. And I took my three kids, plus she already had three kids when I met her, and I raised two of those out of the three. So I raised five by myself for at least five years. I was working and hustling at the same time. And I'm shamed to say this. But I took care of my kids. I could cook, I could clean, I could French braid. I could French roll. Whatever it took to do. You see, I had two girls and four boys. See what, I'm saying, I had to do all them things. So, I'm saying, I became the mommy and the daddy. And I . . . didn't . . . I . . . this stuff didn't bore me because my momma is the same way . . . That's why I stepped in and took my shorties. To make my daddy feel good in his grave. I did it out of my heart because it was born in me.

This father had five of his eleven children in his physical custody. He was granted sole custody of five of his youngest children.

All five of the men with sole custody (and the father who has guardianship of his grandchildren) had children in other relationships and maintained ongoing contact with all of their children. All had an active child support order and arrearages at the time of the interview.

Informal custody refers to the situation in which the principal residence of a child was with his father but the father had not been awarded custody by the court. Seven of the 13 fathers met the definition of informal custody. All of these men cohabited with the mother of one of their children.⁴⁵

As noted earlier, some of the men with informal custody also had other arrangements. One of the fathers under the age of 25 who had informal custody of one child said he transferred “legal

⁴⁴Edin and Lein (1997) discuss the number of welfare-reliant mothers who have resorted to prostitution and drug trafficking because the welfare check was not enough for the family to survive. Men in this study also told the same story about some of the mothers of their children. These are the two primary reasons for which fathers will gain custody of the children.

⁴⁵If the men in this sample had effective access to the family law system, they might be able to have the actual time spent caring for their children reflected in a placement order. I have defined some of these fathers as having “informal custody” and “frequent visitation.” If they had had such placement orders (reflecting the reality of their lives with their children), their child support obligation would be reduced according to the percentage amount prescribed in Department of Workforce Development 40.04(2)).

guardianship” of his other child to his biological mother. The grandparent received the child because the mother was experiencing drug-related problems.

All of the fathers living with their children without formal custody had an active child support order and were accruing arrearages. In a formal determination in a court of law, these fathers may have been awarded joint custody or sole custody.

Frequent Visitation

The next category of father involvement is “frequent visitation,” meaning that the child frequently visited the home of the father, and these visits included extended overnight visits of four or more days. This arrangement is very similar to legal joint custody (physical placement). Ten of the 36 fathers met this definition. This informal visitation arrangement was facilitated by discussions between the mother and the father. One father explained the ease that he had with coordinating visits with his daughter. He exhibited an interesting dynamic in that he was still legally married to the mother, but they had been separated for nine years. He had been living with another woman for two years. Jack explains the relationship between him and the mother:

No hostilities, man! You know, I can call her [the mother of his child], and say, where is my baby? Or I’ll call her and she’ll pick the phone up and say hello—and I’ll say “Dorothy,” and she’ll say, “No, she’s upstairs in her room; just a minute.” How you doing? What’s been going on? By the time my daughter was five years old, she’s fourteen years old [now], I’d say nine to ten years [ago, we separated], somewhere in that factor. I don’t think she was five years old before we separated.— I see my Dorothy whenever she calls me. She calls me relatively every day, not just when she wants something.— She’ll call me, and let me know how, she’s doing in school— And I see her, give or take, ten times out of a month if possible.

Four of the fathers in this category have arranged with the mothers to have their children through the entire summer. RJ discusses his arrangement with one of the three mothers of his children, and the way that they have worked out their own arrangement of informal “joint custody”:

I get them every summer. Me and their mother have joint custody. We just rotate them from down South to Milwaukee for the summer months.

Do you have them through the court system or do you have some papers?

I don’t have no papers. This is just between me and her, because I’m not going to go through the system trying to get joint custody and all this. You got to do what you got to do as far as being a dad. As far as I’m concerned, we cool, she got a good job, her husband got a good job. I like her husband. He likes me. And we got an understanding. So, that is the key thing.

Do you have any permanent relationship now where you are involved with somebody else’s kid?

Yeah, I’m involved with somebody else’s kid. I’ve been raising my fiancée’s son since. . . I been dating this young lady for four years. She about to graduate from college Sunday. She graduates from Marquette and I’m proud of her. Her baby’s daddy ain’t been doing

nothing he's supposed to do so I guess I'm his daddy. So, everybody asking, you got another son? Yeah, I got another son. I'm helping him, I'm doing whatever I can.

RJ's discussion of the "joint custody" agreement that they have worked out was well intended but was not legally recognized. This is a common way that low-income families adapt to the system, by doing what I term "legislation outside of the system." These families feel disenfranchised in the legal system but have a desire to follow the rules. The rules, however, are determined by their culture and environment. Other members of the sample were conducting their daily lives as if they had legal sanction to operate in a particular way.

Only one of the fathers had a legal designation that guaranteed visitation: John Smith discusses his process for obtaining partial custody of his twin boys. He has four other children.

I have partial custody on my twins.

How did you get that?

Through court—. When we went to establish child support.

You didn't ask the judge for any custody rights?

I have parental rights, being able to visit and stuff like that. But legalized custody rights, just the twins.

Okay. How did you guys get this determination?

I asked her for them.

This category also includes men with complex relationships. One of the fathers had a child living with the father's mother; he agreed to his mother having "legal guardianship" of his son. The mother of the child was involved in drug-related activity. Another one of the fathers was making his last child support payment within one month of his interview. He began making child support payments when his child was born 18 years ago, and has paid consistently.

Another interviewee, Dante, a participant in the Children First program, endorsed the placement of children when the mother became involved in drug-related activity. He describes his experience with the court system and his desire to obtain a court order for partial custody:

I always wanted to go for partial custody. They [the mothers] don't want to go for that. They don't want to give everything up. They don't want the child support to be knocked off— They don't want the taxes, the claiming [of] the taxes and everything. It's a lot of other things involved there— whereas they don't want to give it up. But then they always want to fall back and say, "I always got to take care of the bills." "Well give them to me. I would take them." Yes, I would, because I love my kids— I'd do anything for my kids. To me, it's not that hard of a deal. They always look at me and say, "The mom has a tough job . . ." "So why don't you give some of the responsibility to the dad, if you are not together— Let's see how he handles it." And I think that I am one of them that would be able to handle it— I can get them off to school, I can brush their teeth, I can cook, I can clean. I wash the clothes or whatever, I am fine with it. Just give me the

opportunity— But no, they won't agree with it. It's almost like, especially for a man to wrestle the kids away from the mom, it's got to be something just crazy going on with the mom. She's got to be a drug addict or something like that for them [the courts] to even consider it—But, you can't just go in there, and say I want partial custody. “Well sir we are not going to drag them away from their family that they know.”

How do you know they say that?

Because they have said it to me.

They have said it to you?

Yeah. They always try to twist, and manipulate, when they want it, you know what I mean? If it benefits them, then they will do it—. But by a guy coming in there, I don't know if they just don't know how to handle it, or what, I don't think too many men in there want partial custody of their children.

Some of the fathers in the study did not understand the laws pertaining to custody of their children; they felt that it was a prerogative of the custodial parent. Trucker discusses his perspective on the custody system.

Do you have any custody rights?

Nope. I mean, the way they had the questions in the courtroom on there— it's like, bam, bam, bam. Rush you in— They talk five hundred miles an hour. They don't sit down, they don't sit down with a real man— They don't sit down with a man, and they don't have to be a real man— They don't sit down with that person. That male. And explain to him what is going to happen— What you can do, what you can't do— Or, whatever. They just say bam, bam, bam, you just like everybody else. You got a child, oh well! They got their mind already, that you going to be a deadbeat dad— Bam, bam, bam. You don't need no custody, whatever— Well, like I say, I had the chance. I was young myself.— I didn't know nothing about this. My first. I didn't know the court system had me all screwed up. Screwed me up, down there. Plus, my father passing, too, that same week. Man! It was crazy.

So, then with your second child, what was the difference? You could have asked for joint custody of that one.

I think, because, they were by the same mother, and I think because, I guess, cause she got sole custody with the first child, I guess. I think it rolls over to the second one, I guess.

Several of the younger fathers expressed the same ignorance of the operations and process of custody and courtroom procedures. There clearly seems to be a need for more legal education and representation to assist them in their understanding of the legal process.

Regular Visitation

Six of the 36 fathers, all with active child support orders, were in the category of regular visitation, defined as three or more visits in a month (i.e., weekend visits) with at least one of their children through an informal arrangement with the mother. These children had another place to live. Dante, quoted earlier, a former police officer who had three children, explains his visitation arrangements with the mothers of his children:

Do you see your children often?

Yeah, yeah.

How often?

I'd say anywhere from two to three times per month. Usually it's weekends, you know—so I'll get them on weekends.

Do you have formal visitation rights, or how does it work?

Well, it's really just whatever we decide. It's not like, you know, the court says well you get them this month or this week or whatever. It's like, "Hey are you doing anything that weekend." "No." "Okay, well would you mind if I take them to the ball game or something or Chuck E. Cheese or whatever?" "Okay, that's fine." So, as long as there's advance notice, everything's okay.

So your relationship is sort of resolved on pretty good terms.

Pretty much. We have some stressful points sometimes because—like the holidays, it's kind of like— she wants them for the holidays. I want them for the holidays. So that's [the] one [time] that the stress comes in a little bit—But as far as the rest of it, I can't say it's a problem. I can't say it's a problem at all.

Most of the fathers were concerned with their children's lives. One of the men had kept his child for the first seven years of her life because the mother was experiencing personal problems. During that time, he had an active child support order. Many of the men equated their manhood with their involvement in their children's lives, and they saw it as their responsibility to be involved. A common theme heard from these fathers was that it was important to remain civil with the mother for the sake of the children.

Some said that the mothers used the children as pawns to win back the man's affection; when this did not work, they denied him access to the children. During the course of the interviews the issue was raised that even with a "legal" award of visitation, fathers often felt that they had no assurance of visitation, they were powerless to achieve guaranteed access to their children. "D" discusses his problems with seeing his child:

But, um, man every time she found out that I'd been with my "new" girl and the kids been around her, then, you know— that's sort of a problem, cause then, we really shouldn't be doing that [in his ex-girlfriend's opinion]. I don't care who she's with, as long as I can see my kids. In May, I went to court and the judge said "I see you have

visitation.” I said, “Yeah, but I don’t get to see him.” “Yeah,” he [the judge] said, “why not?” She’s said, “cause I don’t want him.” He [judge] say, “what you mean?” [The ex-girlfriend said] “Well he don’t know him.” He [the judge] said, “How you going to get him to know the baby if you won’t let him see him?”

He was able to see the child more frequently afterward, but it was because he went to court and requested the right to see his child. However, the visits had been getting more difficult again because she had a new boyfriend who did not like to have the old boyfriend around her and the child.

Contact

Seven of the 36 fathers had occasional contact—meaning infrequent visits and telephone contact—with their children. These fathers had children over 18 who no longer lived with them or they had a poor and conflicted relationship with the mother of their children. Dewey Brown, a 46-year-old divorced father of nine children by five mothers, was a former cocaine addict and hustler. He was enrolled in the Children First program because of unpaid, past due child support. He was recently hired in a manufacturing job and was very excited about his future. He lived with his mother because he could not afford an apartment; his child support payments were 39 percent of his payroll check. He explains his past and his problems with contact with his children and his use of cocaine to ease the pain of his life situation:

I lost a brother to cocaine, and my father had passed, and you know, you just look at every excuse to be there. I was still part of my kids’ life, because I was still having relationships with all their mothers. So then they started getting to the point . . . where they were cutting me off. You know, “We [the mothers] don’t want any part of you. You ain’t no good. You only want to come here and have sex and, you know, you ain’t doing nothing for your kid.” And then it got to the point where my kids started getting old enough— they were saying, “Daddy, mom said you can’t come see us no more cause you ain’t paying no child support. You ain’t helping. You ain’t buying me nothing.” I mean, it’s like I hustle up, light it up, and I smoke it all.

A few of the men had very limited contact with their children because of conflict with the custodial parent. They desired an ongoing relationship with their children but were often denied access for a variety of reasons that ranged from hostility (generally due to domestic violence, cheating, or involvement with a new partner) to the mother having moved to another town without the father’s knowledge. John explains his situation in terms of his former girlfriend and his child:

What about your ex-girlfriend who got married? How often do you see that child?

I haven’t seen them in about maybe eight years. That’s because they stayed out of state—They were originally from Indiana too. You know that’s where I’m from. But then she moved from there to Minnesota and then from Minnesota to Tennessee. Cause I just recently found that out from my mother.

Another father refused to have regular contact with his son because he felt “betrayed” in the relationship with the mother. Gary was a 45-year-old father of two, a daughter and a son. He had never been married. He worked in the same factory for 25 years. He expresses his anger about the mother of his son and his rejection of contact with his son:

I told her when I met her that my daughter was a teenager and I didn't want more kids. That's why there is a big age difference, like ten years between my daughter and my son. Cause I told her, she like okay. She had already two boys. So, you would think that she wouldn't want any more kids anyway— But she got pregnant anyway— Then after I left her, she took me down like, “Now you paying child support for your daughter, now you might as well pay child support for your son.” I resent that because I told her that— I did not want anymore children.

Nonmonetary Support

Many of the fathers provided support beyond child support payments. One describes his activities with his sons:

I take them when I go by, and visit my friends, whatever, they ride shotgun with me. We play football . . . basketball. Go to movies. Now that they are getting a little older, getting ready to read— I take them to the library, stuff like that, museums. Stuff they like to do. They like to see dinosaurs and things like that. They only four but, the youngest of the twins, he can dribble like . . . and you should see his free throw. I ain't seen him miss one yet— And my oldest twin, football [is his game]. He more big and rugged. And these type of things, they learn how to ride a two-wheeler at a year and a half. That took me until I was at least ten.

The younger fathers discussed their lack of monetary resources to provide for their child. Deion, 21 years old, father of one daughter, discusses his contribution to his child:

I don't pay [child support] all the time cause I don't have it all the time—you know what I'm saying? I'm keeping it real . . . I mean, you know what I'm saying? That don't mean I ain't doing it, I still am buying diapers and shit.

What do you do other than sending money? Do you do other things with your baby?

Yeah, I watch her, you know what I'm saying, when she [the mother] need me to watch her even— though I help pay for day care, you know what I'm saying? I buy diapers all that. Play with her, take her out.

What other things do you do besides pay child support?

Take her to the park, play with her. If she's sick I go with her mom to the doctor, you know what I'm saying? Try to be there so she knows me— Teach her stuff, read to her.

Fathers often spoke of their involvement in birthday parties, financial assistance with the household of the custodial parent, and other parenting activities. RJ's sentiments about involvement with his children was not uncommon:

Every birthday. Every Christmas. Every Easter. Every holiday. Any family reunion we go on.

How does that work, the family reunion thing?

How do it work? I load them all up and we go. They're all here [living in Milwaukee] except for those two. Well, family reunions, the other two that is down South, they be here for the family reunion. I load them up, we all get matching outfits, and we go.

Okay.

And everybody know that is the Johnson family in the house. [laughter]

Some of the fathers assisted the mothers with their household finances, as one father explains: Yeah I help if I have it—she got my kids. Food, clothing, utilities, telephone—“I need so and so.”—“For what?”—“Okay, give me the bill, I'll go take it down there. I'm not giving you any money.”— and then I've given money, the whole nine yards.

Some of the fathers were willing to help so that their children were not hurt. Jack talks about the parameters for helping his wife with the household expenses. They have been separated for nine years.

When she called me and told me things was kind of rough on her, and she couldn't do things with my daughter, then I would compromise with her. We'd have been cool. I'd say, what do you need? —That would concern my daughter. Because I'm not going to help you pay . . . you're living by yourself. There's just you and my daughter, and whomever. Not whomever, just you and my daughter. I'm not going to help you pay your bills, or whatever. — I won't come like that. In order for my daughter to have a roof over her head, if I had to compromise and help you – yea, I'll kick in \$50 or something. I'll loan you \$100 for the gas or electricity. I ain't got no problem with that. Because my daughter is in her household. You is still raising my daughter. – But if you got this Miller beer can sitting over there in the corner and I'm saying, No, I ain't giving you nothing then.

In many cases the paternal grandparents were as supportive as their own resources would allow in facilitating ongoing contact with their grandchildren. The mothers of the noncustodial fathers encouraged and assisted with providing birthday gifts, Christmas gifts, and sometimes housing for their sons' child(ren).

Many of these fathers provided what they perceived to be adequate emotional support for their children. They discussed at length the numerous things that they did to be involved in the emotional life of their children. Many served in the traditional role of disciplinarian, but did not rely on corporal punishment. Instead, they were actively involved in discussing problems with their children and usually reverted to corporal punishment as a last resort. They often referred to their children as their “blood” or “a piece of them,” whom they had to look after the best that they could.

V. Research Findings: Supports and Barriers

The previous sections have revealed multiple levels of parental involvement by the fathers in this study. Often their involvement was contingent on various supports and barriers. This section discusses some of the supports and barriers confronted by these fathers in their attempt to manage a day-to-day existence. “Support” is defined as an asset used for improving their life chances, and “barriers” are defined as impediments to improving their life chances.

Many of the men had significant hurdles to overcome to be involved in the lives of their children. Some had considerable support from family members in their attempts to negotiate their daily existence. In this sample of fathers, family was often their only significant source of support. In general, most of these fathers did not have the necessary supports for management of their own lives and maintaining themselves in addition to fulfilling a child support order.

Discussion of supports and barriers covers employment, family members, social networks, housing, and interaction with the civil and criminal justice systems. At times the supports and barriers become confused, because of their complex nature. An employment opportunity can turn into a perceived abuse of their time, but another employment opportunity may be perceived as a chance to advance professionally as well as to provide financial opportunities.

Some of the men had supportive girlfriends with whom they lived and shared household expenses. Several had lived with the mothers before having children and were sharing the responsibility of a household. At the time of the interview, 15 of the 36 men were living with a girlfriend, sometimes but not always the mother of their children. Three of these fathers did not contribute toward the rent, but shared a household with the mother of one of their children. One father, John, discusses the pattern that prevailed for most of these 15 fathers:

You living currently with your fiancée, do you pay any rent there and what is the rent there?

Ah, it's subsidized housing—it's like three-something a month—I pay half. Three-fifty, to be specific.

Employment and Education

Among the 36 fathers interviewed, 25 (69 percent) held jobs at the time of their first interview, April 1999 to May 2000. In Tier One (the random sample), 17 fathers were employed (68 percent). Eight of the fathers in the Children First sample were employed (72 percent). Most of the jobs, however, did not hold promise of future income growth or job advancement.⁴⁶

Overall Formal Employment of Total Sample	25/36 = 69%
Tier One Sample	17/25 = 68%
Tier Two Sample	8/11 = 72%

The average wage of those working at the time of the interview was \$7.00 an hour. These men held full- or part-time jobs as painters, temporary placements, maintenance workers, meatpackers, child care workers, and fast food workers. One was a radio disc jockey. Of those not employed three were SSDI recipients, one self-identified as learning disabled and unemployed, one was a self-employed construction worker with no current jobs, six were unemployed, and one was involved in drug trafficking.

⁴⁶One of the first qualitative research discussions on the issue of employment of black men was Liebow (1967). For recent quantitative and qualitative research, see Edin et al. (2001), Martinez and Miller (2000), Anderson (1999), and Wilson (1996).

Much research has examined the relationship between educational attainment and increased employment opportunities. In this sample of 36 fathers, 9 (25 percent) had attended college, 5 had attended two or more years of college, but none had a bachelor's degree. Fifteen (42 percent) had obtained either a high school diploma or a general equivalency degree (G.E.D.). The remaining 12 (33 percent) had dropped out of high school.⁴⁷

Less than High School	12/36 = 33%
High School	15/36 = 42%
Some College	9/36 = 25%

Thus, three-quarters of the sample had only a high school diploma or less and may experience very limited access to well-paying jobs.

In the area of employment, one of the barriers for those fathers living with the mothers of their children was child care assistance. Some fathers had family support in their work efforts. Loft, a 22-year-old SSDI recipient with one son, had a temporary placement job in a factory. He lived with his biological mother in a Milwaukee housing development, along with the mother of his child. He explained that while they both were working, “sometimes the baby’s grandmother (my momma) watches him [my baby], and her retiree buddies. Church members watch him, and sometimes grandma watch him too.”

Many of the men discussed the availability of employment opportunities in the suburbs as compared with the city. The obstacles they encountered in accessing these suburban jobs included the lack of reliable transportation, long bus rides, unsolicited police harassment, and discomfort in communities where they did not feel welcome. During the interviews they were asked to describe the current working situation in Milwaukee, and whether it was better in the suburbs or the city. One of the fathers provided his perspective on the current job market:

You have to be very skilled in Milwaukee to get a job—unless you want to be a dishwasher, a newspaper carrier, slinging burgers at McDonald’s or—work in a factory for \$6-\$7 an hour . . . I mean, there are jobs in Wisconsin, but . . . look, we have like the 3rd or 4th highest property tax in the nation so then that tells you right there that we have the 3rd or 4th highest cost of living. So how are people going to survive here, when the average rent in Milwaukee, in a nice neighborhood, is \$400–\$500 a month? How can you live on \$6 or \$7 an hour? You can’t. They have these job fairs. The most they’re offering is \$6, \$7, \$8 at the most . . . let’s take my family, a family of 6. I really need to be making no less than \$15 an hour. No less. And that would keep me just above board, you know? When the bills are paid, the food’s met. That wouldn’t give me any extra.

⁴⁷Two reports were released in the last year on high school dropout and completion rates of high school students in the nation. The reports were *High School Graduation Rates in the United States* (www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_baeo.htm) and *Dropout Rates in the United States: 1999* (www.ed.gov/pubs/edpubs.html). These reports find that the state of Wisconsin is ranked second best in the overall rate of high school graduation nationwide; however the state has the worst graduation rate for African American students in the nation, at 40 percent. The city of Milwaukee has the second-lowest graduation rate for African American students, at 34 percent. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported on the findings of the reports in their November 13, 2001 edition. A copy of the article is available at <http://www.jsonline.com/news/metro/nov01/grads14111301.asp>.

A large majority of the men in the study had worked or were working with temporary employment placement agencies, which provided jobs slightly above minimum wage. Many of the fathers, including Robert Johnson, expressed their excitement at a chance for a future, but then ended up feeling deceived:

Have you ever used any other services for job placement at all?

No. Just the temps.

Just the temps. How are the temps? I don't understand the temp service.— How do they work?

They pinch . . .

Right.

You get \$6 because they figure, they don't want us going through all the trouble finding and placing and then you take that [job] . . .and if you catch a bus or van to the job, they want to take money from you to get there and back.

They take it out of your check at the top?

Yeah, man! Then they promise you that, you know. This job might be long term. After ninety days you are supposed to be hired. But then the company can work you eighty-nine days, and say we don't need you. So then you into a job, get settled into it, think this is going to be it. Then boom. You back on the unemployment list waiting on another job.

Some fathers discussed the gap between what they receive from the temporary agency and what the temporary agency charges the company. Robert Johnson again:

Someone told me that you had to pay for the bus service if they have the job somewhere out.

Oh yeah. Actually, yeah. This is the way the temp works. They get you a job, and they pay you \$7, they are making \$14.

So who gets the other \$7?

They [temp agency] do. For placing you there.

Ronald Smith, the overweight SSDI recipient diagnosed with sleep apnea and the father of a 4-year-old daughter, explains his most recent experience with the “temp agencies” in Milwaukee, and the necessity to earn money “under the table”:

When [were] you working with temp agencies?

A year ago. Actually I was supposed to work this morning, but I was sick.

So, has it been in the last three years?

Part of the last three years I worked . . . But I worked sometimes.

So you've done meatpacking, security, laundromat, child care, and general labor, construction work . . . What were the last three jobs that you had?

Last three? Laundromat, Bolivar hospital, I worked at another laundromat before this. It was just about, last month, I worked for about a week. That other job was occasional work for this guy I know at the laundromat. That was under the table, though.

A few of the men had the appropriate social networks to provide them access to a stable job. Generally it was a family member or a very close friend. Gary was the only member of the sample with a job history of more than 10 years at the same place of employment. Gary has a son and daughter. He does not own a home or car. After 25 years of service, he was earning \$8.00 an hour. In the following narrative, he discusses his job and his father's job:

I been at the job for like twenty-five years.

You've been at the same job for twenty-five years? Congratulations. I haven't met a person that has had the same job for twenty-five years . . .

My father used to work there too. So he kind of carved it [out] for me.

Why did you stay?

One reason was because my father worked there for . . . about ten years, before he got a disability. And when he left, he kept encouraging me. [My father said that] got to keep on going, you got to live. You go so many years, you don't have to work no more. And all this kind of stuff fathers tell sons. He was always running around telling all his friends, yeah, my son works the same job I did. That made him feel good. Like his son works the same job, that he did work. I got so used to hearing that, till I kind of liked going all the time to work.

Although it was not a common practice in this sample, at least 20 percent of the fathers had stable jobs that were secured through a family member or friendly acquaintance.

Some of the men participated in the informal economy, "hustling." Hustling takes a variety of forms, including drug trafficking, auto repair, and yard work for direct cash payment. McClaine was the father of a 16-year-old daughter. He attended a historically black college on a football scholarship. For the first seven years of his daughter's life, he was the primary caretaker because the mother of their child was experiencing personal problems. He was also the main caretaker for his 80-year-old mother. He explains his "hustle" to maintain his household.

What kind of work do you do?

I do like labor work, like detailing cars . . . fencing . . . I paint inside houses. Lay floors. Lay carpeting.

How did you learn to do that?

Basically, this older guy learned me— this shit.

Like sometime— when you were a teenager, when you were young?

Yeah, well, I been doing it— off and on.

How is work right now?

Slow right now— cause, like, I did a couple fences last month. But, you know, somebody might need a fence but they really don't want to pay this money— how much this shit cost. Shit, costs a lot of money. Like, you set a fence, to go around one of these houses out here. It will cost them like \$2000. Okay. But the people don't want to pay that kind of money. So, you got . . . to like get the supplies, they got to pay for supplies. and then the work labor is like— it depend on how big the yard is, you know. But, basically, it's good work. It ain't easy, you know— but it's money in your pocket.

Do you have more work in the summer than in the [winter]?

Summer time. Yeah.

. . . So, what do you try to do in the winter?

In the winter time, you know, I try to get a part-time job cause my mother— like to go to Community Care. She [is] like eighty years old.

Okay.

So, I watch her. From . . . like— she go Monday, Thursday, and Friday [to the community center]. [it is inferred from our conversation that he can work on those days], but Tuesday and Wednesday, I like to be home, cooking her dinner, stuff like that, watching her.

McClaine is an example of the fathers in this study who were responsible for and served as the primary caretaker of their own mother. These men are generally over the age of 30, but some were family caretakers while still in high school, primarily helping the family through drug trafficking. McClaine was fortunate in that he received daily assistance from his partner and her child. They had been a couple for the last 15 years.

In the next examples, both fathers were under the age of 25 and had participated in drug trafficking for different reasons. Anthony Miller was a 23-year-old father of three children. He was a Children First participant because of a court order, and held a job obtained through his participation in that program. His elementary-school-age son in Mississippi lived with him every summer in an arrangement worked out with the mother of the child. He explains his hustling in the past:

I [sold] drugs because employment [was] really a problem, it was just, you know—all the turn-downs—and everyone, they want you to have high standards, and quality, and experience and everything like. – [So] I dropped out of high school.

You did?

Yeah, I dropped out of high school because I wasn't making enough money.

Were you selling drugs considered primarily . . . to [take care of] your babies. . . or were you doing it for yourself and your [family]? What was going on?

I was doing it for my family. I was . . . you know— they was cutting food stamps. And I knew people out there selling their food stamps. I was doing it for my child. Mostly, I want[ed] my child to have everything. I was kind of like doing it for myself, too, for those things that I had wanted—and that's about it. When I was out there doing it. I enjoyed it. I mean, except for when it came fight time—you know, having a guy pull a gun on you or scare you half to death. Kind of make you want [to] change anyway. [When] my friend got killed I was like— it's time to change. . . . [Then] a guy came along again, that's when I fell in the hole again. —He said, you want to come do this work for me? I said, yeah, I come do this work for you. – He was like you got any bills to take care of? . . . And I put child support on the back burner, because he was going to take care of everything. He said as long as I came to work, the child support [was taken care of]. And I knew the child support [bill] was the biggest one I had. . . . I kept putting it behind. I said, it's going to keep piling up and piling up on me. And I was like, no, I going to make this money . . . I kept half of it and I was making approximately \$6000 a night.

Anthony, then, was dealing in drug trafficking because his choices to obtain money for paying bills and assisting his family were limited both in his perception and in reality. His limited education and need to attend to his family responsibilities restricted his opportunities.

In the next example, Don, a father of five children who lived with one of the mothers, explains his rationale for drug trafficking at the time of the interview. He had no high school diploma. He talked about his dreams of being married and working as a truck driver, but those dreams were “destroyed” when he was caught by the police driving with only a permit and was hit by another car. Over the years, he was not able to attend to the traffic violation and subsequently accumulated substantial fines which he could not pay. Our interview was unique in that it was conducted on the roof of his car, so that he and I could both be seen, for our protection and safety. Don explains his current employment situation in the following passage:

Shit, I done put out about ten job applications. I ain't got nary a call.

What kind of job[s]?

Any kind of job. Shit, I do anything. Since I ain't on no W-2 or nothing— [it seems that] they trying to get the W-2 people— they trying to get them [jobs]—first. Then, they, like, say –“y'all out here selling drugs,” but, shit, [I] ain't go no other choice.

I understand. So, in terms, if you don't mind me going in that direction, of the drug part, you have had to sell drugs in order to survive?

[I'm] selling now. Shit! . . .

So, you selling now. Okay. . .

I don't believe in— you know what I'm saying —[selling] poison. I won't sell that [heroin]. Mostly, I'm selling marijuana. I ain't never heard it killing no one at work. . . .

I've talked to some [fathers] who will say to me . . . they work and have to do that, because it's the only way they can take care of their kids, and make the child support payments . . .

No shit. You know what I'm saying? It's hard for motherfuckers like us! Man, you know, shit—we . . . get a job and work eight hours a day, at \$6.50. I got five kids. It's hard for me— to keep decent shoes on my feet. And, you don't want to send your kids to school with any old kind of shoes. They ain't getting no education— [because] then they fighting all the damn time— because somebody say something about their shoes— or the way they look.

Some of the interviewees with legitimate employers, such as security companies, received cash instead of payroll checks. The rationale was to save the company money on payroll taxes and paperwork. In general, the options for employment appeared to be limited.

Housing

Among the many barriers these men faced, housing and interaction with the civil and criminal justice system appeared to be the largest, because they affected their ability to maintain stable and continuous employment. This section discusses housing issues. Interactions with the civil and criminal justice system are discussed in the next section.

The majority of the men in this sample experienced housing insecurity. Many did not make enough money to pay for an apartment alone, often because of low wages and child support obligations. The fathers talked about a variety of ways that they maintained housing for themselves or with their children. Joe'D, the father quoted earlier, discusses his current living arrangement. He and his wife maintained a household with the assistance of other family members.

So you have a home that you rent?

Well, currently, the way it is— it's under my wife's name. We try not to mention it. You know— the house, it's really her auntie's. Her auntie just let us take over on the payments. After years— [of] staying in here, we will be trying to own the house. But we pay the mortgage.

What do you pay a month?

Five-sixty. . . .We pay the mortgage.

Many of the fathers, both younger and older, lived with their mothers, who served as the safety net for many of them. Many were not listed on the lease at their residence, so their housing was not assured. Typically, they had been living with a female partner with whom they had a disagreement, and then had to leave. There were several opportunities in which I was able to observe the mothers' frustration with her adult son returning home.

P-Nut, a 23-year-old father of four biological children and one nonbiological child at the time of the interview, was in a unique situation among the men in the sample. P-Nut was trying to gain custody of his 4-year-old son because the child's mother was involved in illegal activities. His own mother was housing his son and his son's brother, and was also the legal foster parent for her grandchild. She had helped P-Nut get his current job and was also assisting with transportation back and forth to work. His entire check had been garnished to satisfy his current child support order. Despite his first experience with receiving a non-negotiable check, he continued to work at this job, because he was working and maintaining an apartment to gain approval from the state to get full custody of his son. He explains what happened over the next four weeks after the first non-negotiable check:

Then I got another non-negotiable check.— And then, I told the young lady — [what's going on?] . . . my momma— She was working first shift, I was working first shift, so like— she paid my rent one time.

This was your momma?

She paid my rent for me one time. I told her— I know – I was supposed to get a check next week— And the next two weeks, I just didn't get no check.— Know what I'm saying? – So I had to let the apartment go, because “I can't take care of ‘you’ and ‘your’ monthly bills too”. . . [words in quotes are referring to the office of child support enforcement].

Now, before you had this job, what . . . had you been working before this?

Um-hunh. [yes]

And had you been paying child support before that?

Okay, first [time], it occurred like [okay, I'll let it go this time]— my second check — I worked there [for] like four months. My second check.—Okay, they took [it]. I think it was sixty-some they took.— Somewhere like that.— For child support. They had it wrote down— for child support. I said, okay, they going to do it like that— that's cool. And the next week, they took a little bit more. Know what I'm saying? So, I said, all right— I want to check on who was taking it out. And then the next week, I guess they just started taking it for all three kids— or something like that. I don't know what the hell happened. I know it was breaking me.

Okay.

I didn't get a check. And the week after that I didn't get no check— and I was saying, I hope, I get one this week. I went to go pick up my last check . . . it was just a check— which said . . . it had wrote on the check non-negotiable— Non-negotiable, or something— People said they [child support] took it like that— I said, shit, I ain't going to work here no more.

This example highlights the efficiency of the employers in abiding by federal and state requirements to report new hires so that the state can identify those delinquent in child support payments.

Unfortunately for P-Nut, it appeared that the employers needed training on the proper maximum amount for wage garnishment in accordance with child support policy.⁴⁸

Interaction with the Civil and Criminal Justice System

Many of the men had experiences with the civil and criminal justice system which prevented them from adequate employment. Of all the issues that confronted these men, this one seemed to be the most compelling.⁴⁹

In the first year of this research, 66 percent of the fathers—24 of 36—had a criminal charge or a civil action against them.⁵⁰ By the end of the second year, the number with a charge or action increased by 25 percent, to 33 of the fathers, or 91 percent of the sample.⁵¹ The charges ranged from traffic violation to assault and battery. Twenty-five fathers had a charge of misdemeanor or felony on their records—11 felonies and 14 misdemeanors. The majority of the charges were for traffic violations. The charge most pertinent to this report is the criminal charge of failure to support a child. In all, 11 of the 36 fathers, about a third of the sample, had ever experienced a period of incarceration for nonpayment of child support, although only 3 had ever been charged with a felony for failing to pay.⁵² One had four counts of felonies against him for this offense. Over the two years that I interviewed the fathers, 8 reported being

⁴⁸“A garnishment to enforce any order of support shall not exceed 50 percent of an individual’s disposable earnings if the individual is supporting a spouse or dependent other than the spouse or child for whose support the order is to be used, or 60 percent where the individual is not supporting another spouse or child.” 15 U.S.C. § 1673(b)(2).” For an article on the Federal Consumer Credit Protection Act and garnishment for child support, go to <http://www.supportguidelines.com/articles/art200110.html>.

⁴⁹See Jeffries et al. (2001) for a discussion on the current programs assisting noncustodial fathers. For a copy of the report go to <http://www.vera.org/publication_pdf/fathers.PDF>.

⁵⁰See Johnson et al. (1999; pp. 34–35) for a discussion of the past criminal record of a participant as a barrier to employment. The Wisconsin Fair Employment Law, Wisconsin Statute 111.31-111.395, defines arrest record for employers. In Wisconsin, an employer is not allowed to ask about arrests, and other pending charges. An employer cannot legally make a rule that no persons with conviction records will be employed. Each job and record must be considered individually. (Information obtained from the Equal Rights Division of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development). See Mukamal (2000) for a discussion of the issues of discrimination against and employment of ex-offenders.

⁵¹Wisconsin Circuit Court Access provides access to the public records of the circuit court automation program (CCAP). The purpose of the Web site is to provide public access to those records of the circuit court of Wisconsin in CCAP which is open to public view under Wisconsin’s Open Records law, sections 19.31-19.39, Wisconsin Statutes. The site provided information on all of the fathers in the sample. Many of the fathers had shared information on civil actions and criminal charges against them with the researcher. This site provided verification of the shared information. Waukesha and Outagamie County not included. The website address is <<http://ccap.courts.state.wi.us/InternetCourtAccess/>>.

⁵²The charges are based on Wisconsin state failure to support law (Wis Stat Ann 948.22(2) and (3)):

1. 948.22(2) Any person who intentionally fails for 120 or more consecutive days to provide spousal, grandchild, or child support which the person knows or reasonably should know the person is legally obligated to provide is guilty of a Class E felony. A prosecutor may charge a person with multiple counts for a violation under this subsection if each count covers a period of at least 120 consecutive days and there is no overlap between periods.

2. 984.22(3) Any person who intentionally fails for less than 120 consecutive days to provide spousal, grandchild, or child support which the person knows or reasonably should know the person is legally obligated to provide is guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.

jailed on a charge of nonpayment of child support, with jail stays ranging from one day to 6 months. All of the fathers charged with criminal nonpayment of child support were in the Children First program. Indeed, 100 percent of the fathers in the Children First sample and 56 percent of the random sample had various criminal charges.

These numbers caused me to ponder the extent of incarceration for this offense in the city of Milwaukee. It was difficult to gather information about the number of men in the city of Milwaukee who were so charged over the two years of research. The numbers of those booked in the county jail are not available on the court access Web site. However, I was able to obtain the total number booked into the Milwaukee County jail for whom at least one charge was “Failure to support child” under statutes #948.22(2) and 948.22(3).

The Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Department reports that from April to December 1999, 2,093 people (about 233 per month) were booked into the Milwaukee County jail with “nonpayment of child support” listed as one of their offenses. In the year 2000, the number was 3,074 (about 256 per month), and from January to April 2001, the number was 1,059 (about 265 per month). These are all criminal offenses; about three-fourths of these charges are misdemeanors and one-fourth are felonies.⁵³ These fathers were generally not initially arrested for child support offenses;⁵⁴ the overwhelming point of initial police contact for these arrests were traffic stops, and the second most common reason was public peace disturbances.⁵⁵

One of the men arrested for nonpayment of child support, Ron, the SSDI recipient with severe weight problems and sleep apnea, discusses the reasons for the initial stop by the police officer and the subsequent charge of nonpayment. (Ron had been unemployed for nine months, except for a few time-limited security jobs.)

I got to go and tell them [the child support enforcement office] to stop sending me this stuff because after a while it can turn into a warrant.— Actually, I went to jail one day for that [child support].

You’ve been to jail for child support?

This was last year . . . I was working then.

⁵³This information was made available from the Milwaukee County Sheriff’s Department, which maintains the mainframe computer. This mainframe computer stores all data on the inmates and their arrest statistics. These data were obtained by writing a query to the mainframe and asking for specific information. This information was verified on January 18, 2002.

⁵⁴The Bureau of Child Support reports that in most instances in which a warrant is issued due to nonpayment of child support, the warrant is issued under a civil, not a criminal, action. Comprehensive figures on the number of criminal and civil warrants issued are not available for this report.

⁵⁵New research by Pamela Oliver, Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, discusses neighborhood “drug sweeps” in poor communities. Drug sweeps are defined as mass arrests of people in a particular area known for drug dealing, which generally results in charges for a wide variety of other offenses. Information on her research, Racial Disparity in Criminal Justice, is available at the following Web sites: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~oliver/RACIAL/Racialdisparitiesresearch.htm>, <http://www.emum.org/page16.html>, and <http://www.emum.org/page9.html>.

So, when you went to jail, when you were working, did you lose your job?

I was only gone for one day.

How did they [the police] get you?

I was walking down the street. They thought I was a drug dealer.

They just stopped you and . . .

I was walking down the street.

And they stopped you?

Stopped me. They did [it] a couple times.

And the time they stopped you, what did they do? . . . they ran a check?

They searched me— and stuff.

And then they said, oh, you owe child support.

They had a warrant. They didn't tell me what it was for.— They just served it, said [it] was for the sheriff's department. I got out like the next day, but still . . .

Yeah. And did you know you had a warrant?

No, I didn't.

You didn't know? How did you get out?

They let me out the next day. They said it was child support.

No bail?

They gave me a court date.

Did you go to court?

Yeah. I went to court.

And, what did they say?

They told me to start making payments.— I don't know why. —Anytime you start working, automatically, they start taking it out.

And they would take the money out of your check?

Actually, they wasn't. —I don't know why.— I mean, it wasn't like—I was getting paid under the table. I was getting paid a check —from working. I had been working there a while, too.

Where did you work?

I worked for a security company.

Ron's experience with law enforcement was not unusual. Over the two years that I conducted this research, I was stopped by police on two different occasions and background checks were conducted on me. Both times, I requested an explanation for why I was stopped. The first officer said that it was because of a reported burglary in the vicinity, the second because I was a suspected drug dealer.

VI. Research Findings: Knowledge of and Perspective on Child Support Policy

Many of these fathers lacked sufficient knowledge and education to understand the basics of the child support system. First, they did not understand that an order of paternity establishment led to a child support order. They did not understand the requirement of "assignment and cooperation" in welfare policy for parents receiving welfare benefits. They did not understand the procedure for modifying their child support order(s) without an attorney to help them; nor did they understand their right to, nor the process by which they might instigate legal actions and response on their own—without an attorney (in the legal vernacular, this is called *pro se* action). They did have better understanding of the child support enforcement tools. They were able to articulate the criminal charges, the liens and credit bureau reporting, and the suspension of a driver's license for nonpayment of child support. Fathers in the Children First program were better able than the rest of the sample to describe the workings of the child support system, perhaps because one of the required classes discusses the system. However, even these fathers did not consistently understand the details of the "assignment" of child support to the state.

Paternity Establishment

Many of the fathers knew that paternity had been established for their children, but did not fully understand the rationale and process for the legal establishment of paternity. The majority were proud to acknowledge the birth of their child(ren) and were present at the hospital when their children were born—indeed, all of the fathers had been present at the birth of one or more of their children. Other research (Wattenberg, 1993; McLanahan, Garfinkel, Reichman, et al., 2001) has confirmed the presence of fathers at the birth of their nonmarital children.

Fathers' experience with paternity establishment varied. Some had experienced "social" paternity establishment, (i.e., had acknowledged paternity without legal certification) at the birth of their child(ren) and legal paternity establishment with the arrival of a child support order. Anthony discusses being at the birth of his youngest child:

It was all right—. It was a new experience for me. Seeing the baby being brought into the world. – It was a new experience and I felt—, well, my last baby, the one [that] made me feel more like a father—. It made me feel close to all my kids—. I said, "I could bring kids to this world". . .

Did it make you nervous?

She was having it [the baby]—, she was squeezing my hand. Yeah.

You were right in there?

I was right in there—. I saw the whole thing.

Like Anthony, other fathers in the study described their excitement at experiencing the birth of their child. The majority of the fathers and mothers expected the father to be present at the child's birth. However, the birth of a baby could also be associated with conflict, which sometimes could lead to the breakup of the relationship. Trucker, a 28-year-old father of two children, requested a blood test to determine his paternity of the second child. The child's mother claimed that he was not the father, and he wanted to confirm that he was. Although the blood test verified his parentage, he was upset about the medical expenses and did not understand the charges associated with the request.

That's why— I had to pay for the blood test. What she said—, "I had to pay for that." What she said—, "I wasn't going to take nothing. I wasn't going to do nothing." She the one that was saying—, "it could be this, it could be that". Well—, we fittin to do this, do this right now—. It [the baby] came out to be mine. Now I got to pay for it because of what she said—. You can see I got to pay this genetic test . . . I got to pay [for] all it. You know what I'm saying? Why I got to pay for what she said?

The conflict between Anthony and his ex-girlfriend escalated with the birth of the baby. He could not understand why he should be charged for the hospital expenses when they both agreed to the blood test to verify that he was the father.⁵⁶

This example is merely the tip of a large iceberg composed of legal misunderstandings about the process of paternity establishment. "D" cannot comprehend the difference between having a child outside marriage and a child in a marriage, when the last name of the legal father is traditionally given to the child. He thought that once a legal paternity establishment had occurred for an extramarital child, the child should automatically get his last name.

This is what I don't understand about the court system . . .

Okay.

If he found to be mine— Why don't he automatically get my last name, if I got to pay child support, for him 'til he's eighteen, out of school?

Many of the interviewees believed that their acceptance of the role of father was sufficient. They did not understand the rationale for legal paternity when they felt that they had taken on the social, financial, and moral role of fatherhood. A 22-year-old father of one child had this perspective:

⁵⁶According to Wisconsin Statute (767.51) paternity judgment, a judgment or order of the court determining the existence or nonexistence of paternity, is determinative for all purposes. The order can include but not be limited to "requiring the father to pay or contribute to the reasonable expenses of the mother's pregnancy and the child's birth, based on the father's ability to pay or contribute to those expenses; and requiring either or both parties to pay or contribute to the costs of the guardian ad litem fees, genetic tests as provided in 767.48(5) and other costs." (For more information see the State Bar of Wisconsin Continuing Legal Education Book, January 2001).

How did you get paternity established?

I knew it was mine.

Okay, you knew it was yours.

I knew it was mine.

Did you sign some kind of document in the hospital?

I don't know if we signed anything.— But, I knew that it was mine because— I just knew.

Okay. Did you ever sign any papers?

I probably signed some papers at the hospital.

But you don't remember?

Right. I don't remember.

Another 21-year-old father had a similar view. He saw paternity establishment as a private matter between the parents that did not involve the state.

Do you think that establishment of paternity is . . . necessary?

Well, in some cases— like in my situation— I did not see a need for it. I never said anything because . . . I didn't know too much about the state laws, and how much paying [child support] would come behind it. In my case, No—but you have some cases, you have some woman— who have multiple sex partners as well as— Sometimes, you might not know who the father of your child is. In some cases, it's best to establish paternity, but like I said— it depends on the people in that situation. I found out the child was mine [a blood test was done]. They gave us a court date to come back.— I never showed up for that court date. I was already in jail, so they [court/child support] went along with business as usual.

I asked all of the fathers about the benefits of legal paternity establishment. Several were able to articulate some if not all of the benefits. However, many of them saw their acceptance of paternity as enough to recognize their parentage as a father. John, a father of twin boys and a daughter, provides his perspective:

What are the benefits to establishing paternity, legally?

Well, knowing that this is your child.— Can't nobody say different, and being a part of the child's education, and social development, and school life— and all those things.

Do you think it means that a parent has a different relationship with their kids if they [establish paternity]?

As long as you still in the child's life— I don't think it make[s] a difference— on that point, but— by not having it legal, in case anything ever happened to you, the child has nothing.

Some of the interviewees did not understand the connection between paternity establishment and a child support order. Once they did realize that paternity establishment was the first step toward paying child support, they began to view it more negatively.

The Child Support Order

The child support system was viewed both positively and negatively by these fathers. Many of them said that they had no problem with paying child support as long as the support helped their child(ren). Some of the fathers complained about the negative reception they perceived in the Milwaukee courthouse because they were viewed as “deadbeat dads.” One father (Baller) stated:

No. I don't think the child support system is a good thing.— I don't think [so] because—I think it is just a way of controlling people; 80 percent of me don't think it is a good thing. 20 percent figures, okay—I can understand it—[the rationale for the child support program]. The other 80 percent of it, [I] don't understand it.

Another problem that the fathers discussed was the perceived lack of flexibility of child support office staff in helping fathers comply with the child support order. Frequently this problem occurs when circumstances of the fathers change, but their child support orders are not adjusted. Fathers who lived with their children but did not have court-ordered custody did not understand why they continued to owe child support.⁵⁷ Fathers who made substantial contributions to other expenses (for example, paying child care expenses) did not understand why no adjustment was made for these contributions.

For many of these fathers, the amount of the child support order and accumulated arrearages could be perceived as a deterrent to continuing to work. Nearly all commented that they felt overwhelmed by the amounts of child support due.

Noncustodial parents with a child support order receive monthly statements of child support receipt and disbursement from the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development.⁵⁸ Appendix E is an example of the statement for one of the fathers.⁵⁹ This statement shows him with a total debt in the amount of approximately \$28,000 in current child support and arrears. The debt includes, but is not limited to, lying-in (birthing cost), court costs, child support interest, and reimbursement of past welfare

⁵⁷The child support enforcement agencies in the 72 counties of Wisconsin can develop their own policy on the treatment of cohabiting couples. See Meyer et al. (1997).

⁵⁸See “Wisconsin Leads Nation In Child Support Collection,” www.dwd.state.wi.us/notespub/dwdwebma/3a12%5F536.htm Federal data show Wisconsin as number one in collection per full-time state employee. Wisconsin has consistently placed in the top ten states for child support collections. This demonstrates the state's efficiency in child support collections.

⁵⁹Note that the balance on this statement was not the largest balance among this sample of fathers. I saw one statement with a balance of over \$57,000. The statement has been altered to remove identifying information.

(AFDC) costs.⁶⁰ About \$27,000 (about 97 percent of the total amount owed) is owed to the government. These arrears are expected to be paid off in addition to his current monthly fixed child support order of \$340, which is split between two child support orders. In addition, the father owes 17 percent of his gross income in another order. In the last month this father paid over \$1,200, most of it going to the mothers of his children.

This father had a stable job, which he had held for over three years and which paid him an hourly wage above \$10.00. In his household he was also responsible for four nonbiological children aged 9–14 and a 5-year-old biological child with his wife. Even though his children were designated as “in the experiment” for the purpose of the pass-through waiver—that is, the money that he paid toward their support was passed through to the mother—he still received phone calls from the mother asking him to get the children new shoes, clothes, and other items. His wife worked at a job making slightly above minimum wage. So, as described earlier, in order to make ends meet, he hustled by repairing cars on the side for friends and family members.

In terms of the current discussion on marriage and father involvement among welfare families, this father met two of the goals of PRWORA: (1) he *married* the mother of one of his child(ren), and (2) he *paid his child support* monthly through income-withholding procedures. One of the fathers said to me: “Oh yeah those envelopes [child support monthly statements] that come monthly, I don’t open them because they make me depressed. . . . why do that when— I cannot pay them what I owe.” The men perceived that their payments did not benefit their children but instead provided funds for the system, despite the pass-through policy waiver.

The understanding of the monthly Child Support Receipt and Disbursement statement ranged from no comprehension to minimal comprehension. One father thought the “bill” he received for \$57,000 was for *all* fathers in the city of Milwaukee.

Many of these fathers viewed the system as an intruder in their lives. In discussions they consistently identified the child support system as their biggest barrier. Dewey Brown, a 47-year-old father of nine children, was ordered into the Children First program by the court. He had a previous history of drug addiction and was currently living in a SRO (single-room occupancy) unit. In 1997 he was sent to a maximum security prison in Boscobel, Wisconsin, for five counts of nonpayment of child support. After four months he was transferred to a half-way house. He provides his view regarding payment of a child support order:

How do you [feel about] paying child support and, as far as you know, [is] all of it going to the mothers of your children? How do you feel about that?

I don’t like it.

Why not?

Because, first of all— I don’t mind paying the child support.— But, is it going towards the kids?— I don’t get the recognition, that, the money is coming from me.— In other

⁶⁰For this study sample, all of the men were charged for the birthing costs for at least one of their children. The current amount of interest on child support arrears is 12 percent annually. Interest is not charged on birth expenses.

words— I’m still the outcast, I’m still the bad guy. And here— I am doing everything . . . Like I said—I gave up my last weekend, Thanksgiving.— Everybody else having fun and enjoying their Friday off. I only take one day— off cause they said you got to take that day off. I just— [finished] working six weeks in a row. Here it is now, I got to work all the way to Christmas, cause I can’t afford to buy my kids anything.— But they going to have plenty of money from child support to buy whatever they need. —Is the money properly being used for my kids benefits?— Those are my questions about some of the things.— Some of the mothers don’t keep the children up to my par. Like, I like to be clean.— My parents raised me that way, even though I look like a bum today.

The Pass-Through Policy

A question posed to all of the fathers in the study was, “Have you heard of the pass-through policy?” If this was not clear, I would further qualify the question by stating that the pass-through policy was part of the child support program. The great majority of these fathers did not know about the pass-through waiver or its benefits to those paying child support for children on welfare in Wisconsin. There was no difference in knowledge between those in the full pass-through group and those in the partial pass-through group (receiving up to \$50 per month of 41 percent of what was paid), nor was there a difference in knowledge between fathers participating and not participating in Children First. However, I did find examples of the way the waiver worked for some of the fathers. Robert Johnson, a 43-year-old remarried father of three children ranging in age from 13 to 27, had a child support arrearage of approximately \$57,000. He explains his most recent experience with a child support payment to his daughter’s mother:

Recently, my kid’s mother [was] getting child support checks now.— I called her about a month [ago]—she told my daughter to tell daddy “thank you.” I said thank you for what?— She said, “I’m getting child support checks now.” —Now I’m seeing where my money is going.

She’s getting all of the money that’s coming out of your check?

Yeah, I was sad about that.— I used to couldn’t see what was taking my money. She wasn’t getting no checks.— Now she gets them.

Does that make a difference in the way she talks to you?

Oh, yeah! Lot of difference, because she’s getting some money now. She’s getting child support now.— I mean the time— I’ve been paying child support, I’ve never heard— none of the mothers getting any money.

Slim, a 23-year-old father of two children, who was in the Children First program, discussed his experience with the pass-through. His situation was extremely complex. He had asked his mother to take nonlegal custody of his youngest child because of the biological mother’s addiction problems. The family avoided getting the government involved because of her addiction, and they feared that they would lose the baby to the “system.” However, Slim continued to pay \$150 in monthly child support because he did not want the Children First staff to view him as not in compliance. The money went to the biological mother, because she was in the full pass-through group. Slim talks about his experience with the pass-through policy:

They say it’s going to her.

Going to her?

Yeah.

Who told you that?

The child support.

They said that she would get it? Some of it, all of it, or what?

I guess she's getting all of it.

How do you feel about that? That she gets all of the money?

I don't understand— why she[']s getting all [of] the money. It should be going [to my mother, who has my child] at least some of it—they [his mother is] not getting nothing out of it? That's what they saying.— They [his mother] saying the hundred and fifty is going to her [the child's mother, who no longer has the child in her care].— When, I called down there, and asked them, who's receiving it— and how much she receiving— they say —“she [the child's mother] is receiving it and she[']s receiving every penny of it.”

It should be noted, however, that many of the fathers expressed approval of the pass-through policy, once it was explained to them.

The Practice of Child Support Enforcement

Many of the fathers had very limited understanding of the basis for and the mechanics of the child support enforcement system. “D” talks about his experience in the courtroom on a child support case.

[The judge said] [Mothers are] not the father, man. I said, what you mean?— He said, you're responsible for half the cost of them. I said— they're responsible for half too. . . . [The judge said] —if she drawing aid, that's her half, [that's the ways she's contributing to the child's support]. . . . [Then I say]— So, why am I subjected to pay what she drawing from you all?— what is she doing? [Then the judge said] Well, she's taking care of them. And I'm like, well then, I say I don't understand this shit. I was saying, you all got me at a loss, I said—Wisconsin is fucked up with that. And like, this isn't nationwide; like it can't be nationwide like this.

Do you know how much child support you owe a month?

All I know is I owe arrears— and I've got to bring it up to current. The only way— I'd be able do that, honestly man— is if I won the lottery or something. I mean basically any brother out there, only way to me to bring it [the child support arrears] up that quick— unless . . . they live with their mother and they didn't have to pay no bills for the next eighteen years. That's the only way you can get caught up. You just work, and you get child support caught up. — Cause they charge, they start taxing, like, from the first day the kid's born. You got to pay that check— that hospital bill, which is nineteen hundred dollars.

It was obvious from our interview that “D” did not understand that the mother was required to identify a noncustodial father in order to comply with TANF requirements for cash benefits.⁶¹ In fact, this was often a point of conflict for the fathers, particularly for the younger ones, who had limited understanding of the welfare system and its relationship to the child support office. Another problem for them was the requirement that they provide Medicaid reimbursement costs (birth costs); the men often felt that this cost should be shared by the mother of their children.⁶²

Dante Morton, a 32-year-old father of three, discusses his understanding of the child support order and its relationship to the previous receipt of welfare benefits by the mother of their children.

Was she receiving welfare benefits while you were together?

No. It was after we broke up.—That was when she started receiving it [welfare]. So, it’s kind of like— I didn’t know exactly how that worked. I didn’t know that things would fall back into my lap, like— hey, I’m responsible. I have to pay for this.— If I had known that, we’d have said hey— no, we would have planned a way to make this work. You know, “you don’t have to get on the system or whatever.” We can just stay out of it. . . . It’s not really clear as far as— what it is that I owe in back [arrearages]—so it’s kind of like,

⁶¹Many of the men in this sample had arrearages owed to the state, and they understood that the mother and child did not receive all the money they paid in child support. Many of the fathers complained about their inability to pay their child support order and other charges related to the mothers’ receipt of welfare benefits and Medicaid. They questioned why the mother was not required to share some of the cost of government reimbursement. The fathers in this study did not understand the “assignment” requirements for families requesting financial assistance from the state. Current practice in the welfare system is the following: (1) The mother needs financial assistance to take care of her children. (2) In order to receive welfare benefits, the mother is required to assign to the state her right to the child support paid by the noncustodial father, for welfare reimbursement. (3) The noncustodial father makes child support payments. (4) The child support directed to and based on the number of children by one or several mothers of his children is intercepted by the government because the mothers has signed over her “right” to the child support payment. In most states, the mother will receive none of the child support paid by the father; however in 15 or more states, the mothers will receive \$50 (a “pass-through”) and in four other states, the mother will receive a larger amount. At the time of the interviews the state of Wisconsin was the only state with full pass-through and disregard of child support payment for welfare recipients. For a copy of the requirements on the receipt of TANF benefits go to [42 U.S.C. 608] (a) (3).

⁶²In Wisconsin and other states, birth costs of children who receive Medicaid services are charged against noncustodial fathers by the state, and collected by the child support agency. Many low-income, noncustodial parents in this study and in Wisconsin owe this debt. Even if there is no active child support order (for example, if the parents are married or cohabiting), this debt is owed, and the family income is further depleted by its payment. According to Wisconsin’s Calendar Year 2000 OCSE 34 report, \$3,467,007 in birth costs were collected in Milwaukee County Calendar Year 2000. The Federal government pays 15% of amounts collected for birth costs to the state child support agency.

The 1996 federal welfare reform law (PRWORA) required that a Medical Child Support Working Group be formed. The working group was composed of advocates, policymakers, employer representatives (including payroll professionals), and sponsors and administrators of group health plans. The working group recommended that state child support enforcement agencies not pursue recoupment of birth-related costs in Medicaid cases. For a copy of the full report see <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/rpt/medrpt/index.html>. The constitutionality of charging lying-in fees solely to noncustodial fathers has been challenged in the New York in three separate court cases: *Perry vs. Dowling*, 905 F. Supp. 251, *In the Matter of Commissioner of Social Services of Franklin County v. Bernard B.*, [661 N.E.2d 131], and *In the Matter of Steuben County Department of Social Services v. Gregory E. Deats*, [560 N.E.2d 760].

what's going on here?—You kind of never really know with them, because it seems to me, like they smoke job you— It's just— “Well, you owe us this.” Yeah, well, how do I dispute that? You know— I don't know that or whatever. It's real strange now.

Dante's lack of understanding about the “assignment” rule was not unusual among the fathers in this sample. This lack of understanding and the men's poor employment opportunities often led to the accumulation of large arrearages, because many of the unemployed fathers did not distinguish the child support order from other expenses or the monthly bills that they were unable to pay. Thus the child support order was often ignored because it was seen as another bill to handle later. When these men were employed, child support payments were generally made through income withholding by their employer.

In our discussions of the consequences of the arrearages, several of the men were aware of the enforcement tools used by the child support system. They consistently mentioned the use of jail, tax interception, and driver's license revocation as the primary methods. The use of jail as an enforcement tool has already been discussed. The practice of tax interception is discussed here.

According to state administrative data from KIDS, 58 percent of the fathers in this study had experienced a tax intercept since 1997.⁶³ The tax refunds intercepted among the 21 fathers affected amounted to a total of \$47,596 (\$39,307 in federal taxes and \$8,289 in state taxes). Of the refunds intercepted, 78 percent was applied to federal and state birth costs and previous (AFDC) welfare receipt. Of federal taxes intercepted, 95 percent went toward reimbursement of previous AFDC payments and then birth costs.

Joe'D discussed the conflict that the tax intercept caused in his household. He filed taxes with his wife in 1997; without their knowledge, the tax refund was intercepted by the Office of Child Support Enforcement. Joe'D thought his wife's tax refund could not be intercepted.⁶⁴

Oh, yeah. Child support. Say, like, if I work— and we [my wife and me] sit down and figure out bills but I do not get the money and it's not there, it's tight.— And I hear little comments as far as— “giving these other women your money.” “Maybe I ought to divorce your ass and get the money. Make you pay me.” You know. I hear that. I'm kinda to the point where— I'm actually— me being thirty-four, I'm tore down to the point— where, I just don't care any more— It's getting to that point where, I just don't care. I hear so much of it—. You got to do what you got to do. You know. Can't hurt me, no worse than, I'm already hurting—. You know. And, I hear all kind of talk. All kind of talk—. Specially, when tax time come around. You get uppity around here—. I mean, it's

⁶³A handout prepared by the Milwaukee County Department of Child Support Enforcement provides information on the tax refund intercept. According to this handout, the intercept was designed to collect past due court-ordered child support payments (arrears) that are owed to a custodial parent by intercepting state and /or federal tax refunds of the noncustodial parent. The federal government requires that when arrears are certified for federal tax intercept, the federal monies collected will be used to pay arrears owed to the government first. After the state has been paid in full, any federal tax intercept money will be paid to the custodial parent. State tax intercept monies will be paid toward the arrears of the custodial parent before being applied toward the arrears owed to the state of Wisconsin. (Wisconsin Statute: 45 CFR 303.72(1991); Sec 46.255).

⁶⁴Policy requires that before a tax intercept goes into effect, a letter is sent to the last known address of those who are at risk of having their tax refund intercepted. The letter is to explain the tax intercept policy/procedure and the process for filing an injured spouse claim. The couple previously discussed do not remember receiving such notification.

a war and everything. Most of the time— most of the time— I don't feel like filing my taxes, cause I don't. I ain't getting nothing back—. You know . . . When you do file, they [Office of Child Support Enforcement] send you a letter right away. Damn near quicker than when you get your tax back— They send you a letter, we [the Office] seizing your taxes because whatever . . . They did that real fast. You know. So, I get a lot of feedback.

Many of the noncustodial fathers expressed anger and frustration at the child support system for charging them child support and demanding an overall amount they could perhaps never pay. This frustration was particularly evident when the fathers were either living with their children or in their opinion providing significant financial support to their children. Said Don:

I'm like . . . I didn't have nothing like \$290 coming back [in taxes]—. I told my kids “[when] I'd get my tax.” They wanted that 10 and 1 [name brand of gym shoes]. “Wait till I get my tax. We going to do this. We [are going] to get you all some shoes, whatever, for school.” Then I get some paper [letter] saying we [Office of Child Support Enforcement] took that money for child support—. Okay, they took \$290.— She [mother of his children] didn't get shit! My kids didn't get shit—. Out of \$290, they all could have sent the other mother fucking \$90—. So, that meant, that I had to go out and hustle up on that \$125, so they [his kids] wouldn't be disappointed—. I couldn't go tell them, it ain't their fault—, you all [referring to his kids] got my money already. They took it for child support.

Of all of the child support enforcement tactics, many of the men preferred the automatic income withholding from a payroll check as opposed to the voluntary monthly payment process. Among the fathers paying child support, 90 percent had wage garnishment.⁶⁵

VII. Research Findings: Knowledge of and Perspective on Children First and Other Services for Men

The majority of the fathers were not aware of the existence of the Children First program or other services for men in the city of Milwaukee.⁶⁶ If they were aware of the programs, a deterrent was the consequence of jail if they did not fully participate in the program. But the biggest barrier was ignorance about the services available. Many of the men wanted programs to help them with their current life situation. Some suggested that an apprenticeship program that provided a minimal amount of income while they participated in a program such as Children First would be good. This could alleviate some of the stress of the accumulating child support order amounts while they were trying to better their lives.

For those fathers who participated in it, the Children First program proved to be invaluable because of the staff, ancillary services, and the career job placement it offered. It provided an opportunity

⁶⁵Wisconsin was the first state in 1987 to implement immediate income withholding statewide as a child support collection method.

⁶⁶Seven programs are currently directed at noncustodial parents in the state of Wisconsin. The programs are the W-2 Noncustodial Parent program; the Governor's Central City Initiative; Team Parenting Waiver Demonstration Project; Partners for Fragile Families; Team Parenting Demonstration Project; Children First; Welfare to Work; and Workforce Attachment & Advancement, managed by the Department of Workforce Development.

to be involved in peer-support discussions, which many men felt was one of the most valuable parts of the program. The second most valuable component was that the staff of the Children First programs at two agencies, UMOS and Employment Solutions, provided many of the participants an incentive to keep striving for their goals and helped them succeed. Indeed, several of the fathers obtained employment as result of their participation in Children First. Fathers were also able to take advantage of program services, in particular legal services, to help them deal with child support problems and past civil actions and criminal charges.

B-Camp is the father of three biological children and one nonbiological child. He was living with the mother of his biological children. They had been in a relationship for eighteen years. I asked him how he became involved in the Children First program.

I volunteered. Just to say, this is my kid, and I'm going to take the blood test and everything. Just for the records. And, my girl, she was in W-2 program. She say, you know, uhm, they got a nice program going on for women. W-2. . . . I am [the] one paying child support . . . see if they got a job for men. So, she calls, and they say, "yeah, they got something for men." . . . so, when he [the director of the Children's First program] hooked me up, he said, . . . This is going to look good, you volunteered. See most people went down through the court. I came down on my own. I just wanted to get in the program to get a better job to support my kid. Cause I know, I always did support my kid and I am going to continue here. It's a struggle when you don't have the right job to pay the bills.

Many of the 11 Children First participants felt that it was the staff that made the program a success for them. They were able to avail themselves of many needed services, in particular legal services for child support problems and past criminal and civil charges. "Black" talks about his interactions with the staff.

Go down here and check it out. And ran upon some good people. The case worker is a cool sister. I was speaking of her like that cause she ain't never shown me no shady areas. She ain't never lied. She ain't never pretended to me. She ain't never made me feel like something was going to come and it didn't come. And that's been anything . . . Then I met this other guy that works by her, name of [Mr. Taylor]. Another brother that come out of the streets. They both come out of the streets. That way it starts. So they can relate to anything.

Most in Children First participants expressed satisfaction with the some aspects of the program. Many of the fathers interviewed benefitted from staff interaction, peer support, job placement, and other services. In addition, as compared with those in the randomly selected sample, fathers in the Children First program had a better understanding of the child support system.

VIII. Conclusions and Policy Implications

Conclusions

The intent of this study was to gather informative and policy-relevant data to illuminate the situations of noncustodial fathers of children in W-2. The research has addressed several questions: (1) What is the level of noncustodial fathers' involvement with their children? (2) What are the supports

and barriers fathers encounter in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as a parent and maintaining their day-to-day existence? (3) What is their knowledge of current child support policy and how does it affect their lives? (4) What is their knowledge about services for noncustodial fathers? (5) What is their knowledge of the child support pass-through? This final question was most important, given the fact that one of the intended outcomes of the pass-through waiver was to increase the likelihood of more formal child support payments by noncustodial parents. An analysis of these data reveals that these African American fathers contend with a number of issues related to poverty and to their contact with the welfare and child support system.

Nearly all the information discussed in this report comes from the initial interviews with these fathers. Because half of them were again interviewed a year later, an important feature of this study is the ability to discuss changes in their lives. But in fact, the lives of the fathers between the first and second wave of data collection did not demonstrate major changes. Of the 16 fathers in the second wave, 2 (both of whom were under 25 years of age) had additional children. Three had acquired new jobs, which paid less money. All of them had made efforts to pay their child support order in accordance with their ability to pay. One of the fathers had totally paid off his child support order. Another was current in his child support payments except for the lying-fee (birth cost) of \$1,500. Several continued to face housing insecurity.

A significant finding is that between the first and second wave of interviews, an additional 25 percent of the fathers were charged with a criminal offense, bringing the total to 33 of the 36 fathers. The criminal charges were in many cases for traffic violations, and in a few cases were drug possession or use. Between the waves, four men had civil actions brought against them; all were temporary restraining orders.

Poor education and limited employment opportunity was a barrier to improved life circumstances. Civil and criminal charges were often a barrier to employment. The most frequent criminal charges were traffic violations. Perceived race and class prejudice (in particular by law enforcement officers and employers in the suburbs) was identified by many fathers as a significant barrier to employment opportunities. Perceived discrimination by law enforcement personnel by these fathers undercut their incentive to seek employment in the suburbs. They often reported unprovoked traffic stops by police en route to the suburbs for work or pleasure.

The lives of these men reflected involvement at some level with at least one of their biological children. It is important to note that 58 percent considered it their responsibility to act as fathers to the nonbiological children they lived with (children of current or previous girlfriends), and they were actively involved in those children's lives, emotionally and financially. In fact, many men did not differentiate between their biological children and the children they were living with, and counted them separately only when pressed.

Many of the fathers had relationships with at least one of their children's mothers, and these relationships generally were long-lasting, an average of five years or more. In this study, 44 percent of the men had been married to one of the mothers of their children. At the time of the initial interviews 60 percent were cohabiting with one of the mothers of their children, and the majority of them maintained contact with the mothers for access to their children. Relationships with the mothers of their children were reported as complex, in some cases congenial and cooperative, in other cases (and at various times in all cases) stormy and dissonant. Generally, however, the fathers felt that in order to maintain a relationship with their children, it was important to maintain a good working relationship with the mother.

Another finding was that despite a lack of economic resources, these men participate in their families' lives as caregivers and active participants in social networks. Several of the men not only cared for their own children on a daily basis but were responsible for the well-being of their own parents.

The men did not understand child support law or policy. They were further confused by the way their lives were affected when the mothers were required to participate in the family law system as a result of AFDC or W-2 (cash assistance) receipt. This intersection of family law, child support enforcement, and welfare law and policy was confusing and discouraging. Moreover, many of them perceived both the welfare and child support systems as an impediment to their ability to take care of their children. The fathers, and the mothers in many cases, did not understand either the system or the reason for the system's impact on their lives.

One of the goals of the child support system is to benefit the families of poor fathers. This research has shown that the effects of the child support enforcement mechanisms used, including imprisonment and tax interceptions, generally did not benefit the families of poor fathers who lacked the ability to pay. Administrative data show that federal tax interception did not get more money to families with children in poverty. The majority of the intercepted tax refunds went to reimburse the government for prior disbursement of AFDC benefits and to recoup birthing expenses. In one instance, the interception of the federal tax returns of the spouse filing a joint return caused substantial conflict between the couple.

Many of the men had little to no knowledge of the Children First program. However, those participating in it specifically endorsed the peer-support portion of the program. They also praised the staff for the empathic manner in which they worked with them. This finding is similar to the research reports of the Parents' Fair Share program by the Manpower Research Demonstration Corporation. A few of the fathers participated in the Welfare to Work services in the city of Milwaukee. Fathers regarded the threat of jail as a sanction for non-cooperation with Children First as an unnecessary and deterrent aspect of the program. Note, however, that the threat of jail for nonpayment of support exists for these fathers regardless of their assignment to Children First, and fathers who participate in Children First may be able to avoid jail, at least initially.

In conclusion, many of these fathers and their families negotiated their lives outside of the legal systems (i.e., child support, child welfare, etc.) because their lives were filled with perceived and real obstacles, perceived and encountered risks, and human and financial costs. Many fathers had high levels of involvement with some of their children, had long-term relationships with at least one of the mothers of their children, had sporadic to long-term employment, and were willing to participate in the child support system but desired a more direct and assured benefit of their child support payment for their children. It was in their engagement in the child support system that these men believe they had no real agency, no ability to act and have direct, positive impact on their lives or their children's lives. This seemed to cause many of them the most emotional and financial stress.

Policy Implications

Some of the fathers in this study had arrearages (ranging from \$1,500 to over \$30,000) because they were responsible for reimbursing the federal and state government for the involvement of the child's mother in the AFDC program. Arrears and retroactive child support can be so large that the amount of debt will be impossible to *ever* pay for many of these fathers. Furthermore, the benefit of the full pass-through cannot be realized, given that the amount of child support debt to the state is so high that many of the dollars paid by the father (even though the portion of the obligor's payment that is current child

support is passed through to most families) will not directly benefit his children.⁶⁷ This research highlights the importance of efforts to develop programs to renegotiate or reduce child support arrearages.

Noncustodial parents are required to reimburse the state or federal government for welfare assistance to their children under the federal AFDC and TANF programs. Women receiving welfare benefits must assign their rights to child support to the state. They must cooperate in reporting the name and social security number of the noncustodial father. These requirements caused conflict between the parents. The legal requirement of assignment and cooperation was not understood by the fathers (and it is the fathers' perception that it was not understood by the mothers). In light of this finding, policymakers should consider the actual impact of assignment on the income of poor parents. Recent federal welfare reauthorization discussion (including legislation introduced in the House of Representatives in the fall of 2001) recommends eliminating assignment and cooperation requirements, and forgiving previous AFDC debt.

Economic opportunities for these low-income parents are limited. For many men, getting a "good"⁶⁸ job was quite difficult, given their previous convictions. Even when good jobs are found they become more difficult to sustain given the other issues of debt and poverty in their lives. For example, the men in this sample spoke often of concerns with their license to operate a motor vehicle. They are already subject to suspension of that license based on various fines and debts not directly related to child support. The inability to pay the fines or debts has an overwhelming effect on their personal security and employment opportunities. In light of these concerns, the potential negative consequences of enforcing the license suspension policy of the child support agency should be seriously considered before it is used aggressively against low-income payors.

The processes and intention of imputed and defaulted child support orders require reconsideration. These are often based on suspected earnings, which has resulted in unrealistic orders. Child support enforcement policies need to be evaluated in light of the barriers many poor fathers face. Appropriate policies may encourage fathers' involvement and support, especially when combined with programs that increase access to employment.⁶⁹ However, some policies place fathers at greater risk of facing insurmountable challenges and thus discourage their paternal involvement.

The fathers in this study often did not know or understand the process and procedures for representing themselves in court. This fact should not be surprising, given that most lay persons hire a legal professional to negotiate such matters. Fathers also did not generally understand the interactions between the welfare and child support systems. In order to be effective in poor, primarily African American communities, the W-2 agency and the child support agency need to better communicate the resources and opportunities they can make available to low-income, noncustodial parents. Policymakers, legal professionals, and the judicial system need to study the use and the availability of effective "pro se" (without a legal representative) forms for example, modifying child support orders.

⁶⁷Almost all W-2 participants (except those in the federally required control group) and all other recipients of child support receive all current support paid on their behalf.

⁶⁸Many of the men defined "good" in reference to jobs as making at least \$10 an hour.

⁶⁹A report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (1999) documents the problems in the manner in which child support orders are set for low-income fathers. A memo from David Gray Ross, Commissioner of the Office of Child Support Enforcement, provides some guidance in how states can be flexible with respect to low-income obligors; see <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cse/pol/piq-00-03.htm>.

The benefits of the pass-through policy are undermined by the amount of debt that men owe from previous AFDC arrears and by poor employment prospects. Furthermore, the impact of the new hire registry, voluntary acknowledgment, and other child support enforcement policies accompanying PRWORA should be clearly isolated and examined to understand their full impact on the pass-through demonstration. Some fathers knew that the mothers of their children were receiving all child support paid, and in most cases they were supportive of the policy. Others expressed support after the full pass-through was explained. However, given the general lack of understanding of the child support system and the pass-through policy, it is difficult to assess the potential of the full pass-through.

CODE:
DATE:

APPENDIX A

W-2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROTOCOL

Location of Interview:
People Present:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
Time of Day:

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Number of Children**

--

- **How many boys and how many girls do you have?**

# of girls	
# of boys	

- **How old are they?**

Name of Child(ren)	Age

- **Do any of them live with you?**

Yes	No
------------	-----------

- **If not, whom do they live with?**
- **Where do they live?**

Name of Child	Currently Lives With...	Location

Knowledge about AFDC and Child Support

- What do you know about the W-2 system in which your child is a participant?**
- Do you all have child support obligations?**
- How did you learn that you owed child support and roughly, how long have you owed child support?**
- What is the father's obligation in the new welfare system?**
- What is the mother's obligation in the new welfare system?**

B. UNDERSTANDING OF THE PASS-THROUGH POLICY

- What is your current involvement with the child support system?**
- How do you feel about paying child support?**
- Do fathers have some requirements in the new welfare system?**
- Do you know the child support policy about the pass-through? (explain)**
- Do you ever help out with the household finances? How?**
- What do you know about the system?**
- How do you pay child support?**
- How do you feel about the practice of paying “child support”?**
- Do you ever help out with the maintenance of the child (ren) in ways such as babysitting? Presents? Can you give me some examples?**
- Has the new policies changed the way you view your “responsibility” in making child support payment?**
- In recent months have you changed the way you pay your child support? Do you still do those extra things for your family?**

C. THE PROCESS OF PATERNITY ESTABLISHMENT (CHILD SUPPORT AND MODIFICATION)

When the mother of your child had your baby did you go to the hospital?

Yes	No
-----	----

(What was that experience like?) Why did you go or why didn't you go?

Why did you go or why did you not go?

Did you sign your name on the birth certificate?

Yes	No
-----	----

Does the child have your last name?

Yes	No
-----	----

Who decided to do this?

Did you establish a legal relationship with your child (ren)?

Yes	No
-----	----

Why or why not?

Did the people at the W-2 office or child support enforcement office contact you?

Yes	No
-----	----

What did they tell you?

Did you think it was a good idea to do this?

Yes	No
-----	----

- What did the child's mother think about you doing this?
- Are you happy that you did/did not do this?
- Do you think it is important to establish a legal relationship between a father and a child?
- Do you think there are any other benefits to establishing paternity?
- (Do you think it means that the parents have a different kind of relationship?)
- Do you know men who do not want to establish paternity? Why?
- Do you know men who deny they are the fathers?
- Why do you think they do this?
- What are the ways that men can acknowledge their children other than through establishing paternity?

D. ACCESS TO CHILDREN, VISITATION AND CUSTODY

- Describe your current relationship with the mother of your child.
- How often do you see your children?
- Do you have any custody rights?
- How does the mother feel about your relationship with the children?
- What kinds of activities do you with your children?
- How would you make the relationship between you and your children better?
- What help is available to make sure that you see your children?

E. EMPLOYMENT (CHILDREN'S FIRST, TEMPORARY AGENCIES)

- How is the job situation in the city, in the suburbs?
- Is it easy or hard to find a job in Milwaukee? Why is it easy or hard for some and not for others?
- Is there adequate transportation to get to work in the city, in the suburbs?
- Do you know about the Children's First program?
- Is it a good/bad program?
- What services do men need to take care of themselves and their children?
- Where are the opportunities for men like you to gain access to employment opportunities?

F. AVAILABLE SERVICES FOR NON-CUSTODIAL FATHERS IN MILWAUKEE

- Have you ever used any services for job placement?
- Are you aware of any free educational services for men in the city?
- Do you see the need for skill-building services for men? (e.g., GED classes, Carpentry classes, Culinary school training, and some college classes)
- Are you aware of the services available in the city for men?
- When was the last time that you worked?
- What type of job was it? (full/temp/part)

- What type of work were you paid for?**
- Are there reasons why people are not getting jobs in Milwaukee?**
- Are there reasons why people are not getting jobs in Milwaukee?**

{END INTERVIEW}

CHECK-IN QUESTIONS FOR EACH SUBSEQUENT VISIT WITH SAMPLE AFTER THE INITIAL MEETING.

How are you doing? What's new?

During the last month did you see any of your children? If yes, which ones and why? If there were any children you did not see, tell me why you did not see them during the month.

Have you had any contact with the child support people lately? If yes, why did you contact them or they you?

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE: SOURCES OF INCOME

Where do you live now? Are you on the lease?

How much do you have to pay in rent?

Do you have any type of car, hospital, credit payments that you must make each month?

Given your current job situation do you receive money from any other source? Do you get help from your mom, dad, and girl? etc.

How much money besides your child support payments, do you give to your children during a month?

Do different children get different amounts and why?

If you have a hustle on the side, how much do you make a month from it?

Have you ever been married? Have you married any of the women of the child (ren) that you are currently paying child support for?

Where does the mother of your children live?

QUESTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS

Since we last spoke has your relationship with the mother of your child (ren) has gotten better or worse? Why do you think this has happened?

When we first met, I asked you, how you felt about paying child support, in general and how you felt about all of the money going directly to the mother. How do you feel today about child support and what is your feeling today about all of the money going to the mom.

What do you think about marriage?

Have or do you ever think about getting married?

APPENDIX B

WAVE 2

W-2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROTOCOL (A)

Location of Interview:
People Present:
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
Time of Day:

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- **Number of Children**

--

- **How many boys and how many girls do you have?**

# of girls	
# of boys	

- **How old are they now?**

Child(ren) (Male/Female)	Age

- **Has any of lived with you since I last talked with you?**

Yes	No
------------	-----------

- **If not, whom do they live with?**
- **Where do they live?**

Name of Child	Currently Lives With...	Location

B. Follow-Up Questions on Knowledge about AFDC and Child Support.

- What have you learned about the W-2 system since our last interview?**

- Have you had any contact with the child support people lately?**

- What type of contact did you have with them (child support) lately?**

- What was the last time that you had contact with your children?**

- Who made that happen so you could see your children?**

- Do you think that your child(ren) are doing better in life since I last talked with you?**

Do you notice better clothing, better entertainment, etc?

What are your current child support obligations?

Have your child support payments been modified since our last meeting?

What is the obligation of the father in the new welfare system?

What is the mother's obligation in the new welfare system?

C. FOLLOW-UP ON THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE PASS-THROUGH POLICY

- What your feelings about paying child support?**

- How do you pay child support?**

- Do fathers have some requirements in the new welfare system?**

- Since our last meeting, have you learned anything about the pass-through policy?**

- Since our last meeting, have you had to help out with the household finances? How?**

- Do you ever help out with the maintenance of the child (ren) in ways such as babysitting? Presents? Can you give me some examples?**

- Has the new policies changed the way you view your “responsibility” in making child support payment?**

- In recent months have you changed the way you pay your child support? Do you still do those extra things for your family?**

D. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS OF IMPORTANCE: SOURCES OF INCOME

- What are you doing for work these days?

- Where do you live now? Are you on the lease? (if applicable)

- How much do you have to pay in rent/mortgage payments?

- Do you have any type of car, hospital, credit payments that you must make each month?

- What are your bills and have your bills increased or decreased in the last six months?

- Are you supplementing your income?

Given your current job situation do you receive money from any other source? Do you get help from your anyone?

How much money besides your child support payments, do you give to your children during a month?

Do different children get different amounts and why?

Have you ever been married? Have you married any of the women of the child (ren) that you are currently paying child support for?

QUESTIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS

- Since we last spoke has your relationship with the mother of your child (ren) gotten better or worse? Why do you think this has happened?

- When we first met, I asked you, how you felt about paying child support, in general and how you felt about all of the money going directly to the mother.

- How do you feel today about child support and what is your feeling today about all of the money going to the mom.

- What prevents you from getting married? (if applicable)

- What do you think about marriage? (if applicable)

- Have or do you ever think about getting married? (if applicable)

APPENDIX C
Characteristics of Fathers and Their Families in the Qualitative Sample

	All Fathers (N=252)			Randomly Selected Interviewees (N=25)			Children First Interviewees (N=11)		
	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%
Number of Children with W-2 Mothers by June 2001									
<i>Mean</i>	2.13			1.8			2.73		
1		106	42		13	52		1	9
2		78	31		9	36		6	55
3		34	13		0	0		1	9
4		21	8		2	8		1	9
More than 4		13	5		1	4		2	18
Age of Youngest Child with a W-2 Mother on June 30, 2001									
<i>Mean</i>	8.9			9.34			6.08		
0-1		13	5		2	8		0	0
2-5		77	31		10	40		8	73
6-12		114	45		8	32		2	18
13-18		23	9		0	0		1	9
18 or over		25	10		5	20		0	0
W-2 Mother with AFDC Benefits in 24 Months before October 1, 1997									
Yes		236	94		23	92		11	100
No		16	6		2	8		0	0
Race/Ethnicity as Reported in KIDS									
Black		155	62		16	64		10	91
Unknown		87	35		9	36		1	9
White		5	2						
Hispanic		4	2						
Asian		1	0						
Experimental Status of W-2 Cases Associated with This Father									
All Experimental		184	73		13	52		8	73
All Control		43	17		9	36		0	0
Mixed		25	10		3	12		3	27
UI-Reported Earnings in 1999									
<i>Mean</i>	\$9,001			\$9,581			\$5,016		
\$0		66	26		3	12		0	0
\$1-\$2,000		44	17		3	12		4	36
\$2,001-\$4,000		21	8		3	12		2	18
\$4,001-\$6,000		9	4		2	8		1	9
\$6,001-\$10,000		30	12		6	24		2	18
\$10,000-\$15,000		24	10		0	0		2	18
Over \$15,000		57	23		8	32		0	0
No SSN		1	0						

APPENDIX C, continued

	All Fathers (N=252)			Randomly Selected Interviewees (N=25)			Children First Interviewees (N=11)		
	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%
UI-Reported Earnings in 2000									
<i>Mean</i>	\$8,385			\$7,992			\$7,447		
\$0		90	36		7	28		3	27
\$1–\$2,000		36	14		4	16		2	18
\$2,001–\$4,000		16	6		1	4		0	0
\$4,001–\$6,000		14	6		3	12		1	9
\$6,001–\$10,000		20	8		1	4		2	18
\$10,000–\$15,000		18	7		2	8		2	18
Over \$15,000		57	23		7	28		1	9
No SSN		1	0						
Total Amount of Child Support Paid to W-2 Mothers in 1999									
<i>Mean</i>	\$1,110			\$1,433			\$774		
\$0		96	38		4	16		2	18
\$1–\$250		29	12		3	12		3	27
\$251–\$500		17	7		2	8		1	9
\$501–\$750		16	6		3	13		2	18
\$751–\$1,000		8	3		0	0		0	0
\$1,001–\$1,500		20	8		4	16		1	9
\$1,501–\$2,000		13	5		2	8		0	0
Over \$2,000		53	21		7	28		2	18
Total Amount of Child Support Paid to W-2 Mothers in 2000									
<i>Mean</i>	\$1,253			\$1,234			\$2,063		
\$0		87	35		5	20		1	9
\$1–\$250		37	15		4	16		1	9
\$251–\$500		17	7		3	12		1	9
\$501–\$750		12	5		3	12		2	18
\$751–\$1,000		11	4		0	0		0	0
\$1,001–\$1,500		18	7		3	12		1	9
\$1,501–\$2,000		13	5		2	8		0	0
Over \$2,000		57	23		5	20		5	45
Total Arrearages Owed the State for W-2 Mothers at W-2 Entry									
<i>Mean</i>	\$6,723			\$6,242			\$6,199		
\$0		46	18		5	20		4	36
\$1–\$2,000		49	19		5	20		1	9
\$2,001–\$4,000		42	17		3	12		2	18
\$4,001–\$6,000		30	12		5	20		0	0
\$6,001–\$10,000		37	15		1	4		1	9
\$10,000–\$15,000		19	8		3	12		1	9
Over \$15,000		29	12		3	12		2	18

APPENDIX C, continued

	All Fathers (N=252)			Randomly Selected Interviewees (N=25)			Children First Interviewees (N=11)		
	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%
Total Arrearages Owed to the State for W-2 Mothers on June 30, 2001									
<i>Mean</i>	\$6,956			\$6,053			\$7,867		
\$0	50	20		2	8		1	9	
\$1-\$2,000	39	15		9	36		2	18	
\$2,001-\$4,000	43	17		5	20		2	18	
\$4,001-\$6,000	18	7		0	0		2	18	
\$6,001-\$10,000	45	18		3	12		1	9	
\$10,000-\$15,000	23	9		3	12		1	9	
Over \$15,000	34	13		3	12		2	18	
Total Arrearages Owed to W-2 Mothers on June 30, 2001									
<i>Mean</i>	\$2,901			\$2,083			\$4,688		
\$0	83	33		6	24		2	18	
\$1-\$2,000	54	21		8	32		2	18	
\$2,001-\$4,000	53	17		4	16		2	18	
\$4,001-\$6,000	32	13		5	20		2	18	
\$6,001-\$10,000	23	9		2	8		1	9	
\$10,000-\$15,000	14	6		0	0		2	18	
Over \$15,000	3	1		0	0		0	0	

APPENDIX D
Characteristics of 36 African American Fathers in Qualitative Sample

	Age	Number of Children	Sole Custody of at Least One Biological Child	Ever Live with Biological Children?	Ever Live with Nonbiological Children?	Number of Partners That Have Had Interviewees Children	Interviewee's Current Living Arrangement*				Rent or Own Principal Residence	Currently Married	Ever Married	Education	Type of Job at Initial Interview	Employment History during the Period of Initial Interview			Criminal Convictions (as of April 30, 2001)	Incarcerated for Child Support Offense (as of April 30, 2001)	
							Wife	Girl-friend	Paternal Grandmother	Alone						1 Year or Less	2 Years	3+ Years			
<i>Random Sample</i>																					
Langston	31	8	Yes	Yes	Yes	5			√	Rent	NO	Yes	some college	Unemployed	Unemployed				Felony	No	
Jack	44	1	No	Yes	Yes	1	√			Rent	YES	Yes	high school	Painter	√					No	
Jimmy	23	1	No	Yes	No	1		√		Rent	NO	No	some college	Security		√				No	
"D"	30	4	No	Yes	Yes	3			√	Rent	NO	No	high school	Part-Time DJ	√				Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)	
Loft	22	1	No	Yes	No	1		√		Rent	NO	No	high school	Factory Worker(temp)	√				Felony	No	
Robert Johnson	43	3	No	Yes	No	2	√			Rent	YES	Yes	< high school	In-Home Daycare		√				No	
Gary	45	2	No	No	No	2	√			Rent	NO	No	< high school	Meat packer			√		Felony	No	
John	43	3	Yes	Yes	Yes	3			√	Owns Home	NO	Yes	some college	Supervisor (Welding)			√			No	
John Doe	33	1	No	Yes	Yes	1	√			Owns Home	NO	No	some college	Construction			√		Felony	Yes (Jail)	
Jay	38	3	No	Yes	Yes	2			√	Owns Home	Yes	Yes	high school	Mechanic				√		No	
Mansour Muhammad	38	11	Yes	Yes	Yes	7			√	Rent	No	Yes	some college	Chef				√		Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)
Deion	22	1	No	No	No	1		√		Unable to pay rent	No	No	high school	Unemployed	Unemployed					Misdemeanor	No
McClaine	36	1	No	Yes	Yes	1	√			Rent	No	No	< high school	None (self-employed)	√					Misdemeanor	No
Don	28	5	No	Yes	Yes	3	√			Rent	No	No	< high school	None (Drug-dealer)	√					Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)
Jones Henry	57	6	No	Yes	No	3	√			Rent	Yes	Yes	< high school	SSDI	SSDI recipient						No
Robert	28	2	No	Yes	No	1	√			Rent	No	No	< high school	Factory Worker(temp)	√					Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)
Ronald Smith	31	1	No	No	Yes	1			√(1)	Rent	No	No	< high school	SSDI	SSDI recipient						Yes (Jail)
Ricky	41	4	No	Yes	No	2	√			Rent	No	Yes	high school	Maintenance			√				No
Baller	21	1	No	Yes	No	1	√			Rent	No	No	high school	Custodian	√					Misdemeanor	No
P-Nut	23	4	No	Yes	Yes	4	√			Unable to pay rent	No	No	< high school	Unemployed	Unemployed						No
Will Davidson	48	6	No	Yes	No	3	√			Rent	Yes	Yes	some college	Manual Laborer(temp)	√						No
Trucker	29	1	No	Yes	Yes	1		√		Unable to pay rent	No	No	high school	Truck Driver						Misdemeanor	No
Joe'D	34	5	No	Yes	Yes	4	√			Rent	Yes	Yes	< high school	Health Technician			√			Felony	No
Loner	23	1	No	Yes	Yes	1			√(2)	Unable to pay rent	No	No	< high school	Unemployed	Unemployed						No
Popodopolus	29	2	No	Yes	Yes	2	√			Rent	Yes	Yes	some college	Factory Worker				√		Misdemeanor	No
<i>Children First Sample</i>																					
Slim	23	2	No	Yes	Yes	2	√			Rent	No	No	high school	After-school teacher	√					Felony	No
B-Camp	37	3	No	Yes	Yes	1	√			Rent	No	No	high school	After-school teacher	√					Misdemeanor	No
Black	41	12	Yes	Yes	Yes	7	√			Owns home	No	Yes	high school	After-school teacher	√					Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)
Jim Kelly	27	3	No	Yes	No	3		√		Unable to pay rent	No	No	high school	Food Service	√					Felony	No
Dewey Brown	46	9	Yes	Yes	Yes	5		√		Rent	No	Yes	some college	Factory Work	√					Felony	Yes (Prison)
Dante Morton	32	3	No	Yes	No	2	√			Rent	No	No	high school	Unemployed	Unemployed					Misdemeanor	No
Anthony Miller	22	3	No	No	No	2	√			Rent	No	No	< high school	Factory Work	√					Misdemeanor	No
Larry Johnson	45	7	No	Yes	No	3	√			Owns Home	Yes	Yes	< high school	Unemployed	Unemployed					Felony	Yes (Prison)
John Smith	32	6	No	Yes	Yes	3	√			Rent	No	No	high school	Unemployed	Unemployed					Misdemeanor	Yes (Jail)
James J.	42	4	No	No	No	3		√		Unable to pay rent	No	Yes	high school	Food Service	√					Felony	No
RJ	32	6	No	Yes	Yes	5	√			Owns Home	No	No	some college	Barber				√		Felony	Yes (Prison)

*At the time of the Initial Interview
(1) Lives with a roommate
(2) Lives with paternal great grandmother

APPENDIX E

WI SCTF
P.O. Box 07914
Milwaukee, WI 53207-0914
 DES-11457 (R. 02/99)

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Division of Economic Support
Bureau of Child Support
Wisconsin Support Collections Trust Fund (WI SCTF)

As of: [REDACTED]
KIDS PIN: [REDACTED]
SSN: [REDACTED]

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

1. Send a signed check or money order payable to the WI SCTF.
Do not enclose cash or correspondence.
2. Print the amount paid in the field marked "AMOUNT ENCLOSED."
3. If any of your obligations are percentage expressed orders, please fill in the boxes marked "Gross Income:" with the requested information.
4. Please indicate the payment frequency in the box marked "Payroll Freq." using the following codes; 1=monthly, 2=semi-monthly, 3=bi-weekly, 4=weekly, and 5=other.
 5. If you have a new mailing address, mark the Change of Address box and indicate the changes on the Payment Coupon.
 6. Please use the envelope and coupons provided to remit support and fee payments.
 7. If the "DESIGNATED COURT CASE" box is marked, indicate the court case number and/or the specific debt to which this payment is intended on the back of the Payment Coupon.
 8. If the support obligation is currently satisfied through income withholding, the payment coupon may be used to reduce other balances.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
 MILWAUKEE WI [REDACTED]

For questions regarding this statement, to obtain more current information, or for information about new electronic payment options, please call WI SCTF Customer Service at 1-800-991-5530. Representatives are available from 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM (CST) Monday-Friday.

Wisconsin Cares about KIDS
MONTHLY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNT – Child Support Receipt and Disbursement

Court Case Number	Debt Type	Current Balance	Payment or % Due	Greater Than or Less Than Amount	Minimum Monthly Amount Due
	CS ARREARS - AFDC	9013.16			5.00
	CS INTEREST - AFDC	4322.01			(5)
	CURRENT CHILD SPT	165.00			170.00
	CS ARREARS-CUSTODIAL	172.95			(5)
	CS INT-CUSTODIAL	113.92			(5)
	COURT COSTS	10.00			(5)
	LYING-IN - ASSIGNED	1950.00			(5)
	RECPT & DISBURSE FEE	300.00			
	CS ARREARS - AFDC	4750.28			(5)
	CS INTEREST - AFDC	2758.63			(5)
	PAST CS - AFDC	1982.36			(5)
	UNPD PAST CS - AFDC	25.00			(5)
	CURRENT CHILD SPT	175.00			170.00
	CS ARREARS-CUSTODIAL	63.50			(5)
	CS INT-CUSTODIAL	45.84			(5)
	COURT COSTS	10.00			(5)
	LYING-IN - ASSIGNED	1550.00			(5)
	RECPT & DISBURSE FEE	175.00			
	CURRENT CHILD SPT	0.00	17.0% (2)		17.0%
	COURT COSTS	10.00			(5)
	RECPT & DISBURSE FEE	180.00			
<p>Note: To protect confidentiality, some specific figures have been changed (by less than 10%), and some information has been rearranged or deleted.</p>					

Key to Numerical Codes used above:

1. Interest is charged at a rate of 1.5% per month on Child and Family support arrears. Debts marked with a (1) accrue interest.
2. The amount due on a percentage expressed order is determined by multiplying the ordered percentage by your gross income, as defined within your court order.
3. The amount due on a % or Greater Than order is determined by multiplying the % by your gross income. Compare that figure to the amount due on the current support obligation and pay the larger amount.
4. The amount due on a % or Less Than order is determined by multiplying the % by your gross income. Compare that figure to the amount due on the current support obligation and pay the lesser amount.
5. If you have not made an arrangement to repay this debt, please do so now.
6. This debt has been overpaid by the amount listed in the "Current Balance Due" column.

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